



thriving WORKPLACES

A Dual-Client Approach to Career Services

DISCOVERY PHASE REPORT

March 2024



Project led by



Funded by the Government of Canada under the Future Skills Program and overseen by Blueprint under the Reimagining Career Services initiative.

In partnership with Nova Scotia Departments of Labour, Skills and Immigration (LSI) and Economic Development (ED).

Acknowledgements

The **Thriving Workplaces** project is generously funded by the Government of Canada under the Future Skills Centre (FSC) and overseen by Blueprint under the Reimagined Career Services initiative. FSC is a forward-thinking centre for research and collaboration dedicated to driving innovation in skills development so that everyone in Canada can be prepared for the future of work. They partner with policymakers, researchers, practitioners, employers and labour, and post-secondary institutions to solve pressing labour market challenges and ensure that everyone can benefit from relevant lifelong learning opportunities. FSC is founded by a consortium whose members are Toronto Metropolitan University, Blueprint, and The Conference Board of Canada, and is funded by the Government of Canada's Future Skills Program.

Blueprint was founded on the simple idea that evidence is a powerful tool for change. They work with policymakers and practitioners to create and use evidence to solve complex policy and program challenges. At the Future Skills Centre, Blueprint works with partners and stakeholders to collaboratively generate and use evidence to help solve pressing future skills challenges.



Executive summary

What potential could we unlock if small businesses and workers were both supported to thrive at work? This question is at the heart of the **Thriving Workplaces** project. Funded by the **Future Skills Centre** and overseen by **Blueprint** under the Reimagining Career Services initiative, the project is led by **MixtMode Consulting (MixtMode)** and the **Canadian Career Development Foundation (CCDF)**. The project operates in partnership with the **Nova Scotia Departments of Labour, Skills and Immigration (LSI)** and **Economic Development (DED)**.

Thriving Workplaces is exploring innovations in career and employment services to meet the needs of small businesses and workers. Our aim is to design, test, and scale an innovative dual-client service model within the publicly funded employment service system in Nova Scotia that can address the challenges of creating a thriving workplace experience for small businesses and their workers.

This report shares findings from the **Discovery Phase** of the project. This initial phase focused on systematically researching the needs of small businesses and workers across Nova Scotia, and engaging workforce development stakeholders to assess the strengths and opportunities for innovation in the existing service ecosystem.

Through the **Discovery Phase**, we heard from many small businesses that are struggling mightily to find and keep the workforce they need. We also heard from workers, particularly those from equity-deserving groups, who continue to face challenges in finding workplace opportunities that align with their needs and goals. And we heard from employment service providers and other stakeholders who are eager to help address this dilemma but need more tools and capacity-building opportunities to do this work effectively.

These findings have pointed us towards an opportunity to design and test service innovations that directly address the complex interplay between employers and their workers. In the next phase of the project, we are working with employment service providers to co-design and test an intervention that focuses on strengthening the “**workplace bargain**” - the active, ongoing and intentional negotiation between small businesses and workers as they strive to establish a thriving workplace experience.

Our hope is that the findings from this project will lead to the replication and scaling of effective service interventions for small businesses and workers across Nova Scotia and beyond. By empowering our career and employment services systems to help small businesses and workers thrive, we have the opportunity to improve outcomes for individuals, strengthen economies, and positively impact communities.

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Introduction

This report shares the findings, insights and lessons learned from the **Discovery Phase** of the **Thriving Workplaces: A Dual Client Approach to Career Services** project.

Funded by the **Future Skills Centre** and overseen by **Blueprint** under the Reimagining Career Services initiative, the **Thriving Workplaces** project is led by **MixtMode Consulting (MixtMode)** and the **Canadian Career Development Foundation (CCDF)**. The project operates in partnership with **Nova Scotia Departments of Labour, Skills and Immigration (LSI)** and the **Nova Scotia Department of Economic Development (ED)**.

The aim of this project is to design service innovations that can be tested within Nova Scotia's career and employment services system (Nova Scotia Works) to help small businesses and their workers thrive. Many small businesses in Nova Scotia (and beyond) are struggling to find and keep workers and adapt to the realities of a changing labour market, including an unprecedented level of labour and skills demand. At the same time equity-deserving individuals from underrepresented groups continue to experience unequal labour market success. How can we design and test service innovations to help address this core dilemma?

[Nova Scotia Works](#) is Nova Scotia's publicly funded employment services network. It is a one-stop job search and career advice resource that helps Nova Scotians reach their employment goals. Services are delivered by 16 community-based, third-party organizations operating in over 50 locations across the province. Online services are also offered virtually through NS Works Online.

Project background

The **Discovery Phase** of this project began in summer 2022 with conversations between the Future Skills Centre, Blueprint, MixtMode, CCDF and senior decision-makers in the Nova Scotia government to explore the potential of a collaborative project focused on innovation in career and employment services. From there, a working group of MixtMode, CCDF, and representatives from the Nova Scotia government (LSI and DED) collaborated to:

- Develop a shared vision and overarching aims for the project
- Systematically explore the landscape of workforce development in Nova Scotia
- Conduct field research on the needs of workers and employers
- Identify opportunity areas for innovation in the career and employment services system

MixtMode and CCDF have also engaged additional partners to support this work:

- **The Moment** – an innovation and service design firm focused on solving complex challenges and innovating for the future. In the Discovery Phase, The Moment was engaged to conduct field research with employers and workers to identify needs and opportunity areas.
- **Kelly Pasolli** – an independent consultant with expertise in research, policy and program design in the field of employment and career services.

In fall 2023 the project entered the next phase of the project, focused on co-designing and testing interventions in partnership with employment service providers. This phase is building on what has been learned through the Discovery Phase to develop and test service innovations that are scalable, feasible to implement, and directly focused on the unmet needs of workers and employers.

About this report

This report captures the activities, findings and insights from the **Discovery Phase**. It sets the stage for the next phase of the project by documenting where the project has been and what has been learned.

The report draws on:

- Existing documents and reports provided by LSI about the Nova Scotia Works system and the needs of system users (for details on this work please see **Appendix A**)
- Notes and documentation from engagements with system stakeholders conducted throughout the Discovery Phase
- Outputs from project working group meetings
- Results of the field research with employers and workers conducted by The Moment
- Findings from interviews with key project stakeholders in August-September 2023

The report is organized into five sections:

1. **Project overview** – Describes the activities and key milestones of the Discovery Phase
2. **Current context** – Provides an overview of the current workforce service ecosystem in Nova Scotia
3. **System strengths and opportunities** – Shares what has been learned about the strengths of this current system and the opportunities for innovation
4. **Employer and worker needs** – Summarizes the results of our field research with small businesses and workers
5. **What's next** – Outlines the next steps for this project

1. Project overview

Setting the vision

In 2021, Blueprint, a partner in the Future Skills Centre consortium, launched a research program to better understand the career development needs of Canadians. This research program resulted in a series of papers that identified gaps and needs, explored options, and provided actionable insights about what is needed to equip Canadians to navigate the future of work.

One of the central findings from these research papers was that our publicly funded employment service systems need to do more to proactively support employers and workers in the face of a rapidly changing labour market.¹ In response to this need, the Future Skills Centre, Blueprint, MixtMode and CCDF held preliminary conversations with senior leaders in the Nova Scotia government to explore the potential of a joint initiative that would focus on identifying and testing innovative service models to support employers and workers.

These preliminary conversations led to the formation of a working group including MixtMode, CCDF, and representatives of the Nova Scotia government. The initial meetings of this group focused on developing a shared understanding of the needs, priorities and strengths of the current Nova Scotia system and collaboratively exploring different possibilities and directions for the project.

Through these conversations, the project partners identified an important opportunity for innovation that would leverage the existing dual-client employment system to design and test new or enhanced services for workers and small businesses that focus on building a stronger “workplace bargain”- the active, ongoing and intentional negotiation between small businesses and workers as they strive to establish a thriving workplace experience.

Several trends and observations from both the Nova Scotia context and the pan-Canadian labour market and policy context underscored the need for innovation in this area:

- The disruptions created by the COVID-19 pandemic and the emergence of a tight labour market have exacerbated the recruitment and retention challenges faced by many employers in Nova Scotia, particularly small businesses, adding to the pressures they are already facing in building a future-ready and resilient workforce.
- Technological and environmental changes are affecting multiple industries and sectors and will impact the trajectories of many small businesses and workers. In this context, employers and workers need more hands-on information, support and guidance to ensure that they are able to thrive in the context of a rapidly changing labour market.

- The systematic disadvantages that equity-deserving groups experience in the labour market were thrown into sharp relief by the pandemic, and highlighted the need for strategies to help ensure all individuals have equal opportunities to thrive in the workplace.
- The Nova Scotia Works system has already evolved in recent years to include a more direct focus on serving and meeting the needs of employers. These changes have provided an important foundation, but stakeholders have noted that there are still opportunities to fully embrace employers as clients within the career and employment services system. Government partners are eager to draw on what they have learned and what they and their service partners have developed to date to ensure that employer services are not seen as an “add-on” within the employment services but as central to the effective delivery of employment services, especially in the context of current labour market challenges.

While employee shortages and the impact on employers are immediate pain points that the project is responding to, the project team and Nova Scotia government partners are also committed to applying a future-oriented lens to the project. The vision in Nova Scotia is to continue to build a flexible and integrated dual-client service model that can respond to the needs of jobseekers, workers and employers as they change over time, and that supports employers (particularly small businesses) to proactively implement workforce strategies that will help increase their resilience to a rapidly changing labour market.

While the current scope of this project is focused on Nova Scotia, the project team is committed to generating and sharing learnings that are relevant to other jurisdictions. Many of the workforce challenges Nova Scotia is facing are not unique, and the lessons and insights that emerge from testing new approaches to support small businesses and workers could help influence policy change and service innovation in career and employment services across Canada.

Engaging, learning, and understanding needs

MixtMode, CCDF, LSI and DED have worked together to explore, clarify and co-conceive the direction for this project through monthly meetings and working sessions. MixtMode and CCDF have also led extensive engagement with system stakeholders, reviewed existing research and data, and overseen field research to understand employer and worker needs.

Early in the Discovery Phase, the project leads recognized the need to explicitly apply a *service design* approach that focuses on deeply understanding user needs and using these insights to develop services that are effective and cohesive. LSI has already adopted a service design framework in all of the department’s work to design, adapt and evolve the Nova Scotia Works service delivery model since 2016.

To put this service design approach into practice, MixtMode and CCDF engaged The Moment to conduct in-depth field research with workers and employers in communities across Nova Scotia. The research

focused on understanding the root causes of employee turnover and churn in order to inform the development of a future service model that will ultimately help small businesses attract and retain the talent they need.

The Moment leveraged a combination of research methods including 1:1 interviews, pre-session probes, small group interviews, and reviews of previous research conducted by LSI focused on employer and worker needs. A wide range of workers and employers in small businesses (2-50 employees) were included in order to understand and compare a broad range of experiences across Nova Scotia. The dimensions used to inform a diverse sample of workers and employers were:

- **Typology of Community:** Urban centres (population of +40K), small cities and regional towns (population of 10-40K), exurban/rural (population of 2-7.5K), rural/remote (population of 10-1,000)
- **Number of years** in the workforce (range from 0-16+)
- **Career experience** (workers only): experienced career transitions (and not), full time and part time, seasonal.
- **Diversity of participants:** Indigenous or Mi'kmaq, Black and African Nova Scotians, Persons who identify as being from visibly diverse communities, Newcomers, persons with disabilities.
- **Priority sectors:** Construction & Trades, Healthcare & Social Assistance, Agriculture/ Fishing/ Forestry, Manufacturing, Accommodation/Food (Hospitality & Tourism)

Overall, 23 small business workers and 29 small business employers participated in the field research.

MixtMode and CCDF have also engaged multiple other stakeholders in the Nova Scotia workforce development ecosystem over the past year to gather data on system strengths, challenges and opportunities for innovation:

- Nova Scotia Works service providers (including both 1:1 meetings with individual service providers, and two group sessions with representation from all providers)
- Nova Scotia Career Development Association (NSCDA)
- Nova Scotia Center for Employment Innovation (CEI)
- Association of Industry Sector Councils (AISC) and individual Sector Councils

The engagements with system stakeholders have been designed to deeply explore strengths, needs and opportunities in the system; introduce the project and gather feedback on project direction; and lay the groundwork for these stakeholders to make critical contributions in future stages of the project.

The research and stakeholder engagement carried out by the project team built on a rich array of research, documentation and data collected by LSI on the needs of employers, workers and system stakeholders (see **Appendix A** for more details). This ensured that the Discovery Phase research built on the existing knowledge base and avoided “over-consulting” particular stakeholder groups.

Sense-making and identifying innovation opportunities

In October 2023, the project team and Nova Scotia government partners came together for a 2-day working session to collectively review the key data and findings from the Discovery Phase and generate ideas for service innovation based on the findings. Based on this session, we developed a roadmap of innovation opportunities that will guide our approach to the next phase of the project (see Section 5 for more details).

What we have achieved

- **Shared vision and goals** - The core focus of employment services is to help people find work and businesses find people. Through the Discovery Phase we have worked with project partners and stakeholders to start shifting the goalpost from finding work, to thriving at work, ensuring we help achieve employment stability and opportunities for individuals and much-needed employee retention for employers.
- **Understanding of user needs** - Our field research with employers and workers has given us a deep and nuanced understanding of the experiences, perspectives and challenges of small businesses and workers across the province and reinforced the need for service innovations to better meet the needs of these users.
- **Dual-client model** - We have developed a theory of a convergent service model articulating the parallelism between work seeker and small business needs, mapping the range of integrated services that might address both supply and demand-side needs through recruitment, onboarding and retention (see **Appendix B** for the work version of our dual-client model).
- **Roadmap for innovation** - Based on what we learned from the Discovery Phase, we have identified a roadmap of interconnected service innovation opportunities that build towards the vision of a dual-client service model in employment services in Canada that operates in an integrated manner with small businesses and workers to help them thrive.
- **Commitment to sustaining and scaling innovation** - Through our close collaboration with the Nova Scotia government, we have built a commitment to not only testing service innovations, but doing so in a way that lays the groundwork for potentially adapting and scaling them to ensure impact across the system.
- **Stakeholders buy-in** - Our engagement with system stakeholders has generated interest and excitement in this project and a commitment to participating in future stages to ensure its success.

Features of our approach

The **Thriving Workplaces** project is a unique partnership that brings together the resources, structures and expertise of innovation-minded public sector leaders with perspectives from service designers and experts with deep experience in career service delivery. This approach provides an opportunity to design and implement service innovations that can both operate within and stretch the potential of the existing career and employment services system. Some of the key features of our approach include:

- **Understanding employer, labour market and service contexts** – Early on the project team recognized that deeply understanding the Nova Scotia context – the labour market landscape, needs and challenges of businesses, and the strengths and opportunities of the existing service system – would be critical for designing impactful and useful service innovations. All of our work is rooted in a strong recognition of how service innovation interacts with this existing ecosystem.
- **Trust and relationship building** – Working to innovate within an existing system requires “going slow to go fast.” The project team has invested time in deeply understanding local needs, building trusting relationships with project partners and system stakeholders, assessing the mechanisms needed to embed innovations in existing systems, and creating a network of champions that will set the project up for success in the future.
- **User-centered service design** – The project team and our partners from the government of Nova Scotia bring a strong, shared commitment to a service design approach that centers the needs of users and focuses on building services that incorporate their voice, ideas and perspectives. The Nova Scotia government has committed to executing service design in this way since the employment services transformation in 2016.
- **Systems thinking** - Generating innovations with sustainable impact requires a deep understanding of the context in which those innovations operate. This project is using a systems lens to understand the connections, gaps, pain points and opportunities in the employment services and economic development ecosystem in Nova Scotia. This approach will ensure that service innovations work in a complementary way with what currently exists and reduces the likelihood that the innovations will generate unintended ripple effects.
- **Focused on career development** – This project is moving beyond the current emphasis in employment services on getting people ‘any’ jobs, to a career development approach that seeks to support sustainable workplace bargains in which both workers and employers can thrive.
- **Building for scale** – This project is focused on developing and testing career and employment services innovations within the employment service system in Nova Scotia – amongst and with a sample of service providers - that can be effectively scaled to meet the level of user need. To ensure that innovations are scalable, the project team is working to address questions about inputs, activities, delivery channels, target users, human resource requirements, cost and complexity of service innovations from the beginning – ensuring that whatever is developed is operationally viable if or when scaled at a systems level.

- **Engaging system stakeholders** – Effectively implementing a service innovation requires buy-in and commitment from those delivering it. The project team has placed a strong emphasis on engaging service providers to understand their needs and perspectives, ensuring that innovations reflect their day-to-day reality, and laying the groundwork to ensure that intangible success factors like know-how, influence and culture are rallied behind the innovation.
- **Pan-Canadian relevance** - The project team is committed to ensuring that this project has impact not just within Nova Scotia but across Canada. We see this project as an opportunity to develop a “playbook” for what it takes to implement a high-quality, dual-client service model that helps small businesses and workers thrive. We have already begun sharing early insights with other stakeholders through a presentation at Canada’s largest career development conference, [Cannexus](#), and an October 2023 policy forum with leaders in employment services from provincial/territorial governments.

Success factors

The project team has identified several important success factors that have contributed to the establishment of this successful partnership and the development of an ambitious shared vision and approach for the project:

Innovation funding – A critical success factor for this project has been the innovation funding provided by the Future Skills Centre to invest in a comprehensive Discovery Phase, allowing the project team to consult widely with different stakeholders, build strong and trusting relationships, and conduct in-depth field research to understand needs and opportunities. This funding is flexible to support the emergent nature of the project; without it the project would not be able to occur.

Service design and subject matter expertise – The project team has brought expertise and experience in research, service design and delivery, career development and labour market policy, ensuring the project is using a rigorous and systematic approach and building credibility among system stakeholders.

Community presence – Throughout the Discovery Phase, the project team leads have maintained a strong local presence in Nova Scotia, building a deep understanding of needs, priorities and labour market realities across all regions of the province and strengthening their relationships with project partners and other stakeholders.

Senior-level government champions – From the start, this project has been championed by senior-level decision makers in LSI and DED, ensuring that the project has the support it will need to be impactful at a systems level and that it is congruent with the development that is currently occurring within Nova Scotia Works and the broader Nova Scotia ecosystem.

Alignment of goals – Through the Discovery Phase, the FSC project team and LSI and DED partners have found strong alignment in their commitment to innovation and continuous improvement in service

delivery, evolving employment services to meet the needs of employers and workers, and generating insights are relevant at the pan-Canadian level.

A professionalized career development workforce– Prior to this project, the Nova Scotia government had already recognized the imperative to invest in the professionalization of career and employment service providers as a critical precursor to achieving outcomes and creating a system grounded in social innovation. In Nova Scotia, all Career Development Practitioners complete a comprehensive suite of training in career development and must be certified as a Career Development Professional.

Focus on engagement – All partners have brought a shared commitment to engaging stakeholders and embedding their perspectives and needs at all stages of the project.

System capacity to innovate – Nova Scotia created a true system of service in 2016 and since that time has built and enabled a focus on service design and quality. This system has been 'building and flexing its service design muscles' since that time and the Nova Scotia government sees its role as system architects and service design leads, working hand-in-hand with system stakeholders and users.

2. The current context

This section provides an overview of the current context of services for small businesses and workers in Nova Scotia. This foundational understanding of the current ecosystem has helped to ground the project and inform our understanding of meaningful opportunities for innovation in service delivery.

Serving employers through Nova Scotia Works

In 2016, Nova Scotia embarked on an employment services transformation to ensure greater consistency and access to high-quality, equitable employment services across the province. The transformation included the development of a common menu of services to be offered by each provider in order for all Nova Scotians to have access to services, a consistent assessment and service planning process, and a revamped performance measurement and accountability system. As part of the transformation, the province also partnered with the Nova Scotia Career Development Association (NSCDA) to deliver mandatory training and certification to Nova Scotia Works providers and established a Nova Scotia Centre for Employment Innovation (CEI) with the Coady Institute of Saint Francis Xavier University to have a community-based approach to continued innovation in service. The vision of the system also included enabling employment and employer service through online services that were both new and complementary to in-person services. As such, the Nova Scotia Works employment services system was born.

An important piece of this transformation was the introduction of the Employment Engagement Specialist (EES) role within Nova Scotia Works. Under the new system, all Nova Scotia Works providers are now required to have an EES on staff with a mandate to cultivate relationships with employers and provide frontline support for employers. In addition to endeavouring to assess and address employer needs, the EESs also act as a liaison between employers, government, Nova Scotia Works Centres and other community and industry stakeholders, and play a key role in gathering and reporting labour market intelligence to LSI and partners.

The introduction of the EES role marked an important shift in the orientation of NS Works towards a dual-client service. LSI has undertaken ongoing change management efforts to support the development and refinement of the role and ensure that EESs are effectively integrated into the NS Works service delivery system, including dedicated EES training and additional service delivery support. As LSI continues to work to refine and embed the EES role in the system, they have also regularly engaged with EESs to understand what's working well and what has been challenging, through monthly reporting, events and forums, and regional in-person engagements with EESs.

There are other service roles within Nova Scotia Works that have historically played a critical role in working with employers for over twenty years, including:

- **Employment Maintenance Specialists** – Provide an orientation to workplace/specific duties and responsibilities to multi-barriered clients who have difficulty maintaining employment. They also act as liaison between the employer and client as required, providing assistance and support to the client post-employment to ensure that successful attachment continues.
- **Job Developers** - Responsible for creating job opportunities for individuals who have difficulty marketing themselves to employers (market perception barriers). Job developers make a crucial link between the jobseeker and the local business community. They are responsible for understanding diverse client needs, preparing clients for employment, making effective client-employer matches, and maintaining effective relationships with employers.

LSI also recently launched a set of employer services through NS Works Online, which offers employers the ability to post job openings, access an HR toolkit, navigate information and application processes for wage subsidy programs, and connect with their local EESs.

Broader service ecosystem

There are many other related services and supports available to employers and jobseekers/workers in Nova Scotia. These services include:

- Services that engage employers as partners in skills training and employment interventions for jobseekers/workers
- Services targeted directly at employers to help address human resource, training, productivity, and/or other business needs

Other services funded and/or delivered by LSI to support employers and workers include:

- **One Journey Program:** Skills training for unemployed or underemployed Nova Scotians focused on identified industry labour shortages
- **Targeted wage subsidies:** Various targeted wage subsidy programs that incentivize employers to hire unemployed persons and/or individuals from target groups (e.g. underrepresented, youth)
- **SkillsOnlineNS:** A joint project with the Nova Scotia Association of Community Business Development Corporations (CBDCs) and Bluedrop that offers free courses and training for all Nova Scotians to help make organizations smarter and more productive
- **Workplace Education Initiative:** Skills training for employers in developing critical business and workplace skills through a variety of 40-hour courses delivered over 10 weeks
- **Workplace Innovation and Productivity Skills Incentive:** A grant that supports the development of new skills to help businesses increase their productivity, innovation, competitiveness, and inclusiveness to become more competitive outside of Nova Scotia
- **Sector Council Program:** Funding to sector councils and sector council-like organizations in order to support an industry-led approach to human resource development, attraction, retention, and

training. **The 14 sector councils** funded through this program are collectively supported and represented by the **Association of Industry Sector Councils (AISC)**.

The **Nova Scotia Department of Economic Development (DED)** also plays a key role in serving and supporting employers:

- DED works with a wide range of partners on **investment and growth strategies** that encourage entrepreneurship, help attract venture capital investment and grow sectors of the economy
- The **Regional Enterprise Networks (RENs)** are key partners in this work, as business-led and business-facing organizations that use a collaborative approach to economic development to drive growth in their region
- The department also oversees the **Community Economic Development Fund** which supports projects that foster economic development and growth; increase innovation, productivity and competitiveness; and prioritize both the economic and social well-being of communities.

The **Atlantic Canada Opportunity Agency (ACOA)** is a federal government agency focused on economic growth in the Atlantic region. ACOA funds Nova Scotia's CBDCs, which provide technical and financial services to help create small businesses and expand and modernize existing businesses.

In our work to explore the current service ecosystem in Nova Scotia, we have also identified a range of other services (formal and informal) available through for-profit organizations, employer associations and other entities. To support Nova Scotia Works providers in navigating this complex service ecosystem, we have developed a prototype tool that organizes these services into a typology based on employers' business and workforce needs. This prototype tool will undergo initial testing in the next phase of the project.

3. System strengths and opportunities

Throughout the Discovery Phase, we engaged multiple system stakeholders to understand the strengths of the current service ecosystem and identify potential opportunities for innovation. This work built on a rich knowledge base already developed by LSI through their own research and engagement with system stakeholders (see **Appendix A** for more details and findings from our review of LSI's existing research).

This work has helped inform the development of innovation opportunities that can work *within and alongside* the current system to achieve better outcomes for small businesses and workers.

Strengths

Commitment to quality standards in service delivery

Nova Scotia is the only Canadian jurisdiction that requires all service providers become Certified Career Development Professionals, receiving targeted training in career development and completing a competency-based certification program. As the professional association for the sector, the NSCDA receives funding from the government of Nova Scotia through the Canada – Nova Scotia Labour Market Development Agreement (LMDA) to provide a range of training and professional development activities and administer certification. This commitment to supporting the capacity and ongoing professional growth of those delivering career and employment services is an essential foundation for quality and ongoing service innovation.

Enhanced employer services in Nova Scotia Works

The introduction of the EES role within the Nova Scotia Works system has formalized the employer service and provided a runway for exploring novel and regionalized ways of helping employers. EESs have helped employers access training and tools on important topics like diversity and equity in hiring practices and are helping other staff at Nova Scotia Works centres better understand their local labour market and its needs. Many EESs are putting their own creative spin on the role, working to develop tailored solutions for employers, developing their own tools and work aids, and sharing promising practices with each other.

The introduction of the EES role and the focus on strengthened employer services provide a critical foundation to build on as this project explores innovations through a more integrated, dual-client service focused on creating thriving workplace experiences.

Existing service offerings that understand and respond to employer needs

There are multiple initiatives already underway in Nova Scotia that demonstrate the broader employer support ecosystem's knowledge and commitment to understanding and responding to employer needs. The Workplace Education Initiative is reaching thousands of employers with practical training to address

their needs. Sector councils provide robust training offerings, resources, and member engagement that help employers build their capacity and solve HR issues. These and other examples highlight the opportunity to build strong partnerships and connections that leverage the existing capacity and expertise in the employer services ecosystem.

Eagerness to innovate

We found that many system stakeholders are eager to find new ways to address emerging labour market needs and are willing to embrace opportunities for partnership. Several stakeholders expressed their interest in participating in and/or contributing to this project in order to find ways to better serve their users.

Opportunities

Helping employers adapt to new labour market challenges

The shifting labour market context in Nova Scotia means that many employers, particularly small businesses, are struggling to find and keep the workforce they need. Many Nova Scotia Works service providers have shared that they are not fully equipped to respond to these challenges. Providers are still working to build up the capacity and know-how to effectively work with employers, recognizing that this work requires a unique approach to relationship-building and establishing credibility. The current labour market context adds an additional layer of complexity to this challenge. Many providers expressed a desire to be able to provide more direct, hands-on and timely support to employers who are struggling to find and keep the workforce they need.

Moving beyond traditional HR to supporting the workplace bargain

The current system in Nova Scotia already provides high quality information and tools to help businesses with traditional HR functions in the lanes of ‘recruitment and retention’. There is an opportunity to leverage the existing career development expertise in the system to work in a more hands-on way with small employers and their workers on detailed and specific parts of the “workplace bargain” – the active, ongoing and intentional negotiation between small businesses and workers as they strive to establish a thriving workplace experience. Nova Scotia Works could help address this gap by guiding and building the capacity of employers and jobseekers/workers to understand and communicate their needs, expectations and preferences about work – ultimately helping to reduce churn and strengthen alignment between the supply and demand sides of the labour market.

Finding the right balance between consistent service pathways and tailored service delivery

Many Nova Scotia Works service providers shared that while the EES role now has a defined service menu of what it offers employers, it has been implemented somewhat differently across each service provider. In the absence of a clearly defined service pathway for employers that includes not only Nova

Scotia Works services and supports but referrals and warm hand-offs to the broader employer services ecosystem in Nova Scotia, EESs have adopted different strategies to understand employer needs and goals and connect them to services. Moving forward there is an opportunity to ensure a consistent and effective service experience for employers while still balancing the need for local adaptations and service delivery approaches that are tailored to the needs of particular employers. This approach will ensure that employers are connected to the right services and supports, regardless of what service provider they are working with. LSI is already actively working to ensure more consistent service pathways by developing additional service infrastructure and tools, including a case management system for employers.

Integrating employer and jobseeker services

Many providers noted that there is a disconnect within Nova Scotia Works service provider organizations between staff primarily serving jobseekers and staff primarily serving employers. There is an opportunity to foster a more integrated approach that recognizes the direct connections between the employer and jobseeker experience and rallies staff behind a shared vision and mission focused on building a thriving labour market in their local community.

Building stronger system partnerships

Our consultations with stakeholders highlighted some tension and territorialism between different organizations that serve employers in the broader employer services ecosystem in Nova Scotia, often tied to a lack of clarity about roles and mandates, scarcity of resources, and a focus on achieving outcome/output targets mandated by funders. At the same time, there is a strong recognition among system stakeholders that addressing the full range of employer workforce needs will require contributions from all partners. Stakeholders are seeking greater clarity about the roles of different partners to help strengthen collaboration and coordination.

4. Employer and worker needs

A central focus of the Discovery Phase was conducting in-depth field research with small business workers and employers representing diverse industries, business sizes and location typologies in Nova Scotia. This research uncovered powerful insights about the experience of workplace “churn” and identified key opportunity areas for service innovation.

Churn, we discovered, is a wicked problem with many layers of root causes. Below we share key insights about this challenge from the perspective of the worker and employer.

Key insight 1: Churn is a wicked problem

Churn is a complex and wicked problem, meaning it has multiple root causes. To address this issue, it is important to focus on the source of the problem rather than just treating its symptoms.

There is both complexity and contradictions involved in attracting and retaining workers, and the perspectives of both workers and employers highlighted that:

- **Churn comes from a range of drivers and different scales.** Availability of housing, daycare, education, and training are only some of the external factors that complicate attracting and retaining ‘good people.’ Compounded with individual circumstances, the root causes of churn are vast.
- **There will always be churn; it is definitely the norm, not the exception.** Employers and workers find it inevitable that they will part ways at some point. There are countless circumstances and factors at play within each individual journey.
- **Employers lose hope and ambition when they struggle to reduce churn.** Efforts to attract and or retain people extend beyond what an employer is able to control. Having enough employees to do the work that sustains the business is foundational to the employer, therefore when it is not working, it takes all their focus and energy.
- **However, churn can lead to renewal for the worker and the small business.** Despite the challenge of finding new workers, we also heard examples of new people bringing new know-how, lived experience, and soft skills to a small business.

Key insight 2: Need to shift from a survival mindset to thriving

The solution to churn is not in the absence of churn. Rather, we need to start addressing the impacts of churn. We learned that when people, both employers and workers, are in a state of ‘survive’, it is even more challenging to tackle the complexity of churn. If we focus on helping workers and employers move

from just surviving to fully thriving, the whole system can flourish. The 'storm of churn' is not a one-time event to a business but is a dynamic that an employer and its people can face together.

- **Surviving means just getting by.** Employers in survival mode focus on short-term goals like staffing and covering costs. They are unable to plan for a future because they're overworked and caught in a "poverty trap" of surviving. Similarly, workers in survival mode are just trying to get the work they need and pay the bills, with little hope beyond that
- **Thriving is when the business and its people can achieve great things together.** As the employer becomes more resilient, they have the wherewithal to pivot in the future. Attracting and retaining talent is less about working to meet minimal expectations, but producing a collective magic to surpass them. The business can make the most of their people who can then flourish and make the most of the business's mission.

Key insight 3: The Workplace Bargain

There are different factors that draw people in to stay, or leave, a workplace. The negotiation, or "bargain" of these factors that takes place between a worker and a small business employer impacts the extent to which both will thrive. The "workplace bargain" goes beyond just matching skills and availability - it encompasses a more holistic suite of factors that influence the relationship. The stronger the alignment, the more satisfied each party will be in the workplace bargain. While the bargain takes place, both parties will experience and/or propose trade-offs and compromises that they each are willing and able to accept informed by their context and journeys to date.

The workplace bargain is an ongoing experience of finding a fair exchange of value and equity between worker and employer, as well as other workers. The "bargain" that happens during hiring and onboarding sets the tone for the ongoing relationship, and it continues to happen throughout the working relationship whether it is intentional or not.

Key insight 4: The workplace bargain is particularly crucial and challenging for equity-deserving individuals

Past experiences, opportunities and barriers influence the perspectives and hopes of BIPOC and diverse people - whether Black Nova Scotians, Indigenous people, immigrants or persons with disabilities - when it comes to negotiating the workplace bargain and thriving at work.

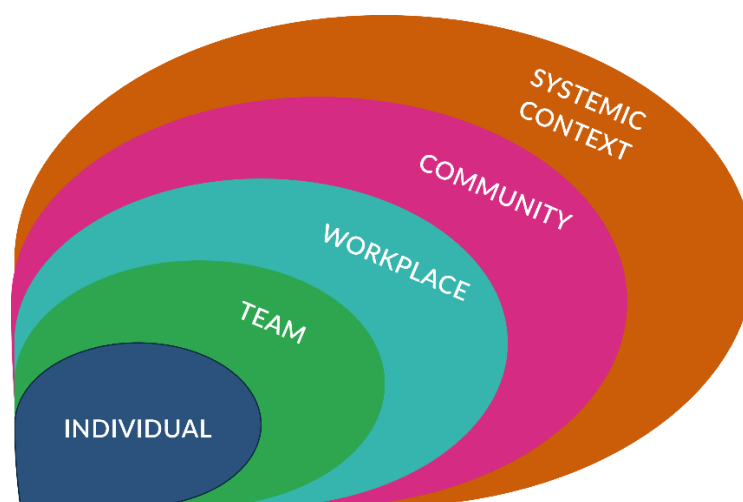
- **Systemic issues and factors are at play.** Systemic and generational factors have created barriers in the workplace today. Barriers to opportunities, experiences and education in the past have reduced the ability of people from equity-deserving groups to access high quality work and also created a shortage of diverse qualified workers. Biases in the system have made accessing support more challenging for employers too.

- **Discrimination is happening and influences hope.** Employers and workers alike continue to face racism & discrimination, whether overt or less obvious. For workers, this impacts their sense of optimism or ambition, limiting the kinds of places or jobs they might consider in favour of safety. Employers are faced with barriers to accessing services, building business and having to “prove themselves’.
- **Being treated as whole people is essential.** BIPOC and diverse workers want to be seen as whole people, not tokenized or just seen as their skin colour or disability. They want to be valued for what they bring to the table, and respected and supported, like everyone. BIPOC and diverse employers often bring a stronger empathy and understanding of these needs, and are able to see potential and invest in it.
- **Diversity can be an advantage and benefit.** BIPOC-led businesses are often more appealing to BIPOC workers. Many BIPOC employers are motivated to create a great workplace. Many employers value what the diverse workforce brings, and are working to enhance this.

Key insight 5: The influences on churn are multi-layered

A decision to join a business or not, and to stay or go, originates with the individual. The needs and motives of the individual are surrounded by four larger contexts (see Figure 1). Each context adds complexity to the workplace bargain, as it introduces new ways to compel employees to stay, develop, and participate in value creation, or to leave. These contexts also help us understand the many different forces that are experienced to either attract or draw workers to businesses or that pull or draw them away. There is interplay between these layers and they operate as an interconnected system.

Figure 1: The contexts of churn



- **Individual** – Employers and worker are both on unique journeys. Different past circumstances in their lives have influenced their career journey, including the ups and downs of past jobs, learning, locations, and life events that are either intentional or unplanned.
- **Team** – Workers and employer engage in a complex dance when their journeys overlap in the workplace. Each brings their past experiences, approaches, perspectives and expectations into the relationship. Finding common ground and understanding helps, but it isn't easy.
- **Workplace** – Focusing on the experience of the workplace, including engaging all individuals in the challenges of the mission, can positively impact employee retention. A wide range of factors contribute to a great workplace, where both workers and employers can thrive.
- **Community** - The ability of employers to effectively attract, qualify, or retain employees is impacted by their local community. Key influencers include the local job market and economy, the services available, and the networks they have.
- **Systemic context** - Reducing employee turnover also requires changes to institutions, policies and social systems. Small businesses are shouldering the effects of systemic issues, and end up stretched to fill the gaps.

Key insight 6: Workers and employers experience five modes of operating

Our field research revealed that the experience of the workplace bargain involves five distinct modes of thinking and doing. Each mode brings a different focus in the relationship. People often experience the modes in sequence, such as employers searching for workers and then establishing fit through interviewing and onboarding. People may also juggle operating in these modes concurrently, such as growing as a worker in a current workplace while also preparing for and searching for opportunities elsewhere.

This complex interplay between modes illustrates the dynamic and evolving nature of the employer-worker relationship. Certain modes are more prevalent during the different stages of a workplace relationship, but it is important to remember they can be present throughout.

- **Preparing** - In this mode, workers and employers are building focus around their priorities and direction, and are planning and getting ready to achieve them. Worker preparation includes readiness, clarity and building skills while employer preparation involves vision and business plan and related workforce needs.
- **Searching** - This mode is about looking for the people and workplaces that might fit each party's priorities. Employers are developing roles and recruiting for them, sometimes in conjunction with support programs. Workers are looking for work, whether already employed or not.
- **Establishing** – This mode is about evaluating whether there is a good fit. In this early stage of the relationship, both the worker and employer are “testing the waters” to see if they want to

establish a workplace bargain that both parties agree on. It is a type of tryout. If it doesn't work out, it's back to preparing and searching.

- **Growing** - This mode captures the ongoing working relationship, and continuing workplace bargain. This is at the heart of a functioning workplace which can include training, development and growth (e.g. building skills, horizontal, promotion, responsibility). Workplace culture grows here, while individuals, teams and the business may change.
- **Moving on** - Eventually, the workplace relationship comes to an end. Workers move on when there isn't enough fit which can include personal reasons, new opportunities or retirement. Employers also move on from a worker when fit isn't strong enough - in the job or the business.

Key insight 7: Magnetic factors of the workplace bargain

There are distinct forces drawing workers and employers together and pulling them apart within the workplace. We use the concept of magnetism as a metaphor for these concepts.

Attract: In a workplace where people are more satisfied with the situation, there is a stronger 'magnetic' attraction. This represents what draws people in and retains them.

Repel: Opposing forces or negative aspects of a job or the context surrounding it can create resistance for workers or employers to enter or continue the relationship, pushing them apart.

The stronger the 'magnetism' between employer and worker, the better the attraction and retention. The weaker the 'magnetism', or the more they 'repel', the more there is churn, and people pull away.

The forces that are involved in attracting and retaining workers, and those that push them apart, are described in eight factors revealed in the research (see Figure 2). Each factor is important and dynamic and plays a role throughout the worker-employer relationship. The relative importance of each factor depends on the individual.

Figure 2: Magnetic Factors of the Workplace Bargain

<p>Meaning & Values</p> <p>There's an underlying meaning to our work and it helps us express our values – both helps motivate employees and employers</p>	<p>Workplace Culture</p> <p>This is how we show up to work and treat each other. It's the answer to a simple yet complex question: 'what's it like to work here'?</p>
<p>Inclusion & Belonging</p> <p>This is how diverse employees and employers experience and are supported in the workplace as people.</p>	<p>Working Arrangements</p> <p>This encompasses the tangible 'when', 'where' and 'how' of the work. It also includes the level of flexibility across these facets.</p>
<p>Skills & Competencies</p> <p>These are the abilities that workers bring to the table (have) and that the employer is looking for (needs).</p>	<p>Growth</p> <p>This is the need and desire for either party to grow the employees' existing skills to take on more work, different work or more responsibility.</p>
<p>Pay & Benefits</p> <p>These are the tangible and often monetary relationships between employees and employers. They are a balance of what both parties can afford, and change over time.</p>	<p>External conditions</p> <p>These are factors that are outside the control of both parties but influence their relationship and can sometimes be mitigated against.</p>

5. Key takeaways and what's next

What we have learned

Employers are struggling and many don't see a way out. Small businesses' recruitment and retention challenges are exacerbated by a lack of resources and capacity to onboard and develop employees, difficulties finding the time to invest in long-term workforce planning, and the inability to assess and buffer themselves from the impact of systemic economic and labour market shifts.

There are a range of factors that affect the workplace experience. The “workplace bargain” between employers and their workers involves negotiating a holistic suite *Magnetic Factors* (see Figure 2). These factors can both attract employers and workers to each other or push them apart. Creating thriving workplace experiences for employers and workers requires them to be aware of, understand, and address these complex and multi-layered factors.

The workplace bargain is more critical and challenging for equity-deserving groups. The past experiences, opportunities and barriers experienced by Black and African Nova Scotians, Indigenous people, 2SLGBTQ+ individuals, newcomers, people with disabilities and other equity-deserving groups influence their experience of the workplace bargain. Developing a thriving workplace experience for these groups requires employers to be able to explicitly acknowledge and address systemic barriers and discrimination.

Services for employers and services for individuals are currently largely disconnected from each other. Employment service providers have experience matching jobseekers with available jobs based on employers' talent and skill needs, but less experience working in a cohesive way with employers and workers concurrently to help them negotiate all the elements of the workplace bargain and cultivate thriving workplace experiences. There is also an opportunity to build stronger connections between employment services and other business/economic development services that help small businesses with related workforce challenges, and ensure a consistent service experience across the province.

What got us here won't get us there. Simply adding more resources, services, or information to this ‘fire’ will not put it out. Small businesses and workers are already overwhelmed, and many are not using services that are already available because they lack the time and capacity to find and access them. To move the needle on this challenge service innovations will need to be accessible, tailored, practical, and timely.

The return on investment from focusing employment services and support on thriving workplace experiences could be enormous. Addressing the challenges facing small businesses and workers could have a transformative impact on Nova Scotia's communities and economy. Creating healthier, safer, and more welcoming workplace experiences for workers could have a transformative impact on health,

productivity, satisfaction, and well-being. Businesses under 100 employees employ 57.5% of Nova Scotia's private sector workforce but make up only about 27% of Nova Scotia's GDP; the economic return on investment from addressing workforce churn and helping small businesses and their workers thrive would be substantial.¹

Our roadmap going forward

At the close of the Discovery Phase, the project partners came together to collectively make sense of these findings and generate ideas for service innovations that address the core dilemmas faced by small businesses and workers.

This exercise resulted in a set of interconnected opportunities for innovation that build towards the vision of an innovative service model that works in an integrated way with small businesses and workers to help them thrive (see Figure 4). This service model will leverage the existing career development expertise and experience in the Nova Scotia Works system and focus it on the “workplace bargain” – the complex set of factors that influence the relationship between an employer and their workers. Providing this hands-on support will help small businesses retain valued talent and workers grow in their careers.

The innovation opportunities described in Figure 4 tackle different parts of the complex system of employment service delivery with the understanding that developing a new approach to serving small businesses and workers will perhaps require not only new or enhanced service interventions but also attention to capacity-building, service infrastructure and partnerships.

¹ Government of Nova Scotia, Economic Development (2021) [Small Business Week Highlights Entrepreneurs' Innovation and Perseverance](#); Government of Nova Scotia, Finance and Treasury Board (2022) [Business and Employment Dynamics, Nova Scotia 2019](#)

Figure 4: Our roadmap of innovation opportunities



In the next phase of this project, we are excited to start putting these ideas into action. We have partnered with Nova Scotia Works employment service providers to co-design and test innovative service interventions focused on building clarity, awareness, and alignment for workers and employers around the *Magnetic Factors*.

By working to quickly develop innovations and gather real-world evidence about their relevance, effectiveness and impact in the field, we will begin generating and sharing critical and timely insights about what is needed to help small businesses and workers thrive, with a focus on strengthening the

“workplace bargain” in the recruitment and onboarding phases that are so crucial to worker retention and thriving in the workplace.

Beyond this phase, our hope is that the innovations we develop are scaled and implemented across the Nova Scotia service system and beyond. By empowering our career and employment services systems to help small businesses and workers thrive, we have the opportunity to improve outcomes for individuals, strengthen our economy, and positively impact communities.

APPENDIX A

Prior to the launch of the **Thriving Workplaces** project, LSI had collected and documented a wealth of information focused on the needs of employers, workers and system stakeholders, to inform service responses and continually improve and build the capacity of the system. This research provided a critical foundation for the Discovery Phase of the project. Examples of the sources reviewed included:

- Results of engagement sessions with Employer Engagement Specialists (EESs) to explore the state of regional labour markets, employer challenges and opportunities, and pressure points related to the ESS role
- EES quarterly reports and dashboards which share information on EES activities and labour market intelligence collected from employers
- Program inventories detailing programs, resources and services offered by LSI and other partners to support employers
- Documentation related to the mission, vision and history of Nova Scotia Works
- Results of engagements with multiple stakeholders (including service providers and community groups) to explore the perspectives of equity-seeking groups and identify successes, challenges and opportunities to inform programming focused on IDEA (inclusion, diversity, equity and accessibility)
- Labour market intelligence collected by the Association of Industry Sector Councils

LSI also shared additional labour market data, program descriptions, tools, training materials, statistics, and policy documents to ensure the project team could build a rich and nuanced understanding of the current system.

A summary of what we learned from these sources about employer and worker needs, the needs and perspectives of equity-deserving groups, and system strengths and opportunities is outlined below.

Employer and worker needs

Recruitment and retention challenges are pervasive

Employers' reported inability to recruit and retain the employees they need is a critical challenge across Nova Scotia. A survey of employers conducted by the Association of Industry Sector Councils in 2021-22 found that over half of employers are having difficulty finding qualified labour in their local area, and 30% report difficulty retaining qualified labour.

EESs report that employers in their region are facing significant challenges finding qualified candidates and retaining current employees. The COVID-19 pandemic brought retention challenges to the forefront for most employers, and many are still struggling to adapt to labour shortages and other challenges brought about due to pandemic disruptions.

Needs vary across industries and economy

Labour market data demonstrates that the industries that are the backbone of Nova Scotia's economy are also the ones experiencing the most significant workforce challenges - including tourism and hospitality, and skilled industries such as retail and home construction. The geography of economic activity in Nova Scotia and in the rest of the Atlantic region does not align neatly with administrative boundaries.

Employers are struggling to adapt to new labour market realities

Many EESs have noted that employers in Nova Scotia are used to a labour market where qualified workers are readily available. The current labour market requires a shift in mindset and practices focused on hiring job seekers from more diverse backgrounds and providing additional support and training to ensure they are successful. Yet it can be difficult for employers who are in "survival mode" to plan for and invest in these strategies. EES engagements have underscored that many employers (particularly small businesses) have become trapped in a vicious cycle in which they are so focused on trying to recruit and retain workers in the short-term that they have no time or energy to work on developing a more sustainable long-term workforce strategy and building capacity in areas like succession planning, equity and inclusion, and employee supports.

Systemic factors are shaping and re-shaping workforce challenges

There are a number of systemic shifts in the broader policy and economic environment that are making it difficult for small businesses to address their workforce challenges:

- The **lack of available and affordable housing** is causing huge pressures, with potential workers sometimes unable to find a place to live, and the surge in housing prices driving demand for higher wages.
- The **aftershocks of the COVID-19 pandemic** are continuing to impact many employers. Workers are increasingly interested in remote work opportunities, which can put employers in industries that don't offer the possibility of remote work at a competitive disadvantage. Supply chain disruptions, worker mental health and burnout, and economic losses suffered during the pandemic are other factors creating challenges for employers.
- A **lack of public transportation infrastructure** also creates challenges for employers, limiting the geographic area from which they can attract workers.

Some employers lack capacity to hire, onboard and support employees

High-quality and thoughtful recruitment, onboarding, and career development strategies are important tools employers can use to address their workforce challenges. But many employers, particularly small businesses, have capacity gaps in these areas. System stakeholders have reported that many small business owners need more support training and onboarding new employees. They also need support designing growth and development plans to assist in retaining their current staff.

These capacity gaps can have negative consequences for businesses' efforts to recruit and retain employees from equity-deserving groups. In IDEA-focused engagements with employers across Nova

Scotia, many shared that they feel they lack the time and resources to devote to targeted recruitment of equity-deserving groups. Many employers are relying heavily on traditional recruitment methods that are not designed to attract a more diverse pool of applicants. Several are also struggling to develop employee engagement approaches and cultures that make their workplace welcoming and encourage the retention of current employees from equity-deserving groups.

Promising practices often come from large and public sector employers

When asked for examples of “good employers”, service providers and community advocates often mention large and public sector employers, which tend to have more resources and capacity to engage in such work. While there are mentions of good, supportive employers from small and micro-businesses, there is an overall sense that SMEs need more workforce services, training, and support.

Opportunities to enhance service awareness and access for employers

Nova Scotia has a rich range of service offerings to help employers address their workforce challenges. However employers need more clarity on the services and supports that are available, and more hands-on help and support accessing these services. Even in cases where they are aware of NS Works and other government programs, LSI has found that some employers still see these programs as “red tape, secretive and difficult to access.”

Needs and perspectives from equity-deserving groups

LSI engagements with equity-deserving communities to inform IDEA programming generated important insights about the needs and perspectives of these groups. The key themes that emerged from these engagements include:

- **Inclusivity and Equity:** Emphasizing the importance of inclusivity and belonging, fair treatment, and representation to create fair, welcoming and supportive workplace environments
- **Flexibility and Accessibility:** Recognizing the need for flexibility and accessibility to better accommodate challenges, schedules and cultural values
- **Overcoming Bias and Discrimination:** Addressing the impact of stereotypes, biases, discrimination, and racism in the workplace and the need for genuine inclusion and respect. This extends to being valued for skills and work rather than identity, or being tokenized.
- **Communication and Feedback:** Highlighting the significance of open communication, feedback mechanisms, and creating a safe space for dialogue in the workplace
- **Leadership Commitment to IDEA:** Stressing the role of demonstrating commitment to IDEA efforts and fostering change within the workplace and its culture
- **Recognition of Experience and Credentials:** Acknowledging past experience, credentials, and qualifications, and the need to remove barriers to entry and advancement

- **Community and Cultural Awareness:** Fostering community connections, and expressing cultural awareness in formal and informal approaches to address concerns and incidents in the workplace
- **Support for Career Growth:** Acknowledging the importance of mentorship, advancement opportunities, skills-building, and personal growth to help employees thrive in their careers.

Insights from consultations with specific groups also emerged from this data:

- **Indigenous and Mi'kmaq people** – Indigenous community members place a high value on cultural awareness and psychological safety in the workplace. When searching for work, they look for employers who have moved beyond tokenistic hiring and built a strong Indigenous presence in their workplace, and for places that offer quality career advancement and development opportunities. They also look for environments that have accommodations for cultural practices and value working in community or to benefit community.
- **Black and African Nova Scotian communities** – Black and African Nova Scotian communities place a high priority on workplaces that offer psychological safety to openly communicate and share feedback, and are free from the microaggressions, stress, and need to perform "whiteness" that characterize many of their employment experiences. They seek employers that have a commitment to DEI at all levels of the organization, including leadership, and those that have adopted inclusive hiring practices. Many Black and African Nova Scotian community members seek out workplaces where they will not be the "token Black" as this does not lead to genuine inclusion or opportunities.
- **Newcomer and Immigrants** – Newcomers place a high value on employers and workplaces that recognize and value the skills and experience they bring from their past, non-Canadian education and experience. They are looking for workplaces that foster a strong sense of belonging; that invest in employees through mentorship and pathways to career advancement; and that provide fair and effective onboarding and feedback. Newcomers also desire support and guidance in attaining permanent residency.
- **Persons with disabilities** – Persons with disabilities prioritize workplaces that not only offer flexibility and accommodations, but have rejected myths and stigma about the abilities of persons with disabilities to contribute meaningfully to the workplace and provide equal treatment and recognition. Psychological safety is also critical as it creates the space for persons with disabilities to advocate and ask for what they need to be successful. Persons with disabilities seek organizations that publicly commit to inclusivity and have clear policies and accountability. They also prioritize having a voice in the workplace, having their strengths acknowledged, feeling that their opinions are respected and valued.
- **2SLGBTQ+** – Members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community look for workplaces that have clear indicators that they are 2SLGBTQ+ friendly and where they feel confident that they will be able to bring their whole selves to work. They also prioritize workplace practices, policies and professional development initiatives that focus on diversity and belonging.

System strengths and opportunities

LSI's research also highlighted some key insights about system strengths and opportunities in services for employers and workers:

Significant progress in developing and continuously improving services to employers

The EES role has led to greater consistency in employer service, better service to jobseekers, better understanding of local labour market needs, novel ways of helping employers, and enhanced employer learning. Workplace Education Initiative training, including the newly launched IDEA training, is reaching many employers with practical training to address their needs. 40 SME business leaders completed IDEA fundamentals course in June 2023 and provided positive feedback and 2113 employers participated in WEI training overall in 2022-23.

Stakeholders have identified additional opportunities to strengthen employer services

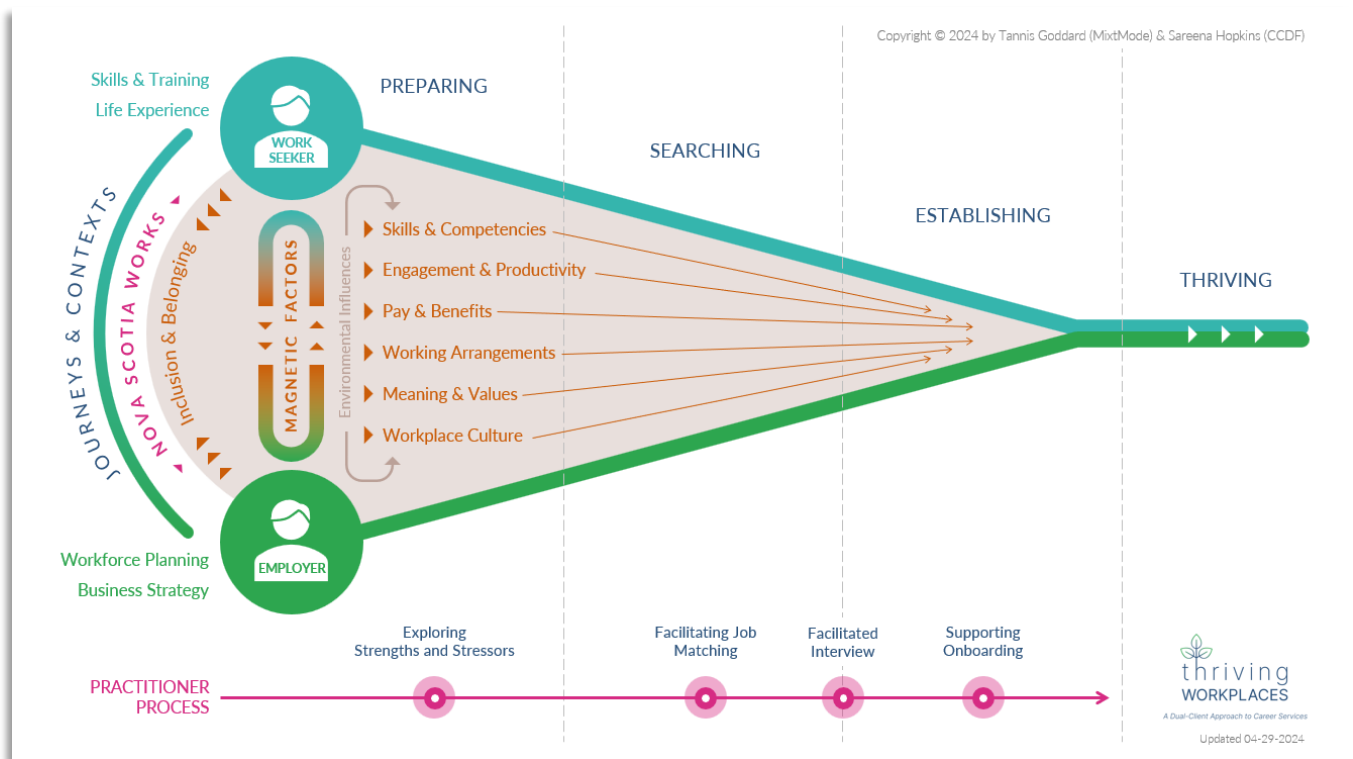
Service providers and EESs are reporting that employers need more help than what they can currently offer (e.g. more direct, timely, hands-on support with workforce challenges) There is a desire to strengthen the integration of the EES role in NSW centres and build stronger connections between services for jobseekers and employers.

EESs can find it difficult to balance data collection and reporting requirements with the need to build relationships and respond quickly to employer needs. EESs and service providers have identified opportunities for more standardization, process, structure and training around the EES role. LSI is already taking several steps to address this need.

APPENDIX B

The working version service intervention model demonstrates how we will use the *Magnetic Factors* as the basis for working with employers and workers to help the negotiate the workplace bargain. Recognizing that the “Inclusion & Belonging” factor is a non-negotiable pre-requisite to creating thriving workplace experiences, we have included it in the model as a foundational first consideration in the process of working with employers and workers to facilitate a strong workplace bargain.

Figure 5: Thriving Workplaces dual-client service model



APPENDIX C

The **Thriving Workplaces** project team is led by Tannis Goddard (MixtMode Consulting) and Sareena Hopkins (CCDF). Both Tannis and Sareena have extensive service delivery experience, research and subject matter expertise, and deep connections in the career development and employment services ecosystem.

Tannis Goddard has worked in the field of career development for 30 years. Her experience includes: operating a public employment career centre in British Columbia for 25 years; providing professional development and training to career practitioner and sector leaders; developing Canada's first fully online career development service in 2004; and providing consultation to national and international governments regarding the design and delivery of career guidance services. Tannis recently completed her PhD which focused on the transformational potential of integrating synchronous and asynchronous communication channels within career service delivery.

As executive director of CCDF, **Sareena Hopkins** has been instrumental in a wide range of strategic leadership initiatives in Canada and internationally. She has worked with the Council of Atlantic Ministers of Education and Training and the Council of Ministers of Education Canada on their policy frameworks for career education and successful student transitions. In her work, Sareena focuses particularly on issues of policy, research, development and capacity building. In addition to her role with CCDF, Sareena is founding Executive Officer of the Canadian Council for Career Development and was awarded the International Gold Medal for Leadership in Career Development in 2014.
