

WHAT WE HEARD

TALENT DEVELOPMENT SYMPOSIUM

November 19, 2025 | Edmonton, AB

This summary reflects the ideas, insights, and experiences shared during our breakout discussions at the 2025 Talent Development Symposium.

WHO PARTICIPATED?

Building a talent development ecosystem that enables Alberta to fulfill its economic potential and shared long-term prosperity.

112 organizations | 204 attendees

- Industry – (31%)
- Post-Secondary Institutions – 25%
- Chambers of Commerce – (17%)
- Education Services (K-12 & related) – (10%)
- Associations – (9%)
- Government – (6%)
- Students – (1.5%)



HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE BREAKOUT SESSIONS

Breakout 1: Building Alberta's Data Advantage (Thinkscape / Unanimous AI)

Participants used a real-time, AI-supported tool to explore responsibility for skills development, enablers of life-long learning, and alignment between talent development and economic opportunity. The session surfaced areas of alignment and confidence, while also highlighting where perspectives remain distributed across the system.

Breakout 2: Engaging Opportunity Populations

This session explored how Alberta can better support individuals facing systemic and structural barriers to employment, including newcomers, Indigenous learners, people with disabilities, and those on income support. Discussion focused on employer awareness, inclusive hiring practices, and strength-based approaches that recognize transferable skills and long-term workforce sustainability.

Breakout 3: Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) That Works to Scale

Participants examined how to build a more coordinated and scalable WIL ecosystem. Key themes included improving alignment between industry and education, reducing administrative barriers, clarifying shared definitions, and expanding flexible delivery models — particularly in rural and regional communities.

Breakout 4: Connecting K-12 to the World of Work & Post-Secondary

This session focused on strengthening early career awareness and improving transitions between K-12, post-secondary, and employment. Participants explored societal perceptions, system capacity challenges, and the need for clearer mentorship pathways and better access to labour market information.



THINKSCAPE DATA SESSION: DATA HIGHLIGHTS

A subset of participants engaged in a real-time Thinkscape data session, using an AI-supported group decision making platform to explore key talent development questions and areas of alignment across sectors, with the session capturing both quantitative indicators of alignment and qualitative discussion. These fruitful initial explorations mark the beginning of a broader conversation, signaling opportunities for continued dialogue with stakeholders to explore these themes in greater depth.

Who has the most responsibility for ensuring employees have the skills required to do their jobs — and why?

Top answer: Employers

Group indicators: Support: 45% | Conviction: 71% | Statistical clarity: >99% | Participants: 36

What we heard

- Employers are best positioned to identify evolving skill needs.
- Responsibility is reinforced by direct knowledge of job requirements and legal obligations.
- Participants emphasized the importance of collaboration with post-secondary institutions and governments to support employers in this role.

Explore the data (<https://app.thinkscape.ai/replay/019a9e12-1e9b-7df2-bff7-d554eeb87295?pwd=21782129>)

What needs to happen for a life-long learning model to become a reality — and why?

Top answer: Rewarding curiosity

Group indicators: Support: 18% | Conviction: 32% | Statistical clarity: 30% | Participants: 39

What we heard

- Incentivizing curiosity was seen as a key enabler of life-long learning.
- Participants highlighted the need to encourage continuous skill development and adaptability.
- Discussion also surfaced considerations related to sustainability & accessibility within a life-long learning model.

Explore the data (<https://app.thinkscape.ai/replay/019a9e1d-65dd-71c8-a281-bc51cb85a512?pwd=21782129>)

What actions today would have the greatest impact on aligning talent development with economic opportunities — and why?

Top answer: Integrating hands-on work experience into education

Group indicators: Support: 16% | Conviction: 48% | Statistical clarity: 67% | Participants: 37

What we heard

- Hands-on work experience was identified as critical to improving workforce readiness.
- Practical, applied learning helps bridge education and real-world economic opportunities.
- Participants noted challenges related to employer capacity and system complexity, reinforcing the need for scalable approaches.

Explore the data (<https://app.thinkscape.ai/replay/019a9e29-5017-763e-9ca9-db63605f37a5>)



COMMON THEMES & INSIGHTS

These challenges reflect system complexity rather than shortcomings of any one sector. Solutions will require improved coordination, clearer pathways, and enabling conditions that support all partners.

System & Structural Challenges

- Fragmentation across the talent ecosystem — employers, PSIs, K-12, government, and community partners are not consistently connected.
- No shared, provincial navigation system for WIL programs, mentors, incentives, or supports.
- Administrative processes are complex and time-intensive for both employers and learners.

Awareness & Perception Challenges

- Employers often lack clear information about WIL models and the benefits of inclusive hiring.
- Longstanding societal perceptions continue to prioritize university pathways over other post-secondary options.
- Limited awareness of learner supports, labour market tools, incentives, and navigation resources.

Capacity Challenges

- System capacity is stretched in delivering trades, career education, and work-integrated learning.
- Employers require more support to confidently host learners and provide high-quality learning experiences.
- Geographic distance and transportation constraints reduce access to learning and work opportunities, especially in rural regions.

SOLUTIONS

Challenge Solutions

- Develop centralized provincial navigation tools for WIL, funding, mentorship, and employer supports.
- Launch targeted awareness & perception-shift campaigns for employers, parents, learners, and educators.
- Establish shared definitions and frameworks for WIL, competencies, and stackable credentials across sectors, including pathways that recognize prior learning.
- Expand flexible and scalable learning models — such as micro-learning, hybrid WIL, and project-based placements.
- Advance strength-based and competency-based hiring, supported by clearer job descriptions and recognition of transferable skills.
- Co-design programs with employers to align training, curriculum, and WIL opportunities with workforce needs and regional realities.



BREAKOUT SESSION THEMES IN DETAIL

2. Engaging Opportunity Populations

CHALLENGES

- Employers seek clearer information on cost, expectations, and risk to confidently participate.
- Limited visibility into the long-term ROI for inclusive hiring.
- Lack of awareness of incentives and employment supports.
- AISH and other policy restrictions limiting participation.
- No centralized place to find supports, programs, or funding.

SOLUTIONS

- Training for employers on inclusive hiring and the value proposition for participation.
- Success stories, promotional campaigns, and toolkits.
- Standardized PLAR frameworks and recognition of transferable skills.
- Longer-term funding and sustainability planning.
- Strength-based job descriptions and competency-focused recruitment.

3. Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) That Works to Scale

CHALLENGES

- Industry-academia “language gap”; unclear expectations.
- Lack of WIL ecosystem mapping and centralized information.
- Administrative and logistical complexity.
- Transportation and rural access issues.
- Inconsistent definitions and job descriptions.

SOLUTIONS

- Standardized WIL definitions across sectors.
- A provincial WIL ecosystem map — one-stop shop for opportunities and contacts.
- Hybrid, flexible, project-based WIL models.
- Employer incentives such as grants or wage subsidies.
- Rural cohort models and partnerships.

4. Connecting K-12 to the World of Work & Post-Secondary

CHALLENGES

- Limited early exposure to diverse careers.
- Parental perception that university is the preferred path.
- Lack of mentorship pathways and labour market tools.
- Resource constraints in delivering trades and career-focused programming.
- Variation in how dual credits apply across admission pathways.

SOLUTIONS

- Early exposure strategies: books, videos, hands-on learning, camps.
- Social media campaigns to shift public and parental perceptions.
- Clearer alignment and communication around dual-credit pathways, where appropriate.
- Labour market tools for teachers and students.
- Mentor registries and clearer school board contact pathways.
- Bridging programs linking university theory to hands-on PSI experiences.



WHO IS BEST POSITIONED TO LEAD?

Across all breakout rooms, participants emphasized that Alberta's talent development challenges are shared — and so are the opportunities. No single group can solve them alone; coordinated action across government, industry, education, and community is essential.



Government

Leads policy alignment, funds system improvements, and creates the enabling conditions for a coordinated provincial talent ecosystem.



Industry & Employers

Co-design WIL experiences, clarify skill needs, provide hands-on learning and mentorship, and adopt inclusive and competency-based hiring practices.



Post-Secondary Institutions (PSIs)

Streamline WIL administration, deliver PLAR and bridging programs, and align curriculum with employer needs and emerging labour market demands.



K-12 System & School Boards

Deliver early career exposure, integrate labour market tools, engage parents, and support smooth transitions into post-secondary and work.



Community Organizations

Provide wraparound supports for Opportunity Populations, help navigate system barriers, and serve as trusted intermediaries between learners and employers.



Chambers of Commerce

Act as regional conveners, champion employer engagement, maintain mentor registries, and help local businesses navigate WIL and inclusive hiring supports.



Parents & Students

Engage in diverse career pathways, participate in early exposure opportunities, and help shift perceptions toward a broader definition of success.