



for the



**Brooks
Region**

Better. Realized.

Prepared by:



Final Report
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A. Executive Summary

The Brooks Region, along with project partners, commissioned a Workforce Development Strategy to get a better understanding of its labour market supply, projected demand, challenges, and gaps and then strategies to facilitate these gaps and challenges.

The Region is unique in that it has especially strong concentrations of labour in the following industries: manufacturing, agriculture, and energy (oil & gas). Geographically, the Region is part of an irrigation district and the conditions (climate) are ideal for raising livestock.

The regional population is young. The biggest age cohort is between the ages of 35 and 45, and 23% of the population is under the age of 14, which bodes well for the Region's future. Immigrants make up close to a third of the population, giving the Region great cultural diversity – of these immigrants, a higher portion compared to the province have entered Canada as refugees.

The high proportion of refugees in the Brooks Region face many challenges with respect to English, literacy-levels, cultural integration, and much more. However, the Region has many community-based organizations, service providers, schools, JBS Canada and more that work collaboratively to serve these families and individuals.

The Brooks Region also has a high proportion of individuals with an apprenticeship or trades certificate or diploma (25% compared to 17% for the province). The Region is running a successful Registered Apprenticeship Program (RAP) with local employers, schools, students, and Youth Careers South East Alberta. Many employers note that skilled trades people will continue to be important into the future.

The regional economy, like much of Alberta, has been hit by the slow-down in oil & gas activities and lost a number of good paying jobs over the past few years. However, this portion of the province has better “weathered the economic storm” due to its strong agriculture and agri-processing industries.

Generally speaking, we heard that there is a reasonable supply of labour in the Brooks Region. The main challenge lies in specific skills and experience required by employers to fill positions. Attracting and retaining speciality skills to the Region can be challenging.

Skill needs all across the country are evolving due to the rapid pace of automation and technological development. Literacy – an ability to continuously learn, creative/problem-solving skills, digital skills, and social emotional skills are becoming more important to the workforce.

Strategies for moving forward include:

1. **Keep building the Brooks Region brand** so that the Region is perceived as a good place to live, work, and invest for both locals and potential newcomers. Continue to celebrate and promote what makes the Region unique in order to both recruit new talent and retain existing talent.
2. **Expose young people to the opportunities that exist in the Region.** Brooks has a young population and it is easier to convince people who already have a connection to the Region to live and work there. One of the main reasons that youth leave rural communities is that they do not perceive that there are any career paths for them. Therefore exposing youth to the job and career opportunities that exist in the Region will help them to consider pursuing careers in the Region.
3. **Upskilling / Reskilling.** The future of work is about continuous learning. Helping both job seekers and workers to upskill will help employers to have a skilled workforce and to be competitive. Additionally, because the Region has higher levels of low literacy due to the secondary migrants that are attracted to the community, helping to build literacy and skills among these workers will be beneficial to the local economy as a whole.

Making learning opportunities more affordable and accessible will help. Micro-credentials, e-learning, and Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) are emerging opportunities for delivery of skills development.

4. **Keep promoting entrepreneurship and cultivating an entrepreneurial culture.** Entrepreneurship will help the Region to diversify and to create more and new jobs. Additionally, a culture of entrepreneurship translates to a culture of opportunity which again increases the attractiveness of the Region for young people to stay or return after they are finished school.
5. **Create a Workforce Development consortium to jointly address and move this strategy forward.** There is already good collaboration among key players in the Brooks Region including this project's partners, community based organizations and contracted service providers, plus in partnerships like Youth Careers South East Alberta, along with industry. A "new" entity does not necessarily need to be formed, rather it may build upon some of the existing partnerships and collaborations. Involving industry is a critical success factor.

By bringing all parties to the table, the players can better collaborate to understand, prioritize, and address regional skill gaps plus pool financial resources. Activities the consortium may focus on include:

- Further exposing youth to career opportunities via career fairs, work experience programs, industry videos etc.
- Helping to connect job seekers and employers through networking opportunities, volunteer programs, internships, etc.
- Supporting initiatives that increase both job seekers and employers access to knowledge and available resources (scholarships, government programs).

- Collaborating with community based organizations to mitigate the barriers faced by job seekers and workers in training and upskilling.
- Collaborating with the school division, college and/or other training institutions regarding the feasibility of expanding the current programs or by offering new programs (e.g. dual credit programming).
- Conducting collaborative research on training needed by and the preferred delivery method of the business community.
- Joint lobbying for changes of issues affecting the Region (e.g. recognition of skills).

6. Work with employers to help improve work culture, and to increase their capacity and competitiveness. Canadian employers are generally not prepared, through hiring, training or re-training, to recruit and develop the skills needed to make their organizations more competitive in the digital economy. Help employers to see the value in investing in skills, literacy, continuous learning and the value in cultural competency and diverse workplaces. We suggest focusing on increasing literacy and cultural competence/workplace diversity.

Working with employers is easier said than done. Employers need to see a return on investment if they are going to become partners in workforce development, therefore we suggest making and presenting a business case and finding some regional ambassadors to help champion other employers.

7. Actively engage and consult with youth. Engaging with youth is a best practice in youth attraction and retention. A significant proportion of rural youth feel that they are not considered to be active participants in their community. The Brooks Region is fortunate to have a strong youth population; they just need to ensure they develop and retain their youth.

8. Provide support to industries and workers affected by COVID Pandemic. It will be important coming out of the pandemic, to support those industries (such as hospitality) and workers (often lower paying, lower skilled, and women) that have been disproportionately affected. There may be a need to help retrain or upskill workers who have been displaced by the pandemic.

It is anticipated that the pandemic will cause many employers to really focus on health and safety, therefore it will be important to help employers access health and safety protocols, best practices, and training.



B. Introduction and Methodology

Labour force is one of the most important variables in economic development as it forms a basis for economic development strategy. Recognizing the linkage between labour capacity and economic development, the Brooks Region, along with project partners, commissioned a Workforce Development Strategy.

Project partners include:

- The Brooks Region Economic Development Team
- Ministry of Labour
- Medicine Hat College
- Community Futures Entre-Corp
- Grasslands School Division
- Brooks & District Chamber of Commerce
- JBS Canada

Project objectives include providing a greater understanding of:

- 1) Current labour market supply/inventory based on industry and occupation.
- 2) Current and projected labour market needs and the extent of those needs.
- 3) An accurate assessment of the labour market challenges for current and potential business, and develop a corresponding action plan.
- 4) Information to support and address the immediate individual business issues and opportunities (labour market issues, attraction and retention issues).
- 5) Enhanced cooperation and collaboration among businesses, local government, schools and economic development organizations.
- 6) Gaps between labour available and labour desired.
- 7) How partners can encourage, support and facilitate human resource planning and labour market adjustments for the Region.
- 8) Recommendation on how the partners can facilitate implementation of recommendations.

Understanding its labour force and having a workforce strategy will give the Brooks Region a competitive edge in terms of business retention, expansion, and attraction.

Workforce and talent are often first or second on the list when it comes to site selection.

B.1 Project Methodology

To accomplish the objectives of this study with regard to labour force supply, the main method involved an online survey of job seekers in the Region, along with targeted interviews with organizations and agencies that work with specific groups of job seekers.

The Job Seeker survey was promoted through the Brooks Region social media outlets, plus post cards were provided to agencies and organizations that worked with job seekers. 112 responses were received. An incentive of a \$500 VISA gift card was provided. The draw was made on January 31, 2020 and presented to the winner. The survey opened in early January and closed February 5, 2020.

One of the main limitations associated with the Job Seeker Survey is that job seekers were asked to self-select themselves. The sampling was not random, therefore results cannot be projected onto the greater population within a margin of error. However, respondent demographics appeared to be relatively representative of the Region.

To analyse labour force demand, the main method consisted of a 10-20 minute telephone or in-person interview and a web based survey targeting a small group of Brooks Region's employers in key industries which were suggested by the Project Leadership Group. Again, employers were asked to self-select themselves for the online survey. The Employer survey was completed by approximately 30 local employers. A few more employers started the survey, but dropped off because they only had one staff.

The person interviewed was either the owner, general manager, or individual in charge of human resources. Respondent participation with the personal interviews was quite successful.

Demand estimations for this research are largely based on the interviews with businesses. As such, positions in some sectors may not be reported even though there may be positions in high demand in these areas. A second limitation of the study is that demand forecasts are based on the opinions of the respondents and are subject to their assumptions regarding business growth and development. These demand projections will be influenced by unforeseen economic events that change the current business environment.

Because the sample was small, and not completely representative of the overall marketplace, results were not cross-tabulated to look for patterns by organization size or industry. Rather, we looked for common themes. To mitigate the limitations associated with the research, we looked at provincial and industry trends, and where applicable corroborated the feedback with this research.

We also interviewed education and service providers in the Brooks Region to better understand the services they provide, the challenges they face, and the challenges and barriers faced by their clientele. Ten organizations were interviewed.

Detailed research findings were presented in supplemental report at the end of March.

Both supply and demand findings were supplemented with secondary research of available data from the following sources:

- Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population
- Alberta Dashboard
- EMSI Analyst¹
- Alberta Labour Force Statistics
- Alberta Occupational Demand and Supply Outlooks
- Skills and workforce literature, studies, and analyses conducted by a variety of groups

Pandemic

In mid-March, Alberta's economy, like the rest of the country, was disrupted by the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic. Consequently, the Brooks Workforce Development Strategy project was put on hold while project partners dealt with other pressing priorities.

One of the industries hardest hit by the spread of the actual virus were large meat processors and JBS Brooks was not immune to the spread of the virus.

Also, in April the price of oil, a major economic driver in Alberta, was driven down into negative numbers as a result of reduced demand due to the pandemic plus a price war between Russia and Saudi Arabia. Pierre Cl  roux, Chief Economist for BDC, speculates it could take up to two years before the world reaches the previous level of demand prior to the pandemic.

It is prudent to note that some of the research findings have likely shifted given the crisis that the pandemic created.

Canadians Shifting Outlook During the Pandemic

Fielding for the *2020 Survey on Employment and Skills*² which was designed to explore the experience of Canadians relating to education skills training and employment ended up occurring during the period in which the impact of the pandemic on Canada emerged.

Consequently, the study offers an early opportunity to explore how Canadians' outlook initially shifted as the pandemic occurred.

The survey confirmed that the pandemic caused a significant shift in Canadians' outlook on employment for all provinces except Alberta where the level of pessimism was already high before the pandemic was declared.

¹ EMSI Analyst is an economic modelling tool; EMSI data brings the various snapshots of the Canadian economy together in a single picture. EMSI aligns the geographies of the data from 2001 to the present, which means the Brooks Region of 2001 is the same as the Brooks Region of 2019. This results in geographically detailed data (down to the Census Subdivision level) that is applicable to today's economy. Data sources include: Canadian Business Patterns (CBP); 2001, 2006, and 2011 Census data; Survey of Employment, Payroll and Hours (SEPH); Labour Force Surveys (LFS); Canadian Occupational Projection System (COPS); CANSIM Demographics; Postsecondary Student Information System (PSIS) Education Data.

² Environics Institute for Survey Research. [Canadian's Shifting Outlook on Employment. 2020 Survey on Employment and Skills](#). Preliminary Report. May 2020.

C. The Brooks Region Economy:

The Brooks Region includes eight hamlets within the County of Newell, the City of Brooks, the Town of Bassano, and the Villages of Duchess and Rosemary. Economic development for the Brooks Region is overseen by a Joint Services Committee that is comprised of the chief elected officials of each of the municipalities in the Region.

The Region is home to several large employers including JBS Food Canada, which employs over 2,800 team members. Additionally three new developments in emerging industries consisting of renewable energy (solar) and cannabis production and processing have been announced for the Region. These developments will require additional employees.

C.1 Key Economic Sectors

Key industries operating in the Brooks Region include:

- Agriculture
- Energy
- Manufacturing
- Tourism

Key Industry	Overview
Agriculture	<p>300,000 irrigated farmland acres, 60,000 acres of cultivated dry land farming, 930,000 acres of native and improved rangeland. Conditions (climate) are ideal for raising livestock.</p> <p>The Government of Canada’s Crop Diversification Centre South is located in Brooks – a 10,550 ft² horticultural research centre includes a Production Greenhouse, a Research Greenhouse, and a Header House.</p> <p>The Canadian Cocoon Testing Centre also located in Brooks. It monitors pollination bees for quality control.</p> <p>The agriculture industry attracts some workers via the Seasonal Agriculture Worker Program (SAWP). Additionally, a number of Low German Speaking (LGS) Mennonite (also referred to as Mexican Mennonites) people are attracted to agricultural work in the Region. This group tends to have low levels of literacy and limited education.</p>
Oil & Gas	<p>One of Alberta’s most active natural gas fields with over 30,000 wells in the area - about 37% of all wells in Canada. The Region has an estimated 67,927 m³ in natural gas reserves. Strong skilled workforce, but declining in size.</p> <p>It is becoming harder to attract young people to this industry due to recent volatilities.</p>
Manufacturing	<p>The majority of manufacturing in the Brooks Region is built around the Region’s key industries of agriculture and energy. The main subsectors in which the Region’s manufacturers operate are: Food & Beverage (specifically meat processing) Fabricated Metal & Industrial Equipment.</p> <p>The Region’s manufacturing sector utilizes a good mix of skilled and unskilled labour.</p>
Tourism	<p>Natural amenities include Dinosaur Provincial Park and Lake Newell. The Brooks Aqueduct is a National and Provincial Historic Site. Good sporting and recreational amenities exist in the Region along with coffee and tea shops, a microdistillery and microbreweries, ethnic food and dining. There is room for entrepreneurship and growth in this sector.</p> <p>More than one in every five “first paid jobs” is in the hospitality sector.</p>

Additionally, three new developments in emerging industries consisting of renewable energy (solar) and cannabis production and processing have been announced for the Region.

Some of the Region’s biggest employers include:

- JBS Canada ~ 2,800 employees
- Grasslands School Division ~ 500 employees
- Alberta Health Services ~ 400 employees
- City of Brooks ~ 130 employees
- League Projects ~100-120 (this fluctuates depending on their contracts)
- MCF Feedyards ~ 75 employees
- Dinosaur Provincial Park ~ 70+ seasonal
- McDonalds ~ 75 to 80 in peak season (60-65 non peak)
- Eastern Irrigation District ~ 75 employees

D. Analysis of the Brook’s Region Labour Supply

D.1 Regional Demographics

The population of the Brooks Region is just under 25,000. The Region’s population has been growing. The Brooks Census agglomeration grew by 5.3% between 2011 and 2016. The Region is relatively young with a median age of 36.0.



Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population.

The Brooks Region has a slightly smaller percentage of people with the working age groups compared to Alberta, but still a very healthy proportion. The fact that Brooks has a high proportion of youth (22.7%) bodes well for the Region’s future workforce.

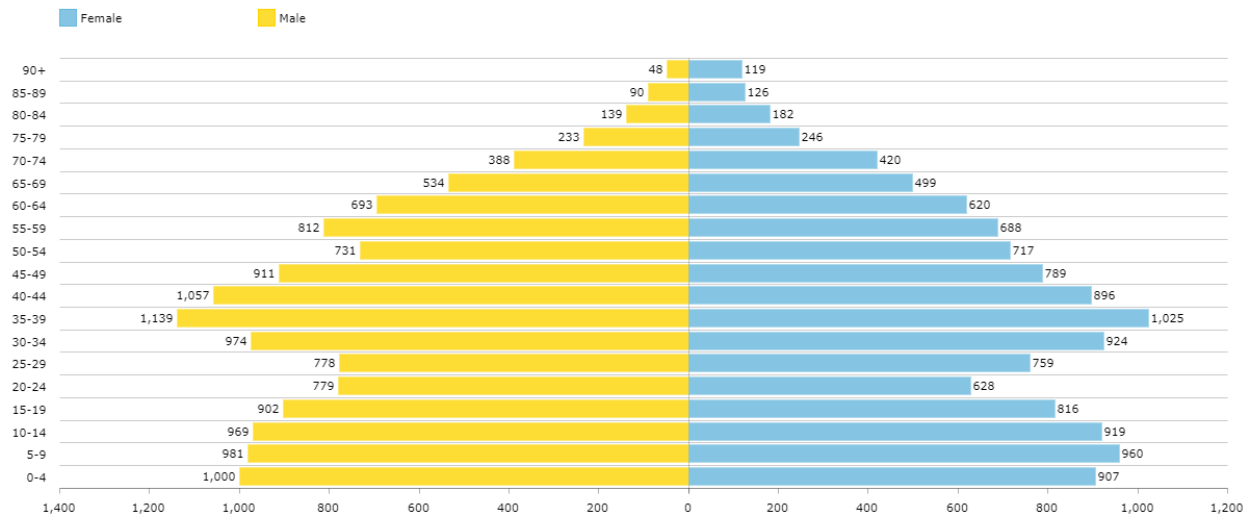
Age Profile Snapshot		
Age Group	Brooks Region	Alberta
0-14	22.7%	19.2%
15-64	65.7%	68.5%
65+	11.6%	12.3%

Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population.

Brooks Census agglomeration

As demonstrated in the population pyramid below, the Region has a strong concentration of younger working age population (the 35-39 age band is the Region’s largest).

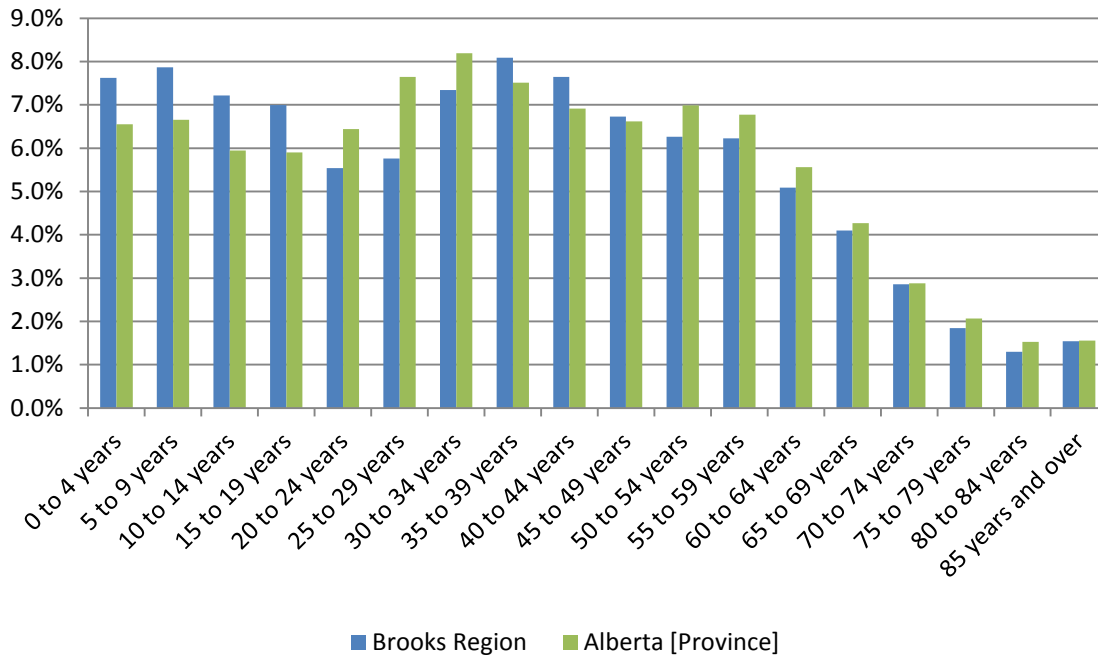
Figure 1: Population Pyramid for Brooks Census Agglomeration



Alberta Regional Dashboard. Brooks CA, 2018.

Compared to the province, the Region has a smaller proportion of workers approaching the retirement age. Consequently, one would expect a smaller retirement departure compared to the rest of the province.

Figure 2: Percent Population by Age Band for Brooks CA and Province



Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population.

D.2.1 Immigrant Population

Brooks is unique in that immigrants³ make up one-third of the population according to the 2016 Census of Population. The city is referred to as the “City of 100 Hellos” with over 100 languages spoken; it is home to one of the most culturally diverse populations per capita in Canada.

There are also 340 non-permanent residents living in Brooks.⁴ Just over half of the immigrants living in Brooks arrived recently, between 2011 and 2016. Brooks’ immigrant situation is even more unique in that a much higher proportion of immigrants living in Brooks entered Canada as refugees (30%) compared to the province and country as a whole.

Admission Category 2011 to 2016	Brooks	Alberta	Canada
Economic Immigrants	56%	68%	60%
Family Class	14%	22%	27%
Refugee	30%	9%	12%

Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population, Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-400-X2016202.

The most common countries of birth for immigrants in Brooks were the Philippines, Ethiopia, Somalia and Columbia. Thirty-seven percent (37%) of Brooks residents identify as a visible minority.⁵

Table 1: Place of birth for all immigrants and recent immigrants in Brooks

Region Country	Total	Arrived 2011 to 2016
Asia	1,170	950
Philippines	1,200	870
China	195	15
India	105	35
Pakistan	85	10
Elsewhere in Asia	185	50
Africa	1,680	890
Ethiopia	505	320
Somalia	425	335
South Sudan	190	15
Congo	125	30
Eritrea	70	65
Elsewhere in Africa	385	105
Americas	495	315
Colombia	280	225
Mexico	70	45
Elsewhere in the Americas	160	35
Europe	260	50
Oceania and other places	10	0
Total	4,215	2,200

Brooks Local Immigration Partnership. Immigration & Settlement Needs Assessment. 2018. P15-16. Source: Statistics Canada, 2017c

³ According to census definitions, “‘Immigrant’ refers to a person who is, or who has ever been, a landed immigrant or permanent resident. Immigrants who have obtained Canadian citizenship by naturalization are included in this group.”

⁴ Brooks Local Immigration Partnership. Immigration & Settlement Needs Assessment. 2018.

⁵ Ibid. P16-17.

Many secondary migrants are attracted to Brooks because the Region’s largest employer, JBS Canada, and PSSI, the company that provides sanitation services at the plant, will hire workers that do not speak English. JBS has translators along with certified ESL⁶ teachers and does a lot of work to help individuals integrate into the local community. Brooks is viewed as place of opportunity for many newcomers; there are not many places in Canada where these newcomers can find employment so quickly.

D.2 Regional Labour Force

Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population estimates that the Region has a population of 18,040 (aged 15 years and over), of which 13,140 are in the labour force. With a participation rate of 72.8%, the Region exceeds the provincial participation rate of 68.3%.

D.2.1 Education and Skills Summary of the Resident Population

While the Region has a lower proportion of the population between the ages of 24-65 with a post-secondary education, the Brooks Region has a high proportion of individuals with an apprenticeship or trades certificate or diploma (25% compared to 17% for the province). Eighty-percent (80%) of the 1,460 individuals are male.

Table 2: Population aged 24-65 by Educational Attainment Level

Highest certificate, diploma or degree:	Brooks Region		Province of Alberta
	Count	%	
Total population aged 25 to 64 years and over	12,785	100%	100%
No certificate; diploma or degree	2,635	21%	11%
Secondary (high) school diploma or equivalency certificate	4,415	35%	25%
Postsecondary certificate; diploma or degree	5,730	45%	64%
Apprenticeship or trades certificate or diploma	1,460	25%	17%
College or other non-university certificate or diploma	2,330	41%	34%
University at bachelor level or above	1,625	28%	44%

Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population.

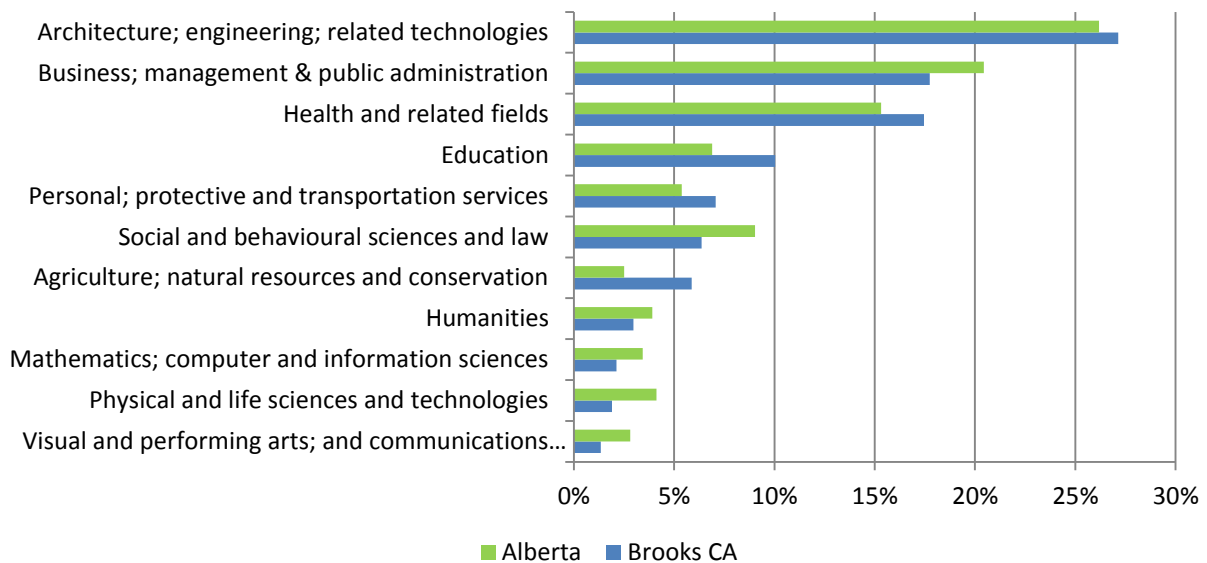
The Brooks Region also has high proportion of individuals with a college or other non-university certificate or diploma (41% compared to 34% for the province). About two-thirds of the 2,330 individuals are female.

⁶ ESL = English as a Second Language and is used to describe non-native speakers of the English language.

Looking at the field of study, the highest proportion of its workforce is educated in the fields of engineering and related technologies; business, management and public administration, and health and related fields.

Compared to the province, the Region also has a high proportion of its workforce educated in the fields of education; agriculture; and personal and transportation services.

Figure 3: Top Fields of Study – Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) 2016 for the population aged 15 years and over in private households



Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population.



D.2.2 Labour Force Composition

In terms of labour force by occupation, not surprisingly, the Brooks Region has a significantly higher proportion of its workforce in occupations in manufacturing and utilities (14% compared to 3% provincially; see Table 3). Agriculture, natural resources and related production occupations are also higher compared to the province (10% compared to 3% provincially).

Table 3: Labour Force By Occupation - National Occupational Classification (NOC) 2016

Total labour force population aged 15 years and over by Occupation	Brooks Region		Province of Alberta
	Count	%	
All occupations	12,910		
0 Management occupations	1,545	12%	12%
1 Business; finance and administration occupations	1,425	11%	16%
2 Natural and applied sciences and related occupations	410	3%	8%
3 Health occupations	565	4%	7%
4 Occupations in education; law and social; community and government services	975	8%	10%
5 Occupations in art; culture; recreation and sport	150	1%	2%
6 Sales and service occupations	2,440	19%	22%
7 Trades; transport and equipment operators and related occupations	2,280	18%	18%
8 Natural resources; agriculture and related production occupations	1,250	10%	3%
9 Occupations in manufacturing and utilities	1,870	14%	3%

Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population.

Table 4 demonstrates those occupations that represent a significant percentage of the jobs and are concentrated in the Region compared to the country. Occupations are considered to be concentrated if they have a location quotient (LQ) greater than 1.25. The table demonstrates how JBS Canada, the oil & gas industry, and agriculture drive the Regional workforce.



Table 4: Concentrated Occupations, Brooks Region

NOC	Occupation	2018 Jobs	2018 Location Quotient
9462	Industrial butchers and meat cutters, poultry preparers and related workers	1,005	84.06
8615	Oil and gas drilling, servicing and related labourers	130	25.10
8412	Oil and gas well drilling and related workers and services operators	127	21.75
8432	Nursery and greenhouse workers	212	20.68
8222	Contractors and supervisors, oil and gas drilling and services	166	15.61
8431	General farm workers	479	11.72
8232	Oil and gas well drillers, servicers, testers and related workers	129	11.26
2222	Agricultural and fish products inspectors	22	8.06
0821	Managers in agriculture	39	7.84
9617	Labourers in food and beverage processing	203	6.60
9465	Testers and graders, food and beverage processing	27	6.53
9232	Central control and process operators, petroleum, gas and chemical processing	49	5.44
7612	Other trades helpers and labourers	31	4.60
8252	Agricultural service contractors, farm supervisors and specialized livestock workers	21	4.50
2261	Non-destructive testers and inspection technicians	18	4.04
0811	Managers in natural resources production and fishing	31	3.96
2243	Industrial instrument technicians and mechanics	24	3.78
9461	Process control and machine operators, food and beverage processing	118	3.75

EMSI Q3 2019 Data Set. June 2020.

Organizing regional employment information by occupation provides a workforce-oriented view of the regional economy. Emsi's occupation data are based on Emsi's industry data, regional occupation data from the Labour Force Survey (LFS), and regional staffing patterns taken from the Census.



The Region has a high concentration of industries—relative to the province (in terms of employment)—related to manufacturing, agriculture, and oil & gas extraction.

Table 5: Labour Force By Industry

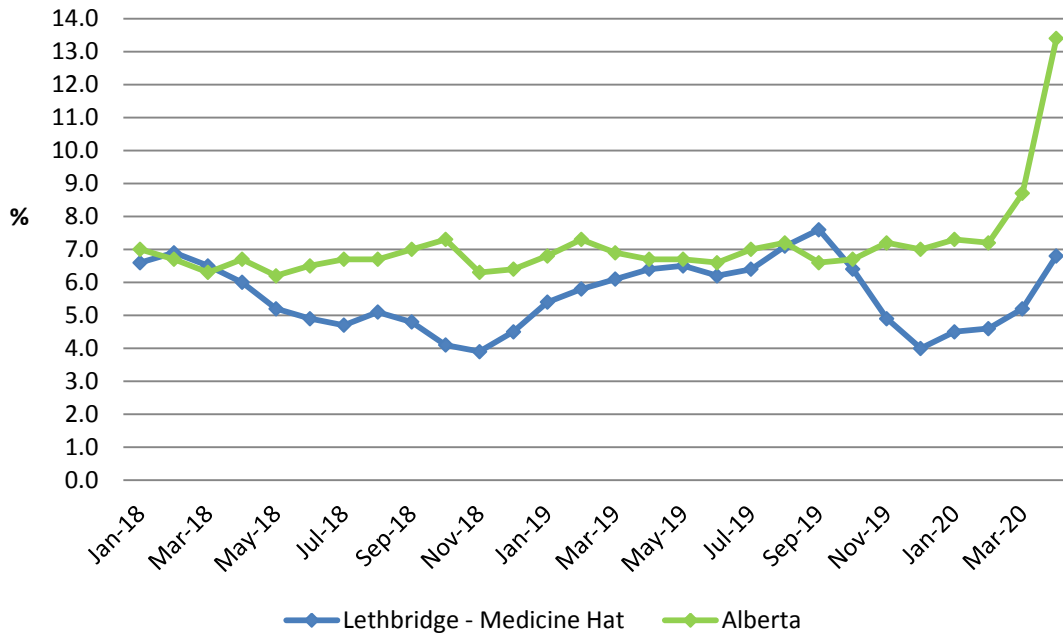
Industry (2016)	Brooks Region	Province of Alberta	LQ Relative to Province
Manufacturing	16%	6%	2.82
Agriculture	11%	3%	3.98
Oil & Gas Extraction, Mining, Quarrying	10%	6%	1.58
Retail Trade	9%	11%	0.81
Construction	7%	10%	0.64
Education	6%	7%	0.97
Transportation & Warehousing	4%	5%	0.85
Accommodation & Food Services	6%	7%	0.88
Public Administration	4%	5%	0.69
Professional; Scientific, Technical Services	3%	7%	0.47
Administrative & support; Waste Management & Remediation Services	3%	4%	0.83
Wholesale Trade	2%	4%	0.65
Finance	2%	3%	0.60
Arts; Entertainment, Recreation	1%	2%	0.61
Real Estate	1%	2%	0.76
Utilities	1%	1%	1.08
Real Estate	1%	2%	0.76
Utilities	1%	1%	1.08
Information & Cultural Industries	1%	1%	0.37
Other Services	5%	5%	1.04

Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population.

D.2.3 Labour Force Trends

Although not a perfect science, many economists will suggest that when an unemployment rate falls below 5%, the economy is very close to or at full capacity or balanced. The Lethbridge-Medicine Hat Economic Region, in which the Brooks Region is located, has generally had lower unemployment rates than the province overall for the past couple of years. Lower dependence on the energy sector and the strong food-processing and agriculture industries in this part of the province have helped it to better weather the economic downturn that hit most of the rest of the province.

Figure 4: Unemployment Rate



Alberta Labour Force Statistics

While the unemployment rate increased in March and April in the Lethbridge-Medicine Hat Economic Region during the pandemic, it did not spike as high as the rest of the province (13.4% for Alberta in April 2020).

D.3 Educational Institutions and Training Resources

D.3.1 K to 12 Learners

As identified earlier, the Brooks Region has a high proportion of individuals under the age of 20. This is a positive sign for the Region’s future as these are the workers of the future. Grasslands School Division serves all communities in the Brooks Region and they appear to be providing a lot of great opportunities to expose students to career opportunities and preparation. For example, Grasslands School Division:

- is an active member of Youth Careers - South East Alberta ⁷
- has an active Registered Apprenticeship Program (RAP) - an apprenticeship program for high school students
- provides Career & Technology Services (CTS)⁸ programs to expose students to specific trades like cosmetics, mechanics, welding, foods, and cooking

⁷ Youth Careers works to build awareness of careers in the Trades and Technology field to students in South East Alberta. They help connect high school students and employers in regards to the Registered Apprenticeship Program. They also engage in classroom presentations to promote careers in the Trades & Technology fields.

⁸ Career and Technology Studies (CTS) is a provincially authorized curriculum designed for high school students so they can explore their interests and career options. CTS offers students opportunities to develop skills that can be applied in their daily lives and improve their employability following high school.

- provides Career and Life Management (CALM) classes⁹ for all high school students to help provide general employment readiness programs
- holds “Passion Fridays” to expose students to a wide variety of activities and experiences, such as technology and robotics
- has a medical skills day
- offers Work Experience programs
- offers a high school welding program which is done at Medicine Hat College – Brooks Campus; this exposes students to the College and keeps the Brooks Campus lab well utilized
- has a mobile CTS trailer to offer programs in their rural schools
- has many students compete in the Regional Skills competitions

“Brooks is fantastic. They put more teacher resources into the programs than other schools/divisions. They support and take the program seriously. Brooks students do well too [in skills competitions]. Lots of local banners to hang in the schools. Duchess has a welding student that wins every year.”

Furthermore,

- Rosemary School offers a Green Certificate Program - an industry driven training program that takes an apprenticeship-style to teaching agricultural skills
- Bassano School has a strong graphic design program (Animation and TV/Video Production programs)
- Bassano School has a Health Care Aide (HCA) program
- Bassano School’s Grade 9 Industrial Arts students access modules in both Electrical and Carpentry at Medicine Hat College – Brooks Campus.

Christ The Redeemer Catholic Schools provides Catholic education to students in Brooks. Nearly two-thirds of their Brooks students are ELL – English Language Learners. The schools work hard with these students and their families, along with SPEC and SWIS¹⁰ workers, to help them acclimatize to the culture. A number of the students are not accustomed to school life.

Their high school is too small to do a lot on its own so they partner with Grasslands School Division for certain activities. For example, students from St. Joseph’s Collegiate attend the post-secondary fair in the fall held by Brooks Composite. Their students attend SAIT and Lethbridge programs through Careers Next Generation and they participate in Junior Achievement¹¹.

⁹ The aim of Career and Life Management (CALM) is to help students to make well-informed, considered decisions and choices in all aspects of their lives and to develop behaviours and attitudes that contribute to the well-being and respect of self and others, now and in the future. It emphasizes knowledge, attitudes, behaviours, competencies and values, and provides students with opportunities to enhance their capacities in problem solving, critical thinking and reflection.

¹⁰ SWIS = Settlement Worker In School

¹¹ Junior Achievement (JA) is an international non-profit organization that teaches youth financial literacy and business skills. It focuses on teaching youth entrepreneurial and leadership skills.

They also provide CTS courses which include things like:

- Personal financial literacy
- Enterprise and innovation
- Career preparation

Both jurisdictions have run Dual-Credit¹² programs in the past in partnership with Medicine Hat College. The programs were well-received by students. The program kicked off with a grant, but when the funding ended, so did the program. Christ The Redeemer Catholic Schools noted that they had run a welding program and other activities in the past, but these were cut due to funding.

In addition to the school systems, the SPEC Association for Children and Families also runs a Makerspace program for youth aged 7 and up. It is a technology based place for like-minded people to make things and targets getting youth out of their basement and away from video games to develop relationships.

Activities include robotics, game day, piano, Lego, STEM¹³ activities, blacksmithing, gardening and composting projects, and youth led winter gardening. Programs like this are beneficial in terms of exposing youth to STEM activities, providing hands-on learning activities which help build critical thinking skills, fostering creativity and entrepreneurship, providing and developing mentorship, and developing leadership skills. The gardening and composting programs are also advantageous in terms of exposing youth from other parts of the world to the Region’s dominant agriculture sector.

Early exposure to hands-on, accessible opportunities like Makerspace programs help develop skills and steer more students into a STEM focused career path.

D.3.2 Post-Secondary Education

The Brooks Region is centrally located to a number of highly reputable post-secondary education programs and institutions.

Calgary (2 hours)	Lethbridge (< 2hours)	Medicine Hat (1 hour)
University of Calgary Mount Royal University SAIT Polytechnic	University of Lethbridge Lethbridge College	Medicine Hat College

¹² Dual credit is optional career-based high school programming that can help students make meaningful transitions to post-secondary or the workplace. School authorities have the flexibility to provide learning opportunities that reflect the needs and interests of their students, schools and community.

¹³ STEM = Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics

Additionally, the Region is quite fortunate in that Medicine Hat College has a satellite campus at Brooks. Medicine Hat College-Brooks Campus programs include:

- Adult Basic Education
- College Preparation
- Computerized Bookkeeping Certificate
- English as a Second Language for New Canadians
- Health Care Aide
- Social Work
- Hospital Unit Clerk
- Management Skills for Supervisors
- Practical Nurse
- Pre-employment Electrician
- Pre-employment Welding

Medicine Hat College (MHC) recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Northern Lakes College, which will eventually allow students from each school to participate in the other’s programming. Expanded programming would include a computer network specialist certificate and oilfield operator training. The program uses Northern Lakes College’s supported distance learning model to offer a wider range of courses to MHC students, beginning with the Brooks Campus.¹⁴

Medicine Hat College also works with regional employers to provide custom programs. For example, they developed a “Foundations for Leadership” program for JBS management as much of JBS’s management comes from in-house.

Having a local college is valuable as it makes education and training more accessible. Even though the Region is well situated to a number of great institutions and programs, it is typically more expensive and inconvenient for individuals to attend programs in other communities or for employers to send employees to other communities.

For example, there is a general industry shortage of qualified Class 1 drivers. The fact that Class 1 driver training and examinations are no longer available in Brooks, as a result of the new Mandatory Entry-Level Training (M.E.L.T.) for Class 1 driver’s licences, means that people need to leave the community for training and testing – another barrier in building the supply of qualified workers.

Two private colleges, The Academy of Learning and Cypress College, have campuses in Brooks. Some of the types of programs offered by these two institutions include:

Academy of Learning	Cypress College
Accounting	Culinary Training
Business	Marketing & Communications
Community Support Services	Computer Technology
English Language Training	Administrative Technology
Health Care	Business Management
Information Technology	Hotel & Restaurant Management
Legal	
Graphic Web Design	

¹⁴ Appel, Jeremy. [MHC partners with Northern Lakes for broader access to education](#). February 25, 2020.

There was some criticism raised during the interview process that the training provided by private colleges is not adequate nor a match for needs in the Region. Additionally, some employers are noting that as the bottom-line matters more for public colleges and universities, graduate skills are not always a good industry match either.

D.4 Local Observations and Feedback

D.4.1 Job Seeker's Experience

The Job Seeker Survey provided some insight as to the types of challenges that regional job seekers were facing. As for the respondents, a good mix of candidates participated:

- 59% of respondents were female; 41% male.
- 46% of respondents were employed, 41% unemployed, the remainder were students, or returning to work from a leave (e.g. sick, parental).
- Education levels varied from less than high school to a university degree or higher.
- The majority of respondents ranged in age from 20 to 54.
- Just under half of respondents had more than 5 years of experience in their field of work. 52% have less than 5 years of experience. The majority of respondents (89%) indicated that the majority of their experience was obtained in Canada.
- About 40% of respondents identified as a visible minority, immigrant (permanent resident, temporary foreign worker, refugee, or international student), Indigenous person, and/or person with a disability. 59% were none of the above.

Three-quarters of respondents were looking for full-time employment. Table 6 shows the breakdown of respondents' primary motivation for their job search. One-quarter of respondents were looking for "anything that pays a liveable wage;" 25% indicated they are looking to re-enter the workforce; 19% indicated that they are looking for a job that better matches their skills/qualifications; 16% were looking to advance their career.

Table 6: Job Seeker Respondents by Primary Motivation in Job Search

Are you primarily seeking:	Number of Responses	%
Anything that pays a livable wage?	28	26%
To enter or re-enter the workforce?	27	25%
A job to better match your skills/qualifications?	20	19%
To advance your career?	17	16%
A lateral transfer (basically keep on doing what you are doing for a different organization)?	7	7%
Other (please specify)	7	7%
Total	106	100%

WDS Job Seeker Survey, 2020

The biggest barrier indicated by respondents that are currently employed is that they cannot find job openings in their preferred field. These respondents are also individuals with a higher education.

For those who are unemployed, they indicate their biggest barriers are “I don’t have the right skills or qualifications for the positions that are available,” plus they are applying for jobs, but not getting any interviews and/or job offers.

Figure 5: Job Seeker Respondents by Challenges Experienced in Job Search



WDS Job Seeker Survey, 2020

Twenty percent (20%) of job seekers indicated that they were challenged in that they could not afford to upgrade their skills.

Although it does not appear to be a pervasive issue in the Brooks Region, 16% of job seekers have skills, education or experience higher than what they were finding in their job search. About a third of respondents with a trade-certification, professional certification/designation or other related credential received this credential out-of-country and of these only a third noted that their credentials were recognized in Canada. Recognition of foreign credentials was also cited as a gap by community based organizations that work with immigrants.

Skills mismatches can be detrimental to skills retention as skills are lost if not used.¹⁵ Having people in jobs that are below their level is an inefficiency that wastes skills that are expensive to teach and learn.

¹⁵ Canada West Foundation. Literacy Lost. P.12.

D.4.2 Trends / Barriers Observed by Contracted Service Providers, and Community Based Organizations

We consulted with a number of community based organizations and government contracted service providers that act as workforce intermediaries. These organizations provide community and government services to individuals to help them upgrade their skills, integrate into society, find sustainable employment, and more. Not always, but in many cases, these organizations are working with individuals who face more barriers and challenges to employment.

Some of barriers mentioned by the organizations serving these job seekers included:

- Language barriers; English language learning
- Low levels of literacy
- Understanding of Canadian work environment / culture
- Coping skills; dealing with adversity
- Financial capacity
- Mental health; addictions
- Transportation, Childcare, Affordable housing
- Essential skills
- Work ethic
- Assistance required to complete a resume or job application
- Typical challenges with government program restrictions

D.4.3 Employer observations regarding Supply

*"The talent is here. We can't harness it.
Everyone wants to work."*

A number of the employers interviewed for the project indicated that there was a good supply of individuals in the Region. Many of them attributed JBS and the oilfield as a key reason for this supply.

"There's a good supply of quality candidates. Staffing is the least of our concerns right now. JBS has allowed Brooks to have a labour force to choose from. The oilfield used to do the same. All talent in town has come from JBS and oilfield. We try not to recruit from outside the Region."

The greater challenge inevitably was for specific skills and/or experience. Some employers noted that they might recruit higher skilled individuals such as engineers or accountants from outside the Region, but it was challenging to get these individuals to stay (perhaps due to limited career path opportunities).

It was noted that the Region has a smaller workforce to draw from for skilled workers.

*"It's a limited workforce. People dried up with the jobs.
Finding qualified applicants within this Region is a challenge.
The oil downturn hurt the workforce."*

D.5 Alberta's Forecast Regarding Supply

According to Alberta's Supply Outlook Model 2019-2028: Education and Skills post-secondary students will graduate mostly in the fields of Trades and Technology, Health Sciences, and Business. The majority of post-secondary graduates will be coming from colleges and trade institutions (53% share) which bodes well for the presence of Medicine Hat College's Brooks Campus. These colleges and trade institutes will graduate a higher proportion of Trades and Technologists while universities will graduate a higher proportion of post-secondary students in Business.

Other key findings from the Supply Outlook for the forecast period of 2019 to 2028 include:

- The proportion of the workforce with a post-secondary education is expected to increase from 59% to 63%.
- Females are expected to have higher growth rates for university degrees compared to males.
- 32% of females and 27% of males will have university degrees.
- Males will see higher growth in college and trade and high school categories.
- A higher proportion of males, 35%, will have qualifications from colleges and trades institutions compared to females at 32%.



E. Analysis of the Brooks Region Labour Demand

E.1 What We Heard From Employers

In terms of demand, about half of employers we consulted with and/or filled out the online survey said they were looking for people to fill positions. Sixty-four percent of employers noted that there were positions that they have had difficulty filling either now or in the past. In most cases, the employers are looking for specific skills and experience:

- *Challenge to find the skill set needed locally. Often have to go outside the community.*
- *Lack of truly qualified technicians in the area.*
- *Not looking to hire anyone right now, but if an experienced person walked in, I would probably hire them. It's hard to hire someone green.*
- *The more technical the training, the more challenging the find.*
- *Backhoe and excavator operators –it's been tricky to find the right experience.*
- *Industrial meat cutters/butchers are getting to be a more skilled role as the industry moves into more value-added versus primal cuts.*
- *All positions are challenging due to limited education or training.*
- *Engineering is tough to recruit. We have to go outside the city.*
- *Sales is tough. Need the right people who are trained and understand the business.*
- *Sales due to lack of experience.*
- *Technician – difficulty filling with qualified people and good work ethic.*
- *Middle management positions.*
- *Even labour. We have quite a few applicants, they even come from out of country, but they need to have those certifications (safety, first aid, etc.)*

As noted in some of the comments above, the challenge seems to be higher when trying to recruit someone from outside the Region to move to the Region to take a position. For example, when asked if they have had difficulty, one employer stated:

“No, but it will be tough if/when we need to. People don't like to stay in Brooks. It's hard to attract people to Brooks. We recruit from our other offices and let individuals know they can transfer to our bigger centres when a position opens there.”

Another employer indicated that they have tried hiring people from Medicine Hat and having them commute, but it generally doesn't last.

The Conference Board of Canada recognizes that Alberta is well positioned to thrive amid demographic change and rapid technological development, but meeting the demand for skilled workers will be essential to ensuring the province's long-term prosperity.¹⁶ The accelerating pace of change to industries and the types of jobs available have not led to a decline in jobs. Rather, they are shifting the jobs and skills landscape.¹⁷

¹⁶ The Conference Board of Canada. [Building Skills Connections Series. Alberta in a Nutshell](#). November 2018.

¹⁷ The Conference Board of Canada. [The Future is Social and Emotional](#). March 2020.

The OECD highlights the importance of investing in skills. “People, especially youth, need to prepare for the jobs of the future by being equipped with the right mix of skills required to successfully navigate ever-changing, technology-rich work environments. Skills development is not just about schools, but increasingly involves lifelong learning that requires rethinking and better targeting and incentivising the beneficiaries of training programmes.”¹⁸



E.1.1 Qualifications and Skill Sets Required

Some of the training needs that were identified as areas for improvement or that would be beneficial to employers in the Region included:

- Health and safety – especially tickets when it comes to working in the oilfield
- Class 1 and 3 driver training; a mentorship program, and tests
- Customer service training
- Essential skills / life skills
- IT, high technology, computer skills, social media / new age marketing
- Language training
- Intercultural understanding, training, cultural competency
- Trades training, pre-employment trades training
- Early childhood education
- Experienced heavy equipment operators / multi-skilled heavy equipment operators

An analysis of skills listed in job postings for the Brooks Region in the third quarter of 2019 highlights the top hard skills listed in job postings – many of which are related to those we heard (see Table 7).

¹⁸ OECD. *Transformative Technologies and Jobs of the Future. Background report for the Canadian G7 Innovation Ministers’ Meeting.* Montreal, Canada. March 27-28, 2018.

Table 7: Top Hard Skills Listed in Job Postings in Brooks Region

Top Hard Skills	Postings with Skill
Hydrogen Sulfide (H2S) Training	27
Merchandising	26
Acute Care	23
Nursing	21
Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR)	19
Loans	19
Mechanics	18
Restaurant Operation	18
Agriculture	17
Personal Protective Equipment	17
Quality Control	17
Basic Cardiac Life Support	16
Food Services	16
Auditing	15
Continuing Care	14
Standard Operating Procedure	14
Cash Register	13
Accounts Payable	12
Customer Relationship Management	12
Customer Satisfaction	12
Nurse Education	12
Secondary Education	12

EMSI Q3 2019 Data Set. March 2020.

Furthermore, other common skills listed in job postings for the Brooks Region included a lot of “softer” skills, also referenced as essential skills, social emotional skills (SES), human and/or transferrable skills. Table 8 lists the top common skills found in Regional job postings from the third quarter of 2019.



Table 8: Top Common Skills Listed in Job Postings in the Brooks Region

Top Common Skills	Postings with Skill
Customer Service	99
Sales	83
Valid Driver's License	81
Operations	73
Management	68
Communications	67
Detail Oriented	63
First Aid	57
Leadership	54
Problem Solving	47
Interpersonal Skills	35
Computer Literacy	32
Professionalism	31
Prioritization	31
Microsoft Office	28
Microsoft Excel	26
Organizational Skills	25
Time Management	23
Written Communication	23
Critical Thinking	21
Verbal Communication Skills	21
Decision Making	18
Microsoft Outlook	16
Troubleshooting (Problem Solving)	15
Good Driving Record	14
Sanitation	14
High Motivation	13

EMSI Q3 2019 Data Set. March 2020.

E.1.2 Key Occupations Currently in Demand in the Brooks Region

Some of the positions we heard employers in the Region are looking to fill include:

- Industrial butchers and meat cutters
- Sales people – help to find new customers, grow the business
- Class 1 & 2 Transport Operators
- Part-time bus drivers
- Trades:
 - Electricians
 - Instrumentation technicians
 - Mechanics / Agriculture Technicians
 - Welders
 - Automotive service technicians
- Pharmacy technician

- Social workers and related positions
- Health care workers:
 - Health Care Aides (HCAs)
 - Licensed Practical Nurses (LPNs)
 - Registered Nurses (RNs)
 - Physiotherapists
 - Occupational Therapists (OT)
 - Mental Health Workers

JBS is always looking for industrial meat cutters and butchers. The company is challenged in that there are very few places across Canada from where they can recruit with respect to industry experience and/or training. Consequently, they have to train their own industry and they end up recruiting from their own plants in other countries. Temporary Foreign Workers make up approximately 7% of their workforce.

The MCF Feedlot also indicated that they had to recruit out of country for pen rider positions in their cattle and herd health division. These are rather unique positions in that individuals have to be able to ride a horse safely and they need to learn how to recognize sick animals. Additionally, the position is out in the elements. Local talent is available, but there are enough of these positions along the front range in the Calgary area, that it is difficult to attract individuals the additional distance to Brooks. Furthermore the feedlot is challenged to keep local individuals as they inevitably leave to work for one of the numerous Grazing Associations in the Region between April and October.



Growing Occupations and Industries

Table 9 shows the Occupational Demand Outlook at 3 Digit NOC-S, 2016 – 2020 for the Medicine Hat – Lethbridge region, in which the Brooks Region is located, for occupations that are experiencing above average growth.

Table 9: Occupations Experiencing Above Average Growth: Medicine Hat – Lethbridge

Occupation	Annual Average 2016-2020 Change
A21 – Managers in retail trade	1.9%
A22 – Managers in food service and accommodation	2.3%
B51 – Clerical occupations, general office skills	2.5%
D11 – Nurse supervisors and registered nurses	4.0%
D23 – Other technical occupations in health care (except dental)	2.4%
D31 – Assisting occupations in support of health services	3.8%
E02 – Psychologists, social workers, counsellors, clergy and probation officers	3.7%
E21 – Paralegals, social services and occupations in education and religion	2.9%
G01 – Sales and service supervisors	1.9%
G41 – Chefs and cooks	2.7%
G51 – Occupations in food and beverage service	2.4%
G81 – Childcare and home support workers	2.0%
G93 – Cleaners	2.0%
G96 – Food counter attendants, kitchen helpers and related occupations	2.8%
G97 – Other sales and related occupations	1.9%
H42 – Automotive service technicians	2.0%
J17 – Machine operators and related workers in food, beverage and tobacco processing	1.9%

Alberta Government. Occupational Demand Outlook at 3 Digit NOC-S, 2016 – 2020 for the Medicine Hat – Lethbridge.

Table 10 lists some of the fastest growing industries in the Brooks Region by four-digit NAICS code between 2008 and 2018. Looking specifically at these trends, we can see that the meat product manufacturing industry dominates in terms of the number of jobs. Community care for the elderly has created the most new jobs in the past ten years (123 new jobs) and support activities for mining, and oil and gas extraction has shed the most jobs (506). Interestingly, jobs provided by farms has grown, given that farming has been employing fewer and fewer Canadians over time.

Some of the fastest growing industries in the Region between 2008 and 2018 are related to health care which will be reflective of a growing population along with retiring baby boomers.

Table 10: Fastest Growing Industries in the Brooks Region between 2008 and 2018

NAICS	Description	2008 - 2018 % Change	2018 Jobs
6233	Community care facilities for the elderly	1118%	134
4452	Specialty food stores	645%	82
2373	Highway, street and bridge construction	408%	61
2382	Building equipment contractors	248%	94
6211	Offices of physicians	241%	92
4453	Beer, wine and liquor stores	230%	33
6212	Offices of dentists	200%	45
8112	Electronic and precision equipment repair and maintenance	164%	37
4841	General freight trucking	110%	122
4131	Food merchant wholesalers	96%	55
9130	Local, municipal and regional public administration	49%	164
1110	Farms	34%	507

EMSI Q3 2019 Data Set

The industry that shed the most jobs between 2008 and 2018 is support activities for mining, and oil and gas extraction (2131) which saw a 56% decrease (just over 500 jobs), followed by utility system construction (2371) with a 76% decrease (close to 300 high paying jobs), and oil and gas extraction (2111) with a 90% decrease (about 80 high paying jobs).

Although, the Region has a high proportion of individuals with an apprenticeship or trades certificate, a continued need for tradespeople was frequently cited by many of the employers that we interviewed. Alberta’s Short-Term Employment Forecast | 2019-2021 notes that trades and health occupations comprise most of the high demand and moderately high demand occupations.

- Most of the High Demand occupations are in the skill category trades, transport and equipment operators and related occupations; and sales and service occupations.
- The majority of the Moderately High Demand occupations are in the health occupations; and trades, transport and equipment operators and related occupations.



E.2 Demand in Emerging Industries

Renewable energy is growing in southeastern Alberta. Western Canada's first utility scale solar project was constructed in Newell County near Brooks. This 17 MW solar power facility is located on 30 hectares of land and includes 50,000 solar panels that can power up to 3,000 homes. There are plans for potential expansion.

Although we did not hear about a large need for solar related workers, we did learn the following:

- There are not a lot of jobs post-construction; mostly maintenance.
- Right now, there is not enough work in the Brooks Region to employ anyone locally for electrical maintenance. Electricians are sent out from Calgary, however, as projects increase in the area, then it might make sense to employ someone locally.
- During the construction stage, the type of skills needed include: primarily electrician based work, plus civil engineering, mechanical assembly, crane operators, controls, and software program operators.
- There was a good local supply chain for the Brooks project.
- It can be hard to find the people who are experienced for solar and wind, but as long as they have transferrable skills that generally works.
- Courses and programs are emerging to ensure people are accredited. There seems to be a lot of qualified people in southern Saskatchewan and Alberta, but just not experienced.
- Electricians need solar specific training, but that is mostly done internally. There is also a need for Industrial Electricians for high voltage equipment.

As for the potential of a cannabis production and processing industry, it is anticipated that large-scale cannabis production is going to need researchers who are experienced in plant science, microbiology, chemistry and other scientific disciplines.¹⁹ Quality assurance will be important for this industry therefore quality assurance workers will be required. These skills can be transferred from a food manufacturing industry which is prevalent in the Brooks Region and southern Alberta (Taber, Lethbridge). The industry will also need marketing and sales staff.

¹⁹ Owens, Brian. [The Professionalization of Cannabis Growing](#). August 28, 2019.

It is expected to be a fast-paced industry, therefore candidates will need to have the skills to work in an environment that is constantly changing. At the retail level, we heard that key positions include: store manager, team leader, and cannabis educator.

E.3 Retention

Project objectives also included probing individual business issues and opportunities such as labour market issues, attraction and retention issues. In the case of employee retention, very few employers cited retention as a concern. Many noted that they were fortunate to have a number of long-term employees.

During Alberta's previous economic boom, it was a job seeker's market. Therefore, employees were quite mobile and able to switch jobs for better compensation or working conditions. Now that jobs are less plentiful...

"Workers are hanging onto their jobs for dear life."

Even employers in industries that naturally have higher turnover rates (food services, hospitality, retail) noted that their current turnover rates were reasonable compared to the industry and/or compared to previous periods.

JBS Canada can proudly boast that when they came into the plant in 2012 the turnover rate was 47% annually. Now it's 12%; it is the lowest turnover rate in the industry in Canada and as well the lowest in JBS North America!

F. Supply-Demand Gaps

"There's no shortage of people looking for work. The only upside to the downturn is access to labour - no one wants to leave their position."

F.1 Specific Skills and Experience

At present, the Brooks Region appears to have a good supply of labour, particularly for less-skilled positions. The economic downturn, driven primarily by the oil & gas industry, means that there is an increased supply of people looking for work, and fewer workers are leaving their current position for other opportunities. However, where we heard of gaps, they generally had to do with specific skills and experience.

"We had lots of applicants for the front desk agent position, but not many industry related... The position requires more administrative experience versus just customer service."

"It's challenging to find the skill set needed locally. We often have to go outside the community."

Skill or worker shortages can hurt employers and the community in the following ways:

- Reduced service
- Reduced quality service / performance
- Increased overtime
- Increased workload for current staff / overworking current staff
- Moving people from different positions (usually higher skill sets) to cover a position
- Turning away work / jobs / projects
- Certain shortages can be “show-stoppers for our whole operation”
- “I end up over-paying someone who is under-qualified”

Supply-demand gaps are costly to employees and to the economy as a whole.

F.2 Increased Pace of Technology and Automation

Technology has always changed the workplace. The rate of technological change and disruption in the workplace is expected to increase at an even faster pace moving forward. RBC’s Humans Wanted report forecasts that over 25% of Canadian jobs will be heavily disrupted by technology in the coming decade.

A couple of the industries expected to be most susceptible to technological change and disruption are agriculture and manufacturing.

Agribusiness is forecast to be the fastest adopter of digital, growing by approximately 25% through to 2022.

Employers in the Brooks Region noted the increased role technology plays in their workforce. Comments heard included:

- *Ag technicians – there are lots of folks who are mechanically inclined, but you need to be more than just mechanically inclined anymore.*
- *I hear some producers say that they would like to have their hired hands educated on a pivot (automated irrigation) system, to troubleshoot soil moisture. They would even be willing to pay those workers more money as a result.*

Manufacturing is another industry that is expected to see increased investments in automation. Rumours have emerged that the Brooks Region, with its high proportion of workers in manufacturing, could be at-risk for high levels of displaced workers. However, it is more likely the Region will need more skilled workers.

Franco Naccarato, Executive Director for Meat and Poultry Ontario states...

“Everyone always assumes, well if you can get robots to do it we won’t need humans; and in fact, everyone I’ve talked to in every type of business that adds automation actually needs to redeploy their staff or hire more staff because it creates bottlenecks in other parts of the business... Sometimes it takes over a labour intensive job, but then it creates a more skilled intensive job. More skilled intensive jobs are needed... How do we scale up our labour force?”²⁰

In terms of meat processing, the good news is that cattle processing is at less risk for automation compared to other meat sources such as hogs, poultry, lamb, and fish due to the inconsistent size and shape of cattle. That being said, the skills required by industrial butchers and meat-cutters are increasing as the industry moves from primal cuts into more value added cuts.

McDonald’s Corporation introduced kiosks for ordering meals which reduced the number of front line counter employees needed, however the kiosks increased the number of orders that could be placed. Consequently, more people were needed in the kitchen. Kiosks increased sales and productivity.

Skill requirements are evolving in the workplace. McKinsey Global Institute finds that automation in the workplace will require adaptations such as higher educational attainment, or spending more time on activities that require social and emotional skills, creativity, high-level cognitive capabilities and other skills relatively hard to automate.²¹

F.3 Essential Skills

Essential skills are the basic communication and thinking skills needed by all workers to varying degrees. According to the Conference Board of Canada, 40% of the workforce does not have the essential skills needed to apply their technical skills and knowledge at globally competitive levels.²²

Furthermore:

- Nearly one-third of 16 to 25 year olds are short of some essentials skills for their jobs
- Half of the people who did not finish high school have essential skills shortages
- 30% of University graduates have essential skills shortages for their jobs
- Immigrants have shortages for their jobs at higher levels (between 10-16%) than the non-immigrant population
- In most of the West, Aboriginal people living on reserves are more likely to have shortages than their off-reserve counterparts

²⁰ Smith Lyndsey. There are many reasons why we don’t have more small processors. Real Agriculture. May 1, 2020. Interview with Franco Naccarato retrieved from:

<https://www.realagriculture.com/2020/05/there-are-many-reasons-why-we-dont-have-more-small-processors/>

²¹ McKinsey Global Institute. Jobs Lost, Jobs Gained: Workforce Transitions in a Time of Automation. December 2017.

²² Lane, Janet and T. Scott Murray. Smarten Up. It’s time to build essential skills. Canada West Foundation. June 2015.

Locally, 27% of respondents in the Job Seeker survey indicated that they do not have the right skills or qualifications for the positions that are available indicating a supply/demand gap.

There is an increasing demand for foundational skills such as critical thinking, co-ordination, social perceptiveness, active listening and complex problem solving.

F.4 Social and Emotional Skills (SES)

Social and emotional skills might also be referred to as soft skills, human skills, transferable, behavioural, non-cognitive and professional. In Canada, in-demand skills include leadership, cultural competence, resiliency, problem-solving, collaboration and communication. These are the skills least likely to be replaced by technologies. They are the skills that allow us to adapt to an ever-changing labour market.²³

Employers often lament that entry-level new hires lack these skills: skills which are difficult to teach, measure, or even define. Both employers and contracted service providers identified these types of skill gaps.

According to The Conference Board of Canada's Impact Paper, March 2020 "closing social and emotional skills gaps will set up learners, workers, and employers for career success. But it will require rethinking SES training and development in the post-secondary context, including it as part of a lifelong learning process."²⁴

F.5 Trades Training

Trades are important and will continue to be important into the near future for the Brooks Region especially in the energy and manufacturing sectors. The Region can celebrate that they have cultivated a good culture of developing and apprenticing high school students in the trades.

However, it can be challenging financially for employers to take on apprentices; employers have to pay these apprentices plus have qualified journeymen on staff to provide the training. Many employers are operating in soft economic conditions at the moment and they tend to be operating at full employment capacity. Despite, the value of building tomorrow's workforce today, employers still need skilled, experienced workers to conduct the current work.

In addition to the investment of apprenticing or training someone locally, there is a frustration that many apprentices will leave their position for a higher paying position in the lucrative oil and gas industry or to advance their career.

²³ Ibid. Page 5.

²⁴ The Conference Board of Canada. The Future is Social and Emotional: Evolving Skills Needs in the 21st Century. Impact Paper. March 2020. Page 2.

The good news is that while several programs across the province are seeing cuts, the Government of Alberta recently announced that it will triple the amount of annual funding to CAREERS: The Next Generation to more than \$6 million a year by 2022-23, providing 6,000 students with paid internships and skilled trades and technologies learning opportunities in elementary, junior high and high schools.

F.6 Basic literacy, computer, language skills

A lack of English language skills, basic literacy, and computer skills were consistently identified as challenges in the Brooks Region by service providers, education institutions, and to some extent employers in the food and hospitality and agriculture industries.

Low levels of literacy, computer, and language barriers tend to come with the high level of secondary migration attracted by the Region. In fact, 63% of students in Brooks are ELL in the Catholic school system. It is challenging for those individuals who lack these skills to find employment.

F.6.1 English Language Learning

In terms of English language skills programs, there are several organizations and government programs that provide ESL in the Brooks Region. The challenge becomes the barriers that individuals face in pursuing these programs. Barriers include things like financial²⁵, childcare, transportation, an individual's time/capacity to attend (they may be trying to take lessons on top of working or other full-time commitments), an individual's personal motivation to attend and participate, and opportunities for conversational English although service providers are doing their best to provide these opportunities.

F.6.2 General Literacy

Low literacy skills are particularly prevalent in many of the Region's immigrant (particularly refugee) population. In the report Literacy Lost: Canada's Basic Skills Shortfall, prepared by Canada West Foundation, across all age groups, Canada is just average among OECD countries in adult literacy.

Literacy is more than the ability to read; it includes the ability to read well and apply what is read to a range of problems. Literacy is key to efficiently apply higher order numeracy and problem-solving skills. Most jobs in Canada require workers to have Level 3 literacy skills or higher to succeed.²⁶

To keep pace with changes, both now and in the future, the ability to keep learning will be one of the most important basic skills of any job.

Low levels of literacy impede a business' ability to compete.

²⁵ Many of these individuals have little disposable income. They are trying to sustain themselves plus help family back home. Additionally, there may be some cultural limitations with respect to loans e.g. Riba is prohibited in Islam.

²⁶ The Conference Board of Canada. Literacy Lost: Canada's Basic Skills Shortfall. December 2018. Page 7.

F.6.3 Computer/Digital Literacy

The process of looking and applying for jobs is way more online now so the ability to use a computer at a basic level is essential. For example, about half of the employers we surveyed/interviewed indicated that their recruitment methods included Indeed (www.indeed.com) and social media (e.g. LinkedIn, Facebook), and 41% indicated that they posted job opportunities online at their or their company's website.

Additionally, basic use of a computer is often needed to complete employee timesheets. Furthermore, as Table 8 previously highlighted, computer literacy, Microsoft Office, Microsoft Excel, and Microsoft Outlook were among the top common skills listed in job postings for the Brooks Region.

F.7 Networking and Experience

A number of the service providers interviewed lamented the loss of the previous Volunteer Resource Centre program. A volunteer resource centre program can help individuals develop and utilize their skill sets, connect to the community, and network. While the Volunteer Resource Centre is no longer available, related services are still offered through the FCSS office although this was not addressed during the consultations.

Many temporary foreign worker (TFW) families come with visitor status. They cannot legally work therefore it is valuable to connect these individuals to volunteer groups, conversations groups, and lifeskills groups to help in their quest to become permanent residents.

More networking opportunities along with work experience or job shadow opportunities were desired to help connect job seekers with employers. However, it is important to also recognize that things like job shadowing, work experience programs, and/or internships can be a significant investment on the employer's part. Even at a very basic level, some degree of paperwork is required to ensure that both the employer and the "intern" are protected both physically and legally. Additionally, the employer needs to invest time and energy for orientation, training, and supervision.

Sometimes internships and work experience programs are viewed as an opportunity for "free" or "cheap" labour rather than as a learning and mentoring experience.

F.8 Workplace Diversity

Although we consulted with many employers that have successfully hired and integrated newcomers, service providers indicate that there is a gap in some employers' willingness and attitude towards hiring newcomers and/or people with a disability. No doubt, there is some risk involved, and a fear of the unknown. Additionally, some employers have been "burnt" in the past especially as many newcomers struggle to adapt to Canadian workplace norms.

Because the majority of businesses in the Region are small businesses (under 100 employees), there tends to be less investment and less capacity for investment into human resources. The number of employers that can provide jobs to individuals who do not have good levels of English and literacy are even more limited. Additionally, a lot of the regional small businesses are self-proprietors and family-run businesses and do not have external staff.

Canadian employers, in general, have a hard time accepting or recognizing out of country experience, which often results in a skills mismatch for immigrants.

F.9 External factors

There are many external challenges that are beyond the Region's control, but certainly present gaps. These include:

- recognizing immigrant credentials
- how the government views certain skill occupations
- the apprenticeship process
- the immigration process
- Mandatory Entry-Level Training (M.E.L.T.) for Class 1 and 2 driver's licences
- government funding for programs and services
- education systems / curriculum
- minimum wage

However, the Region can help bring about some of these potential changes by making its collaborative voice heard, and help support those individuals and organizations.

G. Best Practices in Workforce Development Strategies

G.1 Engaging and Involving Local Business and Organizations

In order to succeed, workforce development providers must work "hand-in-glove" with local businesses to ensure that learners gain the skills employers desire. Employers are not educators, but they do expect a "qualified candidate."

Appendix A highlights a few examples of best practices that include good industry engagement (e.g. McKee Homes Building Futures in Airdrie, Off Campus Education Programs in Whitecourt).

G.2 Building Awareness

In a report completed for the province in 2013, findings indicate that rural living is not perceived by youth to be compatible with diverse career paths.²⁷ Therefore, it is valuable to connect industry to the community in a way that people know what kinds of great opportunities exist in their community.

²⁷ Irshad, Humaira. Rural Development Division. Attracting and Retaining People to Rural Alberta. A List of Resources and Literature Review. January 2013.

By letting young people and their parents know what industries are common or unique in their region, and what opportunities exist within that region, they might find that the opportunities are way more exciting than they realized.

For example, JBS recently provided a presentation of the job opportunities that exist at the plant and within the company to local high school students and their parents. Feedback indicates that many locals were unaware of the opportunities that were available. The fact that JBS can demonstrate a career-path to students and their parents is especially beneficial.

Additionally, information gaps tend to prevent students from taking full advantage of the programs and resources that exist within a community. This is particularly concerning for students from less fortunate backgrounds, who do not have parents or other adults shepherding them. Although this role is typically left to career counsellors, there may be an opportunity for economic development to also help students and parents understand the scholarships, grants, work-experience, and government programs available to them.

G.3 Connecting People to Careers and Career Opportunities

When it comes to recruiting, over half of employers interviewed for this project indicated that they used word-of-mouth or referrals emphasizing the value of networking. This puts jobseekers, especially newcomers and youth, at a disadvantage as they generally lack strong networks. Therefore, it is valuable to match jobseekers to employers and vice versa through work experience programs, by creating networking opportunities, or through other methods that can help both employers find local talent and keeps job seekers in your community. Employers should be reaching into the school system prior to graduation.

This is successfully happening in the local RAP program. Northern Gateway Public Schools can be looked to for best practices as they have successfully connected a number of high school students and employers through their off-campus education programs (see Appendix A).

G.4 Continuous Workplace Training

Moving forward, a skilled workforce is going to include a workforce that is constantly learning, training and upgrading to meet the demands of the rapidly changing workplace. Therefore, continuous workplace training and lifelong learning enables workers and enterprises to adjust to an increasingly rapid pace of change.

According to The Conference Board of Canada research findings, people tend to lose skills as they age, not through the aging process, but through lack of use. Also, skills that are not used on the job are ultimately lost. This is particularly detrimental for workers in jobs below their skills level.

G.5 Youth Leadership Programs

Developing leadership skills among youth has long been a best-practice in skill development, youth retention and building strong communities. Leadership helps create a sense of ownership and worth, and lets youth know that they can add value to their community. Leadership skills are naturally transferable work skills.

The Brooks Region with its rural nature has a strong cluster of 4-H programs. 4-H Canada is a highly respected youth organization whose mission is to empower youth to be responsible, caring and contributing leaders that effect positive change in the world around them.

Civic youth councils, youth advisory committees, and youth positions in local community based organizations are also valued for youth engagement and building future leadership skills.

G.6 Inclusion and Diversity in the Workplace

A key benefit of a diversity strategy is that it improves an organization's capacity to compete globally. Employees of diverse backgrounds bring knowledge of their markets and cultures to a company; if you have employees who come from parts of the world where your company does business, then you are more likely to get closer to these foreign markets. Additionally, a multilingual work force can sharpen a business's competitive edge in the global arena.²⁸

Given the downturn in Alberta's oil & gas industry, local manufacturers are looking for new markets including export markets in order to diversify and grow. Alberta's agriculture industry exports products all around the globe. The province's top five agri-food exports were beef (\$2.4 billion), wheat (\$2.0 billion), canola seed (\$1.1 billion), crude canola oil (\$827.4 million) and live cattle (\$742.8 million).²⁹

²⁸ BDC. [Why workplace diversity benefits your business](https://www.bdc.ca/en/articles-tools/employees/recruit/pages/business-benefits-workforce-diversity.aspx). Retrieved from: <https://www.bdc.ca/en/articles-tools/employees/recruit/pages/business-benefits-workforce-diversity.aspx>

²⁹ Government of Alberta. Agricultural trade services – For exporters website.

H. Strategies for addressing

A brief summary of both the strengths and challenges facing the Brooks Region help to form the key strategies for a Workforce Development Strategy.

Strengths	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Young, culturally diverse population - Smaller community; well-connected - Industrious attitude / work ethic - Collaborative community(ies) and community based organizations - Strong industry clusters in agriculture, energy, manufacturing, and tourism - Attracting solar energy, cannabis - Affordable; lower cost of living - Proximity / Location - Irrigation District - Local college and good proximity to other post-secondary education opportunities - Good quality of life factors - Strong supply of tradespeople - Good RAP program; Makerspace program; Green Certificate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Low levels of literacy - High levels of ESL - High population of immigrants, refugees struggling to assimilate into Canadian culture / workplace culture - Few large private industry employers - Perception - Lack of public transportation - External challenges associated with the Region’s key industries (cost of oil, commodity prices, growing conditions, interruptions in beef processing supply chain) - Government funding / cutbacks

H.1 Keep Building the Brooks Region Brand

In recent years, the Brooks Region developed a branding and community strategy to help capture the unique opportunities presented within the Region and reinforce the Region’s brand values:

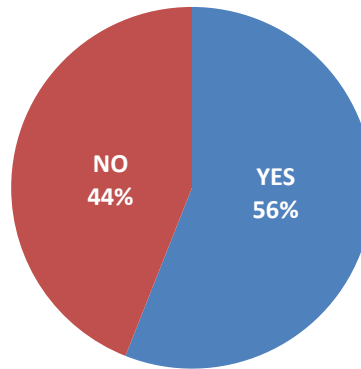
Industrious | Independent | Helpful | Welcoming | Resilient

Sharing positive messages about the Region, its communities, businesses and organizations, and people will help showcase the Region as a great place to live, work, and invest. Business is increasingly following or locating where the talent is (or where it wants to be) therefore quality of life factors are of increasing importance.

The Brooks Region’s unique selling point will help to both recruit new talent and retain existing talent. Communities generally have a better chance of success by targeting workers who already have some connection to the Region. This finding was illustrated in the Job Seeker Survey, where immigrants appear to be more willing to relocate or move (69%) as opposed to 45% of those who identified as none of the above. Given that just over half of immigrants living in Brooks arrived recently (between 2011 and 2016), it could be inferred that they are less connected to the Region.

Figure 6: Job Seeker Respondents by Willingness to Relocate

Are you willing to to move or relocate for the right employment opportunity?



Anecdotally, agencies and organizations that work with immigrant groups indicated that many immigrants and younger males are leaving the community and going to bigger cities to pursue job opportunities. While statistical information cannot yet support this observation, the exodus of this demographic should be tracked by monitoring census data.



Millennials are increasingly drawn to cultural and lifestyle amenities, affordability and job opportunity.

Most young people are looking for a mix of the following in the places they choose to live:³⁰

1. an active cultural scene
2. fibre optics
3. entrepreneurial culture
4. restaurants & bars
5. breweries & distilleries
6. co-working spaces
7. public spaces
8. innovative housing
9. retailers
10. great schools
11. lively downtown core
12. local public markets
13. good jobs

The Brooks Region is able to deliver on a number of these items. The Region really is a lovely, unique place. It includes some fantastic coffee and tea shops, a nice downtown, a couple of microbreweries, with a microdistillery close to opening, good jobs, a modern recreational complex, diverse restaurant options, and warm, welcoming people. Many of the folks we interviewed indicated that they cared about their community and they want their community to do well.

Because the Region can identify what makes them unique, they can convey that effectively to potential young newcomers. We recommend that the Brooks Region continue to own and celebrate its “rural-ness,” and blue-collar, gritty work ethic.



Even the working conditions at the renowned Dinosaur Provincial Park are tough in terms of working in the heat and snakes.

³⁰ Morse, Randy. Youth Attraction: Rural Challenges, Successes. BC Rural Centre. November 1, 2018. Retrieved from: <https://www.bcruralcentre.org/2018/11/01/youth-attraction-rural-challenges-successes/>

H.2 Expose Young People to the Opportunities that Exist in the Region

As part of the Region’s branding strategy, it is also important to market the community to young people. The Brooks Region has a strong young population. A best practice in Workforce Development is to reach into the school system prior to graduation and to expose young people to the opportunities that exist locally for them. The sooner that students start thinking about opportunities in their local community, the more likely they are to pursue those opportunities when it comes time to make decisions.

The Brooks Region is already doing some positive activities in this regard. This type of activity should continue and be further developed.

Given the local economy, it is important to continue exposing youth to opportunities at JBS, to opportunities available through trades programs, to health care opportunities, the energy sector, and to continue to helping youth to see entrepreneurship as an option. There are also good career paths available in the hospitality and foods services industry; helping individuals to see these career paths can help to attract and retain individuals in this industry.

Additionally, the strong prevalence of the agriculture industry in the Region means it is most important to help young people see the vast opportunities that exist in this industry. Although it has improved in recent years, the agriculture industry has not been particularly good at sharing the variety career opportunities that are available.

Critical Success Factors: Industry participation | good partner collaboration | funding.

H.3 Help in the Upskilling and Reskilling of the Workforce

Rural regions often face a mismatch between the high skills required by an industry sector and the skills of local workers.³¹ The biggest challenge we heard from employers in terms of recruiting was for specific skills and/or experience.

“Skilled class 1 drivers are in short supply. Rookies are bountiful but unusable.”

Micro-credentials are a concept that has emerged in response to the skills gap caused by new technologies. Most employers expect their workers to continually seek out learning opportunities. Micro-credentials are like certifications. Students or professionals take courses and develop specific skills in certain fields.

Micro-credentials offer students and working professionals alike a way to bulk up their resumes with field-specific skills. Micro-credentials are bite-sized chunks of education apprenticeship from a traditional university, specialty provider or online learning platform. They might be provided online and/or via a bootcamp certificate.

³¹ Rural Development Institute. [Rural Workforce Development Strategies](#). Selkirk College, Applied Research & Innovation Centre. Knowledge Brief. Spring 2017.

It has been suggested that in the future, a prospective employee might be able to ‘stack’ these credentials together in place of a university degree. The main idea behind micro-credentials is that they would be more accessible and provide a more affordable, perhaps more targeted path into employment. The affordable component could be particularly appealing to individuals and organizations in the Brooks Region. Twenty percent of job seekers indicated that they cannot afford to upgrade their skills.

Although the concept is relatively new, many post-secondary institutions across Canada are testing the concept. Questions remain on how to describe, authenticate and digitally store the skills represented in a badge or micro-credential.

Medicine Hat College – Brooks Campus might be a reasonable size and location to pilot this concept. It could help address the many barriers that particularly low-skilled immigrant job seekers face including time, capacity, and financial.

Additionally, the pandemic has accelerated the pace and transfer to online learning. There may be an increased appetite, hence an increased opportunity, to provide e-learning opportunities and/or online learning modules. Again these can be provided in bite-sized chunks that are affordable and flexible.

Furthermore, Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) are providing learners with the tools, experience and opportunity to learn new skills and practice procedures and in an accelerated format. Early findings suggest that there is improved comprehension and retention using this virtual form of hands-on, practical learning. Additionally, it is beneficial to learners who face cognitive challenges.

Providing increased flexibility in the delivery of programs could expand the overall pool of qualified apprentices.

The provincial government has also identified skills as an important outcome in its Business Plan 2019-23 outcomes for the ministry of Labour and Immigration:

- Albertans have the skills demanded by Alberta’s labour now and in the future
- Alberta is able to attract immigrants and retain new Albertans, resulting in a skilled, resilient and productive workforce that meets the needs of job creators

The provincial government recently announced that it is in the process of developing a new immigration strategy titled the Alberta Advantage Immigration Strategy, that will include two new business immigration streams for start-ups and entrepreneurs. The province will also launch a separate plan, the Fairness for Newcomers Action Plan, to help new immigrants find work at their skill level more quickly. The overall goal of these initiatives is to help fill gaps in Alberta’s labour market and create more jobs.

H.4 Keep Promoting Entrepreneurship

Keep building and supporting entrepreneurship initiatives with activities like Power Up Brooks – an event that connects entrepreneurs to people, organizations and partners. Rural communities can be some of the best places to start-up new businesses because there is so much untapped opportunity. A small business needs assessment could help them identify opportunities.

Continue to cultivate opportunities with young people with programs like Junior Achievement. Creating a culture for young people to “create their own jobs through entrepreneurship while investing in places for them to network with other millennials could provide the incentive they need to stay or return after they are finished with school,” says Pamela Schalhorn, a University of Illinois Faculty of Extension researcher.

The Brooks Region is fortunate that it has access to great entrepreneurship resources through Community Futures Entre-Corp plus The Business Link.



H.5 Form a Workforce Development Strategy Action Consortium to Jointly Address the Supply-Demand Gaps Identified in this Report.

Too often, service delivery is fragmented, with different types of institutions missing the benefits of collaboration, and without sufficient connection to the real, immediate needs of business. Moreover, too often all relevant parties – workers, businesses, educational institutions, and workforce development organizations – speak mutually unintelligible languages about what they need and offer.³²

By bringing all parties to the table, the players can better collaborate to understand, prioritize, and address regional skill gaps plus reduce any duplication or overlap that may be occurring. Partners can better pool financial resources to expand training opportunities plus share ideas and best practices.

³² EMSI. 2019 Talent Attraction Scorecard.

There is already good collaboration among key players in the Brooks Region including this project's partners, community based organizations and contracted service providers, plus in partnerships like Youth Careers South East Alberta, along with industry. A "new" entity does not necessarily need to be formed, rather it may build upon some of the existing partnerships and collaborations.

Actions taken by the action committee may include things like:

- Further exposing youth to career opportunities via career fairs, work experience programs, industry videos, etc.
- Helping to connect job seekers and employers through networking opportunities, volunteer programs, internships, etc.
- Support initiatives that increase both job seekers and employers access to knowledge and available resources (scholarships, government programs).
- Collaborate with community based organizations to mitigate the barriers faced by job seekers and workers in training and upskilling.
- Collaborate with the school division, college and/or other training institutions regarding the feasibility of expanding the current programs or by offering new programs (e.g. dual credit programming).
- Conduct collaborative research on training needed by and the preferred delivery method of the business community.
- Joint lobbying for changes to issues affecting the Region (e.g. recognition of skills, out-of-country credentials).

Industry participation is a critical success factor for any workforce development strategy to be effective, therefore it is highly recommended that any kind of labour force development action committee engages with employers and industry.

Industry can sometimes provide opportunities or resources that schools, post-secondary, and/or government cannot as demonstrated in some of the examples shared in the Whitecourt area.

Critical Success Factors: Industry participation | good partner collaboration

H.6 Work with Employers to Help Improve Work Culture, Increase their Capacity and Competitiveness

Research findings from RBC notes that Canadian employers are generally not prepared, through hiring, training or re-training, to recruit and develop the skills needed to make their organizations more competitive in the digital economy.

Additionally, employers often report that they are hesitant to invest in workplace training beyond that which is necessary for safety and general orientation because the employee does not remain with the organization. This situation was particularly prevalent throughout Alberta's oil and gas boom between 2000 and 2008 when it was a job seeker's market.

Help share information with employers to support and address regional business issues and opportunities. Specifically, help employers to see the value in investing in skills, literacy, continuous learning and the value in cultural competency and diverse workplaces. Employers will only attend those types of events that view as solving an ongoing problem in their place of business. If they don't perceive these activities as being issues in their workplace, then it will be hard to get their participation.

Improve literacy

Employers may need to take the lead and invest in skill upgrading for their workforce when their workers do not do so themselves. This seems to work best in firms where there is a culture conducive to learning.³³ However, Grasslands School Division has tried to make it easier for their Educational Assistants to get the necessary skills and qualifications for their positions, but has found that the uptake is limited. Therefore, this culture may need to extend beyond the workplace and into the community.

Sharing measurable outcomes will be beneficial in getting employer buy-in. Help employers to see the value in investing in their workers' skills by making a business case, and demonstrating how increased literacy leads to higher productivity.

Diversity and Inclusion Training

RBC's Humans Wanted report indicates that global competencies like cultural awareness will be in demand in the future. There is an opportunity for providing some diversity and inclusion training programs for employers and the Region has some good local employers that can speak to this directly. However, we suggest first assessing whether employers are willing to listen/participate. At present, employers can be more selective about who they hire. Many employers believe that they are hiring the best fit for the job, but they don't realize that they may have an exclusive recruiting process and/or a biased selection process.

There may also be some ways to help employers to recognize and verify out of country experience.

Employers need to see a return on investment if they are going to become partners in workforce development.

Critical Success Factors: These concepts will only be of value if local employers are receptive to it. It is recommended that in order to get buy-in, find and utilize some local champions and ambassadors. Additionally, we strongly recommend presenting a business case. Although employers may want to be altruistic, having a presenter that can share metrics, and can demonstrate increased productivity and/or reduced costs, will ultimately be what convinces employers to participate.

³³ Lane, Janet and T. Scott Murray. Smarten Up. It's time to build essential skills. Canada West Foundation. June 2015.

H.7 Actively engage and consult with youth

Make sure youth know that their opinions and ideas matter by including them in community planning processes. Ask them why they stay and truly listen to their answers.

Engaging with youth is a best practice in youth attraction and retention. A significant proportion of rural youth feel that they are not considered to be active participants in their community.³⁴

Social and recreational opportunities are a crucial factor in retaining and attracting youth to a community. Therefore knowing and sharing a community's recreational opportunities with young people is also valuable in terms of building up quality of life factors offered in the Region.

A workforce development strategy works hand in hand with a youth retention strategy.

Critical Success Factors: Active listening and authentic engagement | Ensuring diverse representation (socio-economic, culture, gender, academics).

“Don’t interrupt. I can’t tell you how many times I’ve watched older community members ask what younger people want, then interrupt their answers to tell them how wrong they are. Especially when a young person offers a comment about how little there is to do, older people rush in with interruptions about all the great things the young people are overlooking. Don’t do this. When you ask for their insight, take the time and be respectful enough to actually listen without interrupting. Focus on writing down what they are saying instead of responding.”

~ Becky McCray, Founder of Small Biz Survival and Save Your Town.

H.8 Provide support to industries and workers affected by COVID Pandemic

Although the COVID-19 Pandemic threw a wild card into the economy, it will be important coming out of the pandemic, to support those industries (such as hospitality) and workers (often lower paying, lower skilled, and women) that have been disproportionately affected. There may be a need to help retrain or upskill workers who have been displaced by the pandemic.

It is anticipated that the pandemic will cause many employers to really focus on health and safety (i.e. how do workplaces keep workers and customers safe/healthy?) It will be important that organizations in the Brooks Region help employers navigate emerging best practices.

³⁴ Irshad, Humaira. Rural Development Division. Attracting and Retaining People to Rural Alberta. A List of Resources and Literature Review. January 2013.

New health and safety protocols might require new training. For example, there has been some speculation that cleaning professionals will require training and certification in the future for places like health care settings and beyond. Community Colleges are ideally positioned to deliver this type of training.

There is also concern for the unknown impact of potential mental health concerns brought about due to stresses caused by the pandemic. The Brooks Region may be more vulnerable than other communities to mental health impacts given the actual spread of the coronavirus. On the other hand, the small, tight-knit Region could be more resilient than anticipated. The Region has survived crises before such as the BSE crisis in 2003 and an E.coli contamination scare that shut-down the former XL Foods Inc. plant in 2012.

Appendix A: Best Practices

Calgary Economic Development – EDGE UP Program

EDGE UP (Energy to Digital Growth Education and Upskilling Project) is a short-term skills development program for mid-career Oil and Gas professionals who have been displaced from the Oil and Gas sector in Calgary. The project aims to help former employees of the Oil and Gas sector gain employment in Calgary's high-demand, high-growth digital technology opportunities across all industries.

This program was one of several initiatives to receive funding by Future Skills Centre – Centre des Compétences futures (FSC-CCF) to test innovative approaches to skills development challenges for mid-career workers across Canada. The almost \$1.5 million investment will be used to deliver tech training to highly skilled Oil and Gas sector workers displaced mid-career. This tech training will enable former Oil and Gas workers to pivot their careers in Calgary's digital economy.

Building Futures in Airdrie

McKee Homes, a major employer in Airdrie, in initial partnership with George McDougall High School, and the Rockyview School Division, has entered its seventh year of an ongoing innovative and exciting program called Building Futures.

Building Futures teaches students home building from the foundation up. Students are introduced to every angle of home construction, in a classroom they help to build themselves, and in two new homes they help build to completion. All this, while getting their high school academic education right on site.

Students in the program learn their core courses from two teachers in a repurposed garage. The program allows for individualized instruction and an environment where students can pursue their passions. By the end of the year, with the help and instruction of qualified tradespeople, the students contribute to the building of a complete house while learning how to contribute to their community.

The program is open to all learners, but the type of student who does best in this program is one who is self-directed, isn't afraid to take risks, can think outside of the box, and wants to experience school differently for a year.

Nearly 200 students have gone through this innovative way of learning.

Whitecourt Business Support Network

Created in 2014, Whitecourt's Business Support Network is a partnership endeavor by the following organizations:

- Town of Whitecourt
- Woodlands County
- Alberta Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour
- Alberta Works
- Community Futures
- Business & Industry
- Whitecourt & District Chamber of Commerce

The goals of the Network are to:

- Contribute to the long-term sustainability of Whitecourt and Woodlands County.
- Provide a forum to share ideas, and exchange information on current labour market trends to identify and address workforce issues.

The network gets together with local municipalities to identify common workforce challenges, address and solve these issues and offer support to local employers.

Off Campus Education Programs

Northern Gateway Public Schools has held summer bootcamps for the past three years.

The career bootcamps are a two-week, dual-credit program allowing students from Grade 9-12 to attend a number of courses in order to explore possible future careers, at no cost to the student, while earning high school credits.

The program is in partnership with the Town of Whitecourt, Woodlands County, Living Waters Catholics Schools, CFDC Yellowhead East, and Alberta Labour.

“Our vision is to encourage youth to explore their interests and have an opportunity in a hands-on type of learning,” explains Debbie Vance, NGPS consultant and Dual Credit officer.

Programming continues to grow.

Several students have come out of the bootcamp with safety certifications (H2S Alive, Advance Fire Extinguisher, Ladder Safety, Flagging, WHMIS) and first aid.

They have had good industry participation. For example, Whitecourt Transport offered to provide a tractor trailer and fuel for the bootcamp; United Rentals is at the table to help with forklift training; Shell Canada sponsored experiential work in Fox Creek.

The program is expensive, and could not happen without funding from partners.

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