

REGIONAL WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT IN RURAL BC

Research Agenda

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OVERVIEW

The overarching goal of the *Regional Workforce Development in Rural BC* project¹, funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada's (SSHRC) *Community and College Social Innovation Fund*, is to collectively assess comparative workforce development strategies in ways that inform future policy, planning, and action in the Columbia Basin-Boundary region of southeast BC.

Led by Dr. Terri MacDonald, BC Regional Innovation Chair in Rural Economic Development, and facilitated by Selkirk College and College of the Rockies through the Kootenay Workforce Development Initiative,² the project brings together the region's educators, elected officials, policy makers, economic development practitioners, industry, students, and leading scholars to:

- examine workforce development challenges and opportunities;
- facilitate and mobilize knowledge, analysis and emerging discussions;
- generate new research questions and dialogues; and
- provide opportunity for the engagement, networking, and capacity building of highly qualified personnel.

RESEARCH TIERS – *the project is divided into four research tiers, focusing on different aspects of the overarching project and conducted by different teams of researchers and partner organizations.*

Tier 1: Cluster-Focused Labour Market Information and Workforce Innovation Strategies

Research will focus on better understanding the profile, labour market needs, and workforce development opportunities specific to target clusters³ in the region.

Expected deliverables: labour market/cluster profiles (initial and updated versions); workforce strategies knowledge briefs; proposed strategy revisions

Tier 2: Understanding SME Training and Skills Development Needs

Primary research will be conducted to better understand the training and skills development needs of SMEs (small and medium sized enterprises) in the region and the state of their adoption of digital technologies and innovation. A survey⁴ will be administered to SMEs in partnership with communities and industry associations and a related skills gap analysis will be undertaken. Findings will be used to inform future training, educational programming, and workforce development strategic action.

Expected deliverables: research reports (full and summary); infographics; slide decks; long term data collection process

¹ This initiative leverages \$240,000 of SSHRC funding with \$500,000 of cash and in-kind contributions from more than 30 partners from both within and beyond the study region.

² College of New Caledonia and Okanagan College are also working in partnership with this initiative.

³ Current clusters include technology, forestry, mining & metallurgy, tourism, and advanced manufacturing, but additional clusters may emerge.

⁴ Adopted / adapted from survey used for OECD project: <http://www.oecd.org/publications/skills-development-and-training-in-smes-9789264169425-en.htm>

Tier 3: Regionally-Driven Research Questions

The Kootenay Workforce Development Initiative (KWDI) Steering Committee will identify emerging research questions and possible areas for strategic action relevant to KWDI strategic goals (Grow Competitive Clusters / Build a 21st Century Workforce / Facilitate Inclusive Access to Quality Jobs / Build and Enhance Regional Industry-Education-Community Collaboration). Cluster Advisory Teams (CATs) will also be formed to exchange ideas, identify emerging research questions, and collaborate on actions specific to the region's target clusters. Learning events and workshops will be held to engage a broader group of stakeholders in the identification of emerging research questions and ideas for strategic action. Students and post-secondary faculty advisors will work alongside the CATs to identify and address emerging research questions. Grants of \$2500 will also be made available to collaborative projects that aim to better understand workforce opportunities and challenges and/or to pilot projects designed to advance KWDI goals.

Expected deliverables: research reports (full and summary); knowledge briefs; slide decks

Tier 4: Understanding Our 21st Century Workforce

Selkirk College in partnership with College of the Rockies, College of New Caledonia and Okanagan College have created an initiative to support research designed to advance the work of the [Kootenay Workforce Development Initiative](#) (KWDI). Primary research will be conducted to better understand what will be required to build a workforce in the region that will provide competitive advantage. Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with post-secondary educators, industry representatives, and members of the workforce specific to the region's target clusters. A series of \$8000, four to six month student internships will support this research.

Expected deliverables: research report (full and summary); article (individual and contribution to overarching)

For project outputs please visit: <http://www.cbrdi.ca/workforce/>

For more information please contact Project Coordinator: Dr. Sarah Breen (sbreen@selkirk.ca).

