

BC Centre for Employment  
Excellence:  
Community Consultations Summary  
Report

Canada



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## Acknowledgement

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The knowledge and enthusiasm participants brought to each session made for enjoyable and productive gatherings. The Centre staff look forward to building on the connections that were made, as well as creating new ones in the upcoming years.

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## Introduction

The [BC Centre for Employment Excellence](#) organized community consultations with service providers and practitioners in the employment services sector between November 2012 and February 2013 in various locations across British Columbia (BC). These initial consultations are important for the Centre, as it values input and feedback from its key stakeholders. This feedback will be used to help the Centre develop appropriate information needs and supports to serve the sector. More specifically, the primary purpose of the consultations is two-fold:

1. Introduce the BC Centre for Employment Excellence, its [mission](#) and business functions; and
2. Engage and seek input from service providers and practitioners on the types of information, resources and tools they would like to see available from the Centre.

Locations for the consultations were chosen from the province's economic development regions. Using these regions offered a baseline that would allow for greater provincial outreach in a short time span. Approximately 100 participants attended seven consultations in different locations across the province. Since the Centre's objective is to support the employment services sector, effort was made to broadly invite service providers and practitioners working across the sector. This aim was largely achieved as participants at the consultations came from a range of programs, including individuals working in WorkBC Employment Services Centres, partners to the lead contract holders of WorkBC Centres, programs funded by the Ministry of Jobs, Tourism and Skills Training (JTST), post-secondary institutions, agencies that are delivering services for specialized populations and also agencies that are not directly delivering Employment Program of BC<sup>1</sup> (EPBC) services. The following table shows the date and location of each consultation, as well as the number of participants.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Effective April 2, 2012, the BC Ministry of Social Development implemented the Employment Program of BC, a one-stop employment program. For more information: [http://www.gov.bc.ca/meia/online\\_resource/employment\\_programs\\_and\\_community\\_services/epbc/](http://www.gov.bc.ca/meia/online_resource/employment_programs_and_community_services/epbc/).

<sup>2</sup> The Centre presented at the November 8-9, 2012 ASPECT Conference in Victoria, and therefore, did not include Victoria in these initial consultations.

**Table 1** Date, location and number of participants at the community consultations

Date	Location	Number of participants
November 5, 2012	Vancouver	38
December 6, 2012	Kelowna	9
December 12, 2012	Fort St. John	6
January 17, 2013	Abbotsford	12
January 23, 2013	Terrace	14
February 18, 2013	Prince George	13
February 21, 2013	Nanaimo	8

This report presents a summary of the information gathered at the consultations that were conducted as part of the Centre's initial engagement with the employment services sector. As mentioned, the consultations are designed to provide the Centre with information to thoughtfully develop its activities for the sector.

## Approach to consultations

The Centre sent individual invitations to organizations in the employment services sector for the relevant consultation. In addition to the WorkBC Centres, a quick scan was conducted for each region to identify and invite other organizations that delivered employment programs, including organizations that provide Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy programs, Community Living BC programs, and JTST funded programs. Information about the consultations was posted on the Centre's website, Twitter feed and monthly newsletter, as well as being advertised through associations such as the BC Career Development Association (BCCDA). Table 2 shows the topics discussed and organization of the consultation. The introduction to the BC Centre for Employment Excellence in the first section was designed to raise awareness about the Centre and to provide general context to participants about its mandate and activities, in order to anchor the subsequent discussions. Information collected from each of the topic areas is summarized in the next section.

**Table 2 Topic guide for community consultation**

Section	Description	Format	Approximate length
1. Introduction to the Centre and evidence-based practice	Described the mission and business functions of the Centre, as well as a brief introduction to evidence-based practice.	PowerPoint presentation	40 minutes
2. Topic #1: Knowledge Requests	Participants indicated their top three knowledge requests.	Written and open discussion	20 minutes
3. Topic #2: Training and Technical Assistance	Participants described their effective training experiences.	Written and open discussion	20 minutes
4. Topic #3: Community of Practice (CoPs) and Assessment Tools	Participants discussed their experience as members of CoPs and provided recommendations for an online CoP. In some sessions, participants were also asked about assessment tools.	Open discussion	20 minutes
5. Topic #4: Innovations	Participants described innovative practices they have implemented or know about.	Open discussion	20 minutes

## Discussion and feedback

The key questions discussed at the consultations and responses are presented below.

### Topic 1: Knowledge

#### **Questions**

*Imagine now if you could go to the Centre (physically, by phone or online) to get research information, best practices, resources and tools (e.g. assessment tools, action plans, employer connections, working with specialized populations, HR, etc.), what do you think you would ask for (top 3)?*

#### **Responses**

Responses to the above question covered a wide range of topics, but the following five knowledge requests emerged most often.

##### *1) Information and strategies for employer engagement*

Many participants noted the challenges they face in engaging employers within their communities. More specifically, they mentioned the following challenges:

- identifying effective techniques for marketing job seekers and services to employers
- acquiring information about the types of skills and positions that are most in demand from employers
- seeking feedback from an employer on recent hires and job retention services delivered by the practitioner or service provider
- employers are often approached by several service providers, creating confusion for the employer
- a lack of coordination in terms of identifying effective techniques for reaching out to employers
- willingness to openly share or release specific information about employer engagement with other service providers varies across organizations.

##### *2) Assessment tools and support*

Participants mentioned that an overwhelming number of assessment tools is available in today's market — free and fee-based, and informal and formal. They often have limited information on hand to determine what the most appropriate assessment tool is given the situation such as the job seeker's demographics or skill base.

Participants asked if it would be possible to produce reviews of various assessment tools, or perhaps something like a 'Top 10 List.'



### 3) *Labour Market Information (LMI)*

A common request was for localized, current, accessible and practical LMI. Participants identified a need for timely information on local labour market trends. More specifically, they asked for LMI to be available at the regional and community levels, to address the hidden job market, and to be categorized and reported by industry or sector. For example, communities outside of the Lower Mainland noted the difficulty in obtaining timely and accurate local labour market information. Currently, the available data does not support reporting LMI in small areas; an opening or closure of one plant or factory tends to have a large impact on a small community.

Several participants also mentioned that in the past they had access to Service Canada labour market information specialists across the province who connected to municipal economic development offices and chambers of commerce, and monitored local newspapers to produce local, monthly LMI updates.

### 4) *Integrated inventory of employment programming and services in BC*

Participants remarked that it would be very helpful to have access to a centralized listing of the complete range of employment programs, services, and support measures available to job seekers funded by both the federal and provincial governments.

With the introduction of the EPBC in April 2012, there was a significant move towards employment program integration to ensure consistency of services across the province. Often, information on other programs is difficult to find. Practitioners need to know about program eligibility, funding limitations and availability of programs in their area. Much of the program information is located across multiple websites or sometimes not listed publicly at all. Sometimes this information exists with experienced staff who have become familiar with the suite of employment programming in their region. In any case, it would appear that a centralized directory of employment programming in BC was a top demand from participants at each consultation.

### 5) *Central access point for employment research, knowledge and best practices, including those which address specialized populations*

Participants indicated that they would like to have access to a one-stop resource for information related to their practice. A notable number of participants cited an interest in research and best practices, from BC, Canada and internationally, that address specific client populations, including people with disabilities, immigrants, youth, Aboriginal people and older workers.

Specific research and best practices topics of interest mentioned were:

- Improving outcomes for clients after completion of training programs
- Effective case management practices in the one-stop employment model
- Remote and outreach practices
- Interpreting evidence-based research.

A small number of participants also expressed the importance of having access to abstracts and summaries of research findings, given their time constraints.

In addition to the five most common requests described above, several other topics were included in the participants' top three requests:

- A calendar of training and professional development opportunities for practitioners
- Current career practitioner skills and trends in the field
- Customized and supported employment practices
- An 'Ask an Expert' function.

## Topic 2: Technical Assistance and Training

### **Questions**

- a) *What are the two or three most effective, useful and appealing training experiences you've had that helped you with your work?*
- b) *What key factors made them successful for you?*

### **Responses**

The types of training experiences participants indicated to be the most effective for them covered a wide range of areas. However, the responses can be categorized into two groups. Some participants chose to cite more general training experiences, such as an online webinar, whereas other participants referred to specific or formalized training opportunities which they had previously taken, often mentioning specific institutions and trainers.

More specifically, some of the more effective training experiences identified by participants included:

- **Webinars / Online Training**

Some participants remarked that webinars and online training modules were an effective, practical and low-cost form of training, and a good fit with the high-paced schedules of practitioners. However, participants also commented that webinars should not be seen as a perfect replacement to in-person training that provides opportunities to connect and network with other practitioners in the field.

- **Career & Professional Development Training**

Like most professions, the Career Development profession is always evolving. A number of participants indicated a desire to engage in additional training related to their practice. They remarked that professional development opportunities provided them with tools and resources that led to improved outcomes for clients. Some of the training institutions that offer these opportunities are mentioned below.

- Employer Focused Training

Similar to the request for information about employer engagement identified earlier, participants wanted to take training with an employer focus. It is clear that practitioners are consistently identifying their need to access tools and resources to assist them with their employer outreach activities and to better understand employers' needs.

- Training to support Specialized Populations, including Customized & Supported Employment

Some participants emphasized that they would benefit from learning new and creative approaches to help support clients with barriers to achieve their employment goals. More specifically, some mentioned wanting to participate in training that involves proven techniques in working with specific populations such as the Customized Employment and Supported Employment courses offered by Douglas College.

- Motivational Interviewing

Several participants had previously received training in Motivational Interviewing (MI) and found it to be a successful approach with their clients. Some of these practitioners indicated that the implementation of MI techniques was encouraged throughout their organization and some also wanted a review or upgrade course on MI.

Other effective and useful training experiences mentioned, but less often, include:

- Program & curriculum development
- Internal and informal training, e.g., case conferencing and sharing of practices amongst colleagues
- Social media
- Operational & management training (EPBC-specific)
- Professional Development and Career Education Courses from training institutions and educators such as Douglas College, Life Strategies, Provincial Networking Group Inc, Canadian Education and Research Institute for Counselling, the Justice Institute, Norm Amundson, Denise Bissonnette, and Gray Poehnell.

In response to the question about the factors that made the training experience successful for them, participants indicated two main factors: practical and interactive. These two items suggest that practitioners respond well to training that they can use immediately and is relevant to their jobs, as well as hands-on training that allow participants to interact with the facilitator and other participants. Other key factors noted were:

- Inclusion of case studies or success stories to illustrate the lesson or practice
- The opportunity to network in person, outside of the day-to-day workplace
- Clear, guided, specific, step-by-step processes
- Skilled and knowledgeable facilitators
- Exposure to new ideas and skills
- Continuous learning with the opportunity for follow-up.

### Topic 3: Community of Practice (CoP)

#### **Questions**

- *What would make you want to join an online CoP? Do you currently participate in any online CoPs?*
- *What benefits would you gain from an online CoP over an in-person CoP and vice versa?*
- *What types of issues or topics would you want to discuss?*

#### **Responses**

Although the conversations on communities of practice were intended to primarily address the online variety, in person versions of CoPs were also raised. This provided a balance to the dialogue, as well as helpful insights into the advantages and disadvantages of each.

Participants were keen to acknowledge the existing groups in which they belonged including membership in associations such as the BC Career Development Association (BCCDA), the Association of Service Providers for Employability and Career Training (ASPECT) and the various EPBC committees and working groups. Several service providers have even founded or helped form new committees or working groups with other service providers in response to programming changes and other circumstances.

Participants indicated that there continues to be a reluctance to share information and best practices across the employment services sector. However, trust levels seem to vary, with participants reporting that service providers in some communities have recently become more open and collaborative in this regard.

As employment service providers develop various kinds of expertise over the years, many treat this expertise as a kind of intellectual property they wish to protect. In an uncertain funding environment, they are understandably hesitant to share their entire repertoire of knowledge. A somewhat unintended benefit of the community consultations was that it provided a space for participants to share their knowledge, concerns, resources and ideas with their peers in a “hospitable” environment.

The following are some key recommendations provided by participants for the Centre’s online Community of Practice:

- Discussions that are relevant, of interest and needs-driven
- Ease of use and navigation is important (i.e., filtering by topic)
- Place emphasis on sharing rather than self-promotion
- Assign a moderator/facilitator to screen posts and promote dialogue
- Address best practices in the field
- Avoid a venue for venting and frustration with little engagement towards change
- Complement online CoP topics with regular in person gatherings.

As mentioned above, early on in the consultations the Centre staff heard from participants that knowledge and information pertaining to assessment tools are a top priority for them. Therefore, in later consultations, the following questions were added to facilitate a discussion for practitioners to share their knowledge about various assessment tools with each other.

### **Questions**

- *What are your top priorities for assessment tools? What types of assessment tools are valuable to you? Are there gaps for certain client populations?*
- *What criteria (top 3) do you use for choosing an assessment tool? Where do you go for advice?*

### **Responses**

When asked about assessment tools and the idea of making the topic a discussion item in the Centre's online blog, *Join the Conversation*, participants put forward a number of suggestions and points for consideration, summarized below.

- **Informal vs. Formal**  
Some service providers have access to certified professionals who carry out formal, specialized assessments for clients. Unlike informal assessments, formal assessments output data that support conclusions from the testing. Distinguishing between the two types is critical for any discussion on assessment tools.
- **Free vs. Fee-based**  
Consideration must be given to the price of the assessment tools. Many assessment tools are free while others have a cost attached to them. Clearly, with the most expensive tools, there would be fewer contributions to the conversation.
- **Incorrect Use**  
Participants emphasized the importance of understanding how and when to apply an assessment tool. Some stated that they had witnessed misuse of assessment tools or misinterpretation of their results on a number of occasions and that general lack of knowledge in this area is a significant issue.
- **Applicability**  
It was noted that in some cases, the appropriate assessment tool does not exist. For example, newly arrived immigrants are often highly trained and educated and do not benefit from assessment tools that evaluate career paths. With the increasing emphasis employers are placing on soft and cultural skills, a more useful assessment tool for this particular population would assess these skills at the appropriate reading and knowledge levels. An assessment tool's relevance is a key question for specialized populations especially.

## Topic 4: Innovations

### Questions

*Think about innovative, promising and effective practices. They can be really simple things that help you with your work.*

- *Is there an innovative approach for delivering employment programs or practices that you want to describe or share?*
- *Why do you think it's successful?*

### Responses

One of the key objectives of the community consultations was to learn about innovative and promising practices from practitioners. The final question was intended to provide them with an opportunity to share some of their practices with others in the group, as well as to help the Centre identify new innovations in the employment services sector. Table 3 provides a summary of these practices.

**Table 3 Summary of innovations suggested at the consultations**

Innovation/Practice	Example(s)
Introduction of new employment practices to meet outcome targets	Job shadowing, integration of outreach services into new communities
Modification to an existing employment practice in an effort to improve service effectiveness	Changing job subsidy orientation & program from group-based to individual
Tailoring programs to specific employers or industries	Oil Patch for Rookies workshops for individuals considering field work
Tailoring programs to specific populations	Mothers to Miners, Legacy career counselling for older workers
Facilitated job coaching practices that go the extra mile	Driving clients to the job site
Employer engagement initiatives	Job fairs, employer forums, employer speaker series
Partnership agreements between service providers	Marketing, cross-training of staff, human resources, emergency coverage

## Concluding thoughts

Overall, the initial round of community consultations met its two key objectives of:

- Introducing participants to the Centre and raising awareness of its mandate and services
- Offering an opportunity for participants to provide input into the types of activities and outputs they would like to see from the Centre

In addition to the opportunity for the Centre's staff to meet practitioners from across the province, there was a considerable exchange of information among consultation participants and Centre staff. Participants remarked that they appreciated that the Centre's staff traveled to their community, and they proposed ideas for future consultations and improvements.

Although the consultations were relatively well attended, the Centre would have liked to reach more service providers and practitioners, which was challenging due to scheduling conflicts or distance from the venue. Some participants had a much longer distance to travel than others. While it would not be feasible to travel widely across the province to reach all organizations in BC that deliver employment services, there is certainly an opportunity to build on this initial outreach and perhaps offer onsite visits to other locations for the next round of consultations.

Some common themes emerged from the discussions. More specifically, the most popular knowledge requests were consistently mentioned at each consultation (information and strategies for employer engagement, assessment tools and support, LMI, integrated inventory of employment programming and services, and a central access point for employment research, knowledge and best practices).

## Moving forward on participants' suggestions

The consultations provided many ideas and suggestions for the Centre, and it has since moved ahead with some items. These include:

- the integrated inventory of employment programming and services in BC
  - the program information has been collected and the Centre is working with a web developer to display it on our website in a simple and accessible manner
- further discussion regarding assessment tools
- best practices on the one-stop employment centre model
- outreach services such as those showcased in a recent story in the *Learning from Practice* series.

Furthermore, these initial consultations have facilitated subsequent one-on-one and small group conversations that allowed for more detailed dialogues.