



# Career Ladders at Two:

## The Guide Book

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## PROJECT LEAD

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## PROJECT PARTNERS

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## PROJECT FUNDER

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**EMPLOYMENT  
ONTARIO**

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# INTRODUCTION

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While employment rates and wages for individuals with post-secondary education have nearly returned to pre-recession levels, the rates for individuals with a high school diploma or less have continued to decline. Many of these adults along with their families face precarious employment, have fewer opportunities for career progression and make significantly lower wages.

Much has been written about Ontario's skills gap as the economy continues to emerge from the recession. Many workers have been left out of the recovery and face difficulties finding and maintaining employment. At the same time, many employers indicate that they cannot find people with the skills they require to sustain and grow their business.<sup>1</sup> Often times, the individuals facing significant barriers to employment are Ontarians with low levels of skills, have low levels of educational attainment and face numerous barriers to employment. According to the National Household Survey in 2011, the employment rate for the population aged 25 to 64 was 75.2% in Ontario. In general, the employment rate increases with educational level. The employment rate for those with university credentials was 81.8%, compared to 54.7% for those who had no certificate, diploma or degree. This 27% discrepancy demonstrates the impact education has on finding and sustaining employment in the province.

National results from the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) in 2013 indicate that higher education is associated with greater literacy, numeracy and problem solving in technology-rich environment skills. Moreover, the literacy and numeracy skills of those unemployed and not in the labour force are lower than that of their employed counterparts. Given the impact that education and skills have on employment and earnings in Ontario, these results are concerning.

The strong correlation between education and skills, and employment and earnings indicate there is a need to find employment and training interventions that allow chronically unemployed and precariously employed adults with limited educational attainment and skills an opportunity to upgrade and advance within the workforce. All too often when workers want to progress in their careers, they have to remove themselves from their current jobs to participate in traditional educational and training opportunities. For many workers, especially those with low skills and low incomes, this is not a realistic option.

Both the Ontario Chamber of Commerce and the Canadian Chamber of Commerce have noted the uneven levels of involvement of employers in the education and training system. According to PIAAC data, those with the lowest skills are receiving the least training from both the public and private sector.

The Commission for the Review of Social Assistance in Ontario's *Brighter Prospects: Transforming Social Assistance in Ontario* (2013) and Don Drummond's *Commission on the Reform of Ontario's Public Services* (2012) both note that Ontario's current employment and training array does not adequately serve the most vulnerable populations. Their findings indicate that the system is poorly connected to local labour market information, with many decisions around education and training based on dated information utilizing delivery methods that are not conducive to assisting those most in need. In addition, these reports suggest that employers as well as education and training systems are not adept at providing flexible services that allow low skilled and low wage workers to develop marketable skills or to work towards post-secondary credentials that afford them the opportunity to advance within the workplace.

Many low income Ontarians would like to return to school to earn additional credentials that can assist them in moving their careers and families ahead however, given the way the system is designed, further education and economic mobility is rarely a realistic aspiration. Skills training programs often take too long to complete, do not accommodate working lives and are not necessarily designed around sector-specific employment and career advancement expectations. Furthermore, these opportunities rarely offer the intensive wraparound supports required by marginalized and at-risk adults. This begs the question: how can we better serve the many Ontarians without high school diplomas who are commonly over-represented in unemployment and low wage occupations, but are not accessing employment or training supports?

# PREFACE

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The Career Ladders model has shown encouraging results in a number of jurisdictions around the world. For communities, workers and employers, Career Ladders align career advancement and training opportunities to local economic and industry workforce needs. For adults, Career Ladders allow access to flexible training options that are usually accompanied by wraparound supports, such as childcare and career counseling, ensuring seamless movement and progression towards sector-specific career goals. Essential Skills Ontario and regional literacy network partners Literacy Link South Central, Literacy Network of Durham Region and Literacy Northwest have spent the past two years assessing the viability of Career Ladders in Ontario communities. *Career Ladders at Two* reflects a culmination of experiences, learnings and directions for addressing the problems faced by the working poor.

## Who is the guide book for?

This guide book is directed to the needs of a wide range of employment, education and training program stakeholders in Ontario, including: program managers, trainers, regional literacy networks, workforce planning agencies, community college faculty, local economic development officers and agencies, employment service providers, people who work with individuals who are on income support and/or other community-based programs and services that assist individuals who have multiple or systemic barriers to employment and training.

Communities wishing to gauge the suitability of Career Ladders can use the contents of this guide book to direct key activities towards investigation and implementation of the model at a local level.

## How to use the guide book

This guide book is organized into steps - each covering an aspect of the second phase of the Career Ladders planning process. Each section specifically highlights the work undertaken in the pilot communities, provides insights into different practices and addresses key challenges.

Communities can utilize this information based on their own particular local needs, readiness and resources. A critical lesson learned during the first two phases of Career Ladders is the significant

variation in the three pilot communities in terms of training assets and local economies. Any Career Ladder has to be customized to a community's unique features and context and requires a 'place-based approach'.<sup>2</sup>

Upon reviewing this guide book, it may be determined that a Career Ladder process may not be viable or suitable for a given community, however aspects of this guide book can assist with other employment, education and training planning in new and innovative ways. It is often beneficial to examine and reflect on how existing community services are organized and how they can be adjusted to better serve the emerging needs of local areas.

## **Why are career ladders important for Ontario's communities?**

All too often, when workers want to advance in their careers, they have to remove themselves from their current jobs to participate in traditional educational and training opportunities. For many workers, sequential training is not a realistic option as most do not have the luxury to forgo wages or have the time to take part in conventionally designed part time training programs. At the same time, employers struggle to find skilled workers who can progress and grow with their businesses. Compounding these situations are community skills mismatches between the skill demands in the workplace and the skills workforces possess.

Career Ladders approaches represent a deliberate, systematic model that supports job seekers, under-skilled workers, employers and communities alike. While Career Ladders initiatives are designed to serve the needs of low skilled, low income workers, they are also demand-driven and act as organizing frameworks that add value to local communities. Essentially, each ladder acts as a local sector skills pipeline – one that advances, nurtures and grows workforce talent according the needs of the industry selected.

In addition, Career Ladder approaches often are catalysts that bring together various community members, employment, education and training service providers to achieve a common goal. Trainers are asked to customize materials and teaching strategies to serve the needs of workers in specific sectors or

job clusters. Employers are encouraged to make employment more learner-friendly by supporting training during work hours and by facilitating career advancement. Service delivery agencies are enlisted to address barriers outside the workplace that may prevent participation in training – from childcare challenges to the development of employment skills for managing time. Given the breadth of diversity present in Ontario’s communities, Career Ladders can act as adaptable frameworks that are used to address persistent, key community workforce challenges.

Career Ladders typically deconstruct post-secondary training programs into a series of incremental certificates that workers can access in a flexible manner. These small certificates can be stacked into larger credentials such as college diplomas. Each certificate, or rung, in a Career Ladder is designed to meet the particular needs of both participants and local employers through the development of necessary workplace skills. In order to address the needs of low-skilled multi-barrier individuals, literacy and essential skills training and extensive personal wraparound supports are embedded in the delivery of the stacked post-secondary certificates allowing for supportive and seamless career upgrading. The following are key aspects of the model:

- Training opportunities are ‘chunked’ into shorter unit sizes and are offered in a format that is both accessible and manageable for working adults.
- Credentials are broken into small and obtainable units that reflect competencies and skills associated with specific occupations that ascend up a Career Ladder - each stackable certificate has meaning and currency to both participants and employers.
- Training providers are asked to customize the content of training materials so that they meet the needs of workers in specific job contexts. Training curriculum reflects local industry and employer skills requirements.
- Employers are encouraged to create work that is learner-friendly by supporting training during working hours, providing space for instruction and by facilitating career advancement.
- Social agencies are enlisted to address other barriers outside of the workplace that may impede participants – from childcare challenges to the development of skills for managing time and domestic budgets.

Upon implementation in a community, Career Ladders accomplishes the following key objectives:

- Program alignment with local industry and economic development
- Increased participation of low income, lower skilled workers in training (including persistence and completion)
- Accelerated learning and skill building
- Stackable learning aligned with local industry and occupations
- A coherent system for both workers and employers
- Increased private and public investment for those who would most benefit
- Strategically aligns employment, training, and other social services in a systemic manner

## **Overview of *Career Ladders at One***

In the first year of the Career Ladders project, Essential Skills Ontario worked in partnership with Literacy Link South Central, Literacy Network of Durham Region and Literacy Northwest to determine the viability of a ladder approach to sector training in Ontario. In order to complete the first phase of the project, each pilot area partnered with local literacy agencies, workforce planning boards, employment and training programs, community service agencies and industry partners to make significant progress towards the development of local Career Ladder models that would align with local employment and training systems, geared to occupational progression in specific industries. Phase II of this project builds on the objectives accomplished in the first phase by mapping out community training assets, expanding the work of the local Integrated Planning Groups and creating preliminary implementation plans to further expand Career Ladders in each pilot community. These activities were also designed to help validate and guide the future development of other local models across the province.

During the first phase, Essential Skills Ontario and the three pilot partners strategically and deliberately gathered commitments from potential partners, identified concrete ways to re-engineer existing services so that they align to a Career Ladder approach and developed strategic communications to mobilize

change within the three communities and across the Employment Ontario system. Specific activities of the first phase of the Career Ladders initiative included:

- Collecting and analyzing best practices in the development and implementation of Career Ladders in comparable jurisdictions
- Introducing the concept of Career Ladders in each pilot community through formal and informal discussions with local employment and training providers
- Conducting initial consultations with workforce planning and development boards, provincial industry associations, economic development staff and local Chambers of Commerce to determine an appropriate industry sector
- Establishing criteria for selecting a specific industry sector upon which to focus future Career Ladders activities
- Developing local Integrated Planning Groups to lead the initiative
- Reviewing common entry-level occupations within the selected industry
- Identifying the appropriate education and training related to occupational progression and mapping the necessary training programs
- Identifying training gaps and alignment challenges necessary for occupational progression in the selected industry
- Finalizing a Career Ladder model
- Designing a sustainability plan to continue the process

At the end of the first phase of the Career Ladders project, each community had established an Integrated Planning Group, conducted an environmental scan, selected a sector focus and developed a strategic plan that outlined steps towards future project phases.

## Overview of *Career Ladders at Two*

In the second phase of the initiative, Essential Skills Ontario, Literacy Northwest, Literacy Link South Central and Literacy Network of Durham Region reconvened project activities to address training development gaps and identify steps towards more fulsome implementation. This included beginning to carry out more intensive employer and community engagement by leveraging the efforts of each community's Integrated Planning Group, identifying preliminary occupational progression and mapping out local training assets and requirements related to the sector focuses selected in the first phase.

Second phase activities were intended to build on the outcomes of Phase I and focus on the necessary program specifications and service modifications required for further progress towards implementation. The work in the second phase was directed towards determining the ability of each community to mobilize around the training requirements of Career Ladders, pinpointing sector requirements for up-skilling and beginning to organize the community around concepts of Career Ladders delivery and candidate support.

The focus of the second phase included the following steps:

- Conducting a comprehensive examination of existing training assets in each community
- Confirming commitments of service providers and local industry in each community, including potential training deliverers
- Determining which employment and training programs could be modified or tailored to support a Career Ladder
- Establishing modifications for existing programs required to support occupational progressions
- Identifying additional wraparound supports and programming required, and engaging committed social service providers regarding the alignment of existing services into a Career Ladder framework

- Developing Career Ladders training maps which included occupational progressions and associated training steps
- Validating and finalizing Career Ladders training maps with employers and labour groups
- Developing a timeline and full implementation plan for each community

At the end of the second phase, the three communities designed plans to move towards developing a preliminary pilot phase during which first rung Career Ladders training could potentially be delivered to candidates. Ideally, the completed implementation plans will attract funding to support focused pilot training related to Career Ladders and specific sector programming with targeted candidates. Each of the three pilots has progressed through the phases in slightly different ways, according to the specific needs and context of the community. It is hoped that additional project development activities will accompany any future soft launch of Career Ladders training.

## STEP 1: INDUSTRY DEMAND

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The determination of a focus sector for Career Ladders includes a variety of mapping activities that identify key aspects such as potential industry growth, skills mismatches, need for occupational progression and employer receptivity. Industry selection hinges significantly on supply and demand issues. Once a community has established its sector focus, it is necessary to articulate to employers how the model can address supply and demand by determining training needs and designing or modifying suitable curriculum, as well as ensuring fair and supportive access to training. In the case of this particular Career Ladders initiative, the results of a local environmental scan, training asset mapping exercise and development of implementation planning have relied greatly upon partnership and engagement with local sector representatives and employers.

In any community interested in developing a Career Ladders model, decisions about industry demand should be validated through a variety of measures such as those mentioned above. The assembly of local intelligence on supply and demand issues related to specific sectors should be augmented where possible with dialogue targeted towards economic development, workforce planning boards, employers and sector representatives. Ongoing direct employer engagement will provide opportunities to highlight challenges to recruiting suitable employees as well as determining occupational progression, first rung training options and potential future workforce requirements. In order for the model to work optimally, it is critical to ensure that a Career Ladders approach is established on clearly articulated employer and sector needs and that training (stackable certificates) are aligned to these needs.

## STEP 2: TARGET PROFILE/CANDIDATE RECRUITMENT

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As guiding principle, Career Ladders approaches should be designed and made accessible to those who are furthest from the workforce. In targeting high needs clients, it is critical to provide valuable assistance to candidates who are least able to access training and employment due to systemic barriers. While communities may focus on particular target populations, the organizing principle of attracting candidates should be to recruit those who require up-skilling the most and require additional supports to participate.

Both phases of Career Ladders project included investigation and research into local community populations who are most distant from the labour market. In the first phase, environmental scans identified key educational attainment and local income support trends as well as identified a target sector requiring skilled workers. This work continued in the second phase with pilot sites beginning to build potential candidate profiles based on more detailed education and training data, available sector occupational progression and specific workforce requirements. In concert with these aspects, it is critical to determine an area's unique demographic profile. Target population selection should be geared towards demographic realities in a local economy such as an aging or inexperienced workforce, high immigrant population and other local workforce trends and impacts.

Once the target population is established, further consideration must occur in terms of whether candidates will be employed or unemployed, what sort of wraparound supports are required and what recruitment activities will take place. Some of these decisions may be directed by funding or support opportunities or driven by local partnerships with Ontario Works and Employment Services. In these cases, individuals may be unemployed, directed to training and then provided employment placement with wraparound supports provided throughout the process. The selection of a client target and accompanying recruitment strategy should be locally driven, validated by sector partners and supported by local community agencies.

As it is likely that target candidates will always represent marginalized populations, customized wraparound supports may require development above and beyond what is locally offered and available. Intensive employability skills, literacy and essential skills and basic needs must be identified and appropriate intervention provided in concert with training delivery. Some target populations may require considerable retention counselling in order to complete Career Ladders training sessions.

When target populations are already employed in the sector in entry-level jobs, there must be understanding on the part of employers that training is ideally linked to tangible workplace progression and potential increased compensation. Conversely, the realistic expectations of workers in regards to future compensation and advancement must be managed throughout. Supports may differ slightly from high-risk, unemployed target groups and include aspects such as career counselling, transportation support and time management strategies.

Long range follow up support is an important aspect of Career Ladders. Once candidates have completed training, employment service supports should remain in place to assist with job retention, ongoing training requirements and wraparound interventions.

## STEP 3: COMMUNITY ASSET TRAINING MAP

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The objectives of the training asset map activity are not only to identify local employer training needs, but also to determine which course offerings are available locally, which require development or modification and which training institutions will consider adapting or augmenting their provision to meet sector training requirements in a Career Ladder's model. Key to the accomplishment of this aspect of the model is strong partnership and ongoing open dialogue with a variety of local training providers.

The early engagement of training partners is critical to gauging existing educational offerings as they relate to a particular sector, as well as how likely it is that courses and curriculum can be adapted according to a Career Ladders design. This specifically requires that the training be chunked into several shorter sessions, adapted to include integrated literacy and essential skills instruction and designed to support occupational progression within a given sector. Each stand-alone course should provide candidates with tangible skills and knowledge that can be utilized within the workplace and is recognized by the employer as beneficial to operations.

During the second phase of Career Ladders, pilot sites undertook extensive investigation in to the following:

- Identifying existing local training programs and curriculum linked to specific, locally relevant sector training needs
- Articulating gaps in current training courses and programming that require adaptation to meet occupational progression needs
- Identifying how training modifications could be developed and delivered
- Engaging and identifying potential local training partners for future delivery
- Identifying a potential first rung, entry-level training offering or course

The second phase activities of Career Ladders determined tentative sector training needs, the local array of sector-specific training assets and gaps in educational offerings. This process occurred largely through a variety of ongoing community consultation approaches in each pilot community. Consultation was conducted in the form of key informant interviews, focus groups, research activities and dialogue with workforce content experts such as workforce planning boards and sector representatives. The information collected through this process was arranged in a training asset map.

The development of a training asset map for Career Ladders should accompany investigation into the model as viable within a given community. The training offerings that are inserted in the map should be sector specific and cover a wide variety of provisions, including educational programming at the college and university level. It is important that the map be validated not only with education partners but also employer and sector representatives to ensure that the curriculum actually meets the demands of the sector workplace.

A training asset map should include the following aspects:

- Local organizations offering training related to the sector
- Type of service or training offered (for instance Apprenticeship, Employment Services, Literacy & Basic Skills, post-secondary training)
- Delivery mode offered including distance, online or time-flexible options
- Duration of existing or modified training
- Entrance requirements for enrolment
- Credentials awarded at the end of programming
- Sector/subsector and job specific focuses addressed through the training

*Please see **Appendix A** for detailed training map.*

Through the process of identifying sector training needs, local training offerings and potential provision of first rung occupational training, several key observations were noted by the pilot communities. The lessons varied in each area, but may represent critical consideration for communities wishing to undertake investigation into the local viability of Career Ladders.

- Training delivery may be partnership based with several institutions working together to create local programming by sharing facilities, curriculum, resources and instruction responsibilities.
- Suitable Literacy & Basic Skills and employment readiness programming may already exist and can be adapted for integrated use in sector training.

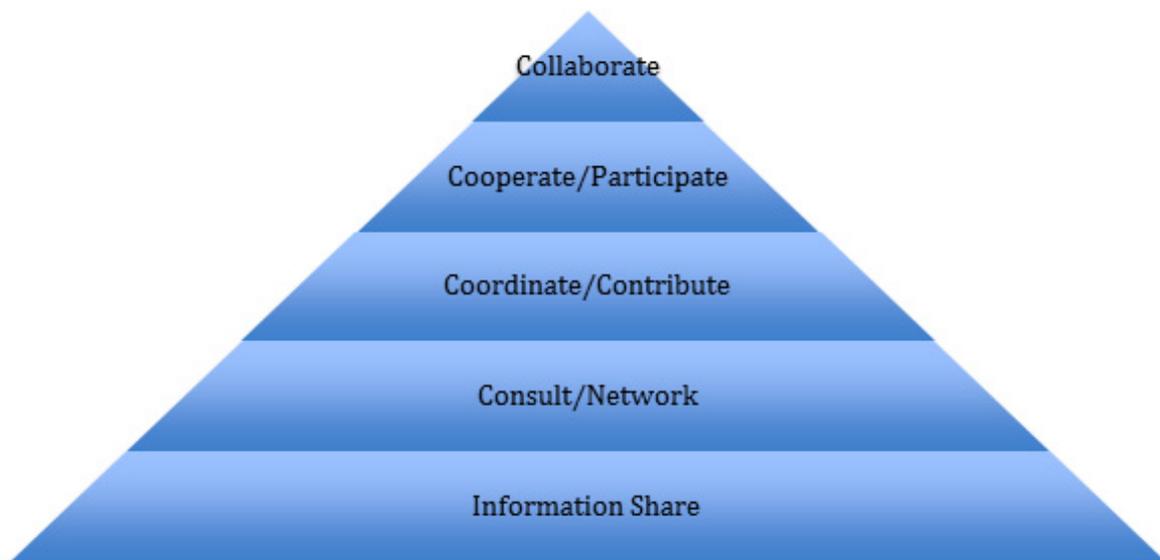
- The provision of extensive wraparound supports such as drop out counselling or retention coaching will be critical to the success of training completion.
- Sector specific training may already exist in a community but is not necessarily part of current educational offerings.
- The chunking of larger credentials in to smaller increments may be subject to the discretion of post-secondary institutions and funders.
- Not all resources required to offer training are monetary. Location and facilities may be available through partnership delivery at low or no cost.
- The readiness, commitment and innovative culture of training institutions is critical to ensuring success of future Career Ladders training development and delivery.
- There can be large gaps and/or difference perceptions between what training providers offer in terms of specific sector programming and what employers consider as beneficial training for their particular workforce.

## STEP 4: COMMUNITY PARTNER ENGAGEMENT

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Career Ladders is a model that relies heavily on the development and maintenance of strong community partnerships between training providers, employers, community agencies and local stakeholders. Throughout the first two phases of Career Ladders, each community has worked diligently to establish and nurture suitable partnerships in order to carry out preliminary investigation into the feasibility of the model, as well as potential implementation activities.

There are different stages or aspects of partnership development that range from simple information sharing to intensive collaboration. In communities, the spectrum of partnership governs relationships between agencies, sectors and fields of study. For the purposes of Career Ladders, any intersection between partners is an opportunity for the development of collaborative community approaches. Issues related to risk management, decision-making, sharing of responsibility and ongoing communication must be taken in to consideration when establishing partnership-based initiatives. This work should be seen as ongoing, holistic and sometimes time-limited or temporary.<sup>3</sup>



At the earliest stages of Career Ladders development in a community, it can be difficult to fully determine all aspects or implications of future partnership. To some degree, the engagement of the community may be based on information sharing or consultation and be comprised of informal or theoretical underpinnings until concrete development of training and sector engagement is underway. At that point,

more substantive partnership activities may take place. Key aspects of partnership development must include attention to not only the mutual interest and benefit of potential partners, but also their individual and collective capacity and will for participation, contribution and commitment to change or innovation.

Key issues for community partnership engagement related to Career Ladders must take in to consideration the following questions:

- Do agencies demonstrate a readiness and willingness to adapt to the Career Ladders model?
- Is there partnership capacity at the local community level?
- Are there suitable internal organizational capacity components present to support partner participation?
- Do partner agencies embrace concepts related to change and innovation?
- Are partners willing to do things differently and collaboratively?

The rationale for partnership selection will differ within communities. In some cases, it is not only how ready and capable a partner is to support the model but also what can they bring to the table in terms of facilities and resources. Furthermore, organizations must be able to respond flexibly to the requirements of employers and employees. Support for the model must be enthusiastically shared by front line staff and managers alike and ideally the organizations interested in partnership should be dedicated to broad-based, community-directed innovation.

## STEP 5: EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT

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The engagement of employers throughout the two project phases has been an ongoing initiative facilitated through a variety of strategies. Employer engagement is considered to be one of the most crucial aspects of Career Ladders success in a community.

From the first phase, engagement was leveraged by strategic communications developed by Essential Skills Ontario and was focused on determining sector receptivity to the model. It was cautioned in the *Career Ladders at One Guide Book* that employers not be fully engaged until there were tangible and concrete project outcomes to which they could respond. Initial discussion with employers was limited to informal conversations using existing contacts. By the end of the first phase, some more formal activities occurred such as town hall events to introduce the concept locally. Carrying on this work, the second phase of the project included the development of specific employer profiles and key informant interviews in order to establish relationships, validate the model and collect critical data to guide next steps.

Ongoing engagement with employers can be facilitated by organizations that already have established sector or employer relationships such as local job developers, workforce planning boards, social planning councils or economic development departments. Outreach activities to employers elicit the best results when aligned with the ability of the community to address employer questions and meet their expectations for involvement.

Engagement is not only intended to gauge interest or initiative activity, but is a key aspect of collecting requisite local intelligence on sector needs, validating career progression and determining training modifications and design. All discussion with employers should be focused around a particular aspect of project development so that expectations are controlled around initiative realities.

Some examples of outreach and employer engagement include:

- Development of sector employer profiles
- Targeted key informant interviews with selected employers
- Outreach events such as town halls, networking opportunities and industry tours
- Presentations to sector groups and industry associations
- Local community investigative activities such as skill shed studies, social planning research, local labour market plans, workforce data research, etc.
- Lessons learned from other project activities such as workforce training pilot projects
- Service coordination meetings with employment agencies, literacy programs and job developers

## STEP 6: MAPPING OCCUPATIONAL PROGRESSION

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In the first phase of Career Ladders, occupational progression was preliminarily mapped out according to the types of occupations and occupational movement that workers experienced within a sector. The presence of an occupational progression, that is the ability of workers to move along a ladder within a sector to achieve higher levels of employment, was key to determining whether a community could build a Career Ladder around a selected industry.

During the second phase of Career Ladders, occupational progression was further identified as a result of training asset mapping and other activities that support implementation. Assumptions about progression were made partially on the information collected from employer engagement and through venues such as examining national occupation codes, O\*Net online, industry association reports, as well as intelligence collected on job vacancies in a given community.

Results of a local investigation into occupational progression should be aligned with training asset mapping activities to ensure that local curriculum is designed, modified and delivered according to employer expectations and local workforce realities. The activity should result in the identification of potential “first rung” training focuses as well as future tiered training opportunities that lead to certification. Ideally, the rungs or tiers of training are stackable, but also stand independently and can be used laterally to increase employment prospects without further training participation. In other words, participants should be able to extract training and employment benefit from each discreet rung even if they do not complete more than one offered training session.

Although this is not always possible, horizontal movement between sectors should be investigated in a community. For instance, in the case of quality assurance standards and training there are aspects that can be applied to more than one specific sector or industry. The benefit of identifying and planning around horizontal Career Ladders is that candidates have a wider opportunity for meaningful, stable employment in more than one community sector. When planning for delivery, the articulation of a horizontal training opportunity should be made known to training participants for future application. For instance, this can be a valuable consideration in the case of foreign trained professionals who must take jobs in an unrelated sector for survival purposes, but may wish to return to their preferred field of expertise and therefore desire training that meets both immediate and longer-term career requirements.

## STEP 7: IDENTIFICATION OF RESOURCES

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At the time of the initial development of the Career Ladders initiative by Essential Skills Ontario, it was clearly noted that significant work is required over multiple implementation stages throughout the course of four to six years. To date, two years of funded activity have taken place in three pilot site areas. Full implementation of Career Ladders in Ontario over the coming years will require ongoing funding support as communities continue to build on the momentum of the first two phases of investigation and development.

While it may be challenging to obtain funds to continue with research and development activities, a variety of supports may be available to launch actual Career Ladders pilot training. These range from the modification of existing training delivery, the donation of free classroom space or incentives offered through other programs such as Employment Services. In addition, integrated Literacy & Basic Skills programming may be obtained through providers wishing to develop boutique programming within their existing funding allocation. The delivery of wraparound supports may be offered as itinerate delivery of services already available and funded in the community.

Potential funders of specific pilot training could include the following:

- Canada Ontario Jobs Grant
- Provincial or Federal Grant Foundations
- Community College Corporate Training
- Fee for service (union, participant or employer)
- Ontario Labour Market Partnerships program
- Ontario Trillium Foundation

The ongoing difficulty of obtaining long-term, supportive funding to establish a sound research base for Career Ladders is not anticipated to be easily remedied. Local communities may find it necessary to mobilize around existing funds, resources and supports in order to develop a local model. However the framework of Career Ladders lends itself well to partnership development and is well situated to attract workplace training grants or subsidies.

The three pilot communities will investigate ways in which to continue developing the provincial model as they also endeavour to fund actual local pilot delivery of first rung occupational training.

## STEP 8: IMPLEMENTATION PLANNING

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The culmination of investigating the viability of a Career Ladders model is a full implementation plan that articulates community readiness, capacity and next steps. Once a community has determined that it has the engagement required from all sector partners including employers, support agencies and community service providers, it must create a template for moving towards the delivery of what is considered to be “first rung” training, this being an entry-level, basic program or class.

Implementation plans may be developed in advance of funding opportunities and in the case of scarce project resources, it is advisable to determine early on the parameters of offering a Career Ladders program. The completed plan will include many aspects that funders will require in a formal application and will also appraise the Integrated Planning Group of the scope and scale of anticipated delivery. In short, a well-crafted implementation plan can serve as the foundation of a grant application and be easily applied to a wide range of funder requirements in terms of future proposals.

Aspects that can be included in an implementation plan are as follows:

- Rationale as to why the community is adopting a Career Ladders approach
- Record of any relevant community trends, challenges or requirements that support this approach
- Objectives to be met through a Career Ladders approach
- Description of the selected occupational sector
- Brief outline of the results of employer engagement
- Client/candidate profile and target population
- Rationale for specific candidate, target population selection
- Client/candidate recruitment strategy
- Support services and wraparound approaches required to assist high needs candidates
- Clear description of occupational progression and related ladder “rungs” for future training
- Description of the training asset map process

- Description of modifications or adaptations required to training courses to make them suitable for Career Ladders
- Memorandum of understanding template
- Identification of lead agency
- Model design including criteria, assessment, screening processes, training, wrap-around supports, work placement, etc.
- Outline of the required and available facilities and resources
- Estimated costs and budget for service provision
- Brief community plan of action to approach future pilot phases

*Please see **Appendix B** for the implementation plan template.*

## STEP 9: LESSONS LEARNED

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The second phase of Career Ladders has resulted in lessons learned for all three pilot sites. In some cases, learnings were articulated as best practices and in others they were identified as distinct challenges. The topics varied across each pilot community depending on local trends and realities.

Areas of key consideration identified through the training asset map and implementation plan process, as well as feedback from community stakeholders include the following observations:

- It is important and also very challenging to obtain employer buy-in for the initiative as historically employers do not get involved with community training.
- In large, rural geographic areas transportation/travel may be a significant challenge especially in the absence of a public transportation system.
- Current capacity in the training system must be carefully evaluated.
- The amount of time employees would need to be released from work to acquire skills can be difficult to negotiate with employers.
- Flexibility of offerings are key considerations when planning delivery (for example, different times of the day/night to cover shift work).
- Childcare and eldercare support specifically must be considered so that individuals with caregiving responsibilities can attend training.
- It is important to determine if a specific Career Ladders initiative can work in a unionized environment.
- Individuals with undiagnosed learning disabilities must be considered and accommodated. Most adults don't have documentation of their learning disability and can't afford testing.
- Overall promotion of the initiative must be carefully planned and delivered to control expectations.
- It is important to manage expectations about wages and promotions when existing staff are up-skilled.
- "Poaching", losing staff to other workplaces once trained is a frequently mentioned concern of small employers.

## STEP 10: RECOMMENDATIONS

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The following recommendations have been identified and documented throughout the second phase of the project. In future project development, these points will contribute to the rationale for next stage activities.

- Stable long-term funding is required for additional development of the model in the province in order to elicit high quality results.
- Employer engagement must take place when something tangible or concrete can be offered in order to manage expectations.
- Further investigation is required as to how Career Ladders can be supported by training and employment initiatives such as the Canada Ontario Jobs Grant.
- It is important to carry out ongoing promotion of the Career Ladders model to funders, government and communities.
- Future wide-scale adaptation of the model may require post secondary institutions and funders to modify certifications around “chunked” or “stacked” delivery.
- It would be beneficial for communication to take place with provincial industry associations in order to facilitate local engagement and delivery.
- The development of multiple Career Ladders training rungs will require ongoing support for curricular development and community planning.

# ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> The Conference Board of Canada. *The Need to Make Skills Work - The Cost of Ontario's Skill Gap*. Toronto. 2013.

<sup>2</sup> Place-based approaches are most frequently used as a response to complex community issues that are persistent or structural in nature. They are most commonly described as a collaborative process where stakeholders are engaging and work together to address issues that are experienced within a geographic space, be it a neighbourhood, community or region. While the focus, scope and intensity of place-based approaches vary, they most commonly result in new, locally made strategies and interventions that use, modify and/or extend existing resources in order to better serve the particular needs of a given community.

<sup>3</sup> Project Read Waterloo Wellington. *Enhancing Pathways*. Waterloo. 2010.

# APPENDICES

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# APPENDIX A: CAREER LADDER COMMUNITY TRAINING ASSET MAPPING TOOL

Career Ladder Community Training Asset Mapping Tool								
Organization	Programs/Services	Program type/Service	Delivery Mode	Duration	Entrance requirements	Credentials Awarded	Subsector and Job Specific Focus	NOC Codes
Name:	Ex. Types of Programs and service that are relevant to the selected industry	ES Community Based program Community College Private Trainer Private College	Online, class room, day or evening, etc.	Program length, when it is held and hours per week.	High school diploma or equivalency, etc.	Certificate etc.	Specify job and/or subsector focus or the service or training.  How strong are the services or trainings related to the selected industry?  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Strongly related to the jobs in the selected industry</li> <li>- Partially related to selected industry</li> <li>- Poorly related to the selected industry</li> </ul>	ESO will complete this section
Example: Supply Chain in Peel Region and GTA								
College of Applied Arts and Technology	Business Operations Management (Co-op)	Community College	Class Room and Co-op	3 Years (6 Semesters)  Fall, Winter, Summer	Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD) or equivalent, or mature student status (19 years or older)	Advanced Diploma	Inventory / Material Control, Logistics Information Systems, Purchasing, Transportation, Warehousing  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Partially related to supply chain, general focus is on service or goods manufacturing industry which includes supply chain.</li> </ul>	
Equipment Co. Ltd.	Fork lift and safety trainings	Private Trainer	Class Room and Hands on Training	1 To 5 Days  Held periodically based on demand	None	Certificates	Fork lift operator  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Strongly related to the selected industry</li> </ul>	
Canadian International Association  CIIFA Certificate in International	International Transportation and Trade Program (Complete first)  Essentials of Freight Forwarding within three calendar years.	Industry Association	Online/Classroom  Toronto	13 Weeks  13 Weeks  104 Hours  Complete both within three calendar years. Classes run throughout the year and online available anytime	No prerequisites	Complete two courses to receive a certificate	Inventory / Material Control, Purchasing, Transportation, Warehousing  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Strongly related to the jobs in the selected industry in managerial positions</li> </ul>	NOC Codes 0721, 1214, 0713, 1236, 1476, 1471

# APPENDIX B: IMPLEMENTATION PLAN TEMPLATE

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## Implementation Plan Template

The intent of the implementation plan is to document information required to launch a Career Ladders pilot. If a pilot community has not yet achieved particular aspects outlined in the plan then it is appropriate to discuss how the necessary steps will be achieved in the future (i.e. what activities will be occur to obtain the requisite information, data, partners, etc.). Where possible timelines and responsibilities should be included in the plan.

### Section A - Introduction

#### 1. Introduction of the Career Ladder in the Community

- a) Rationale as to why the community is adopting a Career Ladders approach (brief outline of how the model has been introduced, what potential population is targeted and how will they benefit, what partners have been engaged, what is the level of community capacity and/or readiness)
- b) Record any relevant community trends, challenges or requirements that support this approach
- c) State specific objectives to be met through a Career Ladders approach

#### 2. Occupational Sector Selected for a Career Ladders approach

- a) Description of sector (the local need for a CL approach, what is the rationale for supporting a CL approach. Which sector has been selected? How does CL help sector needs? How many people might need training?)
- b) Brief outline of employer engagement (how have employers representing the sector been engaged, which employers have committed to participate, how will employers be recruited, etc.)

#### 3. Candidate Profile and Target Population

- a) What is the client/candidate profile and target population?
- b) How will the target population and candidates be identified? (criteria, profile - current low-level employers, Ontario Works recipients, etc.)

- c) Recruitment (how will candidates be routed to training? marketing and outreach approaches)
- d) Support services (what wraparound or other service supports are required to assist the candidates? do these supports exist in the community; do they need to be adapted?)

#### 4. Occupational Progression (*create flow chart if suitable*)

- a) What is the occupational progression? (what jobs have been identified?)
- b) What are the required or related certificates or educational attainment? (wallet card certification, GED, etc.)
- c) Other occupation-related information (wages, required years of experience, working conditions)

#### 5. Training Assets

- a) Description of the training asset map process in each community (lessons learned, what is available in the community, what can be modified, what needs to be developed)
- b) Which training course, curriculum or programming has been identified for a Career Ladders pilot?
- c) What training partners have been identified?
- d) What are the modifications or adaptations required to training courses to make them suitable for Career Ladders? (smaller training increments, stacking of credentials, flexible learning, etc.)

### **Section B - Draft Outline of Pilot Model**

#### 1. Memorandum of Understanding Template (what will be included in MOU for Career Ladders pilot/template of community MOU, what additional questions are included such as liability, etc.)

- a) Identification of lead agency
- b) Identification of partners
- c) Identification of employers
- d) Partnership objectives
- e) Terms of agreement (resources, timelines and responsibilities, financial obligations, reporting requirements, post-program follow up and evaluation)

- f) Other things to consider (case management negotiation, wraparound support, information and referral, etc.)

## 2. Model Design (who might be responsible? what partners are involved?)

- a) Development of required and available resources (facilities, technical requirements, equipment, ongoing funding etc.)
- b) Identification of curriculum (development and/or adaptation)
- c) Recruitment, marketing, outreach of employers
- d) Recruitment, marketing, outreach of candidates
- e) Intake and assessment of candidates
- f) Program delivery and design
- g) Wraparound support engagement
- h) Post-program or follow up delivery

## 3. Timelines

- a) Recruitment, intake, assessment schedules
- b) Training start dates
- c) Training duration
- d) Evaluation and post-program follow schedule
- e) Ongoing program delivery schedule

## 4. Next steps for ongoing Career Ladders development (next rung occupations, additional curriculum design, cohort follow up and evaluation/research)

## **Section C - Financial Requirements**

1. Estimated Costs/Budget (project/program development, curriculum development, case management, project manager, administration requirements, wraparound, training delivery - all expected costs included)
2. Additional Resources (partnership contribution, hoteling, non-financial assistance)
3. Identification of sources of funding and revenue generation (grants, government, social enterprise, etc)

## **Section D - Next Steps**

Plan of action to approach a third phase or pilot

For more information please visit  
[essentialskillsontario.ca/career-ladders](https://essentialskillsontario.ca/career-ladders)

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