



# **EMPOWERING THE ENVIRONMENTAL WORKFORCE IN CANADA**

FEBRUARY 2024

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Environmental Careers Organization (ECO Canada) is a not-for-profit corporation established in 1992 as part of Canada's Sector Council Initiative. ECO Canada is focused on identifying, communicating, and meeting the needs of environmental practitioners, employers, educators, and students. Its vision is to build the world's leading environmental workforce.

ECO Canada has supported Canada's environmental workforce by establishing professional development resources, training programs and educational partnerships, conducting in-depth labour market research and providing the largest industry-specific job board.

ECO Canada's programs and services are developed through strong national partnerships, consultative strategic planning, and ongoing labour market research. Its labour market research provides valuable insights into environmental career trends, which can be used by governments, educators, youth, and industry partners to make decisions and formulate strategies. To learn more, please visit [www.eco.ca](http://www.eco.ca)

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS:

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The opinions and interpretations in this publication are ECO Canada's and do not necessarily reflect those held by the Government of Canada.

## CONTEXT

This report synthesizes the outcomes of a collaborative brainstorming workforce strategy session held on February 9th, 2024, focusing on bolstering awareness and attraction towards environmental and sustainability careers.

The workshop convened a diverse group of 27 participants, including representatives from small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and large enterprises. The discussions revolved around key themes such as enhancing diversity and inclusion, educational engagement, industry collaboration, and addressing barriers to entry. Through exploration, ideation, and assessment, the participants identified innovative solutions to vital challenges in the environmental sector. These solutions ranged from improving entry pathways and leveraging interactive awareness initiatives to developing targeted recruitment strategies for underrepresented demographics. The report further outlines a strategic roadmap prioritizing actionable strategies to foster talent attraction and retention within the environmental workforce.



# DEVELOPING A TALENT STRATEGY

## Our purpose:

Gather your insights to help ECO Canada to build a "green" talent attraction strategy outlining how to improve:

1.



Awareness and perception  
of environmental and  
sustainability careers  
(current and emerging)

2.



Diversity and inclusion –  
includes reducing other  
barriers to entry

3.



Educational engagement  
and alignment

4.



Industry collaboration  
for a unified approach  
to talent attraction

# AGENDA

1.



**LEVEL SETTING:**

Creating a shared understanding of factors and issues that frame the imperative to boost environmental career attraction and awareness

2.



**EXPLORATION & IDEATION:**

Solutions and actions that have been taken by ECO Canada and industry with a focus on what's working, what needs a refresh and what we have yet to consider

3.



**ASSESSING:**

Evaluating the outputs of our exploration and ideation for feasibility, overall impact, alignment with Perception Survey insights, potential barriers, etc

4.



**BUILDING A ROADMAP:**

Leveraging our assessments to build a strategy to increase the effectiveness of environmental career awareness and attraction activities

## FROM YOUR PERSPECTIVE...

“

What's working?

“

What could be improved?

“

What else needs to be done?



# WHAT'S WORKING?

## Participant Feedback

- ECO Canada is creating avenues for new Canadians to network
- Sector has developed a good reputation that helps attract talent
- Sense of climate urgency being created is spurring innovation and experimentation in the sector
- Employee referrals are a great recruitment tool
- Availability of education to qualify for opportunities in the sector
- Media coverage of climate issues is creating a sense of urgency
- Strong Partnerships
  - Post secondary
  - Industry
  - First Nations programs
- Multitude of avenues to increase awareness:
  - Education
  - Networking
  - Documentaries
  - Exposure to environmental professionals



# WHAT NEEDS IMPROVEMENT

## Participant Feedback

- Improve leadership development to increase their skills in retaining talent
- Broaden recruitment practices
  - Adapt application and interview methods to accommodate applicants with disabilities; increases access and appeal to wider talent pool
- Work with stakeholders to align / recognize credentials to work in the sector opportunities in the sector
- Greater diversity in leadership – people want to “see themselves” in leadership ranks
- Outline pathways into the sector- conventional and unconventional
- Involve youth more directly
  - Conduct perception surveys for youth audiences
- Offer retraining and upskilling to facilitate transition to environmental industry
- Increase wage subsidies and provide support to “interns” to improve retention in sector
- Improve transition into the sector by prioritizing foundational skills in recruitment supplemented by on-the-job training to upskill





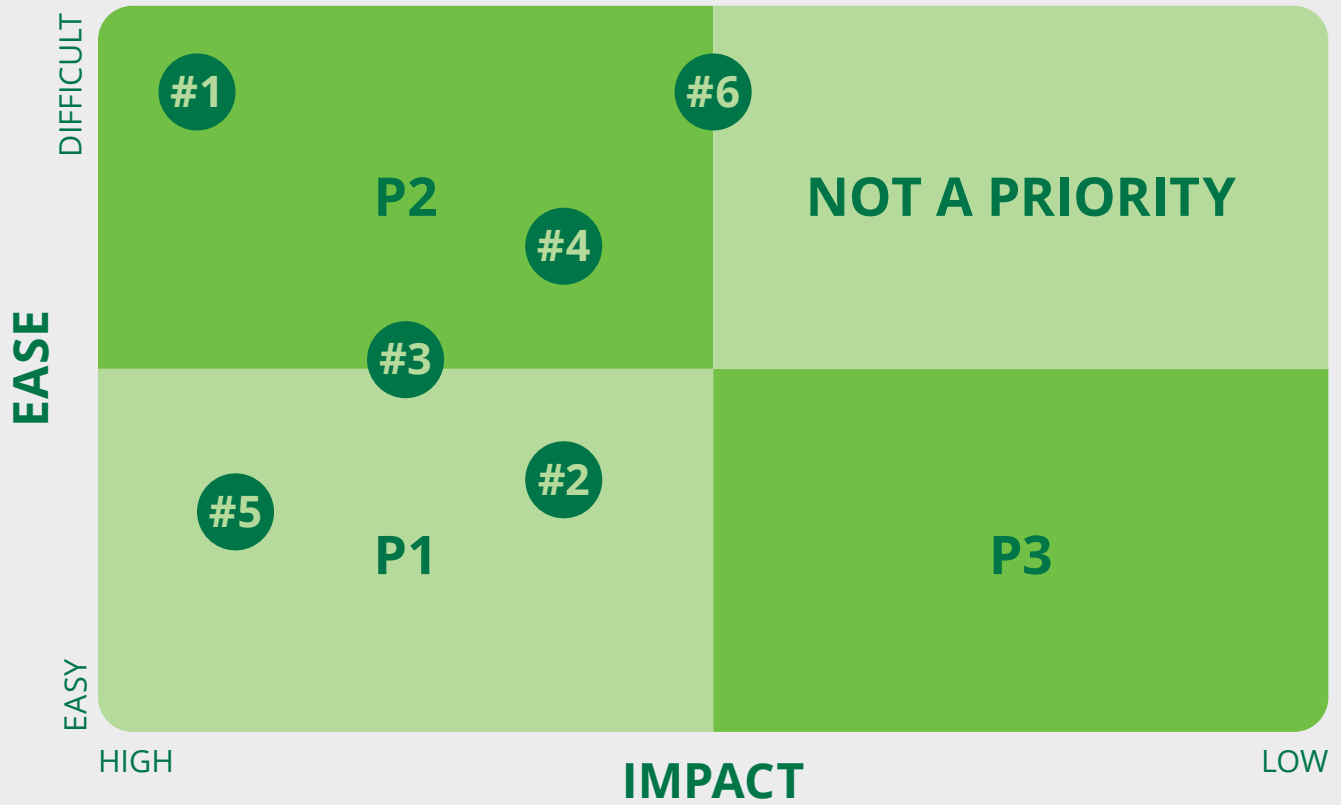
# NEW IDEAS AND SOLUTIONS

Solutions  Most necessary; address critical issues or opportunities and with higher consequences of inaction	Addressing Opportunities and Barriers			
	Lack of Interest in Sector	Limited Availability of Skills/Talent	Greater Diversification of Talent Pools	Other Sector Competition from Other Sectors for Skills
<p><b>Solution #1- Improve entry into the sector.</b> Develop reasonable expectations for credentials &amp; years of experience required. Is PSE really needed or are skills for the job more important? Build educational programs that provide hands-on experience directly related to industry skill needs. E.g. Capstone projects, work-integrated learning. Spotlight role of colleges in providing hands-on learning. Work with industry &amp; professional associations to recognize skills and credentials not just PSE. Outline needs for specific education disciplines in sectors.</p>	●	●	●	●
<p><b>Solution #2- Leverage opportunities to make sector more appealing and approachable.</b> Build interactive and accessible awareness games – incorporating fun and play - to generate interest in the sector. E.g. Disney/cartoon short films highlighting jobs and skills, gamification (VR/AR), design challenges, programming in Science Centres, cooperative board games. Market to schools.</p>		●	●	●
<p><b>Solution # 3 – Develop targeted recruitment strategies for audiences including persons with disabilities.</b> Develop partnerships with agencies (e.g. CASE) to tap into under-represented talent pools. Evaluate skill requirements and gaps, training and accommodations needed. Understand and address biases and fears of employers and support they need.</p>	●	●		●

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<b>Solution # 4 - Engage potential talent earlier.</b> Introduce environmental sector and careers to younger students–elementary to high school. Provide opportunities for land-based learning integrated into curriculum. E.g., Nature-based learning outdoors, field trips, partner with STEM and charter schools.	●	●		●
<b>Solution #5 - Re-imagine exit strategies</b> - Rethink and plan for attrition due to retirement. Develop ways to retain knowledge and skills of retirees and engage them as industry advocates and mentors. Understanding competencies required to do the job will help to build the talent pipeline and ease the transition of workers with attrition.		●		●
<b>Solution #6 - Take steps to better understand the audience</b> - Identify the talent we want to attract. Engage them to understand their needs: “Nothing about us without us!” What do they value? How we we appeal to them? What are the barriers to entry? Conduct targeted surveys or focus groups. Tailor marketing to audience needs.	●	●	●	●

# STRATEGY PRIORITY MATRIX



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# PRIORITY 1

**RELATIVELY EASY  
TO IMPLEMENT**

**RELATIVELY HIGH  
IMPACTFUL**

## **#2. LEVERAGE OPPORTUNITIES TO MAKE SECTOR MORE APPEALING AND APPROACHABLE.**

Generating tactics such as online games, gamifying training, or other such initiatives do not require large stakeholder engagement and thus are relatively easy to implement.

Impact could be greater broad-based stakeholders adopt initiatives to generate interests with prospective talent pools.

## **#3. DEVELOP AUDIENCE SPECIFIC RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES**

Recruitment strategies are currently within the purview of employers however, what makes this solution a little more difficult are the mechanisms employed to get to know the audience- i.e. surveys, benchmarking, etc.

The potential impact is important because it could enable tapping into under-represented demographics.

## **#5. RE-IMAGINE EXIT STRATEGIES**

Talent strategies are currently within the purview of employers as are program design and implementation. Designing new programs would only depend on generating innovative ideas.

Given the projected exodus of talent, the possibility of retaining skilled people could have significant impact to meeting talent demands.

# PRIORITY 2

**MODERATE TO  
DIFFICULT TO  
IMPLEMENT**

**RELATIVELY HIGH  
IMPACTFUL**

## **#1. IMPROVE ENTRY INTO THE SECTOR**

There are many examples of potential entry barriers that prospective employees face. Addressing many of these involves collaboration, coordination with many stakeholders increasing the difficulty of implementing many of the ideas suggested to improve entry into the sector.

Improving entry could help reach some of the under-represented talent pools.

## **#4. ENGAGE POTENTIAL TALENT EARLIER**

ECO Canada 2023 perception survey indicated that youth were generally interested in the environmental sector and green jobs. The challenge engaging younger involves managing many different stakeholders and the time it takes to implement new province/ national policies.

The impact could be significant since the talent pool is still emerging and “up for grabs”.

## **#6. TAKE STEPS TO BETTER UNDERSTAND THE AUDIENCE**

The tactics associated with getting to know the targeted audience/ talent pools could be time consuming and complex to execute. In addition, there have already been surveys conducted and data is available. Data generated from surveys and other feedback channels can be used to develop action plans.

Data pertaining to specific audiences could help employers design and implement action plans that target specific talent pools in an impactful manner.

# WORKSHOP THEMES

1.



## LEADERSHIP

Regardless of sector and/or job types, leaders are the single most important factor to attract and retain talent. Current toolkits help build leadership skills, but participants felt more could be done and certainly more is required to increase diversity and skills amongst leadership ranks.

2.



## EDUCATION, CREDENTIALS & CAREER PATHWAYS

There are existing programs to support new entrants into green jobs and that are viewed as working well. There are opportunities to outline pathways, reinforce importance of hands-on skills and reduce credential creep to overcome barriers to entry.

3.



## YOUTH

ECO Canada's 2023 perception survey confirms that youth are the demographic most interested in environmental issues and jobs. Workshop participants support this view and made several suggestions to develop programs and initiatives to appeal to a younger audience.

4.



## DIVERSITY

Whether through recruitment, leadership development, or recognizing credentials, participants' feedback pointed to a need to increase diversity in the sector.

# POTENTIAL ACTIONS

## DEVELOP/ ENHANCE RECRUITMENT TOOLKIT(S)

Update or create net-new toolkits to support employers find effective, creative ways to reach talent and increase diversity.

- Feature traditional sourcing and more novel approaches (agencies, etc.)
- Develop guidelines for employee referral programs
- Flag agencies that support diversity hires
- Ensure toolkits are suited to broad audiences and sectors.

## ENVIRONMENTAL YOUTH EXPO & COMPETITION

Generate interest in the sector in a fun and visible manner.

- Partner with existing nationally recognized agencies (e.g. Canada Wide Science Fair) to recognize and award youth projects that highlight environmental issues, innovation, etc.

## RETENTION TOOLKITS

Update or develop new toolkits to support employers who risk losing talent due to retirements.

- Tips to create an advisory board
- Guidelines to create purposeful mentoring and ambassador programs
- Sponsor work-integrated-learning programs
- Ensure toolkits are suited to broad audiences and sectors.

## PILOT AN INTERNSHIP FRAMEWORK

Interest in the sector is greater among those who have worked In/or volunteered in it. To increase exposure and generate greater interest in the sector, ECO could supplement their wage funding programs to provide additional support to employers. For example, developing a framework for them to use to implement a paid internship program in their organizations to enhance attraction to the sector.

## BROAD AD CAMPAIGN(S) TO INCREASE AWARENESS OF JOBS

Target those who would not typically seek out information about the sector.

- Much like other sectors (military) who are fighting for talent and having to educate on the wide variety of jobs in the sector, launch ad campaign target to “captive audiences” (where they simply can’t change the channel); e.g. movie theatres
- Booths at “gate-keeper” and hiring events: employment counsellor conferences, teachers’ conventions, job fairs, etc.

## DEMONSTRATE LINKAGES BETWEEN ENVIRONMENTAL JOBS AND SUSTAINABILITY GOALS

Leverage goals in Canadian Sustainable Jobs Action Plan (expected release is 2025).



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