



Targeted call for FSC Project Partners

Instructions to complete the application form

Please refer to the Future Skills Centre's (FSC) **Targeted Call for FSC Project Partners Guidelines** document when preparing your application.

This application form is structured to help you address the selection criteria for this call and give reviewers easy access to your project information. This form is divided into the following sections:

- Part 1 - General information
- Part 2 - Project summary
- Part 3 - Project details
- Part 4 - Project work plan and budget
- Part 5 - Declaration

If you would like to request accommodations or other types of support, please contact Maysa Mourad by email at targetedcall@fsc-ccf.ca or by phone at 437-331-0613.

If you have any questions while compiling your application, you may contact our team at targetedcall@fsc-ccf.ca. We would be happy to answer any questions.

PART 1 - GENERAL INFORMATION

1. Lead organization

Name of lead organization

SkillPlan

Name of project lead

Kyle Downie, CEO

Project lead's preferred method of contact (email address and/or phone number)

kdownie@skillplan.ca
604-436-1126 Ext. 102

2. Proposed project

Project title

Expanding and Enhancing National Recruitment System for Construction

Project start and end dates

January 1, 2022 to September 30, 2023

Projects must end no later than September 30, 2023.

Amount requested from FSC (total)

\$2,582,485.00

Project partners and their location

Canada Building Trades Union
72 Chamberlain Avenue
Ottawa, ON K1S 1V9

Social Research and Demonstration Corporation
400-55 Murray Street
Ottawa, Ontario K1N 9M5

PART 2 - PROJECT SUMMARY

1. Proposed project “one-liner”

How would you describe your new project in one sentence?

This project expands and enhances a “next generation” Virtual Recruitment and Assessment Centre for the unionized construction industry, with augmented functionalities and alternative pathways further customized to the trades contexts.

(30 words maximum)

2. Proposed project summary

How would you describe your new project and how it builds on the testing and learning of your current project to date?

We suggest that this summary covers the main information about how your new project addresses all selection criteria of this targeted call.

The Virtual Recruitment and Assessment Centre for the unionized construction industry has shown early success, especially in attracting under-represented populations (i.e., women, Indigenous people, newcomers, and youth) to explore a career in the trades and connect to an innovative online assessment and matching system. Through engagement with a national network of stakeholders, there is an interest in building on the virtual model, with augmentation to functionalities, increased site customization and optimization of user pathways, and continued enhancement to engagement and recruitment capacity of the sector. This project will focus on expanding, customizing and optimizing components to be more responsive to local conditions, recruitment challenges, and union-specific skills needs. Evidence on the effectiveness of these enhancements will be generated through a mixed methods approach, which will include both implementation research and an outcomes study to evaluate the success of the initiative. We aim to contribute to the broader skills ecosystem by generating further insights, best practices and lessons learned to facilitate creative solutions that are sustainable and responsive to the evolving skills needs, learning contexts, and communication preferences of the unionized construction trades - a major sector within the modern Canadian labour market.

(250 words maximum)

3. Additional scope

How does your new project go beyond the scope of your current FSC-funded project?

The additional scope may include expanding or extending a project model, its principles and/or components. For example, it may include expanding the project to new regions or jurisdictions, including new or larger target populations, and testing different delivery formats to understand what works to address demands. This would assume the potential for bringing additional partners to deliver the project at a broader scale. The additional scope must be grounded in new concrete learning questions to contribute to your work and of others in the skills ecosystem.

The additional scope expands on the current implementation format to be more responsive to the needs of stakeholders, engaging with 14 additional unions, while optimizing the user experience to ensure 750 more users interact with the system.

The additional scope is grounded in the following learning questions:

- How can specific transition points within a virtual environment be augmented to better respond to the unique learning needs of jobseekers interested in the unionized construction trades?
- What additional customization is needed to better address the recruitment and communication needs of unions, especially to facilitate continued engagement in skills upgrading and career pathfinding from prospective apprentices?
- What additional tools, resources, and supports are needed for a seamless integration of the virtual ecosystem into the core operations of stakeholders in the unionized construction industry?
- What are the factors of success that ensure a sustainable use of the virtual ecosystem?

(150 words maximum)

4. Importance of the additional scope

Why is the additional scope of your project important to your organization, sector and target populations? Why is it timely?

There is an opportunity to leverage the extensive and nation-wide partnership network established in the current project. This proposed expansion aims to enhance the synergies and deepen the recruitment and engagement capacity of the unionized construction industry, while at the same time supporting its modernization by adding to its technological infrastructure and strengthening its capacity to conduct virtual activities. Greater opportunities for collaboration through customization and user optimization allow a variety of actors in this ecosystem to streamline processes and resources, while reducing duplication and staying responsive to local conditions and unique user needs. Leveraging current interest and engagement in the development

of effective digital tools for recruitment and training in the construction industry comes at a time where an expected post-pandemic construction “boom” will create demand for skilled labour in construction, as well as an increased demand for flexible, virtual training options.

(150 words maximum)

PART 3 - PROJECT DETAILS

In this section, please provide information about how your new project supports each of the selection criteria of this targeted call.

We provide prompting questions to help you address all criteria in the application guidelines. You may prepare this section following the prompting questions in sequence or using your own sections and narrative.

Although you have flexibility regarding the format for this section, please make sure that you address all criteria according to the prompting questions. Reviewers will assess your application by scoring each criterion individually.

This section should not exceed **seven** pages. We anticipate that most proposals will present this section in **five** pages.

Relevance

It is well-established that there is a growing and unmet labour demand in the construction industry, which has encouraged employers and governments alike to focus recruitment on traditionally under-represented populations, including women, Indigenous people, newcomers, and youth (BuildForce, 2019). Evidence shows that virtual training and digital tools can be further leveraged for the trades, as they enable industry stakeholders to evaluate skills and connect with prospective candidates more seamlessly, while providing workers with flexible opportunities to upgrade their skills and navigate training pathways (Canadian Apprenticeship Forum, 2019). Leveraging digital tools for recruitment and training in the construction industry is also timely within the context of Canada’s post-pandemic recovery: at both the federal and provincial level, governments have identified stimulus projects aimed at infrastructure renewal, which will create both an acute demand for skilled labour in construction, as well as an increased demand for flexible, virtual training options that can adapt to various public health restrictions at the regional level.

In our current project, we have created the foundation for a centralized, national website dedicated to the recruitment, assessment, and training for the unionized construction trades, aligned with industry and employer needs. This Virtual Recruitment and Assessment Centre directs prospective apprentices from under-represented groups to explore the unionized construction trades, where they can also

undertake an online assessment, and based on those assessments, be connected with construction trades union(s) to receive further training and employment supports.

There has been overwhelming industry support and interest for the digital tools developed in the original project from Building Trades Councils, unions (local and international), affiliated training schools, colleges, sectors councils, associations, and training authorities. The proposed extension of the project activities is a direct response to this interest: stakeholders have signaled a demand for increased site customization and optimization of user pathways, while continuing to enhance their engagement and recruitment capacity to attract under-represented groups into the unionized construction and building trades. These interests are well-aligned with FSC strategic priorities of creating responsive career pathways, while collaborating with sectors and stakeholders to address labour market challenges and equip workers with necessary skills.

Innovation and Evidence

This proposal expands the Virtual Recruitment and Assessment Centre project with the following objectives:

- Identify, prototype, and test customized solutions to adapt Centre components to regional and local construction industry needs;
- Enhance the user experience/user pathways to increase the connection between prospective apprentices, local trades unions, and employers; and
- Expand the repository of social media assets with a view toward long-term sustainability of the construction trades' digital presence.
- Document and disseminate findings, best practices, and lessons learned in building a virtual ecosystem that is sustainable and responsive to the needs of the unionized construction industry

Preliminary project data suggests that our approach to leveraging behavioural insights in the recruitment of target groups through social media is generating success. This is evidenced through increased traffic of jobseekers to microsites, who then move through career options exploration and into the online assessment and training components of the Centre. Through regular project meetings, stakeholders have indicated that there is a need to further customize components to be more responsive to local conditions, recruitment challenges, and to further tailor recruitment, assessment, and training for targeted groups. For example, Building Trades of Alberta has indicated that they would benefit from a more customized system to distribute, collect, and manage different types of applications to participate in their training programs, while the Manitoba Building Trades Institute wishes to leverage components to expand their recruitment program for Indigenous jobseekers. The Construction Association of Ontario and the Ontario Construction Secretariat are looking to automate and streamline the application process for 105 trades training centres in the province, where there is an opportunity to integrate Virtual Recruitment and Assessment Centre assets with provincial web services and digital strategy. These and other examples suggest that there is an opportunity to leverage momentum of the partnership network to enhance the synergies and deepen the

capacity of the unionized construction industry to recruit, engage, train, and assess jobseekers and apprentices in a virtual environment. Greater opportunities for collaboration through regional and local customization would mean greater ability to share infrastructure and resources and reduce duplication, while staying responsive to those local conditions and needs.

We have also identified an opportunity for greater optimization of the user experience, specifically as it relates to user pathways and navigation of “transition points” between regional microsites, virtual assessment, and within the online training platform. Under the current design, users explore trades career options through a provincial microsite, which then connects them to a portal for further assessment, as well as a learning management system for foundational skills training. Jobseekers also have an opportunity to connect with a local trades union. Observation and stakeholder feedback on these “user journeys” (i.e., as jobseekers progress from career exploration into skills assessment and learning) suggests that there are opportunities to support users’ transitions, through enhanced functionality and features of the current navigation pathways. There are also opportunities to build new, innovative, and highly customized pathways for local unions, representing the career journeys of specific trades. These customized pathways will provide tools to facilitate more proactive engagement and communication between unions and prospective apprentices, potentially through additional union microsites, virtual coaching/communication with jobseekers, or union-specific multi-media to illustrate specific union job opportunities. These customized pathways and enhanced tools will be especially suitable to unions who are ready to expand their online presence.

Finally, the proposed project extension would seek to expand the repository of social media assets available to participating councils and unions, with a view to increasing and sustaining their marketing capacity and digital presence. This includes the development of additional multi-media content (e.g., images, videos), the creation of union-specific content, and the creation of further recruitment content to highlight the availability and benefits of training materials, including the opportunity to highlight newly customized and optimized features of the Centre.

Evidence and insights on the impacts of these enhancements will be generated through a mixed methods approach, which will include both implementation research and an outcomes study. Implementation research will be conducted using mainly qualitative methods, documenting the reach, perceived values and applicability of the augmented Centre in supporting the recruitment and engagement efforts of provincial councils and local unions. We will also seek to answer questions around sustainable use of the Centre, assessing stakeholders’ commitment to incorporate it in their recruitment, communication, and engagement activities in the medium term. Stakeholders will be asked to elaborate on their perception around the feasibility of the Centre to become part of sustained change across the sector, and its potential in enhancing the efficiency of the construction labour market overall. User experience research will document user behaviours, needs and attitudes using various observation and feedback methods to understand pathway optimization. An outcomes

study will be conducted using survey data and website analytics. We will be able to observe incremental impacts of the enhancements relative to the results of the current project or “base” model. Where possible, data collected will be analysed by under-represented group (women, Indigenous people, newcomers, and youth), intersecting characteristics, and by other socio-demographic characteristics of interest, such as age and education.

This approach contributes to the broader skills ecosystem by continuing to increase the capacity of unions and trade councils to recruit individuals from under-represented groups while linking local, regional, and national efforts to support innovation. While the current project established evidence to show how a centralized “hub” can serve the recruitment needs of the unionized construction industry, it was also generative in the sense that it has pointed to the conceptualization of other tools, activities and resources. By improving the Virtual Recruitment and Assessment Centre’s design and delivery through customization and optimization of user pathways, we will be leveraging existing interest and engagement of a vast network of stakeholders to generate further insights and evidence on how to coordinate and augment a number of engagement, learning, and training interventions into a coherent virtual ecosystem. The evidence generated through this additional scope will be highly relevant for recruitment in other contexts and can serve as a model for what works in a virtual environment, especially when addressing issues of how to leverage and coordinate on a national level, while responding to regional and local contexts, union needs, and recruitment challenges. The proposed additional scope will formally document the needs of regional and local stakeholders, explore the technical feasibility in implementing customized and customizable components, and evaluate the extent to which these features are effective in addressing the needs of stakeholders who may be at a more mature/advanced stage of integrating the virtual ecosystem in their day-to-day operations.

Learning

Learning from the current project has informed the scope of this project proposal. Unions and trades councils vary in terms of their social media and web presence, web infrastructure, and capacity to engage and recruit new apprentices. Existing recruitment and application processes also vary across organizations. Through the current project, we have confirmed the need for a centralized Virtual Recruitment and Assessment Centre that provides the infrastructure and support for groups facing barriers to entry and retention in the trades. We have further learned that customized solutions are required to strengthen supports that align with the unique contexts of the construction trades regionally and locally. In addition, we have learned that the pathways that jobseekers from underrepresented groups experience – from awareness of the construction trades, acceptance into a union and pre-apprenticeship training, to securing employment and actualizing the benefits of being an apprentice – can be further optimized. The current pathways are designed to meet provincial councils’ basic recruitment needs; however, they recognize that greater support is needed for groups facing barriers to entry and retention.

The additional scope and extension of this project will allow us to continue to explore how under-represented individuals can be supported effectively in a virtual environment to take steps towards becoming an apprentice, while exploring the benefits of site customization and optimization of user experience and pathways. Specifically, the following additional learning questions will be explored:

- How can specific transition points within a virtual environment be augmented to better respond to the unique learning needs of jobseekers interested in the unionized construction trades?
- What additional customization is needed to better address the recruitment and communication needs of unions, especially to facilitate continued engagement in skills upgrading and career pathfinding from prospective apprentices?
- What additional tools, resources, and supports are needed for a seamless integration of the virtual ecosystem into the core operations of stakeholders in the unionized construction industry?
- What are the factors of success that ensure a sustainable use of the virtual ecosystem?

Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

This project continues to focus on groups facing barriers to employment with the goal of supporting increased equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) in the unionized construction industry. Evidence shows that women, Indigenous people, newcomers, and youth all experience lack of exposure and familiarity with apprenticeships and trades careers, lack of mentors and role models, and lack of industry supports and connections to employers. Further, those under-represented in the trades may need additional support to navigate the skills upgrading and other training requirements of the trades (BuildForce, 2018, 2019; SRDC, 2017).

EDI principles of working directly with communities to understand their experiences and perspectives on barriers to training and employment have been reflected throughout the project. In the initial design of the Virtual Recruitment and Assessment Centre, organizations serving under-represented groups were engaged to validate research findings and approach, while providing them with an opportunity provide their perspectives and insights into development of the social media campaigns and Centre components. Through interviews and meetings with community organizations and internal experts, the project validated barriers and motivations of under-represented groups identified in the literature review; identified local barriers, experiences and considerations for development of recruitment campaigns and Centre components; provided feedback on recruitment messages, portal content and functionality; and identified potential community partners and supports to enhance recruitment efforts.

Understanding the multiple, intersecting, and systemic factors that contribute to barriers to training and employment continues to be a central focus of the research approach to generate evidence and learning through this additional scope. EDI considerations will be included in all elements of implementation and outcomes research, with a goal of understanding the differences in the user experience between

the four target groups, as well as examining how intersecting identity factors (e.g., the combination of age, gender, age, ethnicity) influence that experience and outcomes observed in the research.

Capacity

The proposed project continues to be led by SkillPlan, which has almost 30 years of workforce development experience within the unionized construction industry. All of its senior staff have extensive relevant experience in workforce development, project management and managing national sector-based projects of similar scale and scope. SkillPlan continues to partner with Canada Building Trades Union (CBTU) to support the recruitment and retention of under-represented workers in the construction industry and support their efforts to improve their working conditions. The project will also be supported by the Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC), which has been involved in every aspect of the design, delivery and evaluation of workforce development programs. Through this SRDC has developed relevant research frameworks and a range of measurement tools customized for the construction industry that will be leveraged for the proposed project. SkillPlan, SRDC and CBTU have successfully collaborated on many nationally funded initiatives, including many initiatives promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion through their work. For example: *Enhancing Pre-apprentice and Apprentice Training Tools, Office to Advance Women in Apprenticeship, Improving Performance through Mentorship Project BC Women in Trades, Indigenous Mentorship Project for ITA of BC.*

Coherence

The main project activities are aligned with the project objectives of Centre customization, user optimization, and deepening the unionized construction industry's digital recruitment capacity. Activities are as follows:

- Conduct a comprehensive **needs analysis** with key informants, stakeholders, and subject matter experts to identify and prioritize web portal features, content, and functionality for regional and customization and user optimization;
- Work with web development partners on **implementation and testing** of new Centre features and expansion of social media and other digital assets for recruitment;
- **Launch** of the new Virtual Recruitment and Assessment Centre with added features and enhancements, with active **data collection** (quantitative and qualitative) on user experience, implementation research, and outcome evaluation; and
- Conduct **data analysis** to document findings, identify learning, and propose next steps. Knowledge products will be developed to share findings broadly. Stakeholders will be involved throughout.

The proposed extension presents good value for money as it aims to maximize opportunities to leverage the early success and momentum of the current projects. The augmentation and expansion add high value to the overall initiative as it strengthen the sustainability and long-term application of the virtual ecosystem. The

budget, presented in greater detail in the accompanying document, is reasonable given the scale of the additional activities and milestones, aligning with the work plan, project timeline, and expected outcomes.

(3,500 words maximum)

PART 4 - PROJECT WORK PLAN AND BUDGET

1. Please submit a **one-page work plan** with key milestones and their timeline. **Do not** include detailed activities at this time. If your proposal is selected, we will work with you to develop a detailed work plan.
2. Please complete the project budget template provided to you as part of the application material.
 - a. Include only **new funding** associated with your new project and its additional scope. Please do not include the existing funding that is already part of your current funding agreement with FSC.
 - b. If applicable, identify new funding pending or confirmed for this project from other sources. **This funding should be included as in-kind contributions.** (Please note that funding from other federal sources cannot be counted towards in-kind contributions)
3. Please submit your work plan and budget by sending these files, along with this completed form, to targetedcall@fsc-ccf.ca.
4. You may use the space below to provide comments to accompany your work plan and/or budget.

(100 words maximum)

PART 5 - DECLARATION

By submitting an application, the lead organization and its partners agree to the requirements of the following sections, detailed in the guidelines outlined for this funding call, and they affirm that they comply with and/or commit to the following:

- Organization eligibility.
- Active support for co-creating and carrying out an evaluation with an FSC-approved evaluator, if FSC decides an evaluation is appropriate for this project.
- Active engagement in knowledge mobilization activities related to the project.
- Compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement on the Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Humans.
- Confidential due diligence inquiries from Future Skills Centre into the applicant.

Signature

A rectangular box containing a handwritten signature in black ink. The signature is cursive and appears to read "Kyle Downie".

Name of signing authority

Kyle Downie

Date

November 2, 2021