



Waterloo Region Talent Attraction, Retention and Reskilling Plan

March 2024



Table of Contents

Table of Contents	1
Acknowledgments	3
Glossary of Terms	4
Glossary of Acronyms	5
Executive Summary	6
Creating the Talent Plan	9
Regional Context	13
Establishing Priorities to Ground the Talent Plan	16
Strategic Pillars for a Thriving Talent Ecosystem	24
Action Plan	31
Achieving Excellence: Executing for Optimal Results	40
Disclaimer	42

Talent is the key to Waterloo Region's future. We collectively plan to build a diverse and inclusive talent ecosystem that reflects the richness of Waterloo Region's community and drives innovation.

Acknowledgments

The Strategy Working Group gratefully acknowledges the insight and support of the organizations and individuals who contributed to this strategy and recognized that this is the beginning of a broader conversation.



The TOWNSHIP of NORTH DUMFRIES



Workforce Planning Board
of Waterloo Wellington Dufferin



Children and Youth
Planning Table
of Waterloo Region



Deloitte LLP Team

Trudy Parsons, Managing Director; Chris Bandak, Managing Director; Evelyn Paul, Manager; Simon Webb, Manager; Jose Rodriguez, Senior Associate; Darcy Acton, Senior Associate; Noah Fast, Analyst; Ivana Bjelakovic, Analyst, Tanushri Sawant, Analyst.

Glossary of Terms

Apprenticeship: An apprenticeship is a combination of on-the-job training and classroom learning. This form of training results in a skilled certification qualification. An apprenticeship relationship is usually administered by an employer. Employees are hired and trained through in-house on-the-job learning that are traditionally specific to a skilled trade, with periods of in-class training held throughout the apprenticeship.

Co-op: A Cooperative program (Co-op) combines classroom education with practical, structured work experience. It differs from the apprenticeship as it is usually provided by an educational institution. A student can complete several co-op placements throughout the period of academic study and receive academic credit for each. A co-op can be either paid or unpaid depending on the type of program.

Internship: Traditionally, an intern receives on-the-job training in the workplace. Internships are usually completed as part of coursework and students receive credit towards final program completion. They can be completed full time or part time and can be paid or unpaid.

Micro-credential: Micro-credential is a certification that recognizes specific skills, learning outcomes or competencies that are valued by industry and employers. They are gained in a flexible, fast, and affordable way.

NAICS: The North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) is the standard used by Federal statistical agencies in classifying business establishments for the purpose of collecting, analyzing, and publishing statistical data related to the Canadian business economy.

Newcomer: Refers to a person who has immigrated to a region from another. This person could be an international immigrant or refugee or could originally be from a different region in Canada.

NOC: National Occupational Classification (NOC) is the standard used by Federal statistical agencies to classify occupation establishments for the purpose of collecting, and analyzing statistical data related to the Canadian business economy.

Talent plan: Refers to the Waterloo Region Talent Attraction, Retention and Reskilling Plan.

Target Sector: Target sectors best match the unique competitive advantages in the area, as well as the needs of industry sectors. The target sectors are based on the five key sectors of advanced manufacturing, aerospace, automotive, food processing, and tech and digital media, as identified by the Strategy Working Group.

TEER: Training, Education, Experience and Responsibilities (TEER) categories refer to the type and/or amount of training, education, experience and responsibility that is typically required to work in an occupation. Each NOC consists of six TEER categories identified from 0 through 5 which represents the second digit of the NOC code.

Upskilling: Upskilling is the process of learning new skills either in a structured format such as micro-credentials or post-secondary degrees or employer driven on-the-job skill development.

Region of Waterloo: Refers to the regional government.

Waterloo region: Refers to the geographical area that comprises the Census Division, Waterloo, Regional Municipality.

Glossary of Acronyms

Acronym	Meaning
CMA	Census Metropolitan Area
CIP	Classification of Instructional Program
COC	Chambers of Commerce
ECE	Early Childhood Educator
EDI	Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion
FTE	Full Time Equivalents
KCW	Kitchener, Cambridge and Waterloo
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
LMI	Labour Market Information
NAICS	North American Industry Classification System
NOC	National Occupational Classification
PSI	Post-secondary Institution
SOARR	Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, Risks and Results
TEER	Training, Education, Experience and Responsibilities
WPBWWD	Workforce Planning Board of Waterloo Wellington Dufferin
WREDS	Waterloo Region Economic Development Strategy
YMCA	Young Men's Christian Association

Executive Summary

The Waterloo Region Talent Attraction, Retention, and Reskilling Plan is designed to create a roadmap for the region’s future talent pipeline. Its main goal is to foster collaboration with industry and community partners to address labour challenges in the Waterloo region across all sectors. The plan aims to co-create solutions and strengthen implementation through collaboration and collective efforts to address regional opportunities identified in this strategy.

Process and Methodology

The full research conducted to support this Talent Plan included a comprehensive research and data collection and analysis that outlines the background review and quantitative analysis of the regional economy. Some areas of these analysis were broken into urban, rural, and overall regional figures to assess strength and potential challenges in the community’s labour force.

Instrumental to the research and data gathering phases, was the stakeholder engagement. This phase provided opportunity to engage with residents, industry representatives, community partners, workforce organizations, employment and training partners, local businesses, major impact employers, high school and post-secondary students, as well as job seekers and employees. Over 1,500 community members participated through various stakeholder engagement techniques including workshops, surveys, focus groups and a validation session to assess the validity of the actions recommended.

The following is a snapshot of the project lifecycle depicting the three phased approach.



The figure below includes all the different engagement activities conducted during the development of the Waterloo Region Talent Attraction, Retention, and Reskilling Plan.



What We Learned

The local labour force continues to change, influenced by factors at the local, regional, and global levels. It is necessary and prudent for the Strategy Working Group and its partners to consider the influencing factors impacting the labour market to ensure current relevancy of actions and initiatives. The following are some of the key factors to keep top of mind moving forward.

- **The region’s population is booming, but growth has not been uniform across the region:** the region has experienced rapid population growth, surpassing the provincial average, primarily driven by immigration and international students. Growth has been concentrated in urban areas, with a 16% increase compared to 13% in rural areas.
- **New housing is essential to sustain population growth:** There is a growing number of accessory apartments, such as basement suites or duplex conversions, being added to existing dwelling units. This indicates a shift towards more diverse housing options in the region and the high demand for housing in the region.
- **Positive labour force performance contrasts troubling labour demand indicators:** The latest data from Statistics Canada’s Labour Force Survey paints a positive picture of the employment recovery in the KCW CMA following the COVID-19 pandemic. However, a concerning trend emerged between 2022 and 2023, as the number of job postings in the region plummeted by 30%. This decline affected almost every industry sector, except for utilities.
- **Post-pandemic labour force recovery has not been robust amongst all demographic groups:** Despite improvements in labour force indicators, there are some concerning trends. The participation rates for women in the CMA remain below pre-pandemic levels. Furthermore, the unemployment rates for youth (aged 15 to 24) for both genders are significantly higher than pre-pandemic levels. These statistics suggest that women are facing challenges to enter or re-enter the workforce, and young individuals are struggling to find employment opportunities.

- Stakeholders documented that there are opportunities to improve regional workforce:** During engagement activities, stakeholders and community members identified several key opportunities. The most common themes included collaboration, aligning skills, promoting trades and apprenticeships, diversity, equity, and inclusion, and improving marketing messaging.

The Strategy

Various scales of analysis have been used to assess Waterloo region's existing labour market, demand projections, and anticipated labour market needs and skills gaps. Input has been gathered through data collection and engagement activities. The culmination of all these elements is the development of a strategy that is centered around four key strategic pillars of workforce development: Talent Attraction, Talent Development, Talent Readiness, and Talent Integration.

The following figure provides a summary of each strategic pillar along with the objectives associated with each one:

Talent Attraction	Talent Retention
<p>Objectives:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Define the Waterloo region’s value proposition and create marketing materials to increase the attractiveness of the region. 2. Grow and diversify jobs in Waterloo region. 3. Improve labour participation with a focus on equity-deserving groups. 4. Assess the impact of the international student cap on the region’s available labour force. 	<p>Objectives:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Retain secondary and post-secondary graduates. 2. Support business talent retention efforts. 3. Improve wrap-around supports that help to increase participation in the labour market.
Talent Readiness	Talent Integration
<p>Objectives:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Increase alignment of education programming and training with employer attraction needs. 2. Strengthen partnerships with education providers to promote continuous experiential learning; soft skills development, and micro-credential programming focused on attaining skill(s) or competency(ies) based on industry needs. 3. Advocate for increased credential recognition for newcomers. 	<p>Objectives:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Support the integration of the newcomer workforce in skills aligned occupations. 2. Support equity, diversity, and integration initiatives in the workplace.

Achieving Optimal Results

To achieve successful implementation of the talent plan in the Waterloo region, the Strategy Working Group needs to focus on leadership and commitment, working partnerships, ongoing coordination and monitoring, and procuring additional funding. The workforce ecosystem in the region consists of several partners, including educational institutions, workforce planning boards, and social services, who all play a role in supporting the labor market. It is crucial for partners to leverage the strengths of the ecosystem, share information and opportunities, and prevent duplication of work. Monitoring progress and maintaining accountability are vital for the plan's success, and ongoing conversations with partners can uncover new actions for continuous improvement. These actions should be actionable, have clear success criteria, and be supported by specific benchmarks and resources.



Creating the Talent Plan

Communities and regions that prioritize creation of a Talent Plan are prioritizing their economic sustainability and competitiveness. Plan development is complex and is most successful when there is a collective and collaborative effort. Building a regional talent plan requires extensive research and engagement to ensure that the complicated nature of the labour market and of workforce development is understood to the greatest degree. It is the collective input of all who make up the workforce ecosystem that leads to an evidence-based strategy that is validated, inclusive, and positioned to proactively respond to the challenges impeding an aligned labour supply and demand. The Waterloo Region Talent Plan Working Group representing the area municipalities and regional government, have demonstrated their commitment to positioning the region for success.

Introduction

The full comprehensive research conducted to support this Talent Plan has been presented in two supplementary reports, **Labour Market Insights Report**, and the **Engagement Summary Report**, presented under separate cover. To support the reader having a fulsome understanding of key insights that emerged through the supplemental work, relevant content and key findings are summarized in this document.

Presented in this section is:

- **Data Collection and Analysis:** Outlines the approach used to gather information captured in the Phase One Report and the rationale for employing each research tool.
- **Stakeholder Consultation:** An explanation of the various stakeholder engagement techniques employed during the strategic planning process and relevant considerations.

Data Collection and Analysis

Various scales of analysis have been used to assess Waterloo region's existing labour market, demand projections, and anticipated labour market needs and skills gaps. Input has been gathered through data collection and engagement activities. A summary of each assessed component is presented in the following list, with detailed results available in the **Labour Market Insights Report**.



Background Review: Multiple documents have been reviewed as related to the Waterloo region's workforce ecosystem and provide an understanding of the region's realities as it relates to labour availability issues and shortages. Work completed by the Workforce Planning Board of Waterloo Wellington Dufferin has been leveraged including the job demand report and EmployerOne survey. Special attention was paid to the topics of immigration, wrap-around supports, training and skills development, and the current labour force context/economic recovery from COVID-19.



Global Leading Practice Review: According to the Deloitte's Global Human Capital Trends Survey, business and human resource leaders across every industry from 105 countries were asked which entities in society they felt are primarily responsible for workforce development. The majority of respondents (73%) felt that employers were primarily responsible for workforce development while ten percent of respondents identified governments as the primary entity responsible. Leading practices on workforce development in North America were reviewed with a lens of relevance for the Waterloo region context.



Regional Workforce Ecosystem Mapping: A workforce ecosystem refers to the structure and interaction of partners and programs that influence talent attraction, retention, and readiness within the Waterloo Region. This analysis was informed by qualitative online research and is not designed to identify the complexity of working relationships between partners, but rather, give a sense of scope of each distinct component of a workforce development ecosystem. Organizations in Waterloo region were classified into the four broad categories of governments, employers, workforce supports, and education and training.



Socio-economic Profile: This profile of Waterloo region provided an assessment of the local demographic and economic indicators, including population growth, labour force, job demand and key sector trends. The data was presented for the region overall, the urban areas, and the rural areas. In some instances, relevant comparisons were made to the province of Ontario.



Labour Supply and Demand Projections: Developed by metroeconomics¹, projections for the number of new workers required for each industry were developed which also consider the estimated retirees for each occupation.

Stakeholder Engagement and Consultations

Stakeholder consultation is essential to understanding the needs and perspectives of stakeholders across the Waterloo region. It shapes a nuanced understanding and assists in grounding elements of the strategic process. The following engagement and consultation activities were undertaken to inform this Talent Plan and contribute to the developed priorities, objectives and actions.



Business Mixed-mode Survey: A mixed-mode survey was conducted among a random sample of 250 businesses and organizations within the Waterloo region. This survey gathered responses to assess the workforce needs, the challenges facing the business community and their insights on what is needed to address them. Key themes that emerged from the survey results included access to required labour, satisfaction with availability of labour, employee attraction and retention, attraction and retention priorities, and recruitment outside of the region.



Workforce Panel Survey: A panel survey was conducted to understand the needs of the local workforce and challenges they have experienced in the Waterloo Region. From the survey, 200 demographically represented surveys were completed as well as an additional 153 completed from a shared open link. The top priorities that emerged from respondents were the accessibility of the region from other areas, adequate pay/compensation, and commute times.



Key Informant Interviews: Eighteen one-on-one interviews were completed with industry and workforce partners, along with major employers within the region. The interviews discussed key barriers that are impacting minority groups as well as opportunity areas to better serve these populations. Further insights were garnered related to the workforce ecosystem and economic development within the region. The key themes that emerged from stakeholder groups were improving quality of life, reducing barriers to entry for the workforce, embracing DEI, and workforce retention.



Newcomers Open House: An in-person open house for newcomers to Canada living in Waterloo was conducted by the regional staff. Five participants contributed to a series of questions that explored their integration into the Waterloo region workforce. Further insights informed on positive and challenging experiences they had. Many of the participants felt that the community was welcoming and noted they received support from their neighbours and local organizations. The most significant barrier identified by newcomers was poor credential recognition and limited pathways to transfer credentials from other countries.



Workforce Partners Focus Group: An in-person workshop with the Waterloo region workforce development partners was conducted. Approximately twenty individuals attended the workshop. Initial research was presented to participants for brief discussion followed by discussions on the workforce ecosystem, labour, and growth sectors. Key findings that emerged from this workshop included the significant impact affordability and availability of housing was to the labour force. The focus group also identified several success metrics to measure improvements in the region including the number of retained qualified residents, the number of jobs in the region, and DEI employment metrics.

¹ metroeconomics is an economic consulting firm specializing in assessing historical trends and in modeling the economic and demographic future of countries, provinces, states, metropolitan areas and individual communities. metroeconomics was engaged as a subconsultant for research used to inform this talent plan.



Quality of Life Survey: Deloitte conducted a survey to identify key drivers of resident perceptions of quality of life and overall satisfaction with the Waterloo region among community members. Using a mix of cell and landline phone numbers in the region, numbers were randomly dialed by live interviewers. Respondents were screened to ensure they currently reside in Waterloo Region and were over the age of 18. This methodology resulted in 507 statistically valid completes. The survey responses have been weighted by age and gender according to the 2021 Canadian Census profile Waterloo Region to ensure the findings are representative of the adult population.



Student Survey: After the EmployerOne 2022 survey, the Workforce Planning Board of Waterloo Wellington Dufferin and its partner group came together in spring and had questions around what was happening with youth employment over the summer. As of early June of 2022, employers were saying that they had fewer applicants and it seemed that youth were just not engaging in summer jobs. The partner group wanted to know what was happening in the big picture compared to what some small pockets of people may be doing. This report explores the last 3 years of summer employment (May to September) for youth 15 to 29.



Youth Workshop: The WREDS/Talent Youth Workshop was held on January 17, 2024, in the Region of Waterloo Council Chambers by Region of Waterloo economic development staff and was supported by engagement specialists from the Children and Youth Planning Table (CYPT). The workshop had 17 youth in attendance, aged from 13 to 18 years, and aimed to engage participants in issues and solutions relating to economic development and quality of life in Waterloo Region.



Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Workshop: Ethic Talent hosted three workshops focused on diverse cultural communities in Waterloo region. These sessions were held in Cambridge (November 26), Kitchener (December 6) and Waterloo (December 15). There were 102 participants across the three gatherings.

Regional Context

This section builds upon the key findings from the Labour Market Insights Report and shares insights and implications for the regional economy, influenced by current statistics and trends. This offers a more comprehensive understanding of new and emerging factors that must be given consideration in the Talent Plan development.

The Changing Landscape

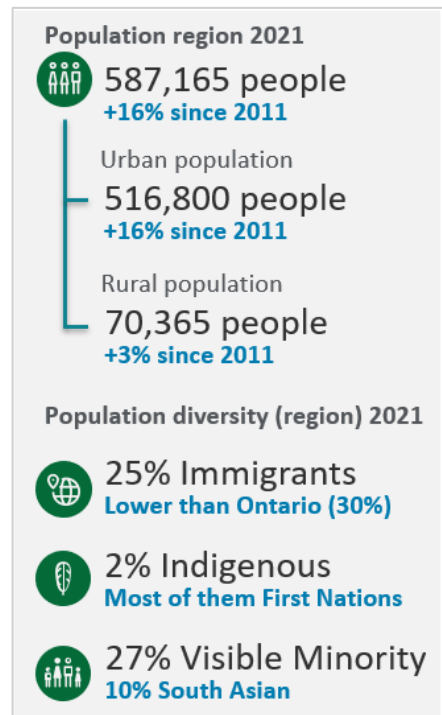
The local labour force continues to change, influenced by factors at the local, regional, and global levels. It is necessary and prudent for the Strategy Working Group and its partners to consider the influencing factors impacting the labour market to ensure current relevancy of actions and initiatives. Following are a series of factors to keep top of mind moving forward.

The region’s population is booming, but growth has not been uniform across the region

The Waterloo region has experienced a remarkable rate of population growth, surpassing the provincial average. According to the Statistics Canada Census, between 2011 and 2021, the region's population surged by over 80,069 people, reflecting a 16% increase. This growth has been primarily fueled by immigration and non-permanent residents, particularly international students. Growth has been concentrated in the urban centers, with urban areas witnessing a 16% growth compared to a 13% growth in rural areas between 2016 and 2021.² The region’s population is further projected to grow by 27% between 2021 and 2036, adding 165,400 new residents (excluding Census undercounts).³

New housing is essential to sustain population growth:

The three cities in the region (Kitchener, Waterloo, and Cambridge) accounted for 92% of the new units. One notable trend is the growing number of accessory apartments, such as basement suites or duplex conversions, being added to existing dwelling units. In 2012, 67 permits were issued for accessory dwelling units, while in 2021, this number had reached 546 permits.⁴ This indicates a shift towards more diverse housing options in the region and the high demand for housing in the region. The demand may see a slowdown, as new caps in the number of international student permits will decrease the influx of international students into the region.



Source: Statistics Canada, 2021 Census | 2011 NHS

² Statistics Canada, 2016 Census | 2021 Census.

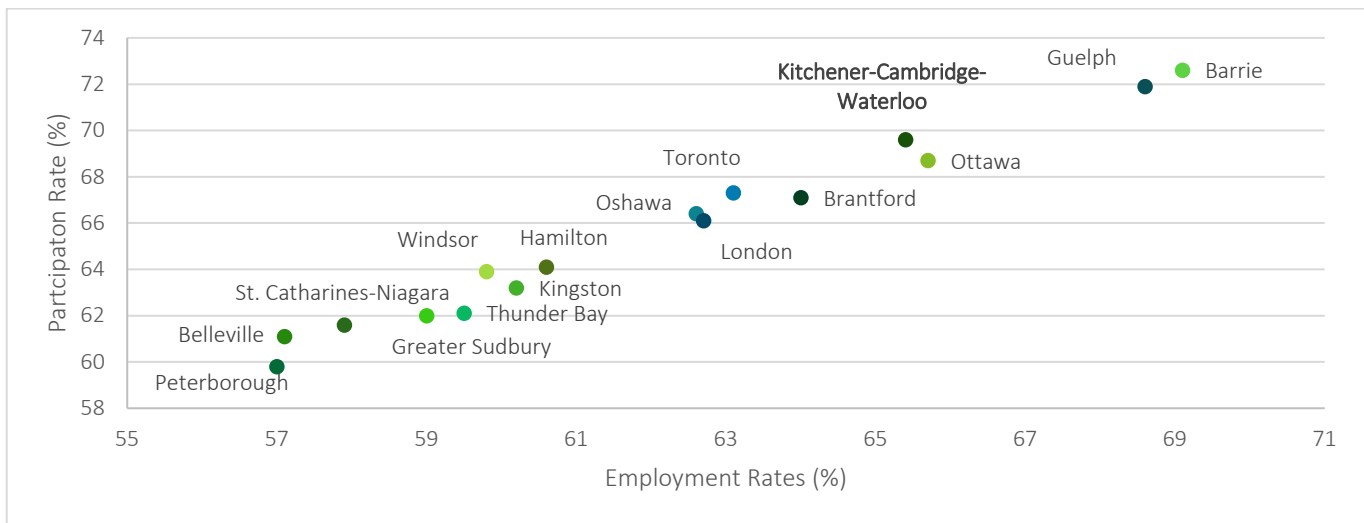
³ Region of Waterloo, Land Needs Assessment, April 2022

⁴ Region of Waterloo, 2021 Building Permit Activity and Growth Monitoring.

Positive labour force performance contrasts troubling labour demand indicators:

The latest data from Statistics Canada's Labour Force Survey paints a positive picture of the employment recovery in the KCW CMA following the COVID-19 pandemic. From 2021 to 2022, the unemployment rate decreased from 6.3% to 5.7%; this indicated a gradual improvement in job availability. However, between 2022 and 2023, unemployment rate slightly increased to 6%. Furthermore, the participation rate increased from 68.9% to 69.5%, suggesting a growing number of individuals actively seeking employment opportunities in the CMA.⁵ The figure below highlights the KCW CMA strong participation and employment rates compared to other jurisdictions within Ontario. When examining job demand between 2020 and 2023, it becomes evident that certain sectors experienced significant demand. Notably, the retail trade sector witnessed a 17% increase in job demand, followed by educational services with a 15% rise, and health care and social assistance with a 13% surge. However, a concerning trend emerged between 2022 and 2023, as the number of job postings in the region plummeted by 30%. This decline affected almost every industry sector, except for utilities. Of particular concern is the notable decrease in job postings requiring lower skill levels (TEER 4 and 5).⁶ These levels experienced the largest decline, emphasizing the potential challenges faced by individuals seeking employment opportunities that do not demand extensive qualifications or experience. It is crucial to address these declining job postings and the subsequent impact on lower-skilled workers.

Figure 1: Labour force participation and employment rates for Ontario CMAs, 2023



Source: Statistics Canada. Table 14-10-0385-01 Labour force characteristics, annual

⁵ Statistics Canada. Table 14-10-0385-01 Labour force characteristics, annual.

⁶ Vicinity Jobs, 2023.

Post-pandemic labour force recovery has not been robust amongst all demographic groups

Despite these improvements in labour force indicators, there are some concerning trends. The participation rates for women in the CMA remain below pre-pandemic levels. In 2019, the participation rate for women was 66.7%, but by 2023, it had decreased to 63.9%. In comparison, the participation rates for men stabilized from 75.8% in 2019 to 75.3% in 2023. This indicates that women are facing more challenges in rejoining the workforce compared to men.

Furthermore, the unemployment rates for youth (aged 15 to 24) for both genders are significantly higher than pre-pandemic levels. In 2019, the unemployment rate for youth was 10.5%, while by 2023, it had risen to 13.8%. Similarly, the participation rates for youth also declined from 68.1% in 2019 to 65.7% in 2023.⁷ These statistics suggest that young individuals are struggling to find employment opportunities and are facing higher unemployment rates compared to pre-pandemic.

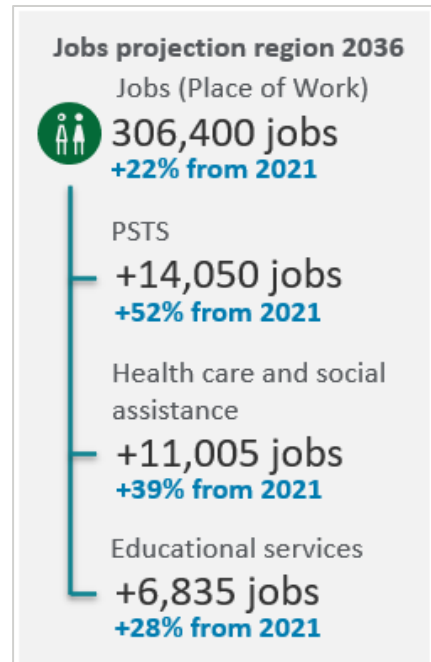
Growth expected in the region indicate the need for individuals to align their skills with key sectors such as manufacturing and professional services

The job market in the region is expected to grow by 55,800 jobs by 2036, with an average of 3,700 jobs per year. Notably, the manufacturing industry, which saw a decline of over 16,000 jobs between 2001 and 2021, is projected to experience slight growth between 2021 and 2036. Two timeframes, 2023 to 2028 and 2028 to 2033, are considered for assessing future labour requirements. Over the next five years, job growth is estimated at 18,900, followed by an increase of just over 15,800 jobs in the subsequent five years. The major job gains are expected in professional, scientific, and technical services, health care and social assistance, educational services, finance and insurance, and retail trade. These industries will continue to grow, although at reduced rates, between 2028 and 2033. Approximately 28,300 new workers will be needed over the next five years to meet the combined demand from job growth and replacement needs. Individuals seeking employment should consider these sectors and align their skills accordingly, while educational institutions and workforce development programs should focus on preparing individuals for the anticipated demands in these sectors.

The population of the Waterloo region is projected to experience a significant increase of 27% between 2021 and 2036.⁸ This growth rate surpasses the projected job growth rate of 22% during the same time period.



Source: Statistics Canada, Table 14-10-0385-01



Source: metroeconomics

⁷ Statistics Canada. Table 14-10-0385-01 Labour force characteristics, annual.

⁸ Region of Waterloo, Land Needs Assessment, April 2022



Establishing Priorities to Ground the Talent Plan

When the elements of research and engagement are analyzed holistically, a more fulsome understanding of what is important to the region can be understood. Grounding priorities in evidence is foundational to creating a relevant and strategic action plan to guide collective efforts and collaborative approach.

Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, Risks and Results (SOARR) Assessment

The SOARR assessment represents a critical turning point in developing the workforce development and economic growth priorities for Waterloo region. It serves as the pivot from 'what has been learned' to 'what needs to happen'.

This forward-looking model takes elements of what would traditionally be affiliated with a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis and focuses on Risks and Results. By bringing risk and results into the conversation, contingency planning receives due attention, and outcomes are reflected in an action-oriented, measurable manner. Identifying opportunities and understanding potential risks allows for the design of specific action steps to achieve

desired results. This approach enables strategic leveraging of identified strengths while also addressing areas for growth and improvement.

The concepts underlying the SOARR analysis model are illustrated in the figure to the right, providing a clear visual representation of the model's components and how they work together to inform strategic planning and decision-making.

It should be noted that the conclusions within the SOARR assessment reflect the responses given during the stakeholder engagement sessions. As such, they should not be taken as generalizations of all stakeholders within Waterloo region's economic development or workforce ecosystem.

S	Strengths What are we doing well? What key achievements are we most proud of? What can we build on?
O	Opportunities What our best possible future opportunities? What changes in demand can we expect in the future? What broader trends and policies may affect development and impact our aspirations?
A	Aspirations What are we deeply passionate about and want to achieve? What difference do we hope to make for all?
R	Risks What challenges do we need to be aware of? How will we recognize and mitigate or eliminate potential risks?
R	Results How we know we are succeeding? What are the key goals we would like to accomplish to achieve these results?

S

Strengths

What are we doing well? What key achievements are we most proud of? What can we build on?



The Strength component of the SOARR focuses on answering key questions, including what the region is doing well, the key achievements underway, and the strengths that can be built to realize new opportunities.

- ❖ Stakeholders identified that the Waterloo region has many **geographic advantages**, including its location along Highway 401, the presence of an international airport and proximity to growth markets in Canada and the United States; all influential for business, investment and talent attraction. Waterloo is at the heart of the Toronto-Waterloo Corridor, a stretch of 112 kilometres of talent, connectivity, and innovation. The Corridor offers a similar density of tech talent as Silicon Valley, affording the region **access** to 150+ million consumers and over 250,000 tech workers.⁹
- ❖ Post-secondary institutions, including the University of Waterloo, Wilfred Laurier University and Conestoga College are valuable providers of education and training. As per Lightcast 2023 data, more than 18,000 students graduate every year from these post-secondaries. This translates to the existence of a **strong talent pipeline** and opportunities to support talent development across many industries and sectors.¹⁰
- ❖ Waterloo region has a **growing and diverse population**. As of 2021, 25% of the regions total population were immigrants, and 27% of the total population identified as a visible minority group. The growing population is complemented by a **strong labour force** in various industry sectors, including healthcare, retail trade, public administration, education, manufacturing, construction and agriculture.¹¹ The region is attracting immigrants with strong education and credentials while post-secondary institutions are actively recruiting international students. Overall, this translates to a **wealth of training and talent resources** that can be leveraged to support the local workforce and economy. As per the CBRE Scoring Tech Talent 2023 report, Waterloo region ranks 18 out of the top 50 of the largest markets by number of **tech talent professionals** in the U.S. and Canada.¹²
- ❖ Employers identified strengths to include **its culture of innovation and collaboration**. The region has a **diverse economy**, which has attracted global players in business and financial services, manufacturing, and information and communications technology. Along with post-secondary institutions, the presence of research facilities and networks, ICT innovation in big data, embedded security, auto-tech, and artificial intelligence to quantum and nanotechnology has provided the region a reputation as a **global technology leader**. The region is home to a **corridor of hydro power** making it a leader in this sector and providing opportunities and capacity for business growth.
- ❖ Waterloo region offers a **strong quality of life** that appeals to the diverse preferences of its residents. Urban centres, including Cambridge, Kitchener, and Waterloo, are balanced by the rural areas of North Dumfries, Wellesley, Wilmot, and Woolwich. The region is home to several conservation areas, open spaces, parks, trails, and lakes, providing a variety of outdoor recreational activities, such as camping, hiking and fishing. In addition to its natural attractions, the region also offers numerous arts and culture facilities and shopping, dining, and entertainment options.

⁹ Waterloo EDC, What is the Toronto-Waterloo Corridor?, 2023.

¹⁰ Lightcast Economic Modeling, Datarun 2023.3

¹¹ Statistics Canada, 2021 Census


¹² CBRE, Scoring Tech Talent 2023

- ❖ The region is home to a **strong business and workforce ecosystem** that includes the regional government, Waterloo EDC, municipal economic development departments, educational institutions (ranging from primary to post-secondary), innovation and research networks, start-up supports, mentorship programs, leading employers, and workforce development providers and intermediaries. Strong partners in the region include the Immigration Partnership (Immigration Waterloo Region), Kitchener-Waterloo Multicultural Centre, Niagara Peninsula Aboriginal Area Management Board’s Youth Employment & Training, Workforce Planning Board of Waterloo Wellington Dufferin and the YMCA Cambridge and the YMCA Kitchener-Waterloo.

O

Opportunities

What are our best possible future opportunities? What changes in demand can we expect in the future? What broader trends and policies may affect development and impact our aspirations?



Building on the strengths, the best possible future opportunities for the region are presented here. Workforce trends, changes in demand and external forces that impact the region’s workforce development are also identified.

- ❖ **There is a need for increased collaboration and coordinated efforts** that bring together economic development, workforce partners, and businesses to address the current and future labour force needs of local businesses. To support efforts, advocacy for the region and its priority sectors to provincial and federal partners is required.
- ❖ Coordinate between employers and employment service providers to understand their needs and develop appropriate responses. To **align skills needs**, sector-specific training programs, micro-credentials, upskilling opportunities, building career pathways, creating positive career campaigns for high-demand jobs and employment readiness programs were identified as critical.
- ❖ Opportunities exist to foster a **skills-first hiring environment** that enables businesses to target candidates based on new and dynamic skills requirements, rather than static job titles.
- ❖ A desire to promote manufacturing and agriculture-related **trades/mechanic programs** as a viable and attractive career opportunity was expressed by stakeholders. They also noted a better job can be done to educate job seekers and employees on the ‘realities’ of work, including shiftwork, on-the-job training, and work culture.
- ❖ **Advocate** to provincial and federal regulators for more comprehensive credential recognition and credential translation to support immigration.
- ❖ Workforce partners indicated a pressing need for enhanced efforts in **diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI)** in the Waterloo Region. To fully engage residents, it is imperative to ensure that DEI resources are readily available to businesses, recruitment policies are in place, and working groups or organizations are established to strengthen equal opportunities.
- ❖ **Reducing barriers to employment** is crucial for a fully engaged workforce. Support systems such as daycare, transit, affordable housing, well-being, and access to healthcare are essential for workforce engagement. Societal issues such as poverty, homelessness, addiction, and mental health need to be addressed to enable labour force participation for disadvantaged groups. Community support is essential to addressing these issues and facilitating positive change. Furthermore, adequate healthcare resources, including doctors, are required to ensure that all residents have access to medical care.

- ❖ The business community has identified an opportunity to expand the **tourism** sector within the Waterloo Region. Partnerships with Explore Waterloo Region present a unique opportunity to further support tourism product development.
- ❖ **To enhance economic competitiveness**, employers identified opportunities including easing development constraints, servicing employment lands, continuing to make downtown cores desirable and thriving places to work. Additionally, creating a diverse mix of new housing developments, growth of the regional airport, and expanding GO Transit services were identified.
- ❖ Waterloo region is uniquely positioned to **enhance quality of life, talent attraction and business growth value propositions and marketing messages**. Opportunity exists to consider its unique sense of place and quality of life, ideal post-graduate destination, arts and culture offerings and the Toronto-Waterloo Innovation Corridor as a brand and channel for investment. Opportunities also exist to collaborate with local organizations to host cultural events and festivals, encourage more foot traffic, and increase shopping and dining options.

A

Aspirations

What are we deeply passionate about and want to achieve? What difference do we hope to make for all?



Aspirations highlights the voice of the stakeholders, including the programs, strategies, and outcomes they are deeply passionate about and want to achieve and the difference they want to see for each player in the workforce ecosystem, including students, job seekers, employees and businesses.

- ❖ **Aligned sector-based talent pipeline:** Adjusting expectations of employers of needing to hire individuals with a traditional degree to instead hire and employ individuals who have the required skills and competencies for the expected work. This can increase the pool of individuals participating in the labour force across all groups, including the unemployed, under-employed, immigrant, and diverse and marginalized communities in the region who may have trouble in completing traditional requirements.
- ❖ **Favourable work environment:** Consider strategies to attract national (local, regional, and provincial) and international labour force and increase youth labour force participation. Businesses may benefit from well-defined career pathways, prioritize work-life balance, and offering flexibility in terms of work location, part-time and shift work, wages in line with industry standards, benefits, and retention bonuses, etc.
- ❖ **Diversity, equity and inclusion:** Addressing barriers to labour force participation among diverse and marginalized groups in the region is crucial.
- ❖ **Integrated workforce ecosystem:** All partners should have a clear understanding of their role in encouraging, supporting, and facilitating labour force planning for the region.
- ❖ **Supported and growing business community:** Establishing strong and ongoing collaboration with local businesses is important to ensure that programming, strategies, and decisions align with local business needs.
- ❖ **A stronger, diversified economy:** Build on sector-specific strengths, including manufacturing, professional, scientific, and technical services, and tourism sectors to focus economic diversification, increase job opportunities, higher economic growth potential, and attract more investments.

- ❖ **An investment-ready community:** Addressing land development and infrastructure servicing will increase land availability for industrial and commercial businesses and residential development.
- ❖ **Data-focused:** Enabling the understanding of current and future labour market needs and gaps between labour available and labour desired is essential.
- ❖ **An attractive place to live and thrive:** Many students within the region are reporting a desire to stay in the region post-graduation. Thriving and vibrant downtown and village cores should be developed to strengthen and expand local employment opportunities for youth, retail, and professional services. A focus on such areas as recreation amenities and livability will foster a place where young professionals and new Canadians choose to live and raise their families.
- ❖ **Be a global brand:** Coordinated efforts that promote Waterloo regions' story together including rural and urban strengths, talent availability and business investment.
- ❖ **Rural economic development:** The unique challenges and opportunities that exist within rural townships are recognized and addressed. By implementing programs reflecting the rural-urban divide, a more equitable and prosperous society is realized, where everyone can thrive and succeed.
- ❖ **Economic development programming with a demonstrated return on investment (ROI):** All economic development programming should demonstrate a ROI that is clearly understood and effectively communicated within the community and its leadership to promote community buy-in and commitment.

R

Risks

What challenges do we need to be aware of? How will we recognize and mitigate or eliminate potential risks?



Risks highlight the labour force and business challenges that partners and organizations need to be aware of and strategies to recognize and mitigate or eliminate potential risks to achieve the best possible future opportunities for the region.

- ❖ Labour force participation has still not recovered to pre-pandemic levels.¹³ An uneven reopening of the economy after the COVID-19 pandemic, combined with demographic factors and long-term changes in where people live and work, has contributed to the difficulty employers are experiencing in trying to find qualified candidates for open roles. It is likely that these **labour shortages** will continue to exist for the near future. This then puts pressure employment support organization who are working with clients with great needs.
- ❖ **Attracting and retaining talent** in the region has been difficult for employers. The Waterloo Region used to provide a more affordable option to live, but housing affordability and accessibility have decreased over recent years due to population growth. Newcomers often look to Toronto as a potential destination that offers a more diverse mix of housing options. Youth are looking to stay in the region post-graduation but are citing affordability and accessibility of housing as two quality of life factors that need the most improvement.
- ❖ **Wages** are not keeping up with inflation and the growing expenses of individuals and families. There is concern among stakeholders that this could make it more difficult to attract individuals and families from these communities. The lack of student employment opportunities and student's inability to earn wages impacts retention of this population segment.

¹³ Statistics Canada, Table 14-10-0385-01 Labour force characteristics, annual

- ❖ Service providers and support organizations indicate gaps in support from regional governments to **address wrap-around supports**, including daycare, transit, affordable housing, and access to healthcare. These can detract from the region's value proposition for both businesses and the workforce looking to move to the community.
- ❖ There is **insufficient availability and affordability of housing** in the Waterloo Region. There is an increased challenge in the housing market of rural communities compared to urban communities.
- ❖ There is **higher unemployment for minority groups** compared to the majority population. It is difficult for newcomers to network and connect with employers in the region, as many do not have established connections in the community.
- ❖ Service delivery providers are still noting **low levels of credential and skill recognition** from international residents by regulatory bodies, and there is not a clear path for newcomers to easily become recertified in Canada and the Waterloo Region.
- ❖ Organizations within the Waterloo Region are sometimes **fragmented** and do not collaborate when there are opportunities to share resources. The lack of collaboration between businesses and government is hindering growth in the Waterloo Region.
- ❖ The **lack of land** available for industrial use, the high cost of land and construction, in conjunction with high commercial vacancies due to the rise in working from home, means a rethink of what business attraction efforts should look like.
- ❖ There can be long **transportation** distances and commute times for employment, especially in the rural townships and villages. Young people are getting their driver's license at a decreasing rate, which lowers overall mobility of the population without sufficient public transportation.

R

Results

How we know we are succeeding? What are the key goals we would like to accomplish to achieve these results?



Results show how the region can succeed and the key goals that need to be accomplished to achieve these results.

- ❖ **Alignment of training programs to address skills and training gaps:** There is clear information that guides individuals through the process from training to employment.
- ❖ **Improved workforce retention:** Waterloo region has increased retention of trained individuals and graduates from local post-secondary institutions.
- ❖ **Diversity of talent pools, increased retention, and participation in the labour market:** To support an inclusive culture and diversity initiatives that support a more equitable workplace.
- ❖ **Targeted focus on generating high-quality jobs in the region:** There are additional high-quality jobs offered in the region.
- ❖ **Business growth:** Businesses have the needed land, facilities and supports to scale up within the region.
- ❖ **Increased regional tourism:** Waterloo region sees a substantial increase in tourism through an increased awareness of its assets and the development of new tourism opportunities.

- ❖ **Immigration hub within Canada:** Waterloo region has capitalized on the opportunity as a successful immigration hub, with a focus on aligning labour supply with labour needs among local businesses.
- ❖ **Stronger partnerships:** Partnerships that become established between workforce development and economic development support greater program alignment and outcomes that address the needs of businesses and residents.
- ❖ **Improved transit infrastructure:** Transit infrastructure is improved, including the GO Transit options, inter-regional connections to rural communities and an increase in airport connections to major Canadian and US cities.
- ❖ **High quality of life:** Waterloo region offers a high quality of life that is attracting and retaining business and talent.



Strategic Pillars for a Thriving Talent Ecosystem

The Talent Plan reflects the extensive research, analysis, and valuable input from stakeholders. Foundational components and strategic pillars have been validated and positioned to drive identification of specific objectives and tactical actions that will inform the implementation and monitoring stages that will follow.

Foundational Components for Success

The foundational components serve as key elements that form a broad framework for decision-making. These components represent core factors and a collective longer-term vision for talent attraction and retention in the Waterloo region. These foundational components will remain relatively stable throughout the plan's timeframe and will be addressed in conjunction with the strategic pillars.

Communicate and champion efforts to strengthen labour market support

The labour market in Waterloo region is made up of multiple stakeholders spanning workers, job seekers, students and other labour force participants, business and industry, intermediaries, education institutions and all levels of government. Select stakeholders often work independently to seek out solutions to identified labour supply and demand challenges, while others recognize the importance of a collective and collaborative effort. At the end of the day, the goal is consistent – achieving stronger alignment between talent and the jobs available by local business and industry. By the virtue of being a regional government, The Strategy Working Group is well positioned to be the central facilitator of the workforce ecosystem to ensure that residents are receiving the supports they require and that businesses have access to a pool of qualified individuals to hire. A key role in this facilitator capacity is to strengthen communication within and among the workforce ecosystem, and to determine other key players that may act as convenors.

Enable collaborative partnerships

Supporting partners in the region and creating an environment where collaboration is encouraged can support positive outcomes throughout the entire workforce ecosystem. Collaboration is encouraged when a common vision exists. Collectively, the Waterloo region workforce ecosystem is committed to strengthening the alignment of the local labour supply and labour demand, while promoting diverse, equitable and inclusive actions that leave no one out of the labour market, should they choose to participate.

Established partnerships support greater program alignment that address the current and future needs of businesses and residents and maximize resources and outcomes.

The Strategy Working Group can take a leading role in enabling partnerships and managing the collective vision in the region by committing to open information sharing. Sharing knowledge and information across the workforce ecosystem can foster new ways of thinking and bring creative ideas and tactics to the forefront to respond to current issues and to proactively plan for future challenges.

Partnerships within the workforce ecosystem should seek to understand barriers from all perspectives with an end goal of minimizing the workforce shortages currently being experienced in the region. Many partners in the region have already expressed their desire to move toward a skills-based approach in response to talent development, talent attraction, and talent retention.



Strategic Pillars

The strategic pillars, which were derived from the foundational components, provide a roadmap that outlines the priorities within this plan. They are tactical and operational in nature, offering specific actions and goals to be pursued. The strategic pillars are designed to guide the allocation of resources, initiatives, and actions within a specified timeframe.

Talent Attraction

Attracting new residents to participate in Waterloo region's labour market

The Waterloo region aims to attract and create high-quality jobs within its boundaries. This is supported by the high quality of life the region offers. By focusing on industries and sectors that offer high-value employment opportunities, the region can stimulate economic growth and provide its residents with access to fulfilling and well-compensated careers.

Talent Retention

Retaining employees and entrepreneurs in Waterloo region with opportunity

The Waterloo region seeks to enhance its workforce retention rates, particularly among trained individuals and graduates from local post-secondary institutions. By creating a supportive environment and providing opportunities for professional growth and development, the region aims to retain talented individuals within the local workforce.

Talent Readiness

The labour pool is ready and equipped with in-demand skills for employment

The Waterloo region aims to establish clear information and guidance for individuals, ensuring a smooth transition from training programs to employment. This alignment will help bridge existing skills and training gaps, ensuring that individuals are equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge demanded by the job market.

Talent Integration

Waterloo region is an inclusive community that connects with and supports one another

The Waterloo region is committed to fostering an inclusive culture and implementing diversity initiatives that promote a more equitable workplace. By actively supporting diversity and inclusion, the Waterloo region aims to attract and retain a diverse talent pool, ensuring that individuals from all backgrounds have equal opportunities to participate and succeed in the labour market.

Strategic Pillar: Talent Attraction

Motivation for improvement

Strengthening the availability of the labour force is of crucial importance in the region. This strategic pillar is directly related to talent attraction. The region, particularly the rural areas, has recognized challenges in attracting residents who are active participants in the labour market. While the region's overall growth has been consistent, the growth of rural municipalities has not kept up with their urban counterparts. This highlights the need for a reflective and common message that showcases the assets and quality factors of these areas.

A clearly stated value proposition is essential to support consistent communication that local employers can utilize in promoting their businesses and employment opportunities. These messages should include success stories of individuals who have chosen the region and highlight the assets that drew them to the area.

Reducing barriers to employment for historically vulnerable groups is another way to improve the availability of the labour force. These barriers include issues such as childcare, transportation, the cost of living, and advocating for the recognition of foreign education and credentials. In addition, recent announcements by the federal government regarding the cap on student permits for international undergraduate students will pose a significant challenge to the region. These students tend to work in jobs that serve the retail, food, and hospitality sectors, which are already struggling to meet their labour needs. A reduction in the number of international students will further exacerbate these labour constraints. In the short-term, while the cap is in place, the region can focus its talent attraction efforts within the province and in other regions of Canada. However, significant efforts should be made to ensure that housing and services for residents keeps up with the increasing demand.

Objectives

1. Define the Waterloo region's value proposition and create marketing materials to increase the attractiveness of the region to employers and potential employees.
2. Grow and diversify jobs in Waterloo region.
3. Improve labour participation of vulnerable groups, including Indigenous Peoples, women, visible minorities, youth and newcomers.
4. Assess the impact of the international student cap on the region's available labour force.

Outcome

The Waterloo region is recognized as a destination of choice known for offering a desired quality of life, a supportive environment, and an abundance of career opportunities.

Strategic Pillar: Talent Retention

Motivation for improvement

Demand for talent is competitive in most sectors across the province, nationally and globally. Validating those sectors facing greatest labour challenges and defining specifically the occupations that are most difficult to fill is essential to positioning the community competitively. Given the changing dynamics of the labour force and the influencing factors that contribute to their career decision making, it is imperative to position the Waterloo Region in a positive light that reflects the employment opportunities, local and regional assets that contribute to quality of life, and opportunities for career advancement. With the rise in remote work, individuals can increasingly choose where they prefer to live. Providing a high quality of life that is balanced with affordability can not only support the attraction of the workforce, but also the retention of the workforce that enables economic growth within the region. Adding to the quality of place is the importance of an inclusive and welcoming community that promotes diversity, equity and inclusion. This will take a coordinated effort between employers and employment service providers to understand needs and develop corresponding approaches to address the needs.

It will take a collective effort to depict what is needed to ensure that local talent have the desire to remain local. As the region is an attractor for immigration, a focus on what it means to be a welcoming community that creates opportunity for integration of newcomers, including those choosing to study in the region, is essential. Those who have a less established network than individuals born and raised in the region have less pull to the area and in many cases, are more likely to move elsewhere if they are unhappy with their quality of life and employment prospects. Equally important to directly supporting the residents in the region is supporting employers. Employers in the region need to be kept aware of the resources available to them and the current leading practices in employee retention and engagement. As with business retention, there is a greater return on investment to keep workers in the area as compared to the effort it takes to attract new workers.

Creating a positive experience is vital to retaining talent and to creating a positive desire to consider Waterloo region as a great place to live, work, and enjoy.

Objectives

1. Retain secondary and post-secondary graduates.
2. Support business talent retention efforts.
3. Improve wrap-around supports that help to increase participation in the labour market.

Outcome

The Waterloo region provides a positive experience for the labour force that actively promotes the retention of talent including graduates, newcomers, and those active in the labour market.

Strategic Pillar: Talent Readiness

Motivation for improvement

One of the key issues that emerged from interviews, workshop sessions, and research is the disconnect between the skills offered by local talent and their alignment, or lack thereof, with the local and regional economies. Furthermore, the Workforce Planning Board of Waterloo Wellington Dufferin has highlighted that many newcomers who come to the region are economic immigrants with education that may not align with the jobs in demand.¹⁴ To prepare the next generation of workers, it is essential to integrate work and learning. This involves addressing the skills gap through responsive and flexible learning channels and credentialing.

It is important to align the skills of the workforce with the current job market and future growth sectors. This begins with an evidence-based understanding of what sectors are growing and declining, what occupations are most relevant to those sectors, and how might displaced workers transition to areas of demand. This is in essence, the formula to identify where upskilling may benefit labour supply and demand alignment. This applies to workers at all skill levels and those who actively participate in the labour market. The foundation of a well-aligned labour market lies in ensuring that the skills, competencies, and abilities that employers are seeking are present in the workforce. When certain skills are lacking, the role of local post-secondary institutions and training providers becomes even more crucial. The readiness of talent to enter, transition, and build relevant skills that contribute to a community's competitiveness and attractiveness lies in labour market alignment. This requires a strong partnership and collaboration between educational institutions, trainers, and employers.

Employers possess a unique advantage when it comes to identifying the specific skills they require and identifying any gaps within the current labour force. On the other hand, educators have the capability to respond to these needs and generate avenues for skills development and upskilling. By collaborating, employers and educators can support workforce development in areas relevant to meet the talent demands of the regional economy. Furthermore, employers can play a pivotal role in providing experiential learning and on-the-job opportunities, supporting post-secondary institutions and training providers to connect potential talent with potential employment. Additionally, the utilization of micro-credentials as a skills development solution is worth consideration.

Objectives

1. Increase alignment of education and training with employer needs.
2. Strengthen partnerships with education providers to promote continuous experiential learning; soft skills development, and micro-credential programing focused on attaining skill(s) or competency(ies) based on industry needs.
3. Support workers in declining occupations transition into high-growth industry sectors.

Outcome

Waterloo region has alignment between in-demand skills and program offerings through local and regional training and education providers.

¹⁴ Workforce Planning Board of Waterloo Wellington Dufferin, Local Labour Market Plan 2023

Strategic Pillar: Talent Integration

Motivation for improvement

Waterloo region is one of the most diverse regions across Canada demonstrated by its demographic profile. The region's diversity is a significant strength as it promotes an inclusive community culture and enables innovative ideas to address complex problems locally, regionally, and beyond. Contributing to the diverse population is the world-class post-secondary institutions that attract students from around the world seeking to learn, graduate and begin their careers. The attraction of students has contributed to the number of newcomers who chose Waterloo region as their new home. With an influx in new residents in the region, it is essential that these individuals understand the support networks available in the region, promoting cultural and community connections.

Equally important to this pillar is supporting diversity, equity and inclusion in the workplace. This was important to partners and stakeholders throughout the engagement process. The Strategy Working Group and its partner organizations can promote leading practices for the workplace that meet the needs of both employers and employees and promote the development and retention of a diverse talent pool, that is inclusive, equitable, and engaged.

Objectives

1. Support the integration of the newcomer workforce.
2. Support diversity, equity, and integration initiatives in the workplace.

Outcome

Talent retention, attraction and readiness are supported by partnerships across the ecosystem that utilizes accessible data and information to aligns the region's workforce ecosystem.



Action Plan

The actions outlined in this section have emerged through comprehensive research of primary and secondary data and an expansive consultation process. The actions are a starting point (and not presented in any priority sequence) based on input and research at a point in time. It is by no means an exhaustive list, as it is recognized that current actions are in motion, and new actions will emerge based on influencing factors within the region.

Reading the Action Plan

Actions

The direction the Region, its partners, and ecosystem stakeholders will undertake to address the essential issues or opportunities that emerged as key areas of focus through the strategy development.

Potential Role

A collective discussion among the workforce ecosystem would be an appropriate step when assigning leads and collaborators to specific actions. Identifying roles for organizations benefits from an active dialogue amongst partners to best align activities with existing mandates, planned initiatives, and available resources.

Priority

The priority of each action has been identified a time period in which the action should be implemented. Priorities are designated as follows:



Short term (1-2 years)











Medium term (3-4 years)

















Long-term (5+ years)

It is important to take into consideration changes in the economy and the region, as this may shift timelines for implementation.



Strategic Pillar: Talent Attraction		
#	Tactics	Priority
Objective 1.1: Define the Waterloo region’s value proposition and create marketing materials to increase the attractiveness of the region		
1.1.1	Establish a working group to develop a compelling talent attraction value proposition and brand for the region. This brand should highlight the unique opportunities and advantages of the area, showcasing it as an attractive destination for workers. The working group should include representatives from the economic development offices, the Workforce Planning Board of Waterloo Wellington Dufferin, and other relevant stakeholders.	
1.1.2	Develop a communications plan to promote the Talent Plan, its benefits to the stakeholders and the broader region. Use this communications plan to equip local businesses and sector organizations with the information and messaging they can use to “sell” the region by leveraging regional brand.	
1.1.3	Explore opportunity to build a "Move to Waterloo" webpage that targets talent attraction. The webpage may align with the " New to Waterloo " site and address information gaps that are most relevant to those seeking education opportunities, special interests community organizations and supports, places of worship, transportation networks, neighborhood details, and links to job opportunities.	
1.1.4	Promote the "Move to Waterloo" brand in key target markets, both domestically and internationally, by utilizing targeted social media advertising to reach specific age groups and desired profiles (e.g., LinkedIn).	
Objective 1.2: Grow and diversify jobs in Waterloo region		
1.2.1	Assist employers with business expansion to create jobs in collaboration with local economic development offices. Conduct direct employer outreach through an annual (or semi-annual) survey to local businesses to capture their input on projected labour demand over 12, 24, and 36 months. This survey should be coordinated among organizations seeking employer input to minimize survey outreach initiatives and strengthen employer participation. One way to avoid survey fatigue would be through integrating this action into the ongoing EmployerONE survey.	
1.2.2	Leverage existing partnerships to support local businesses needs and improve networks to strengthen and diversify local supply chains.	
1.2.3	Integrate relevant actions of the (WREDS) into departmental business plan to drive implementation.	
Objective 1.3: Improve labour participation with a focus on equity-deserving groups		
1.3.1	Identify and integrate organizations that support vulnerable populations, immigration, and social support in the region in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of workforce system practices. This can be achieved by inviting representatives from these organizations to participate in relevant meetings, working groups, and decision-making processes. These may include non-profit organizations, community centers, advocacy groups, or government agencies.	









Strategic Pillar: Talent Attraction		
#	Tactics	Priority
1.3.2	Work with regional school districts to increase student awareness of local and regional career pathways in key growth sectors.	
1.3.3	Explore the inclusion of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) considerations across all attraction and retention efforts.	
1.3.4	Maintain engagement and support for Indigenous-led organizations to develop targeted programs that aim to increase Indigenous youth participation in the labour market.	
Objective 1.4: Assess the impact of international students caps in the region’s labour force		
1.4.1	Conduct an economic impact assessment of the potential impact on undergraduate international student gaps in the region.	
1.4.2	Gather and analyze enrollment and graduation data across all educational institutions to inform integrated planning, talent supply and demand alignment.	
Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participation rates and unemployment rates for vulnerable groups. • Number of survey respondents per year or increase in the numbers of existing business surveys. • Number of childcare spaces created. • Number of connections & outcomes with First Nations representatives and organizations. 		






Strategic Pillar: Talent Retention		
#	Tactics	Priority
Objective 2.1: Retain secondary and post-secondary graduates		
2.1.1	Host sectoral employer panels on PSI campuses to bring together employers and graduating students to showcase career opportunities available in the region.	
2.1.2	Promote knowledge exchange among employers and PSIs to communicate skills requirements for existing work opportunities and employer expectations currently and anticipated future demand.	
2.1.3	Develop cultural programming, events, or peer networks that connect international and domestic students to each other that support the development of peer networks in the region that promote Waterloo region as the place to live and work.	
Objective 2.2: Support business talent retention efforts		
2.2.1	Develop a “best and promising practices information resource” that showcases hiring practices that consider and promote inclusion, diversity, and a welcoming workplace.	
2.2.2	Communicate directly with businesses and economic development partners to share leading practices of workforce retention and recruitment. This ensures that businesses can receive the same information from across the ecosystem	
Objective 2.3: Improve wrap-around supports that help to increase participation in the labour market		
2.3.1	Advocate to the Provincial and Federal governments for transit infrastructure improvements that support the inter-regional connections of the urban and rural areas in the region. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advocate for improved GO transit options that operate for more of the day. Advocate for increased connections to major Canadian and US cities from the Strategy Working Group International Airport. 	
2.3.2	Advocate for and invest in the creation and expansion of additional childcare spaces within the region. Connect with major employers within the region to create joint childcare spaces in their facilities to support their workforce.	
2.3.3	Support post-secondary initiatives to increase the number of Certified Early Childhood Educators (ECEs) and childcare workers in the region.	
2.3.4	Develop marketing campaign that centres on the attraction of professionals working in the healthcare sector. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote the quality of life and the lifestyle that the region provides to professionals. Focus the campaign on those who have previously lived in the region as the barrier to attract them will be lower than those new to the region. 	






Strategic Pillar: Talent Retention

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

- Number of students who find employment in Waterloo region after graduation.
- Number of new childcare spaces in the region.
- Number of employers who collaborate on PSI campuses to highlight opportunities.
- Number of new health care professionals working within the region.

Strategic Pillar: Talent Readiness		
#	Tactics	Priority
Objective 3.1: Increase alignment of education programming and training with employer attraction needs		
3.1.1	Facilitate access to labour market information tools to continuously track changes in the labour market demand trends and keep regional PSI informed about occupational and skills needs (e.g., Vicinity Jobs).	
3.1.2	Disseminate knowledge and local labour market intelligence among educators and personnel involved in career development discussions with students.	
3.1.3	Create career pathway profiles for high-growth occupations and target sectors. These pathways should be created in collaboration with employers and focus on education/training requirements, competencies, capabilities, and skills. They should also emphasize the transferable skills that can be applied across distinct roles or industries.	
3.1.4	Increase awareness of career pathways for displaced workers to transition from declining and low demand occupations into high-growth occupations in target sectors.	
3.1.5	Support displaced workers to transition to occupations in economic growth sectors. Use regional economic development strategic efforts as an opportunity to target those sectors where transferrable skills are relevant.	
3.1.6	Capture employer input regarding changing job requirements and skills needs to inform training program development. This can help to inform on micro-credentials, shorter-term training programs, and higher-education learning needs.	
Objective 3.2: Strengthen partnerships with education providers to promote continuous experiential learning; micro-credential programming focused on attaining skill(s) or competency(ies) based on industry needs; and soft skills training programs.		
3.2.1	<p>Collaborate with regional PSIs, workforce organizations, employment services, and employers to explore the feasibility of implementing occupation-based programming.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These programs can be designed to provide a hybrid teaching environment, combining on-the-job training and classroom instruction. • By offering micro-credentials or skill-based training, participants can acquire the necessary skills and knowledge to excel in their chosen occupation. • These programs can also be structured to build towards a proper certification, providing individuals with a recognized credential to enhance their employability. 	
3.2.2	Continue to promote experiential work term opportunities (internships, co-ops, apprenticeships) with local businesses to increase participation and career awareness for local secondary and post-secondary students.	

Strategic Pillar: Talent Readiness		
#	Tactics	Priority
3.2.3	Explore the Federal Sectoral Workforce Solutions Program for the reskilling, upskilling, and transition of workers into high-demand occupations and target sectors.	
3.2.4	Host workshops/round tables with labour force support partners to identify opportunities for collaboration, promote knowledge sharing to reduce program duplication, and enhance service delivery.	
3.2.5	Promote hiring and training supports to local employers to help them continue to attract local talent. E.g., Canada-Ontario Job Grant , Youth Job Connection Summer , and the Innovative Work-Integrated Learning Initiative , among others.	
3.2.6	Promote and collaborate with national organizations such as Palette Skills to promote and coordinate additional supports available to Waterloo region employers.	
Objective 3.3: Advocate for increased credential recognition for newcomers		
3.3.1	<p>Advocate for the recognition of international experience and qualifications. This can be achieved by studying the feasibility of implementing an evaluation system for international credentials.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> By establishing such a system, we can facilitate the smooth integration of migrant workers into the workforce by providing a fair and transparent process for assessing their qualifications. <p>This evaluation would help employers and relevant authorities understand the value and equivalency of international credentials, enabling them to make informed decisions regarding employment and professional opportunities for migrant workers.</p>	
Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of education partnerships fostered. Conversion rate of experiential work term opportunities into full-time employment. Number of workshops/roundtables hosted. Number of clients served through upskilling programming. Number of businesses/organizations accessing LMI information. 		

Strategic Pillar: Talent Integration		
#	Tactics	Priority
Objective 4.1: Support the integration of the newcomer workforce in skills aligned occupations		
4.1.1	Maximize resources and leverage networks to increase the Strategy Working Group’s capacity to address local labour force needs by working in collaboration with the Workforce Planning Board of Waterloo Wellington Dufferin and the Workplace Immigrant Network (WIN).	
4.1.2	Support Workplace Immigrant Network through direct employer connections to strengthen the network and link newcomers to employers.	
Objective 4.2: Support equity, diversity, and integration initiatives in the workplace		
4.2.1	Connect with cultural groups across the region to develop EDI practices that can be implemented by businesses to support their diverse workforce and create and inclusionary environment.	
4.2.2	Share the developed EDI practices with employers across the region and ensure that resources are available on the Region of Waterloo’s website.	
4.2.3	Highlight best practices of local employers by sharing their story on the regional website.	
Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduction in time that newcomers are seeking employment in the region. • Number of businesses who have implemented DEI measures. 		



Achieving Excellence: Executing for Optimal Results

Implementing the objectives and actions contained in this talent plan requires a collaborative approach that promotes collective impact towards a shared vision. To achieve successful labour market alignment will take desire, a boldness to push boundaries, and dedicated effort of all in the workforce ecosystem to be accountable.

Achieving Excellence

To achieve successful implementation, the Strategy Working Group needs to consider the following:

- Leadership and commitment provided by the Strategy Working Group that clarifies roles of partners and develops a shared commitment and buy-in from workforce ecosystem stakeholders including education and training institutions, workforce partners and intermediaries, employers, and municipal, provincial, and the federal government.
- Working partnerships among the workforce ecosystem stakeholders that supports and advances the implementation of the talent plan through collaboration, knowledge sharing, and working toward a common goal.
- Ongoing coordination and monitoring of initiatives, key performance indicators, and the talent plans overall impact on the workforce ecosystem.
- Procure additional funding to implement strategic initiatives that have been outlined in this talent plan.

Workforce ecosystem partners all have a role in supporting the labour market in the Waterloo region. A partner's specific role will of course depend on their service offerings and their current mandate. Below is a list of primary partners who have a role to play in implementation of the talent plan.

- University of Waterloo
- Wilfred Laurier University
- Conestoga College
- Workforce Planning Board of Waterloo Wellington Dufferin
- Immigration Partnership
- Waterloo EDC
- YMCA of Three Rivers
- Employment and social services in the region (e.g., Lutherwood Employment Services, The Working Centre)
- Economic Development Offices of regional municipalities

The workforce ecosystem in Waterloo region has a strong collection of partners from which expertise and experience can be shared. It is vital to utilize connections within the ecosystem to further develop a 'strength in numbers' approach as opposed to taking on challenges singlehandedly without engaging in the resources available. It is essential for partners to utilize the strengths of the workforce ecosystem to prevent duplication of work and maximize the impact of local and regional initiatives. Sharing opportunities and information between partners can support increasingly positive impacts on the local labour market and further highlight the unique advantages of Waterloo region.

Monitoring progress of this talent plan and future actions identified is crucial to this plan's overall success. Keeping track of actions and their status internally and with partners creates a sense of accountability and can identify areas where additional resources are required for successful implementation. This process of continuous improvement and keeping the region and its partners accountable will support the Strategy Working Group in creating an environment that is attractive to new talent and creates a sense of belonging from newcomers.

While actions identified in this talent plan identify initial desired outcomes, ongoing future conversations with partners will almost certainly uncover new actions that should be taken in conjunction with this plan. In the spirit of a culture of continuous improvement, new goals and actions should be actionable and have a clear outline of what success looks like. This includes setting specific benchmarks and identifying the required resources to bring the desired outcome to fruition.

Disclaimer

This report was provided to inform the Waterloo Region Talent Attraction, Retention and Reskilling Plan. Deloitte does not assume any responsibility or liability for losses incurred by any party because of the circulation, publication, reproduction, or use of this report contrary to its intended purpose. This report has been made only for the purpose stated and shall not be used for any other purpose. Neither this report (including references to it) nor any portions thereof (including without limitation the identity of Deloitte or any individuals signing or associated with this report, or the professional associations or organizations with which they are affiliated) shall be disseminated to third parties by any means or included in any document without the prior written consent and approval of Deloitte.

Our report and work product cannot be included, or referred to, in any public or investment document without the prior consent of Deloitte LLP. The analyses are provided as of February 2024 and we disclaim any undertaking or obligation to advise any person of any change in any fact or matter affecting this analysis, which may come or be brought to our attention after the date hereof. Without limiting the foregoing, if there is any material change in any fact or matter affecting the analyses after the date hereof, we reserve the right to change, modify or withdraw the analysis.

Observations are made based on economic, industrial, competitive and general business conditions prevailing as at the date hereof. In the analyses, we may have made assumptions with respect to the industry performance, general business and economic conditions and other matters, many of which are beyond our control, including government and industry regulation. No opinion, counsel, or interpretation is intended in matters that require legal or other appropriate professional advice. It is assumed that such opinion, counsel, or interpretations have been, or will be, obtained from the appropriate professional sources. To the extent that there are legal issues relating to compliance with applicable laws, regulations and policies, we assume no responsibility, therefore. We believe that our analyses must be considered as a whole and that selecting portions of the analyses, or the factors considered by it, without considering all factors and analyses together, could create a misleading view of the issues related to the report. Amendment of any of the assumptions identified throughout this report could have a material impact on our analysis contained herein. Should any of the major assumptions not be accurate or should any of the information provided to us not be factual or correct, our analyses, as expressed in this report, could be significantly different.

© Deloitte LLP and affiliated entities.



www.deloitte.ca

About Deloitte

Deloitte provides audit and assurance, consulting, financial advisory, risk advisory, tax, and related services to public and private clients spanning multiple industries. Deloitte serves four out of five Fortune Global 500® companies through a globally connected network of member firms in more than 150 countries and territories bringing world-class capabilities, insights, and service to address clients' most complex business challenges. Deloitte LLP, an Ontario limited liability partnership, is the Canadian member firm of Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu Limited. Deloitte refers to one or more of Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu Limited, a UK private company limited by guarantee, and its network of member firms, each of which is a legally separate and independent entity. Please see www.deloitte.com/about for a detailed description of the legal structure of Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu Limited and its member firms.

Our global Purpose is making an impact that matters. At Deloitte Canada, that translates into building a better future by accelerating and expanding access to knowledge. We believe we can achieve this Purpose by living our shared values to lead the way, serve with integrity, take care of each other, foster inclusion, and collaborate for measurable impact.

To learn more about Deloitte's approximately 330,000 professionals, over 11,000 of whom are part of the Canadian firm, please connect with us on [LinkedIn](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#), or [Facebook](#).