



REGIONAL PLANNING FLAGSHIP INITIATIVE SKILLS PIPELINE

Mission: Ensure that the Okanagan region and its cluster are able to obtain the skills needed for competitive growth on an ongoing basis.

Objectives: Create an advantage in the ability to match skills supply to demand in this region--whether for graduates or existing workforce.

- **Define Demand:** Identify skill needs shared in common *across* clusters that need to be addressed. These may be needs for preparation of future employees as well as retraining of existing workforce. Note that recruitment of skills can certainly be part of this agenda.
- **Evaluate Supply:** Ensure that the match between existing training (at all levels) and regional cluster needs using existing courses and curriculum, but also explore new modes of delivery, timing or cost that may respond to workforce or student needs.
- **Develop New Training:** Plan new curriculum to meet growing or unsatisfied demand for occupational skills--whether individual cluster or across clusters.
- **Create New Degrees:** Explore and develop new degree programs that might create a regional skills advantage for one or more clusters (e.g., wine, value-added agriculture, etc.).
- **Ensure Responsiveness:** Manage the quality of supply and demand through ongoing skills pipeline activities.

Structure: Establish an action-focused "Okanagan Skills Pipeline Network" (or analogous entity).

- **Entity:** This network will develop and manage collaborative solutions focusing on meeting skills needs. This organization can start informally and become more structured as the partnership learns best how to undertake collaborative solutions to meeting skills needs, now and for the future.
- **Leadership:** The Okanagan Skills Pipeline Network would have interim co-chairs from Stewards and or cluster co-chairs to start with and would have its members vote for a formally designated set of co-chairs at a time of convenience (e.g., once up and running).
- **Membership:** Participants in the network should include: The deans or heads of instruction for every public or private education and training institution in the region; the heads of human resources and training of every cluster company (or at least those that are most concerned with skills issues) and key provincial and federal agency (HRDC) representatives.
- **Activities:** The Skills Pipeline Network will have a developmental path that will begin with: (a) confirming its basic objectives (why do we need a skills pipeline?), and then (b) systematically examining the mismatch or needs that should be acted upon, and (c) developing well-defined projects to carry them out as well as evaluate the outcomes.
- **Schedule:** The Skills Pipeline Network would meet formally on a quarterly basis, reporting to the Okanagan Partnership. At the quarterly meetings the Flagship's action teams would report on the progress of their individual implementation activities. The following tasks are likely to be fundamental to a Skills Pipeline Network, though not necessarily with equal importance. The key is to define an Okanagan specific skills pipeline agenda and carry it out:



Tasks

1. Convene Skills Pipeline Network Members: The Co-Chairs of the Flagship and the delegates from each cluster will meet with the deans or heads of instruction for all secondary and post-secondary education institutions (public and private) in the Okanagan region. During this meeting the group will:

(a) Listen to the skills concerns of each set of cluster delegates. These may focus on skills preparation as well as retraining or continuing education.

(b) Identify commonalities across the clusters that can guide the agenda of the Flagship.

(c) Define work plans to address the priority crosscutting issues as well as for distinctive cluster-specific needs.

The outcome of this first session should be confirmation that an ongoing dialogue between cluster representatives and educational institutions is good and can contribute to a improvement in meeting the skill needs of companies AND the formation of action teams to move elements of the agenda forward.

2. Confirm Skill Demand: Frequently cluster skill needs and training institution training activities need to be better aligned with each other. For this reason there may be a need to carry out a survey of occupational or professional skill demand across members of each cluster. This project can be carried out by any qualified supplier--whether an existing institution or a consultant. If funding is required, then this would be noted and the Okanagan Partnership would explore where support for this activity could come from. However, this same objective can be carried out, though less rigorously, through a carefully structured "focus group" during which participants on both sides bring their own "data" and knowledge together and collaboratively explore the "gaps" that might exist between supply and demand. The outcome of this inquiry or assessment can be used to focus training development and delivery more systematically.

3. Skills Preparation Groups: Where there is agreement that there is a "mismatch" between skills training and labor market demand by cluster companies, then both sides can undertake simple projects through which the number of people to be trained in a given field is increased or decreased. The key requirement in this process is for companies to help assure training organizations--whether colleges, universities or private training organizations--that their estimates of the number of individuals that will be absorbed or hired or who need to be retrained is reasonably accurate. The goal here is to make it worthwhile for both sides to better communicate with each other.

4. New Curriculum or Course Development: In some cases there is an opportunity to develop either new training curriculum or courses and in some cases new degrees (or degrees missing from the region that might benefit its cluster economy). In these cases a collaborative team can begin to plan the content and delivery modes for new courses or degree programs, using best practices and focusing on ensuring that the output of the courses is what the regional economy needs. There can be as many new course or curriculum teams as are called for. However, establishing basic rules for managing this process would be very helpful. The key is to ensure that there are going to be students or employees enrolled in courses that are developed. In certain cases, courses can also be marketed externally from the region, helping to build the image of the region to potential labor markets.

5. On-Line Job-Skills Marketplace: If there is sufficient interest on the part of clusters (in particular) there may be good reason to establish a regional on-line job-skills marketplace. As regions, such as Austin have done, this marketplace permits participating cluster companies to post jobs offers (confidentially, if required) and those seeking employment to post their resumes. The web site can be designed so that participant users can either scan for applicants using a keyword search, or have them automatically screened, and vice-versa. The Okanagan marketplace is of modest size so that have one



integrated skills marketplace might be helpful in creating greater local skills retention. However, many industries have provincial level or national skills networks that perform some of these functions. None the less, a regional job-skills marketplace could be very helpful in generating economic synergies. Moreover, if the Okanagan Partnership decides to expand its web community, a buyer-supplier exchange can be set up for each cluster using simple matching principles (not trying to replicate more complex industrial web 'exchanges').

6. Monitor Results: The participants in the Skills Pipeline Flagship should set up simple criteria to measure their progress in generating more trained workers and retraining more existing workforce. These criteria can be used to help track the overall responsiveness of the Okanagan's education system and labor force to cluster needs.

Team Responsibilities: The Core Flagship Team

As described earlier, the participants in this Flagship core team should include representatives of each public or private educational institution as well as each cluster and provincial and federal agencies, to start with. Overtime, more specific representatives will be needed for specific action initiatives (e.g., experts in a given discipline or occupational skill from both the instructional and the employer side). The core team will need to work together to decide and plan how to launch the Flagship activities summarized above.

Resource Requirements: From Flagship Initiation to Specific Actions

The core team for this Flagship should be able to determine what materials are required both to launch this effort and build up its activities over time (e.g., define what might be needed to do a survey of cluster skill demands, or to plan new courses or curriculum, or deliver them in a new way via e-learning, etc.).

Timing: Near-term vs. Longer-Term Activities

The timing of the Skills Pipeline Flagship should include immediate efforts (e.g., the first task alluded to above) and then break into specific actions, as required. Some action teams can move very quickly others will have a longer time to deliver their results (e.g., new trainee graduates, etc.).

Expected Results: Dynamic Skills Supply Matching Cluster Needs

See discussion of Monitoring and suggest specific skill outcomes that might be sought through this Flagship.