

thriving WORKPLACES

A Dual-Client Approach to Career Services

Interim Report

February 2025



About the Future Skills Centre

The Future Skills Centre (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. We partner with policymakers, researchers, practitioners, employers and labour groups, and post-secondary institutions to solve pressing labour market challenges and ensure that everyone can benefit from relevant lifelong learning opportunities. We are founded by a consortium whose members are Toronto Metropolitan University, Blueprint, and The Conference Board of Canada, and are funded by the Government of Canada's Future Skills Program.

About Blueprint

Blueprint was founded on the simple idea that evidence is a powerful tool for change. We work with policymakers and practitioners to create and use evidence to solve complex policy and program challenges. Our vision is a social policy ecosystem where evidence is used to improve lives, build better systems and policies, and drive social change. Our team brings together a multidisciplinary group of professionals with diverse capabilities in policy research, data analysis, design, evaluation, implementation and knowledge mobilization. As a consortium partner of the Future Skills Centre, Blueprint works with partners and stakeholders to collaboratively generate and use evidence to help solve pressing future skills challenges.

About MixtMode Consulting

MixtMode Consulting (MixtMode) is a project-based consulting agency that focuses on strengthening and modernizing career and workforce development services. MixtMode's expertise evolved from operating government-funded career services for 25 years in British Columbia, delivering services in rural and remote settings across many different client needs and demographics. With a comprehensive understanding of all facets of the career development sector, MixtMode offers relevant and innovative solutions for practitioners, service providers, educational institutions, and governments.

About Canadian Career Development Foundation

The Canadian Career Development Foundation (CCDF) is an internationally renowned organization with proven expertise in the field of career development. CCDF is a non-profit, project-based organization with a national Board of Governors, expert staff and a global network of specialist Associates. CCDF leverages career development to enable Canadians to manage learning and work, acquire and enhance skills, seek/create employment, and access community services in an increasingly complex, interdependent and changing world. Through this work, CCDF promotes positive health, social and economic outcomes for individuals, institutions, and communities.



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About this Report

Thriving Workplaces, a project under the *Re-Imagining Career Services* (RCS) initiative (formerly called Responsive Career Pathways), is a partnership between the Future Skills Centre (FSC), Blueprint, MixtMode Consulting (MixtMode), the Canadian Career Development Foundation (CCDF), and the Government of Nova Scotia. It aims to co-create and test innovative approaches to publicly funded career service delivery to better meet the needs of workers and employers.

Beginning in the summer of 2022, project partners collaborated to create a shared vision by drawing on insights from Blueprint's [RCS initiative](#), research on the needs of small businesses and workers in Nova Scotia, and an analysis of opportunities for innovation in the province's workforce development system, as outlined in the [Discovery Phase Report](#) and [Needs Assessment Report](#).

This Interim Report, co-written by the Thriving Workplaces team and Blueprint, builds on these findings by presenting insights gathered from designing and testing an initial prototype of an innovative dual-client service model in Nova Scotia, conducted from April to November 2024.

The evidence presented in this report was collected by Blueprint and the Thriving Workplaces team and incorporates the perspectives of work seekers,¹ employers, and service practitioners engaged in delivering the new model.

The report is organized into five sections:

- **Introduction (pp. 8-11)** briefly outlines the challenges faced by work seekers and employers in accessing career development services and the need to develop a dual-client service model.
- **Thriving Workplaces Model (pp. 12-18)** describes the development process, current state, and future vision for the dual-client service model in Nova Scotia and more broadly.
- **Research and Evaluation Strategy (pp. 19-24)** presents the approach to evidence generation, learning agenda, data sources, and limitations.
- **Findings (pp. 25-48)** discuss preliminary results on early implementation, uptake, user experience, and effectiveness.
- **Conclusions (pg. 49)** summarize key findings, next steps for the project, and plans for future reporting.

¹ Work seeker encompasses both unemployed and employed individuals seeking new employment opportunities.



Executive Summary

This report presents insights from the most recent phase of Thriving Workplaces, a project under the *Re-Imagining Career Services* (RCS) initiative (formerly Responsive Career Pathways).

A partnership between the Future Skills Centre (FSC), Blueprint, MixtMode Consulting (MixtMode), the Canadian Career Development Foundation (CCDF), and the Government of Nova Scotia, Thriving Workplaces aims to explore and test a new approach to publicly funded career services to better meet the needs of work seekers and employers.

Unlike traditional publicly funded employment services models in Canada, which primarily engage employers to match work seekers to job vacancies, the Thriving Workplaces model engages both work seekers and employers in a consistent set of activities to explore and identify their needs, offerings, and mindsets related to work. The model is based on the “Magnetic Factors” framework, a set of variables that either attract employers and work seekers to one another or repel them. This framework was developed based on user research with employers and workers in Nova Scotia in an earlier phase of the Thriving Workplaces project.

About the Thriving Workplaces prototype

In the **Research, Design, & Prototyping** phase of the project (November 2023-present), the project leads (MixtMode and CCDF) worked with five employment services providers in Nova Scotia to design and test an initial prototype of an innovative dual-client service model and generate early learnings about the implementation and effectiveness of the model within the Nova Scotia government’s publicly funded employment services system, Nova Scotia Works.

Early implementation learnings

The practitioners engaged in the delivery of the Thriving Workplaces prototype believe in the relevance and usefulness of the approach and its potential to strengthen service delivery. The prototyping phase also highlighted opportunities to experiment with new ways of engaging employers, streamline the model activities and find new ways to integrate the Magnetic Factors approach into existing workflows.

- At site visits and check-ins, practitioners reported that the model addresses an important need in bridging the gap in understanding and expectations between employers and work seekers, and shared that the Magnetic Factors framework is intuitive, relevant and easy to understand.
- The project helped practitioners strengthen their relationships with clients and has positively influenced their approach to service delivery. The model also led to increased collaboration between practitioners who primarily serve work seekers, and those who primarily work with employers.
- While practitioners initially struggled to recruit employers, experimentation with different employer engagement strategies, including new messaging and the use of group-based employer awareness sessions, has helped increase interest.

- Integrating the new model into existing workflows was challenging for some practitioners, while others appreciated the structured approach to delivery. Practitioners' mental models about their role and their ability to support clients also influenced delivery.
- The Thriving Workplaces team has begun streamlining the Magnetic Factors activities to reduce the burden on practitioners and clients. In future iterations, the project leads intend to co-design and test new applications of the Magnetic Factors and refine delivery modalities to better support a broad range of users.

Uptake

- Thriving Workplaces engaged 44 work seekers and 15 employers between April and November 2024.
- Work seeker participants are predominantly highly educated, Canadian-born individuals who have been unemployed for at least 10 months, with just under half identifying as part of an equity-deserving group. Some were uncertain about their requirements and expectations for their next jobs and their ability to find a good match. They hoped Thriving Workplaces would help them understand their needs and secure a suitable job.
- Almost all employer participants are small businesses. Due to challenges with hiring and retention, most employers hope the program will help them find suitable candidates and clarify their expectations for potential hires.

User experience and effectiveness

- Work seekers who have completed the Magnetic Factors activities (17) reported that the Magnetic Factors activities helped them gain clearer insights into what they want and need from work, boosting their confidence and optimism.
- Employers (11) shared that the Magnetic Factors activities helped them delineate what they offer and how to communicate it transparently to potential candidates. They also valued the opportunity to connect with other employers facing similar challenges.
- While the prototype is not yet operating at a scale to achieve high proportions of job matches, one successful match has demonstrated the potential of the Magnetic Factors process to align employer recruitment needs with work seekers' preferences, resulting in a satisfactory outcome for both parties.

While these findings are positive, small sample sizes mean these results should be interpreted with caution.

Early insights on scaling and systems change

In addition to assessing the early implementation and outcomes of the Thriving Workplaces model, this phase also included continued policy dialogue with government partners to lay the groundwork for potential future scaling and systems change. This work has highlighted that:

- An important success factor in future efforts to scale and sustain the model will be the capacity for successful delivery among individuals and organizations in the system.
- There are opportunities to innovate existing components of the Nova Scotia Works service pathway to embody and enable the successful delivery of the Magnetic Factors approach.
- Ensuring the model is aligned and working in coordination with the existing workforce development ecosystem will be important for future efforts to scale and sustain to the model.
- To make informed decisions about the future of the model, the project partners will need to continue to gather evidence about the model's impact on users as well as its broader relevance and uptake across the system.

Conclusions

This phase of the Thriving Workplaces project has demonstrated the relevance and usefulness of the prototype service model and the Magnetic Factors framework. Going forward, the project leads will continue to iterate the model to enhance its effectiveness, streamline its delivery, and ultimately help more work seekers and employers thrive in the workplace.



1. Introduction

What potential could be unlocked if both small businesses and workers were supported to thrive at work? This question lies at the heart of the [Thriving Workplaces](#) project. Many small businesses in Nova Scotia and across Canada struggle to find and keep workers and adapt to the realities of a changing labour market including high levels of labour and skills shortages. At the same time, many individuals, including those from equity-deserving groups, face challenges in finding and keeping sustainable employment. The Thriving Workplaces project aims to design, test, and scale an innovative dual-client service approach in Nova Scotia's publicly funded employment services system to address this fundamental dilemma and better meet the needs of small businesses and work seekers.

Funded by the Future Skills Centre and supported by Blueprint under the Re-imagining Career Services (RCS) initiative,² Thriving Workplaces 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 Department of Economic Development (DED).

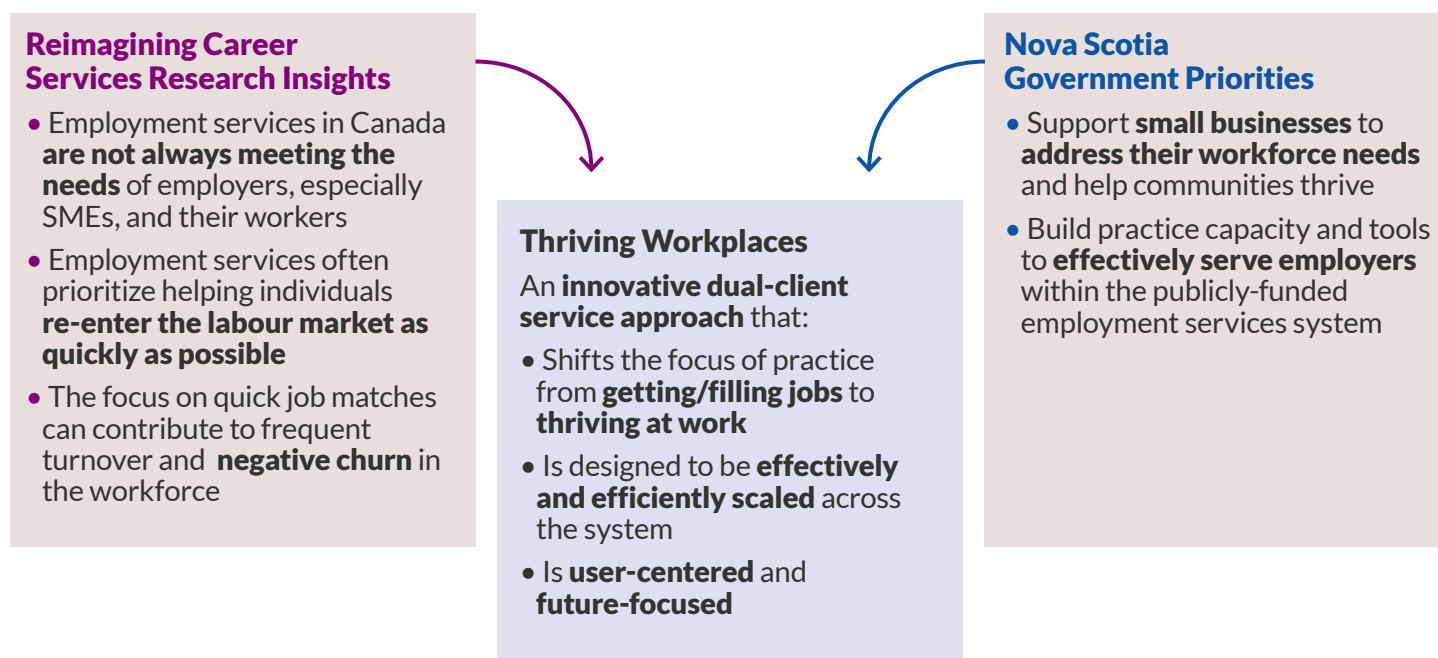
The project's goals are informed by a combination of insights from Blueprint's RCS initiative and the needs and priorities of the Nova Scotia government and its publicly funded employment services system, **Nova Scotia Works** (see [Figure 1](#)).

The RCS research program identified opportunities for publicly funded employment services in Canada to better meet the needs of a dynamic labour market, including more effectively supporting employers (especially small businesses) who sometimes lack the resources and expertise to identify their workforce needs and effectively access and work with government-funded services to address them. This opportunity aligns closely with Nova Scotia's focus on assisting small businesses with their workforce needs while building capacity, skills, and expertise within Nova Scotia Works's dual-client (job seeker and employer) employment services model to address them.

The Thriving Workplaces project builds on these insights to explore and test a new (and evolving) approach to career services that can help both workers and employers identify and articulate their needs, highlight their offerings, and ultimately foster more sustainable employment opportunities.

² RCS focuses on developing innovative, future-oriented career service models designed to better support career development practitioners, work seekers, and employers, especially mid-career workers and SMEs, who face increasing economic uncertainty amid a rapidly changing labour market.

Figure 1 | Rationale for Thriving Workplaces



1.1. Project History

The Thriving Workplaces project began in the summer of 2022 with conversations between the Future Skills Centre, Blueprint, MixtMode, CCDF, and senior decision-makers in the Nova Scotia government. The goal was to co-create a shared project vision and develop a roadmap for designing and testing an innovative approach to career development services within Nova Scotia's existing employment services model, Nova Scotia Works.

Since launching its transformed employment services system in 2016, the Nova Scotia government has been committed to continuously improving the **Nova Scotia Works** model by formally incorporating employers as clients through the creation of a new Employer Engagement Specialist (EES) role, and seeking to strengthen its dual-client services and orientation toward employer recruitment and retention needs. At the time of co-creation of what is now Thriving Workplaces, the government was also grappling with how to assist small employers address labour shortages (people and skills). The project team viewed this as an opportunity to develop and test innovations that were responsive to the current system's needs and opportunities, as well as innovative, user-centred, and future-focused.

Building on this vision, the project leads and partners in the Nova Scotia government developed the initial concept for a service approach that supports employers and work seekers, helping all parties thrive in a rapidly changing labour market. **Box 1** provides an overview of the principles the project leads have used to guide this work.

Box 1 | Core principles for the project

The project leads identified core principles to guide this work, ensuring it remained innovative and responsive to the needs of practitioners and users it aims to support. These principles are:

- **Partnership-driven:** The project leads have recognized that innovation and system change cannot occur in isolation. MixtMode and CCDF have intentionally engaged partners in the government and community organizations to help design, implement, and assess the effectiveness of the intervention.
- **Open to adaptation:** Developing and implementing a “fully-baked” intervention limits the project’s ability to adapt to real-time learning and insights. Instead, the project leads are testing, learning, and iterating based on insights about what is working well and what needs improvement.
- **Comprehensive:** Career development services do not exist in isolation. The project is exploring both the intervention’s inner workings and the broader conditions that influence its design and implementation, such as the economic climate, service ecosystem, and emerging user needs.
- **Strengths-focused:** Nova Scotia Works has incorporated many promising practices into its current delivery approach. The project leads are aiming to highlight and build on what is currently working and provide strategies, supports, and tools that can further strengthen efforts to serve work seekers and employers.
- **Community-based:** Meaningful engagement and a deep understanding of the current climate are critical for the project’s success. The project leads have committed to maintaining a regular presence in Nova Scotia to ensure strong relationships with project partners while grounding themselves in the lived experiences of policymakers, practitioners, employers, and workers.

As the project leads continued in the **Discovery/Needs Assessment** phase, they assessed the current landscape and understood user needs through:

- User research conducted by [The Moment](#) with workers and small businesses to understand their challenges and priorities
- Engagement with partners in the workforce development ecosystem to assess system constraints and opportunities for innovation (see the *Discovery Report*)

Through this work, the project team learned about the needs of small businesses struggling to find and retain talent, as well as workers, especially from equity-deserving groups, that are facing challenges in finding opportunities that align with their needs and goals. Employment service providers and other system actors shared their eagerness to tackle these challenges but stressed the need for more tools and capacity-building to coordinate efforts and improve effectiveness.

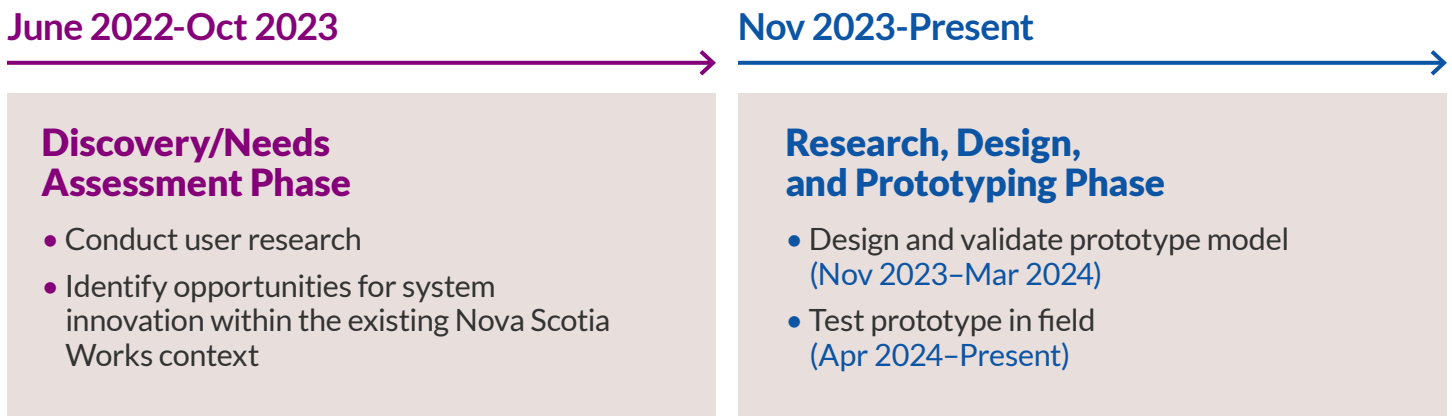
1.2. Research, design, and prototyping phase

The project is currently in the **Research, Design, & Prototyping** phase (the focus of this report), which was launched in November 2023 (see [Figure 2](#)). As part of this phase, the project leads developed an innovative dual-client service model to help employers and work seekers gain clarity and awareness about their goals and needs, using a common framework, the Magnetic Factors, and language to guide workforce strategies and employment journeys (see **Section 2. Thriving Workplaces Model** for an overview of the model concept). The Magnetic Factors, further explained in section 2, are a set of variables identified through user research that either attract workers and employers together or push them apart.

The project leads are currently collaborating with five employment service providers (“delivery sites”) to test the prototype model with work seeker and employer clients. Using an implementation science lens, they are gathering insights from these sites about the relevance and usefulness of this framework and assessing the individual, organizational, and system factors impacting the use of the factors within their professional practice and services.

In addition to testing this, the project leads have continued to engage government partners in ongoing policy dialogue, with a focus on identifying future scaling opportunities or constraints. These joint efforts aim to lay the groundwork for future changes in the Nova Scotia Works model and service system that could facilitate the potential future scaling of the “Magnetic Factors” framework.

Figure 2 | Thriving Workplaces Development Journey





2. Thriving Workplaces Model

2.1. Model concept

The Thriving Workplaces service model concept is an innovative dual-client approach to employment services that uses a “Magnetic Factors” framework for engaging work seekers and employers. The Magnetic Factors, identified through the user research conducted in the **Discovery Phase**, are factors that either attract employers and work seekers to one another or push them apart (see **Box 2** for more details). The underlying theory for the model is that by helping work seekers and employers gain clarity on their needs and offerings related to the Magnetic Factors and apply this clarity in their workforce and career journeys, both parties can achieve more suitable employment matches, job retention, and ultimately a thriving workplace.

The initiative in Nova Scotia prioritized small businesses (those with less than 100 employees), which have limited internal resources to address hiring and retention needs. Small businesses make up the vast majority (97.8%) of employers in Canada, including in Nova Scotia (97.8%). Nationally, small employers account for 46.8% of the private sector workforce,³ while in Nova Scotia this proportion is even higher at 59.4%.⁴

Unlike traditional publicly funded employment service models in Canada, which primarily engage employers to match work seekers to job vacancies, the Thriving Workplaces model engages both work seekers and employers as clients, using a common approach through the use of the Magnetic Factors framework. The model helps both work seekers and employers build clarity and awareness around their needs, wants, and offerings. This clarity and awareness can then be applied to various workforce scenarios as they engage with supports from the model, or with Nova Scotia Works more broadly, such as:

- Assisting work seekers with career exploration and skills development planning
- Assisting employers with more effective recruitment and hiring processes based on a shared understanding and aligned expectations
- Assisting workers and employers with workplace integration to help foster retention and sustainable employment
- Assisting workers and employers with professional development and career growth strategies

³ Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada. (ISED) (2023). *Key Small Business Statistics, 2022*.
<https://ised-isde.canada.ca/site/sme-research-statistics/en/key-small-business-statistics/key-small-business-statistics-2023#s1.1>

⁴ Government of Nova Scotia. (2024). *Economics and Statistics*.
https://www.novascotia.ca/finance/statistics/archive_news.asp?id=19859&dto=0&dti=3

Magnetic Factors Framework

At the heart of the **Thriving Workplaces model** are the **Magnetic Factors**—a set of variables identified through user research that either pull workers and employers or push them apart.



The Magnetic Factors do not have a “good/bad” dichotomy. Employers and work seekers will have unique strengths and stressors related to each factor, the importance of which may also vary over time. The hypothesis is that helping participants gain clarity and awareness about their strengths and stressors concerning these factors will foster greater **transparency**, improve **alignment**, and lead to **more successful employment and workforce strategies**.

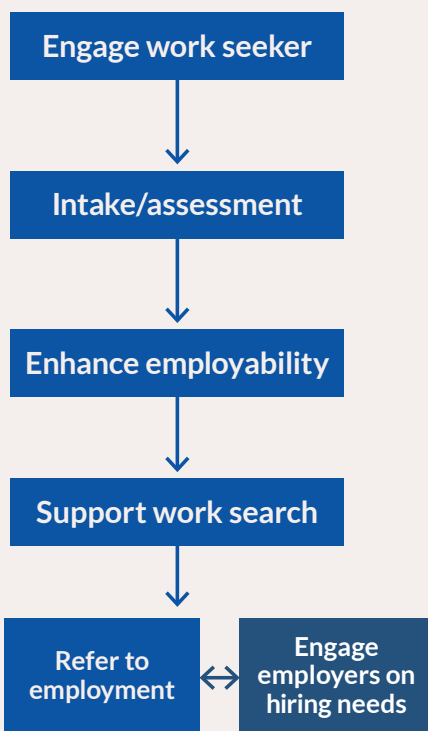
In addition to the six Magnetic Factors described above, the research identified **some additional variables** that are critically important to the relationship between employers and work seekers. The first was the need for a workplace to foster inclusion and belonging, where individuals feel safe and welcomed. LSI already offers targeted training and services designed to help employers build more welcoming workplaces, recognizing this is a foundational prerequisite for thriving workplaces.

The research also highlighted that external conditions impact the working relationship. Factors such as the availability of housing or transportation will influence the attraction between employers and workers. While these are outside the scope of the Magnetic Factors model, it is important to note that these types of external factors may influence the viability of a workplace arrangement.

Figure 3 illustrates the model concept and its comparison to traditional employment services. The model uses the Magnetic Factors framework to help both work seekers and employers build their clarity and awareness, and ultimately achieve more suitable employment matches, job retention, and a thriving workplace. Note that this represents the future state vision of the model, while the current prototype includes some, but not all, of the envisioned components (see **Section 2.2. Prototype Service Pathway** for details).

Figure 3 | Future State Thriving Workplace Model

Traditional employment services model



Future State Thriving Workplaces model

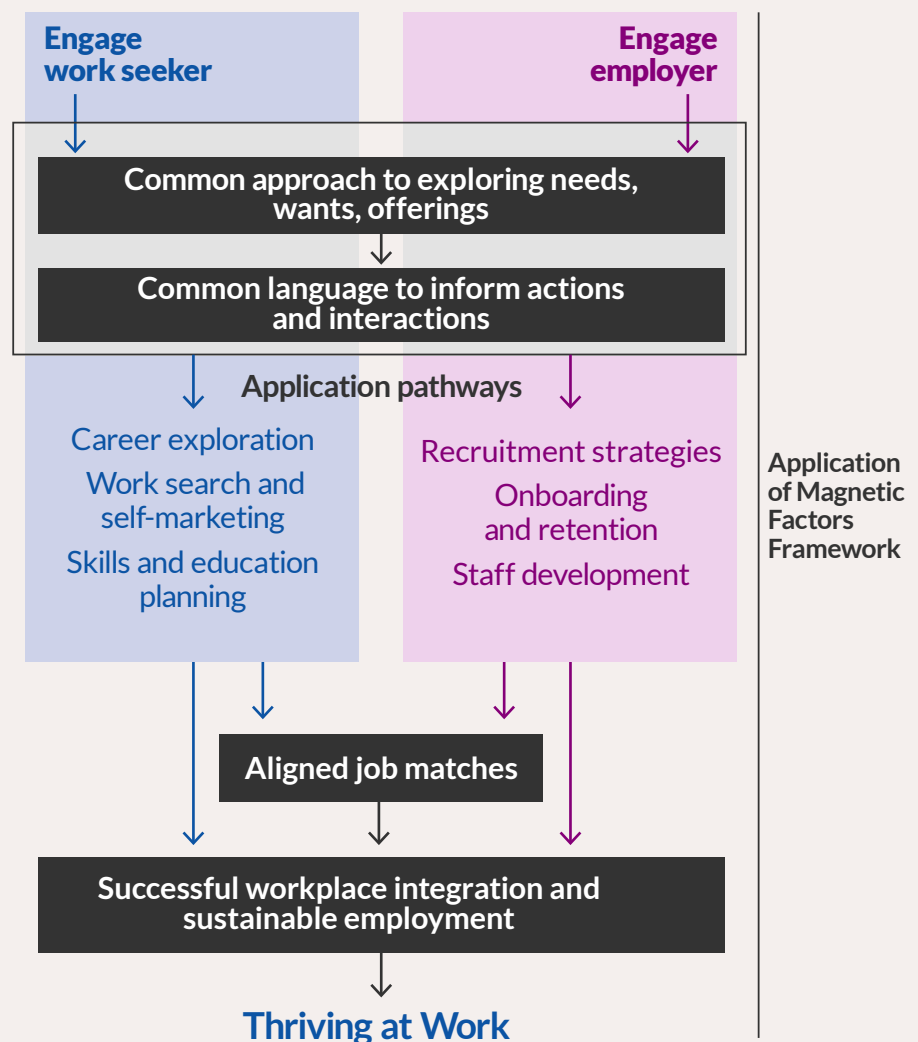


Figure 4 shows how Thriving Workplaces can help achieve innovation across three levels: at the level of the client and the interventions they receive, at the service delivery level by strengthening its dual-client focus, and at the systems level by demonstrating a new approach to innovation and systems change.

Figure 4 | Thriving Workplaces layers of innovation

“Layers” of Innovation	Operational Impact	Underlying Shift
Service Interventions	Activities for work seekers and employers to build clarity and awareness to inform their employment journeys and workforce strategies	Introduction of a common language for what users want/need from work, and consistent system for assessing what individuals and employers bring to the workplace bargain
Dual-Client Model	Integration/collaboration of work seeker and employer-facing roles Metrics of success focused on addressing the underlying causes of negative workforce “churn”	Shifting the goalpost from getting unemployed people jobs, to building scalable strategies to help everyone thrive at work
System Innovation	Evidence-informed implementation strategies; co-designing and learning along with practitioners	New visions and model for employment services as a user-centred service for nimbly intervening in labour market challenges

2.2. Prototype Service Pathway

The current **Research, Design, & Prototyping** phase focuses on designing, testing, and refining components of the Magnetic Factors framework on a small scale within the Nova Scotia Works system while generating insights about what is needed for its success.

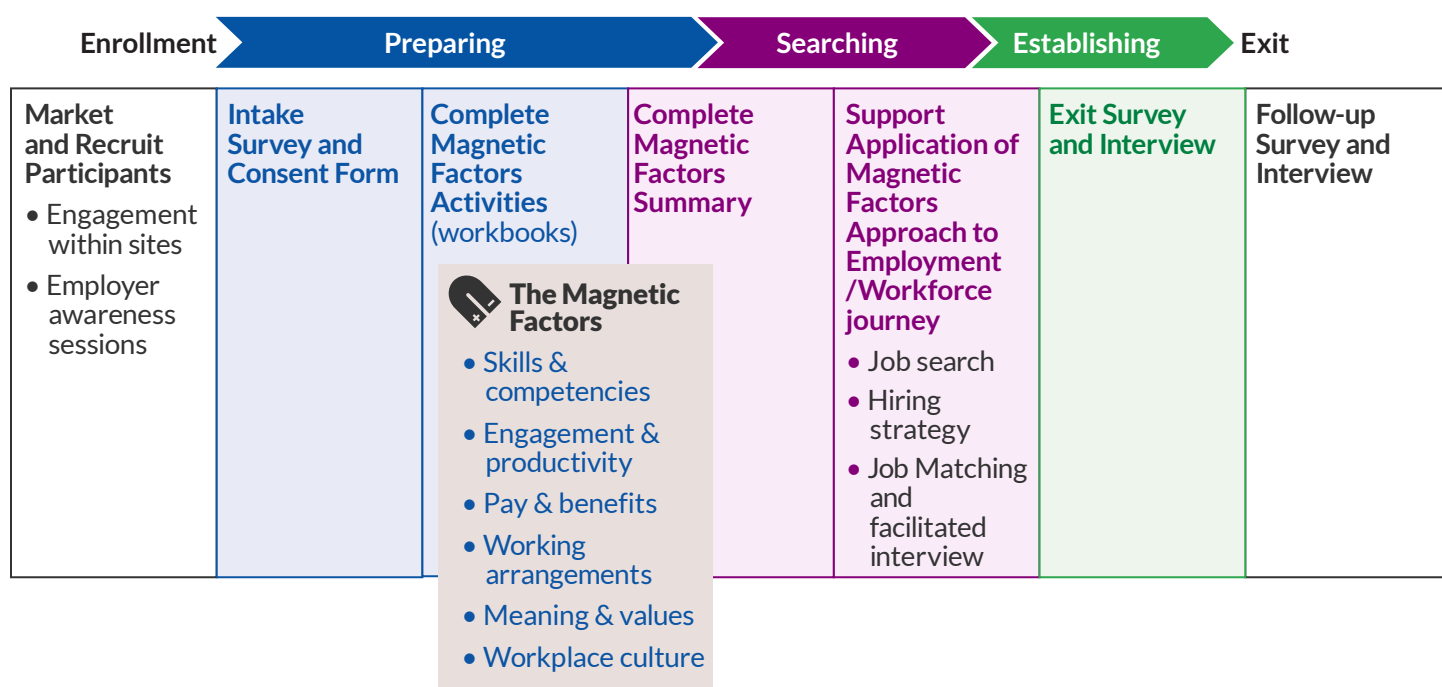
This phase has focused on assessing the usefulness and effectiveness of the Magnetic Factors framework for Nova Scotia Works work seeker and employer clients to gain **clarity and awareness** around their needs, offerings, and mindsets as they relate to the Factors. The project team is working with practitioners to experiment and gather data on how to help clients apply this clarity and awareness to the next step in their employment and workforce development journey. This translates to a focus on career exploration, job search, and matching for work seekers, and on the process of hiring and promoting staff retention for employers. Future phases will explore opportunities to define, develop, and test the framework’s various applications in alignment with the future state vision for the model.

The service pathway from enrollment to exit for the current prototype is presented in **Figure 5**. This figure focuses on the steps involved in participating in this phase of the Thriving Workplaces prototype in Nova Scotia Works and does not reflect the additional service delivery activities that participants continue to engage in as part of their typical participation in the Nova Scotia Works employment service model (e.g., intake and completion of existing assessments).

The prototype is delivered by existing Nova Scotia Works staff. At each delivery site, Case Managers and Employer Engagement Specialists (EESs) use their discretion to identify Nova Scotia Works work seeker and employer clients for participation in the project.⁵ The Case Manager guides participating work seekers through this pathway, while an EES does the same with participating employers. An Operations Manager and/or Executive Director provides ongoing oversight and guidance for delivering Thriving Workplaces.

Figure 5 | Current Service Delivery Pathway for the Thriving Workplaces Prototype in Nova Scotia

Current phase: Service delivery pathway



The service pathway for the prototyping initiative in Nova Scotia included the following steps:

- Market the service and recruit participants:** Case Managers and EESs engage work seekers and employers using multiple strategies, including social media, physical advertising, and recruitment from within the sites' existing client base. Work seekers and employers were offered the opportunity to engage in discussions and activities with Nova Scotia Works practitioners to better understand their work needs and offerings, as well as follow-up support with employment and job matching. Additionally, project leads have partnered with the delivery sites to organize and host employer awareness sessions—events designed to bring together groups of employers, introduce them to the project and the Magnetic Factors, and encourage their continued participation.
- Complete Magnetic Factors activities:** Once enrolled in the project, service practitioners guide

⁵ As existing clients of Nova Scotia Works, participants have already completed the typical intake and assessment process and can access the full range of other services and supports available at each centre.

participants through the Magnetic Factors activities—a series of reflective exercises in their workbooks designed to build clarity and awareness of their needs, offerings, and mindsets. At this early stage of the project, service practitioners have experimented with various delivery approaches and modalities for the Magnetic Factors activities, such as group-based and one-on-one appointments. After completing the activities, participants work with their service practitioner to complete the Magnetic Factors Summary—an overall reflection of their strengths and stressors for each factor to inform their next steps.

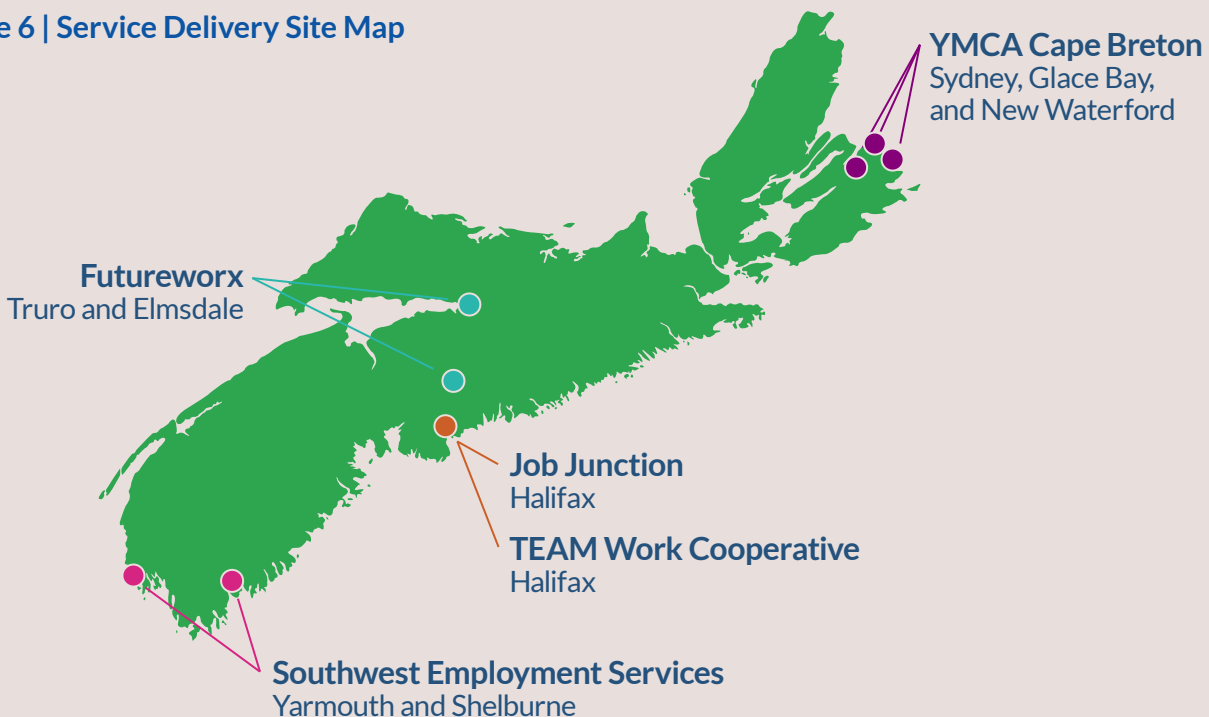
- **Support application of the Magnetic Factors framework to a participant's journey:** Once the Magnetic Factors Summary is finalized, practitioners use various strategies to help employers and work seekers apply the insights gained to the next step in their employment and workforce journey. At this early prototype stage, the support period typically lasts 4–6 weeks. At the end, practitioners conduct an exit interview to gather feedback on how Thriving Workplaces has impacted their employment and workforce development journey.

2.3. Implementation

Before launching the current Thriving Workplace prototype, the project leads worked closely with the government partners to confirm the prototype's direction, approach, and overall concept, ensuring their continued commitment and engagement. Together, the project leads and government partners developed a request for applications distributed to all Nova Scotia Works employment services providers to identify interested delivery sites. The selection criteria focused on the organizations' interest and willingness to partner on this innovative project rather than factors like their size, experience, or capacity.

Five providers applied and were accepted to participate in the prototype stage as illustrated in the figure below.

Figure 6 | Service Delivery Site Map



During this phase, it was originally envisioned that the service delivery sites would focus on job matching between participating employers and work seekers. However, the project leads quickly realized that the prototype delivery is not yet operating at a scale where achieving matches among participants is realistic, given the small number of practitioners (and, consequently, participants) involved. As a result, the focus of the early prototyping phase has shifted to testing the applicability and utility of the Magnetic Factors concept. This has involved learning and experimenting with various applications of the model to enhance work seekers' and employers' clarity and awareness, and to translate that clarity into actionable next steps in their career and workforce journey.

To support the providers in implementing the prototype and experimenting with the various applications of the project, the project leads used several strategies:

- **Tools and Resources:** The project leads developed several tools and resources, including an online resource hub, to equip practitioners to deliver the Thriving Workplaces model. User workbooks were the key tool, featuring activities to help employers and work seekers gain clarity and awareness using the Magnetic Factors.
- **Training and Co-design:** The project leads held a four-day session with participating practitioners to introduce the model and gather their feedback and input on its design and delivery. The attendees included at least one Case Manager and one EES from each site, as well as each site's Operations Manager. Several Executive Directors from the participating sites engaged as well. The attendees also received an overview of the research strategy and learned about their role as co-researchers.
- **Partner Portal:** An online partner portal was developed to serve as a hub to organize project resources and facilitate easy and timely communication among all partners involved in the project.
- **Ongoing Support:** Project leads had regular check-ins with practitioners and visited sites in person to review progress, identify what works, answer questions, address issues, identify needs for additional supports, and communicate project updates.

3. Research and Evaluation Strategy

3.1. Evidence Generation Approach

Blueprint and the Thriving Workplaces team collaborated to design an evidence-generation strategy that aligns with Blueprint's evidence generation approach and the **Research, Design, & Prototype** phase of the Innovation Cycle (see [Figure 7](#)). (For more details about Blueprint's evidence generation approach, please refer to the [Re-imaging Career Services Design Report](#).)

The strategy focuses on iteratively developing service innovations based on data about their relevance and usefulness for employers and work seekers, as well as identifying opportunities and constraints for successful delivery. A key priority is actively engaging practitioners as co-researchers and co-designers, empowering them to generate and apply data to reflect on their learning and contribute to ongoing project improvements.

As the project leads are working within and alongside the Nova Scotia employment services system, they have also placed a strong emphasis on **policy dialogue and knowledge mobilization**. This involves engaging the government partners and other interest holders to shape and interpret the evidence, helping to lay the foundation for potential future scaling and long-term sustainability of the initiative.

Figure 7 | Innovation Cycle



3.2. Learning Agenda

Blueprint and the Thriving Workplaces team sought to answer the following questions:

1. Early implementation learnings

- What's working well?
- What are the opportunities and constraints in delivery?
- What adjustments have been made to the model so far in response to early learnings?
- What future iterations are planned?

2. Uptake

- Who has participated in Thriving Workplaces so far, and what are their service needs?

3. User experience

- How are work seekers and employers experiencing the model?
 - o Are they satisfied with the service?
 - o What are their service journeys?

4. Preliminary learnings about effectiveness

- Do work seekers and employers achieve increased clarity and awareness related to the Magnetic Factors?
- Do work seekers and employers experience suitable job matches?

5. Understanding the process of innovation and systems change

- What are we learning about the opportunities and constraints to scaling and systems change in the Nova Scotia Works context?

3.3. Data Sources and Sample Size

Blueprint and the Thriving Workplaces team used a mixed methods approach to answer these research questions, collecting feedback from work seekers, employers, and service practitioners through surveys, focus groups, site observations, and other sources from April to November 2024 (see **Table 1**).

Table 1 | Data sources

	Data Source	Timeframe	Responses (rate)	Description
Work Seeker	Intake Survey	May– November 2024	32 (73%)	Administered upon registration to capture work seekers' baseline awareness of concepts underlying the Magnetic Factors and sociodemographic data not normally collected by practitioners.
	Intake Form	July– October 2024	19 (43%)	Completed by service practitioners to capture participant demographic information (data normally collected by practitioners).
	Magnetic Factors Summary Data	July– October 2024	17⁶	Summaries of work seekers' needs, mindsets, and offerings identified during the Magnetic Factors activities.
	Exit Survey	September 2024	1 (100%) ⁷	Completed at exit to capture work seekers' reflections on their experience and current employment.
	Exit Interview	September 2024	0 (0%) ⁸	Conducted at exit to capture a work seeker's feedback, perceived benefits, and opportunities to strengthen the service going forward.
	Follow-up Interview	N/A	N/A ⁹	Completed one month after exit to capture work seekers' reflections on their experience since exit and its impact on them and their current employment situation.
	Follow-up Survey	N/A	N/A ¹⁰	Completed three months after exit to capture work seekers' reflections on their current employment and the supports they received.

⁶ Response rates are not yet available for this data source, as work seekers were still progressing through the model at the time of writing this report.

⁷ At the time of writing this report, almost all work seekers were still actively engaged in the program by either participating in the Magnetic Factors activities or receiving supports and resources to apply their learning to understanding their needs and expectations. Only one individual had finished the program and completed the survey. Results are not included in this report to protect anonymity.

⁸ At the time of writing this report, almost all work seekers were still actively engaged in the program by either participating in the Magnetic Factors activities or receiving supports and resources to apply their learning to understanding their needs and expectations. The one individual who has finished the program has yet to complete the exit interview at the time of the report.

⁹ Currently, no data are available for this source, as no work seekers have been out of the program for one month.

¹⁰ Currently, no data are available for this source, as no work seekers have been out of the program for three months.

	Data Source	Timeframe	Responses (rate)	Description
Employer	Intake Survey	June–November 2024	15 (100%)	Administered upon registration to capture an employer’s baseline awareness of concepts underlying the Magnetic Factors and basic business characteristics (e.g., size and sector).
	Employer Session Survey	June–August 2024	24 (100%)	Administered after the employer awareness sessions in Cape Breton and Halifax to capture employers’ perceptions of the event and the Magnetic Factors framework.
	Magnetic Factor Summary Data	September–October 2024	11 ¹¹	Summaries of employers’ needs, mindsets, and offerings identified during the Magnetic Factors activities.
	Exit Survey	N/A	N/A ¹²	Completed at exit to capture employers’ reflections on their experience and current workforce outcomes.
	Exit Interview	October 2024	3 ¹³	Conducted at exit to capture an employer’s feedback, perceived benefits, and opportunities to strengthen the service going forward.
	Follow-up Survey	N/A	N/A ¹⁴	Completed three months after exit to capture an employer’s reflections on their current workforce outcomes and the supports they received.

11 Response rate is not yet available for this data source, as employers are currently progressing through the model.

12 Currently, no data are available for this source, as practitioners have yet to complete the exit survey with the three exited employers.

13 Currently, many employers are actively engaged in the program by either participating in the Magnetic Factors activities or receiving supports and resources to apply their learning to workforce development practices. As a result, there are exit interviews from only three employers. Due to the small sample size, this report will focus solely on insights about these employers’ experience with the project. Future reports will be based on a larger sample and discuss the outcomes achieved.

14 Currently, no data are available for this source, as no employers have been out of the program for three months.

	Data Source	Timeframe	Responses (rate)	Description
Service Practitioners	Baseline Survey	April 2024	32	Administered to practitioners by the Thriving Workplaces team before they engaged with the model to capture their perceptions of organizational capacity and readiness to deliver dual-client service.
	Training Feedback Survey	April 2024	13 (62%)	Administered upon completing the training session in April to capture practitioners' perceptions of the training and confidence to implement the model.
	Site Visit Notes	Ongoing	N/A	Reflections captured by the Thriving Workplaces team in conversations with practitioners during their in-person visits to the delivery sites.
	Site Check-in Notes	Ongoing	N/A	Reflections captured by the Thriving Workplaces team during regular check-ins with practitioners.
	Reflection Journals	June–September 2024	43	Practitioners' bi-weekly reflections about the implementation of the model and strengths and challenges encountered in its delivery.
	Interim Survey	October–November 2024	9 (38%)	Captured practitioner's initial experiences with delivery, highlighting what worked well and identifying opportunities for improvement.
	Focus Groups	October–November 2024	11	Focus groups with three Case Managers, four EESs, and four Operations Managers to provide additional insights into the model's implementation, including enablers and barriers to delivery.
Nova Scotia Government	Key Informant Interviews	October 2024	3	Key informant interviews with LSI representatives to assess project perceptions and implications for scaling and systems change.

3.4. Data Limitations

The findings in this report should be interpreted within the context of certain limitations:

- **Limited data on participants' experience and outcomes:** Most work seekers and employers¹⁵ were still in service delivery at the time of this report. Therefore, only one work seeker completed the exit survey and none have completed the exit interview yet, and only three employers have completed an exit interview.

¹⁵ Of the 15 employers enrolled, 12 were still going through the program, and three had completed it. Of the 44 work seekers enrolled, 40 were still going through the program, one individual has completed the program and three had dropped out (one left Canada, and practitioners did not know the exit reasons for the other two).

As a result, data on participants' satisfaction and perceived effectiveness of the services are limited to perceptions from practitioners, participants who have completed the Magnetic Factors summary activity, and the three employers who have completed the exit process. Future reports will include more participant exit and follow-up data, allowing more robust conclusions about participant experience.

- **Gaps in demographic data collection:** Practitioner intake forms that provide work seekers' demographic data had a lower than desired completion rate (43%). Given the importance of demographic data for understanding who is accessing the service and their needs, the team will collaborate with practitioners to streamline the data collection process and emphasize the importance of each data collection tool.
- **Low response rates:** Some data sources for insights from practitioners, such as the practitioner interim survey, had low response rates. This can introduce bias by overrepresenting the views of those more inclined to respond while underrepresenting others. To help mitigate this, we triangulated findings across multiple data sources, including practitioner reflection journals, site check-ins, and practitioner focus groups. This approach helps ensure a more comprehensive understanding of practitioners' perceptions and experiences, increasing our confidence in the validity of our findings.



4. Findings

4.1. Early Implementation Learnings

What's working well?

Perceptions of relevance and usefulness of the Magnetic Factors framework

Service practitioners strongly believe in the **relevance and usefulness** of the Magnetic Factors framework and generally feel equipped with the **knowledge and tools to deliver it successfully**.

Practitioners strongly believe in the **relevance and usefulness** of the Magnetic Factors framework. All 13 service practitioners who responded to the post-training survey conducted in April 2024 agreed or strongly agreed that the Thriving Workplaces model will help work seekers and employers thrive at work. As noted previously, given the low response rates to this survey, these results should be interpreted with caution. However, this sentiment was echoed throughout the project at in-site visits and check-ins, as practitioners frequently emphasized the need for a project that bridges the gap in understanding and expectations between employers and work seekers.

In site visits, check-ins, and reflection journals, practitioners also shared that the Magnetic Factors framework is intuitive, relevant, and easy to understand, providing a solid foundation for this work. For some EESs, the project was particularly valuable because it provided a unique service designed to address the root causes of the recruitment and retention challenges faced by many small businesses.

"The concept is, without a doubt, something that's been needed and is needed."

- Thriving Workplaces practitioner

Readiness to implement

Most practitioners felt **confident in their ability to implement the model** after training. However, some expressed **concerns about remembering all the steps** in the model and **maintaining project momentum during periods of staff turnover**. Regular check-ins and site visits helped address these concerns and ensure ongoing support.

In the post-training survey conducted with practitioners in April 2024, **85% (11 out of 13)** agreed or strongly agreed that they were confident in their ability to implement Thriving Workplaces and use the Magnetic Factors, and the same proportion agreed or strongly agreed that they had the knowledge needed to do so. Although data from the practitioner interim survey is limited due to low response rates, results from

November 2024 suggest that this sense of being well-supported may have remained during delivery, as **89%** of respondents (**8 out of 9**) strongly agreed they had the proper training and tools to support program delivery.

“The supports have been fantastic. The team is always there with any questions.”

- **Thriving Workplaces practitioner**

In focus groups and regular engagement with the project team through check-ins and site visits, practitioners generally expressed confidence in their readiness to deliver the model. However, some reported feeling slightly overwhelmed at the project’s launch as they were introduced to the model’s various components and research process.

While they acknowledged that all aspects of the project made sense and were necessary to achieve its goals, some practitioners were concerned about keeping track of each step. Staff turnover at several sites created further challenges, as new team members had to be brought up to speed while the team worked to continue the project’s momentum. The Thriving Workplaces team responded to these challenges by providing additional tools, support, and check-ins.

Some practitioners shared that they felt most excited, committed, and clear about the model after check-ins with the Thriving Workplaces team and other sites. Many suggested that fostering cross-site connections and mentoring new staff could be effective strategies for maintaining momentum in project delivery going forward.

Building relationships between practitioners and their clients

The project is helping many practitioners **strengthen their relationships with clients** and is positively influencing their **approach to service delivery**.

In focus groups, site visits, and check-ins, practitioners shared many examples of how the project has helped them build trust and strengthen relationships with clients. For some EESs, the project has provided a new way to engage in more in-depth discussions with employers about their challenges and needs and offer various avenues for support. EESs noted that the Thriving Workplaces project has fostered trust with employers, making them more open to guidance and advice on potential adjustments to their recruitment and retention strategies.

Case Managers were also positive about the project’s impact on building client relationships. While it is typical for Case Managers to discuss topics with clients related to the Magnetic Factors, many felt that the structure and process provided by the Thriving Workplaces model facilitated stronger rapport and a good working alliance. By encouraging more thoughtful and intentional discussion on the full range of factors affecting an individual’s relationship with work, Case Managers believe the model has prompted some clients to share employment needs and desires they might not otherwise have expressed.

“[Using the Magnetic Factors is] a way into those deeper conversations.”

- **Thriving Workplaces practitioner**

Impacts on broader practice and collaboration

The **model** led to **increased collaboration between Case Managers and EESs** and **provided them with tools** to support clients outside the Thriving Workplaces project.

Many practitioners have observed that participating in the project has changed how they engage and work with all clients, not just the project participants. For some EESs, the Thriving Workplaces project has provided a new foundation and framework for engaging employers and discussing their workforce needs. They noted that since the Magnetic Factors are based on research into local employers' persistent recruitment and retention needs, employers are more open to discussing various potential service and support needs during the Magnetic Factors activities.

"For me, it's giving a different way to approach a lot of the conversations I've had with employers, sort of cementing a more comprehensive way of thinking about Employer Engagement as a whole."

- Thriving Workplaces practitioner

Some Case Managers have started using the language and concepts of the Magnetic Factors in intake and assessment conversations with their work seeker clients outside the project. They reported increased awareness of the key questions to determine the type of job that would best meet a client's needs. One Case Manager shared that since the project began, the Magnetic Factors have seemed to be "in the atmosphere" of their daily work.

Case Managers and EESs also shared how the project has improved their collaboration, noting the value of a shared language for discussing the needs of work seekers and employers. They felt that the project enhanced their understanding of each other's roles and helped them share key information to better meet clients' needs. One EES explained that, before the project, communication with their Case Manager about a potential job match would have been "separate, disjointed, and we wouldn't even have... communicated about the needs of those we're working with." Now, this EES and the Case Manager are not only collaborating in new ways to share information and identify potential job matches but also co-delivering Magnetic Factors workshops.

What are the opportunities and constraints in delivery?

Challenges and opportunities in employer recruitment

Practitioners initially **struggled to recruit employers** due to employers' urgent needs and reluctance to try new approaches. Employer engagement has since improved, thanks to **tailored messages** highlighting how the project meets their needs and **employer awareness sessions**.

A common challenge faced by most sites from the outset of the project was recruiting employers, particularly small businesses. This challenge is not unique to Thriving Workplaces and is experienced by other Nova Scotia Works services. EESs reported that small businesses often urgently need to hire and face real constraints

on what they can offer prospective employees. As a result, their requests are typically limited to filling job vacancies and accessing wage subsidy programs, as many lack dedicated human resources staff to participate in services focused on strategic direction or workforce planning.

While these challenges initially slowed employer recruitment, many EESs, with the support from the Thriving Workplaces team, have started to see greater success in engaging employers. Some EESs have experimented with different messaging approaches (e.g., focusing on the long-term value proposition) and working with employers to demonstrate the project's alignment with their priority needs. For some employers, this shift in approach sparked discussions on how their needs relate to broader labour market challenges and how the Magnetic Factors framework can drive long-term improvements in recruitment and retention.

"Most employers just want to get help with what they need right now, but when I introduce the concept of churn and they realize it's a problem beyond their business, I get an invitation to follow-up for further discussion."

- Thriving Workplaces practitioner

Four (4) Thriving Workplaces delivery sites have successfully engaged employers through employer awareness sessions—events that bring together groups of employers to introduce the project and the Magnetic Factors activities. Co-facilitated by the Thriving Workplaces team and the service practitioners, these events provide a low-risk entry point for employers to learn about the project and participate in the activities. EESs have observed that employers value connecting and sharing insights with peers. This format effectively highlights to employers the benefits of continued engagement with the project.

Uncertainty about organizational capacity

Initially, practitioners had mixed views about implementing the new model, with some expressing uncertainties due to concerns about **organizational capacity** for effective employment service and job matching, while also indicating confidence and pride in providing effective services in some areas.

Before they were introduced to the Thriving Workplaces model, some practitioners were uncertain about their organization's capacity in areas that are relevant to the model, including their capacity to serve employers and identify job matches effectively. The baseline survey revealed that **44%** of practitioners at the delivery sites felt "neutral" about their organizations having the support and resources for effective job matching, **34%** were "neutral" about their confidence in long-term employment retention, and **31%** were "neutral" about having the resources to serve employers effectively (see [Figure 8](#)).

Figure 8 | Practitioner initial perceptions of organizational capacity (n=32)**To what extent do you agree with the following statements?**

Source: Practitioner Baseline Survey

Most practitioners, however, reported that their organization effectively intervenes to meet the needs of employers (84%), while 78% agreed that their organization is effective in aligning work seeker and employer expectations. Despite mixed results, early signs suggest that Thriving Workplaces could build organizational capacity in the areas where practitioners are uncertain and leverage areas where practitioners feel confident and effective.

Integration with current role and workflow

Integrating the new model into existing workflows was challenging for some practitioners, while others appreciated the structured approach to delivery.

Practitioners found it challenging to integrate Thriving Workplaces into their existing workflow, given high caseloads and busy schedules. In the interim survey conducted with practitioners in October 2024, 55% (5 out of 9) of respondents felt “neutral” in response to the statement: “It’s easy for me to integrate Thriving Workplaces into my day-to-day tasks.” In focus groups and check-ins, some practitioners shared that balancing the project’s time commitment with their existing workload was challenging.

At the same time, many have also identified strategies to streamline project delivery, making it more efficient and integrated into their daily work. For example, some had participants complete Magnetic Factors activities independently or incorporated them into existing workshops. Moving forward, there are opportunities to expand these strategies and help sites better integrate Thriving Workplaces approaches and the Magnetic Factors into their workflow, easing the burden on practitioners.

For some EESs, delivering Thriving Workplaces was challenging due to the new and evolving nature of their roles within the Nova Scotia Works system. Some EESs reported variations in the structure, support, and scope of practice compared to Case Managers and other practitioners, making effective service delivery difficult, both within and outside Thriving Workplaces. However, some EESs noted in a recent focus group that Thriving Workplaces has provided the structure they had been seeking for their roles.

Mental models

Practitioners’ **mental models** about their role and its impact also influenced delivery.

Throughout the project delivery, both opportunities and challenges have emerged from practitioners’ *mental models*—deeply held beliefs, assumptions, and thought patterns that shape their approach to work. Practitioners demonstrated varying levels of confidence and self-efficacy in engaging, influencing, and guiding employers to meet their workforce needs. Mental models around change and experimentation within the context of a publicly funded system also played a part, by influencing the extent to which practitioners embraced the opportunity for innovation within the project.

For the Thriving Workplaces team, this underscored the importance of developing implementation strategies that address not only knowledge, skills, and tools but also engage with and explore the motivations and beliefs of service practitioners.

"I enjoy the challenge of trying to move the needle...I like seeing the employers, you know, recognizing something...it's like helping them get to where they need to go to improve their own company and their workplace and their own lives. Really. So it's like really quite a big impact"

- Thriving Workplaces practitioner

What adjustments have been made so far in response to early learnings?

Throughout the **Research, Design, & Prototyping** phase, the model delivery strategies were continuously refined based on early insights into opportunities and constraints in delivery.

New recruitment and engagement strategies

In response to early learnings, **new employer recruitment strategies were developed.**

In response to the initial challenges with employer recruitment, the project leads developed new recruitment tools and messaging strategies to assist practitioners with their efforts. As noted earlier, the leads also worked with four delivery sites to co-develop and host employer awareness sessions as an additional channel for recruiting employers going forward.

Streamlining activities

The project leads have begun streamlining the Magnetic Factors activities to reduce the burden on practitioners and clients.

Early feedback from practitioner check-ins highlighted that the Magnetic Factors activities sometimes took too long to complete. In response, the project leads have begun a process of streamlining these activities to reduce the burden on service practitioners and participants while preserving the essence of the Magnetic Factors. The project's next phase will engage practitioners as co-designers in this streamlining process to ensure it aligns better with their needs.

New delivery approaches

Practitioners have begun **experimenting with new approaches to delivery**.

Throughout the project, the project leads encouraged practitioners to experiment with various strategies and delivery methods for the project activities. This has resulted in creative and unexpected approaches, such as regular group-based workshops focused on the Magnetic Factors, co-delivered by Case Managers and EESs. As discussed in the next section, in the next phase the project leads will work to standardize the design of these diverse delivery modalities to help practitioners effectively serve a wide range of clients.

Refining the dual-client model

The original design of the **dual-client model** is being continuously refined based on feedback received.

The current phase allowed for refining and adapting the overall concept and vision of the dual-client service model that forms the foundation of the Thriving Workplaces approach. Based on implementation learnings so far, the project leads have developed a future-state model (see [Figure 3](#)) to demonstrate their vision for providing parallel services to work seekers and employers, using a common language to build clarity and awareness of the Magnetic Factors and applying them in their employment journeys.

What future iterations are planned?

Designing Magnetic Factors applications

The project leads intend to co-design and test **new applications** of the Magnetic Factors.

As mentioned earlier, an important insight from this phase is the recognition of the multiple potential applications of the Magnetic Factors approach for both employers and work seekers at various stages of their employment and workforce journeys.

Service practitioners have identified several potential applications, including:

- Strengthening work seekers' job search skills
- Helping work seekers assess their current employment situation's alignment with their wants and needs
- Assisting employers in revising job descriptions and ads to reflect their workplace culture more accurately
- Preparing both employers and work seekers to approach job interviews with greater transparency and clarity
- Guiding employers in diagnosing and addressing retention challenges
- Helping employers think about human resources strategies and succession plans

- Supporting employers and employees post-hiring to ensure the matches are working out
- Helping start-up businesses define and develop their workforce strategy

In the next phase, the project leads plan to engage service practitioners in a co-design process to develop potential applications further and test them with participants to assess their relevance and effectiveness.

Delivery modalities

The project leads will refine delivery modalities to better support a broad range of users.

Going forward, the design of various delivery modalities—individual and group-based, independent and facilitated, analog and digital—will be standardized to help with reaching and effectively serving a broad range of users. This work will build on the insights about the effectiveness of different strategies and approaches used by many Thriving Workplaces practitioners.

Adaptations to existing processes/tools

The project leads plan to **test integrations of the Magnetic Factors** approach into existing Nova Scotia Works service delivery components.

Through discussions with practitioners and Nova Scotia government partners, the project leads have identified potential opportunities to integrate the Magnetic Factors approach into the existing Nova Scotia Works service, which is a dual-client service, particularly within the current assessment tools used to determine work seeker and employer service needs. The next phase of the project will explore opportunities to test these integrations.

4.2. Uptake

Who has participated in Thriving Workplaces so far, and what are their service needs?

Thriving Workplaces enrolled **44** work seekers and **15** employers from May to October 2024.

Work seekers' demographic characteristics

Work seekers participating in Thriving Workplaces are predominantly **highly educated, Canadian-born individuals who have been unemployed for at least 10 months**, with just under half identifying as part of an equity-deserving group. Half of the participants have been unemployed for 10–18 months, and just over one-third receive financial support.

As seen in [Table 2](#), results from the Intake Form (**n=19**) and Intake Survey (**n=32**) show that participating work seekers are primarily Canadian-born (**72%**), have a university degree or a higher credential (**69%**), and are unemployed (**79%**). A small proportion of work seekers are from equity-deserving groups, with about a third (**32%**) disclosing having a disability and fewer self-identifying as visible minorities (**21%**) or an Indigenous person (**5%**).

Work seekers' duration of unemployment varied, ranging from two months to 12 years, with half of the participants being unemployed for 10–18 months before engaging in the program. In the intake form, workers shared that the reasons they were looking for new jobs, included layoffs (**21%**), illness or injury (**14%**), contract ending (**14%**), quitting (**7%**), moving (**7%**), and returning to school (**7%**).

Table 2 | Sociodemographic data and participant characteristics.

Data Source	Participant Characteristics		Response rate
Intake Survey	Born in Canada	Yes	72% (23/32)
		No	28% (9/32)
	Year of arrival in Canada (if born outside Canada)	2019	22% (2/9)
		2021	11% (1/9)
		2022	33% (3/9)
		2024	22% (2/9)
		No valid response	11% (1/9)
Intake Form	Residency status	Canadian citizen	79% (15/19)
		Permanent resident	5% (1/19)
		Other	16% (3/19)
	Indigenous person	Yes	5% (1/19)
		No	95% (18/19)
	Persons with disability	Yes	32% (6/19)
		No	68% (13/19)
	Francophone/Acadian	Yes	5% (1/19)
		No	95% (18/19)
	African Nova Scotian	Yes	0% (0)
		No	100% (19/19)
	Visible minority	Yes	21% (4/19)
		No	79% (15/19)
	Languages spoken other than English	Bangla	5% (1/19)
		Nepali, Hindi	5% (1/19)
		Other, unspecified	5% (1/19)
		None	84% (16/19)
	Highest education level completed	High school	5% (1/19)
		College	26% (5/19)
		University degree	58% (11/19)
		Master's degree	11% (2/19)
	Employment status	Employed	21% (4/19)
		Unemployed	79% (15/19)

Source: Work Seeker Intake Survey and Form

Work seekers' needs and expectations for Thriving Workplaces

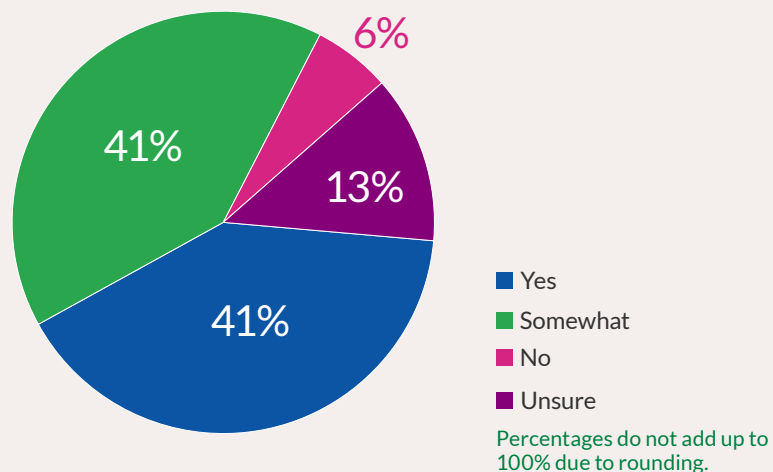
Some participants were **uncertain about their requirements and expectations for their next jobs** and their ability to find a good match. They hoped Thriving Workplaces would **help them understand their needs and secure a suitable job**.

Among the 44 work seeker participants, 32 completed the Intake Survey, which gathered information on their past employment experience and baseline awareness of concepts underlining the Magnetic Factors to inform future service delivery.

Figure 9 shows that less than half of individuals (41%) reported being clear about their requirements and expectations for their next jobs. When asked about their understanding of more specific needs (see **Figure 10**), 31% of work seekers reported being somewhat clear, not clear, or uncertain about their needs concerning workplace culture, good use of their skills, or work-life balance.

Figure 9 | Work seekers' perceived understanding of their needs and expectations for next jobs (n=30)

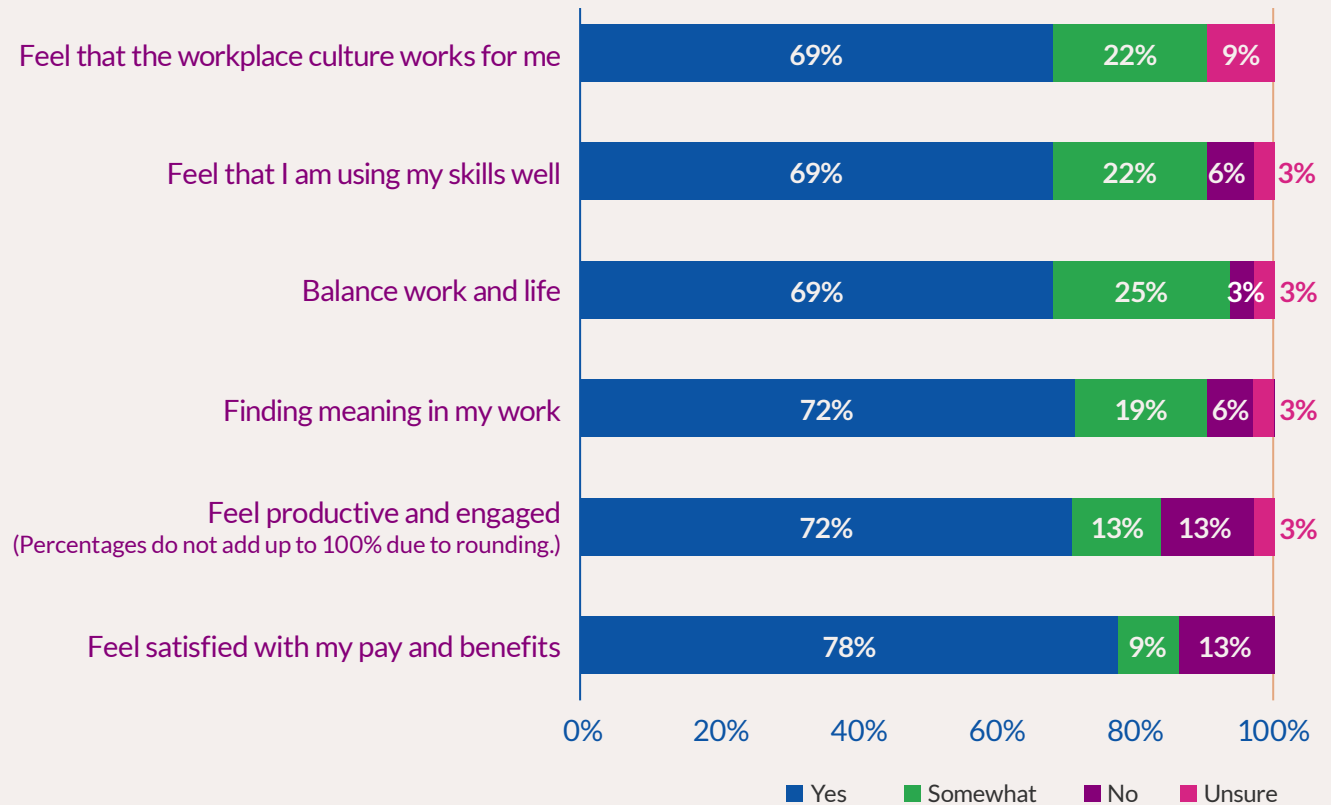
Do you feel clear about what you need, and expect from your next job?



Source: Work Seeker Intake Survey

Figure 10 | Work seekers' understanding of their needs for their next job (n=32)

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements. I know what I need from my next job in order to...

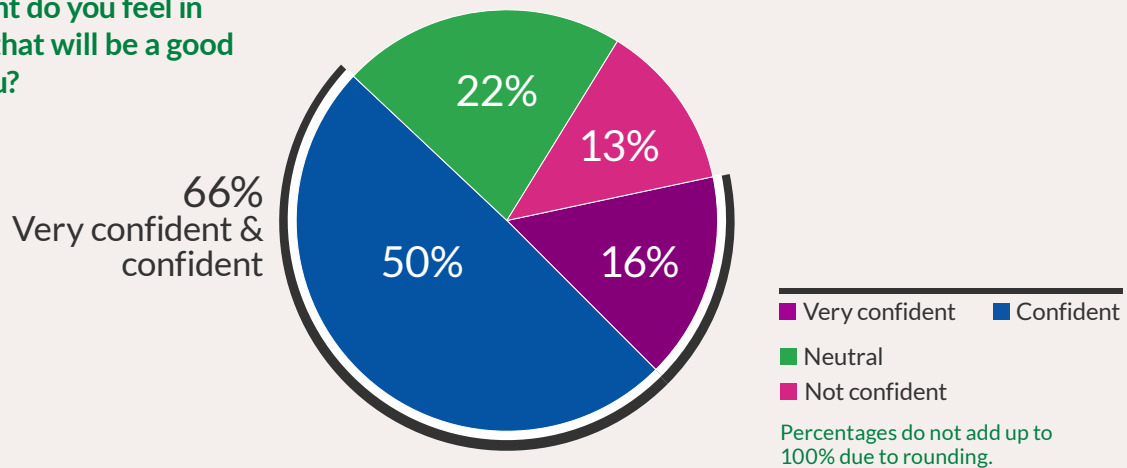


Source: Work Seeker Intake Survey

Over half (66%) of the work seekers reported feeling confident or very confident about finding a job that matched their needs (see [Figure 11](#)).

Figure 11 | Work seeker confidence finding a job will be a good match (n=32)

How confident do you feel in finding a job that will be a good match for you?

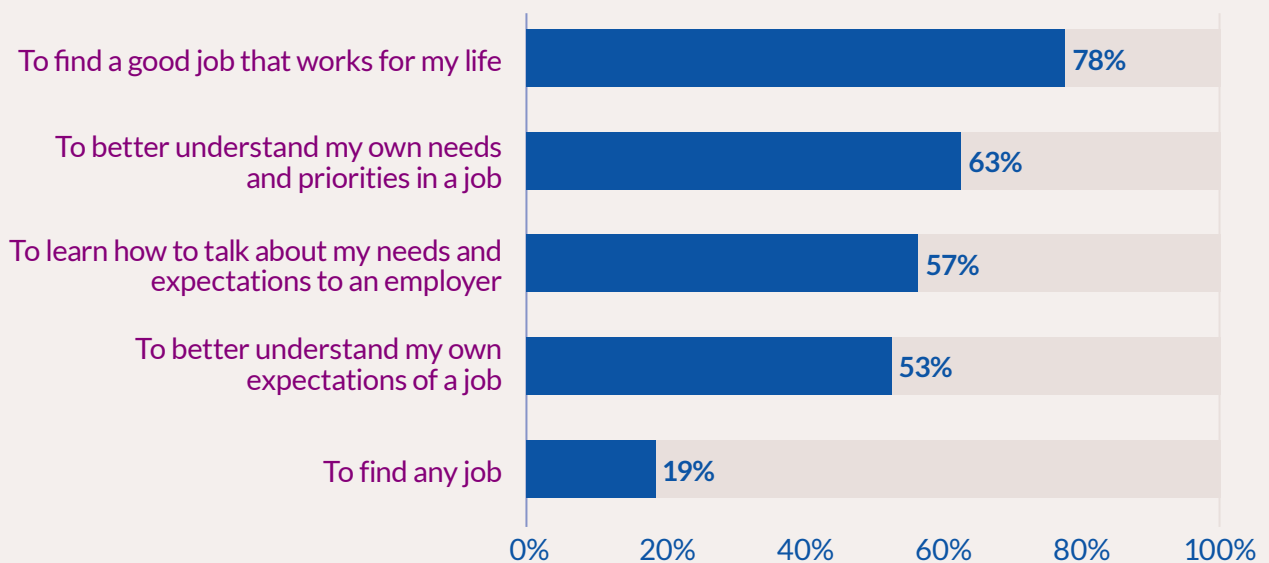


Source: Work Seeker Intake Survey

When asked about their hopes and expectations for participating in Thriving Workplaces, 78% aimed to find a good job that fits their lifestyle, 63% sought a better understanding of their job needs and priorities, 57% wanted to learn how to communicate these needs to an employer, and 53% hoped to clarify their job expectations (see [Figure 12](#)).

Figure 12 | Work seekers' expectations from Thriving Workplaces (n=32)

How might the Thriving Workplaces project support you? [select up to 3]



Source: Work Seeker Intake Survey

Employers profile

Almost all employers engaged in the project are **small businesses**.

A key goal of Thriving Workplaces is to support small businesses with their recruitment and retention needs. Based on the data from the Employer Intake Survey, **97%** of employers engaged in Thriving Workplaces (**14 out of 15**) are small businesses.¹⁶

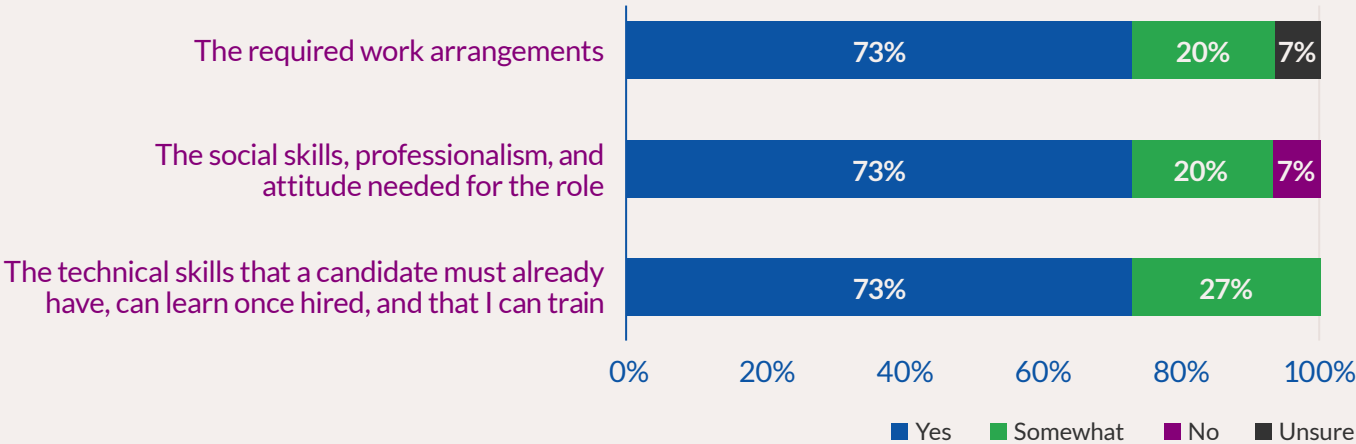
Employers’ needs and expectations for Thriving Workplaces

Due to challenges with hiring and retention, most employers hope the program will help them **find suitable candidates and clarify their expectations for potential hires**.

Data on employers’ needs and expectations come from the Employer Intake Survey (**n=15**¹⁷). Most employers reported having a good understanding of their needs and expectations from new hires, including necessary technical skills (**73%**), social skills (**73%**), and work arrangements (**73%**; see **Figure 13**).

Figure 13 | Employers’ level of understanding of the role they want to hire (n=15)

Do you feel like you have a good understanding of the following aspects of the role you want to hire?



Source: Employer Intake Survey

16 Small businesses have fewer than 100 employees.
17 Some employers did not answer every question, resulting in the sample size decreasing to 14 for some questions.

Some, however, struggled to articulate their organization's offerings beyond pay and benefits like health insurance, RRSP matching, or parking. Only **53%** of employers reported having a clear understanding of their workplace culture or the training and support they could offer a new hire (see **Figure 14**).

Figure 14 | Employers' level of understanding of what they can offer new hires (n=15)

Do you feel like you have a good understanding of what your organization could offer to the roles you want to hire?

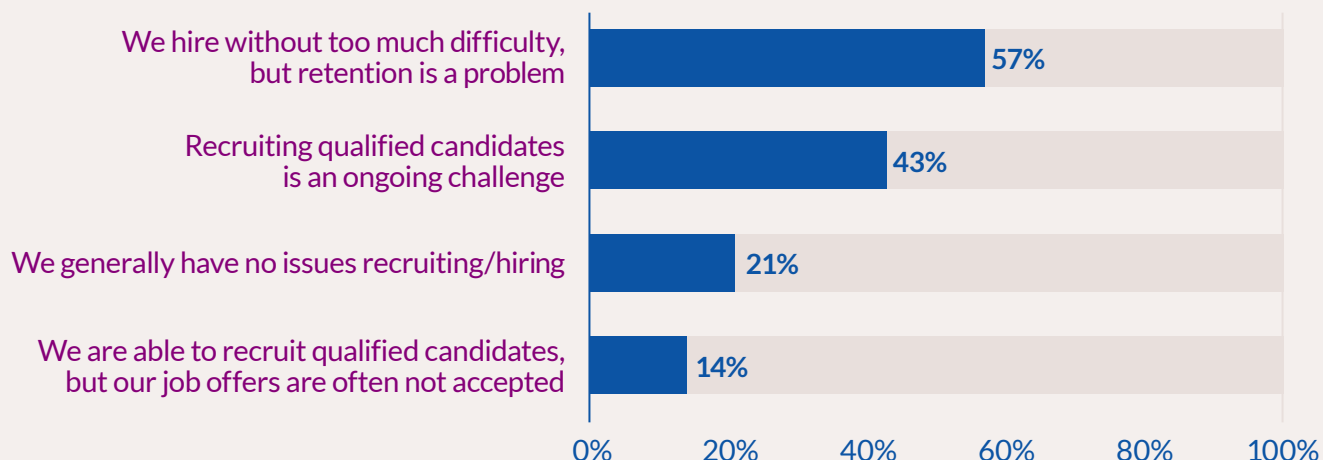


Source: Employer Intake Survey

Given the competitive labour market, the inability to effectively communicate their competitive advantage puts SMEs at a disadvantage relative to larger organizations with more resources to establish and communicate these aspects to skilled applicants.¹⁸ Given these challenges, it is not surprising that some employers reported struggling to recruit (43%) and retain (57%) qualified candidates (see **Figure 15**).

Figure 15 | Employers' experience with hiring and retention (n=14)

Overall, what has been your experience with hiring and retention? [select all that apply]



Source: Employer Intake Survey

As shown in **Figure 16**, most employers (71%) hoped Thriving Workplaces would help them find suitable candidates who would stay, with just over half (57%) wanting to gain a better understanding of their organization's expectations from potential candidates.

Figure 16 | Employers' expectations from Thriving Workplaces' support (n=14)

How might the Thriving Workplaces project support you? [select up to 3]



Source: Employer Intake Survey

18 Galli-Debicella, A. (2021). How SMEs Compete Against Global Giants Through Sustainable Competitive Advantages. *Journal of Small Business Strategy*, 31(5), 13–21. <https://doi.org/10.53703/001c.29812>

4.3. User Experience

How are users experiencing the model?

Practitioners' perceptions of users' experience

Practitioners have reported that work seekers and employers are **highly satisfied** with the service and find value in the Magnetic Factors approach.

As reported in focus groups, site visits, reflection journals, and check-ins, practitioners generally have positive perceptions of users' experience with the Magnetic Factors activities.¹⁹ They noted that users easily grasp the idea of factors that attract work seekers and employers to one another or repel them and feel engaged in discussions about their needs and wants related to these factors.

Case Managers have shared how the Magnetic Factors provided clarity and validation to work seekers uncertain about their needs, gave optimism and hope to those doubting they could find a suitable job, and helped them think more critically and be more discerning in their job search.

EESs have also described how the service has prompted employers to reflect on their organizational practices and identify adjustments they could make in hiring or onboarding practices.

"The factors resonate with people. They want to talk about them."

- Thriving Workplaces practitioner

Employer and work seeker perceptions

Employers shared that the activities helped them delineate **what they offer** and how to communicate it transparently to potential candidates. They also valued the opportunity to **connect with other employers** facing similar challenges.

Work seekers reported that the **Magnetic Factors activities helped them gain clearer insights into what they want and need from work**, boosting their confidence and optimism.

All 24 employers who participated in the employer awareness sessions completed the Employer Session Survey and all reported being extremely or very satisfied with the overall content of the events. When asked what they appreciated most, themes included the opportunity to learn about Magnetic Factors, connect with other employers, and engage in a follow-up discussion with an EES to explore how to apply what they learned. When asked for suggestions for improvement, a common theme was a desire for more time to explore the Magnetic Factors, suggesting employers saw value in the framework. Other suggestions included providing an

¹⁹ As many participants are still actively engaged in programming, practitioners are a key source of insight into their experience.

overview of local employer supports and services, offering more information on how the Magnetic Factors apply to different worker groups, and incorporating case studies to demonstrate their use. Over half of the employers (58%) reported that the event exceeded their expectations, and the rest (42%) said it met their expectations.

Employers who completed exit interviews (3) were very positive about their service experience. They underscored the staff's exceptional support in answering their questions and the valuable opportunities to connect with other employers experiencing similar challenges.

"[The Magnetic Factors] explain all of those very key HR issues, but in a very plain text, easy to understand if you've never heard it before. I was even thinking like as someone who took an HR program, it was a really great overview of some of those key aspects of an employee's life cycle."





- Employer

"Knowing I'm not alone, like other places are feeling the same thing...I'm not struggling alone makes it a little bit easier because it takes the edge off to deal with things."

- Employer

Based on insights from practitioner surveys, reflection journals, check-ins, and preliminary insights from employers, the Thriving Workplaces team developed four personas to illustrate users' experiences with the model (see [Table 3](#)). These personas highlight the value of using the Magnetic Factors to help employers and work seekers gain clarity and awareness at different stages of their employment journey. They also illustrate the opportunity in the next project phase to develop follow-up strategies that support participants in applying this clarity to the next step of their journey.

Table 3 | User personas

	Employers		Work Seekers	
	 <p>“The overworked skeptic”</p>	 <p>“The HR newbie”</p>	 <p>“The curious job-switcher”</p>	 <p>“The hesitant searcher”</p>
Profile	This is a small business owner struggling to find and keep workers, often stepping in to cover frontline shifts. Lacking time for strategy conversations, they seek quick-fix solutions and are skeptical about enrolling in a research project, doubting its ability to address their immediate challenges.	This is a small business leader tasked with developing an HR strategy, despite lacking experience or prior interest. They feel overwhelmed and unsure where to start.	This is a 50-year-old work seeker who has been in the same job for several years but feels increasingly dissatisfied, yet struggles to articulate why. Curious about new opportunities, they are unsure where to begin.	This is a work seeker cycling in and out of survival jobs. After a recent unemployment spell, they are motivated to find stable work but feel apprehensive about the job search process. With negative past experiences, they are uncertain how to avoid falling into these situations again.
What’s Working Well for Them in Thriving Workplaces Service	Recognition of and support with their highest priority hiring needs Simple and clear ways to use the Magnetic Factors to address the challenges they’re experiencing	Learning about the Magnetic Factors as a framework for their work Connections with other employers to discuss shared issues and feel less alone	Connecting the Magnetic Factors to their past experiences Talking with other work seekers to get new perspectives and ideas	A trusting, supportive 1:1 relationship with their case manager to work through the Magnetic Factors activities and clarify their needs, wants, and competencies
How the Magnetic Factors Make Them Feel	Optimistic about their ability to make small changes that could have a big impact	Informed, prepared, and supported	Excited and confident	Hopeful and validated
Changes They’re Making	Exploring adjustments to hiring processes, job descriptions and onboarding approaches	Developing their HR strategy from a place of confidence, knowing they can ask for help	Looking for new job opportunities that align with what they want and need	Exercising more intentionality and discernment in their job search
What Else They Might Need	Ongoing support with their recruitment and retention strategy and hiring needs	Ongoing support applying the Magnetic Factors to their HR strategy	Support navigating the hiring and onboarding process	Ongoing support, identifying and sourcing aligned employment opportunities

4.4. Effectiveness

Do work seekers and employers achieve increased clarity and awareness related to the Magnetic Factors?

Preliminary feedback from work seekers and employers demonstrates the effectiveness of the Magnetic Factors activities in **clarifying their needs, offerings, and mindsets**. For work seekers, this clarity improved their **sense of efficacy in finding work that meets their needs**, while employers learned the importance of clearly **communicating needs and expectations to potential hires**.

Work seekers and employers who completed the Magnetic Factors activities (**17** work seekers and **11** employers) were asked in their Magnetic Factors Summary Activity, “Now that you have completed all the Magnetic Factors activities, how has this process helped you clarify your needs, offerings and mindset?” Almost all work seekers (**94%; 16 out of 17**) and employers (**91%; 10 out of 11**) explained how the activity positively influenced them.

Work seekers reported gaining greater clarity about what they want from a job and a stronger sense of efficacy in finding work that meets their needs. Employers noted a clearer understanding of where they can and cannot make adjustments, as well as the importance of clearly communicating their needs and expectations to potential hires.

Sample Responses from the Magnetic Factors Summary Activity: Work Seekers

It breaks down all aspects of what your interests are and helps you to zero in on where you could go and what is important to you.

It's helped me create confidence and clarity in what I want and value, and that it's OK to want certain things (validating!)

I understand how I am able to contribute more meaningfully when an organization is also meeting my needs.

That I am eager and want to work.

It has sharpened the focus on what exactly I should be looking for.

It has helped me realize that I do have options and that I need to look out for my needs first.

It makes me realize that there is flexibility, and I can communicate to employers what I need.

Sample Responses from the Magnetic Factors Summary Activity: Employers

It has helped me take a closer look at who we are and what we want as an organization.

It helped me to review what changes need to be made to be true to what we promise and expect.

We have limited ability to accommodate higher wages and flexible work arrangements, but we try to keep the environment a positive one.

Able to view some things differently and recognize some other ways to encourage and engage employees.

The activities opened my mind to some innovative ways to support employees.

Really helpful in breaking down the different factors and looking at the components separately.

It reinforced our strengths but also reminds us of areas where we can always improve to make our workplace the best it can be.

Do work seekers and employers experience suitable job matches?

While the prototype is not yet operating at a scale to achieve high proportions of job matches, one successful match has **demonstrated the potential of the Magnetic Factors** process to align employer recruitment needs with work seekers' preferences, resulting in a highly satisfactory outcome for both parties.

As previously noted, the project leads quickly learned that the prototype delivery is not yet operating at a scale where job matches among participating work seekers and employers are realistic, given the small number of practitioners (and therefore, participants) engaged in delivery. However, one match has been achieved to date.

The EES involved in this match shared that the employer has generally struggled with recruitment and that the Magnetic Factors process helped them better understand and articulate the benefits of their workplace environment. On the work seeker side, the Case Manager noted that the Magnetic Factors helped the participant clarify what they need from work, including an environment where they feel appreciated and comfortable asking questions.

The EES and Case Manager worked together to connect these participants for an interview and conducted regular check-ins during the initial onboarding phase. More than two months after the initial hire date, the EES and Case Manager have reported that both the employer and work seeker continue to be very happy with the match.

4.5. Understanding the Process of Innovation and Systems Change

In addition to assessing the early implementation and outcomes of the Thriving Workplaces service delivery model, this phase also focused on continued policy dialogue with government partners to lay the groundwork for potential future scaling and systems change. The project leads' ongoing engagement with LSI and DED has ensured their sustained support of the Thriving Workplaces approach. They remain committed to the project's direction and pace and are proactively considering how to adapt processes, tools, infrastructure, and capacity based on the insights about the model. This dialogue has provided valuable insights into what will be needed to support the model's potential scaling and sustainability.

What are we learning about the opportunities and constraints to scaling and systems change in the Nova Scotia Works context?

Readiness to deliver

An important factor in the success of future scaling and systems change efforts will be the extent to which the individuals and organizations in the system have the **capacity for successful delivery**.

Early learnings from testing the Thriving Workplaces model in the field point to certain individual and organizational factors as essential for successful delivery. With LSI, the project leads have started assessing these factors across the Nova Scotia Works system and exploring strategies to prepare the system for successful delivery.

In key informant interviews with LSI, they highlighted the need for proactive capacity-building and change management at the systems level to develop the necessary **skills, knowledge, and—critically—mental models** to deliver this dual-client approach. In future phases, the Thriving Workplaces team and LSI will collaborate to identify strategies for building this capacity and ensuring the system is ready for the model's potential implementation.

Innovation in the current service system

There are opportunities to innovate components of the Nova Scotia Works service pathway to **embed and enable the successful delivery** of the Magnetic Factors within a Nova Scotia version of the Thriving Workplaces model.

The project leads' ongoing engagement and dialogue with LSI have identified potential opportunities for innovating current system components to align with and adopt the Magnetic Factors approach. This includes opportunities to test revisions to the current assessment tools by integrating elements of the Magnetic Factors. This will allow us to begin determining the service needs of work seekers and employers and embed learnings from the Magnetic Factors framework into job matching services.

The Thriving Workplaces team plans to design and test these revised tools in the next project phase, generating early insights into the relevance and usefulness of integrating elements of the Magnetic Factors approach into the overall Nova Scotia Works service pathway for both in person and online service delivery. This design and testing process can lay the groundwork for the successful future integration of Thriving Workplaces at the systems level.

Connecting to the broader workforce development ecosystem

To be successfully scaled and sustained in the future, the project partners need to consider the extent to which the **model fits within the existing service ecosystem**.

The collaboration with LSI and DED has identified another key consideration for the scaling and sustainability of the Thriving Workplaces model: the degree to which it resonates and fits within the broader suite of workforce and economic development services for employers within the jurisdiction. Recognizing this, the Thriving Workplaces team has been developing a framework to organize and understand the range of services aimed at meeting employers' business and workforce needs both within and outside of the Nova Scotia Works system.

In the next phase, the project leads will continue to work with partners at LSI and DED to explore potential opportunities to test this framework in the field. This would help practitioners, both within and outside the Nova Scotia Works system, understand the value proposition and use case for Thriving Workplaces and more effectively coordinate the delivery of services and supports that help businesses thrive.

Gathering data and evidence for effective scaling

To make informed decisions about the future scaling and sustainability of the model, partners **need evidence about its impact** on users, as well as its broader relevance and uptake across the system.

Close collaboration with LSI is shaping the evidence generation process for Thriving Workplaces to ensure data and insights inform future scaling and systems change decisions. In key informant interviews, LSI partners highlighted the importance of using effectiveness measures that align with the needs and priorities of the government and the Nova Scotia Works system. These include employer service uptake, user service experience, and service practitioner confidence and self-efficacy in delivering services to employers—alongside traditional measures of effectiveness that would indicate readiness for scale, including employment and retention outcomes for individuals and employers.



5. Conclusions

This phase of the Thriving Workplaces project has demonstrated the relevance and usefulness of the prototype service model and the **Magnetic Factors** framework.

- Service practitioners strongly believe in the **relevance and usefulness** of the Magnetic Factors approach. The project is helping them build stronger client relationships and influencing their practice and collaboration with colleagues.
- Work seekers report that the Magnetic Factors activities help **clarify their needs and desires from work**. Employers say the activities help them define their offerings and **communicate them** to potential candidates.
- The Nova Scotia government partners are already exploring pathways for the model's use in services, scaling, and systems change. Together, the team has identified opportunities to **lay the groundwork for future scaling** and sustainability, including the model's further development and continuous improvement and the generation of evidence about its effectiveness.

The project leads have identified several opportunities for iteration in the next delivery stage to enhance the model's effectiveness, streamline its delivery, and position the project for success in future phases:

- Continue to **streamline** model delivery and work with practitioners to **co-design** additional components to meet users' needs at different stages of their employment and workforce development journeys.
- Generate additional **data and evidence** to assess how well the model works, for whom, and under what conditions.
- Refine **implementation strategies** to ensure that the practitioners delivering the model feel prepared, supported, motivated, and connected.
- In close partnership with LSI, test innovations within the **current service system** to align with and support the effective delivery of the model.

The final report will be produced at the end of 2025 and will present updated findings related to the project's learning agenda. As the project moves into its next phase, the team is eager to continue disseminating its **insights** with audiences within and outside Nova Scotia working on the common goal of creating **thriving workplaces** for individuals and employers across Canada.

