

# TOWARD A MODERNIZED YOUTH EMPLOYMENT STRATEGY BENEFITTING ALL CANADIAN YOUTH

CONSULTATION REPORT SUBMITTED TO  
EMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT CANADA

JANUARY 2019



**AXTRA**

Alliance des  
centres-conseils  
en emploi

## AXTRA | ALLIANCE DES CENTRES-CONSEILS EN EMPLOI

AXTRA, the Alliance des centres-conseils en emploi [Alliance of Employment and Career Centres] has been a legally constituted not-for-profit (NFP) organization since February 13, 1987. The Alliance consists of 91 members in 16 of Quebec's 17 administrative regions. It also works with an extensive network of partners provincially, nationally and internationally.

### **Mission**

AXTRA's mission is to bring together and support employment and career centres to promote the integration of all Quebecers in the labour force.

### **Vision**

As a leader in the employability sector, the Alliance is a community-based, innovative and recognized network that strives to build the organizational capacity and engagement of its members to enable them to carry out their employability roles fully and adapt their practices to changes in the labour market and the new realities of communities.

### **Values**

AXTRA is built on the values of social justice, equality, equity and respect. It advocates bottom-up leadership that is inclusive and visionary. Its approach is welcoming, open and respectful of differences. It is also based on extensive knowledge of the issues and needs of the community.

### **An undeniable impact on society**

AXTRA's 91 member employment and career centres serve a clientele of over 80,000 individuals each year, making it the largest employability group in Quebec. The Alliance's members manage budgets totalling more than \$80M and employ more than 1,500 professionals. Their impact on communities is considerable and the programs they implement have significant benefits for its varied clientele (youth, immigrants, persons with criminal records, Indigenous peoples, older workers, persons with substance abuse issues, etc.) as well as all of society.



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## SUMMARY OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS

### > Recommendation 1

Increase and ensure the sustainability of employability development measures to engage and address the needs of youth more distant from the labour market.

### > Recommendation 2

Adjust the length and type of support based on the profile of each young person to promote job retention.

### > Recommendation 3

Ensure that employability services are accessible to all youth who require assistance, regardless of their income level or employment status.

### > Recommendation 4

Support and develop services with a global approach by facilitating the creation of bridges between the employment, education, and health and social services sectors.

### > Recommendation 5

Recognize the specialized expertise, significant economic impact and positive contribution of the services offered by employment and career centres by providing them with adequate funding and limiting the multiplication of new players.

### > Recommendation 6

Fund outreach activities and the development and maintenance of significant partnerships with local employers as part of all youth employment programs.

### > Recommendation 7

Enhance employer support services by authorizing the monitoring of youth who are already employed or recently hired in order to address retention problems experienced by employers.



> **Recommendation 8**

Allow greater flexibility in youth employment assistance programs and service agreements with employability organizations.

> **Recommendation 9**

Include intermediate and qualitative objectives in the results targets for youth employment programs that reflect their degree of remoteness from the workforce.

> **Recommendation 10**

Reduce the time for processing applications and ensure regular follow-ups with the lead organization to keep it informed about the progress of the file.

> **Recommendation 11**

Simplify and optimize the reporting process to make it as effective and efficient as possible.



## INTRODUCTION

In an economic context where there is a labour shortage in several sectors of activity, combined with a constant need for innovation to respond to rapid technological, socio-cultural and demographic changes, Canada's labour market is in need of all its workers more than ever before. Federal, provincial and territorial governments must therefore promote the integration in sustainable employment of under-represented individuals in the workforce, including members of Indigenous communities, people with a disability and youth with little schooling, marginalized or with mental health problems.

As part of its efforts to modernize the Youth Employment Strategy (YES), the federal Department of Employment and Social Development consulted AXTRA and its member organizations in December 2018. A number of topics and recommendations emerged from those discussions that could improve the delivery of employment services for Canadian youth, including:

- > Services accessible to all youth;
- > A continuum of services with a global approach;
- > The engagement of employers;
- > Program flexibility;
- > More appropriate results indicators;
- > Efficient processes for project applications and reporting.

This report presents the main observations and recommendations made by the employment and career centres present at that meeting, as well as from an online consultation of all AXTRA members. In total, more than 20 organizations working with youth participated in this Quebec consultation.<sup>1</sup> As a result, this document reflects the experience and expertise of the Alliance's members—organizations rooted in their communities that are familiar with the challenges experienced by youth, including those more distant from the labour market.

Before presenting the main topics that were discussed, it is important to provide a brief overview of some of the challenges and issues affecting youth and the organizations providing employment assistance services in Quebec.

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<sup>1</sup> See the list of participating organizations in Appendix I.

## CHALLENGES AND ISSUES IN QUEBEC

While not exhaustive, this section covers the main challenges and issues experienced by Quebec youth in seeking employment, as well as by the employment and career centres that support them in their efforts.

### For youth

Given the labour shortage in several sectors in Quebec, it is becoming easier for youth to find work that requires few qualifications. However, this easy access to the labour market does not mean that youth are ready to integrate into and retain a job, primarily because of their lack of basic skills and knowledge. Many youth with academic or economic difficulties will also choose to abandon their education before graduating in order to earn money. This lack of preparation, sometimes combined with incomplete schooling or uncontrolled personal problems, often results in a **rapid succession of several short-term under-qualified jobs**. Employers then have to deal with high employee turnover rates, making their task more difficult and sometimes leading to their reluctance to continue to hire young workers. For youth, this in-and-out pattern in the workforce is often a symptom of repeated failures, loss of self-confidence, and even complete discouragement. In addition, this series of low-skilled jobs prevents them from acquiring significant work experience within a single organization and relegates them to holding entry-level, low paying positions, often with no job security. This situation in turn limits their job advancement and their contribution to the country's economic development. It thus seems necessary to increase the **job retention** support provided to young Canadians.

Furthermore, despite a desperate need for workers, many employers still show a **lack of openness to diversity**, whether cultural, generational, social or other. Thus, young immigrants, Indigenous youth, youth on a different life path, and youth with disabilities are often victims of discrimination when it comes to hiring or even employment. For example, small and medium business employers, who make up the vast majority of Quebec's economic profile, are not always equipped to assess skills acquired abroad by a young immigrant or to determine the workplace accommodations required (or not) to integrate a young person with a disability. As a result, the résumés of these young people are often rejected outright (Eid, 2012; Brière, Fortin and Lacroix, 2016; O'Bomsawin, 2011). If they do get a job, their chances of obtaining a promotion or receiving professional development are sometimes less than those of their colleagues who are not from diverse backgrounds (Sammartino, O'Flynn and Nicholas, 2003).

Lastly, in a constantly evolving labour market with global competition, many companies are demanding more and more knowledge, skills and work experience from their new employees. For their part, youth, like all workers, need to adapt quickly to **changes in the job market** and to acquire new transferable skills. This can represent a considerable challenge for young people who require stability, have anxiety or who adapt less easily. Most youth are seeking a job that aligns with their skills and aspirations: however, some also have an inflated view of the job market and are seeking working conditions (salary, schedule, benefits, etc.) that are rare for a first job. Reconciling these two ways of thinking requires effort and compromise on both sides, a mediation process that is often facilitated by the intervention of a specialized resource.

### **For employability service providers**

In recent years, many employment and career centres have had to increase their placement targets while reducing the length of their intervention because of funding cutbacks by the various funders. In an economic context of almost full employment in Quebec, various studies have highlighted the **increased needs of the clientele** being served by employability organizations, a clientele with more and more diverse problems. A 2012 study by RQuODE for the Comité consultatif Jeunes (CCJ) [Youth Advisory Committee] of 100 stakeholders from 60 organizations in the sector revealed the multiplicity of the needs and problems of youth, including low education and literacy problems, a lack of motivation, low self-esteem, dependencies (alcohol, drugs, medication gambling), mental health issues, excessive indebtedness, and isolation (RQuODE, 2012, p. 8). This multiplication of the barriers to employment increases not only the degree to which youth are removed from the labour market, but also, in many cases, their social isolation and, consequently, their distance from organizations offering assistance. This situation means that considerable effort must be made to find, recruit and engage these isolated youth on a path to employment and that more sustained and longer personalized support is required in a context where preparation and intervention time is being reduced because of a lack of funding.

#### **Box 1 – Employability Organizations Working with Youth in Quebec**

In Quebec, public employment services are provided by over 350 community employability organizations, including 91 employment and career centres that are members of AXTRA. A great many organizations work specifically with young people, including Quebec's 110 crossroads youth employment centres (*carrefours jeunesse-emploi*) (CJE). The CJE are present in all provincial electoral ridings and are mainly part of three associations, namely, Réseau des carrefours jeunesse-emploi du Québec (RCJEQ), Collectif autonome des carrefours jeunesse-emploi du Québec (CACJEQ) and AXTRA, Alliance des centres-conseils en emploi. In addition to the CJE, many other specialized employability organizations work with youth and offer a wide variety of adapted measures and programs in most of Quebec's regions.



Quebec employment and career centres are also dealing with **an increase in players** claiming to be employability experts, which creates confusion among young people and employers. The political lobbying and overbidding taking place around the contracts awarded (generally going to the lowest bidder regardless of the quality of services provided or the expertise of the human resources) often favours the biggest players to the detriment of local organizations. Without adequate coordination, this situation could undermine the deployment of consistent, adapted services and lead to a loss of expertise in long-standing organizations and to gaps in or duplication of services.

Lastly, service providers are faced with a **heavy administrative burden** associated with submitting projects and managing agreements. Having multiple agreements with several funders, employment and career centres have to collect information for different performance indicators and write numerous reports with varied content and different, but often very similar, deadlines. This administrative burden restricts the time devoted to innovation and the deployment of new projects, thus slowing the development of a service offer better adapted to the changing needs of young clients.

## 1. SERVICES FOR ALL CANADIAN YOUTH

In keeping with the many recommendations of the Expert Panel on Youth Employment,<sup>2</sup> the Canadian government is seeking to support all youth more effectively, particularly those who face barriers. There are many terms to designate youth experiencing numerous barriers to sustainable employment: youth at risk, marginalized youth, vulnerable youth, youth with opportunities, youth with a different lifestyle, etc. Certain terms, with a more negative connotation, do not accurately portray the profile of these young people, whose degree of remoteness from the workforce varies greatly. Regardless of the term used, AXTRA and its members believe it is critical to provide all youth with the opportunity to thrive and contribute to the country's socio-economic development.

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<sup>2</sup> The Expert Panel's report indicates that "The Skills Link component should focus on providing wrap-around services to those most at risk." (2017, p. 25).

## 1.1 Recruitment and pre-employability efforts

Young people in very precarious situations, such as NEET youth (see Box 2), are generally less likely to know of the existence and make use of an employment assistance organization. They are also more difficult to reach, mostly because they are not necessarily present on social media or not targeted by the more general promotional materials on employment assistance programs. Moreover, some youth who have left the school system early because of the constraints associated with it are not particularly interested in an employability project with predefined benchmarks. Others who have experienced a number of abandonments and social failures will find it harder to trust an unknown organization and workers. For these reasons, it is important when recruiting and engaging youth on the path to employment to first go out and connect with them in their environment and to create a real relationship of trust, perhaps through special projects created by and for them (see Box 3). The first step toward these structuring, motivating and unique projects, based on the reality and interests of young participants, is to identify local needs and then have sufficient flexibility from funders to implement a project designed in this way (see Section 4).

### Box 2 – NEET Youth

Discouraged by the high youth unemployment rate and the many barriers to employment they face (i.e., lack of work experience, prejudices toward the younger generation, etc.), many unemployed or under-employed youth stop looking for work and disengage from the workforce. Since they are no longer part of the workforce, they are not included in official statistics, thus creating a false picture of the already concerning youth unemployment rate. These young people are often uneducated and may have difficulties that lock them into a vicious circle of unemployment and under-employment. Although the government is increasingly focused on the category of youth not in education, employment or training (NEET)—about 200,000 individuals in Quebec—it is important to consider that these NEET youth have a variety of characteristics and profiles. Not all NEET youth are in precarious situations, just as not all youth in precarious situations fall into this category of individuals about whom there is very little information. It is therefore important to support all youth in precarious situations and to adapt services to their individual characteristics and needs in order to maintain the social and economic balance and reduce or prevent marginalization.

The increased needs of clients means that most youth participants in employability organizations are removed to some degree from the job market. In light of these multiple barriers, it is important to spend more time on job preparation in order to really work with these young people on basic skills and knowledge inherent to successful socio-professional integration. In many of the projects funded by YES, the job preparation period is currently limited to two weeks, which is far from sufficient for these more vulnerable youth. Therefore, it is important to provide programs focused on

### Box 3 – An Example of a Special Project by and for Youth

The "Escouade Y" project by the Carrefour jeunesse-emploi Marguerite-d'Youville was launched in fall 2017 thanks to funding from Quebec's Secrétariat à la jeunesse. The purpose of this citizen engagement project was to share knowledge, highlight human relations and break isolation by encouraging intergenerational relations. Over a period of six months, the four young women who made up Escouade Y offered over 20 free workshops in surrounding towns and reached more than 150 participants of all ages, with a 97% satisfaction rate. As co-creators and deliverers of the Escouade, the four passionate young women had the opportunity to demonstrate and share their skills, while having the satisfaction of promoting community within their community.

pre-employability to youth in precarious situations so they can rebuild their self-confidence, develop their general skills and acquire a better understanding of existing resources.

### X Recommendation #1: Increase and ensure the sustainability of employability development measures to engage and address the needs of youth more distant from the labour market.

The focus of these projects is the development of skills essential to vulnerable youth in order to obtain and retain a job. They can take a number of forms from volunteering in the community to overseas exchange trips to workstations, to work-school experiences, to supervised, credit-earning internships or alternative school environments (ASE) (see Box 4).

### Box 4 – An Example of an Alternative School Environment (ASE)

According to the Alliance des milieux alternatifs de scolarisation du Québec, there are 35 alternative school environments (ASE) operated by employability organizations in the province (AMASQ, 2018). The École du milieu de Lévis (EDML), piloted by Trajectoire Emploi, welcomes school dropouts between the ages of 16 and 25 and offers them a program adapted to their specific needs, in a community setting. In addition to the academic component (French and math courses recognized by the Ministère de l'Éducation et de l'Enseignement supérieur du Québec that are customized to the student by a special education teacher), EDML offers group activities (notably to develop confidence and social and personal skills) and intensive individual support to overcome barriers to school continuation. Classes are a maximum of 15 students, which is an important success factor. EDML's overall goal is to get young people to reconnect with education so that they can successfully reintegrate into the regular school system.

## 1.2 Support for employment integration and retention

Support is critical to removing the harmful tethers holding back certain young people with serious barriers to job integration. This support promotes the development of healthy personal, social and work independence and must be provided in a seamless manner with other issues or efforts if it is to achieve its full potential. To this end, sustained support by a specialized resource should be included automatically in all initiatives related to skill development or the acquisition of work experience in order to encourage perseverance, integration and job retention.

The length and intensity of support initiatives should also be determined based on the needs and profile of the individual youth. Employment and career centres already serve as a facilitating link between job seekers and employers, and follow up on young candidates who are hired. Given the increased complexity of the problems faced by clients, there must be a sufficient number of hours of direct and indirect intervention and these hours need to be able to be spread over the duration of the journey, beyond just the first weeks of job integration or return to school. This follow-up makes it possible to resolve potential sources of misunderstanding or conflict that might result in the young worker's dismissal or resignation, and it encourages the assimilation and application of skills acquired throughout the candidate's educational or job search journey.

A number of organizations pointed out that it is often difficult for employers to inform them of problems encountered with their new employee before it is too late and they are laid off. In this regard, programs and actions that include structured, sustained (a few hours per week) and personalized support offered by qualified resources can minimize the pressure on managers resulting from the arrival of new employees and promote job retention. In short, since job retention is a major concern for economic and social development, it is important to value interventions at this level to prevent more vulnerable young people who want to integrate or reintegrate into the workforce from becoming discouraged, and to prevent companies that are open to hiring persons with integration challenges from looking elsewhere (see Section 3.2). To this end, sufficient funding is an absolute priority to enable the deployment of these support efforts and optimize successful, sustainable integration results.

**X Recommendation #2: Adapt the length and type of supports based on the profile of each young person to promote job retention.**

### 1.3 Measures accessible to everyone

While it is important to prioritize, to some degree, clients who are more vulnerable or more distant from the workforce, we still believe it is imperative to keep employability services available to all young people who need support in keeping with a preventive approach. There is no point in forgetting youth who are a priori less vulnerable but who risk quickly becoming vulnerable if they do not receive the support they need in their job search, such as young graduates who struggle to find a job related to their training and their skills (see Box 5). Consequently, it is important to allow youth of every status to take part in YES programs. To this end, the definition of at-risk or vulnerable youth must be expanded and take into account all youth who require support to stabilize their life course and their sustainable integration in the workforce.

**X Recommendation #3: Ensure that employability services are accessible for all youth who need assistance, regardless of their income level or employment status.**

#### Box 5 – Poorly Integrated New Entrants

A number of studies highlight the existence and growth of a certain segment of the youth population, namely Poorly Integrated New Entrants (PINEs) or “*Débutants En Mal d’Insertion*” (DEMI) in French (Bell and Benes, 2012). According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) although they are “young people [who] often have qualifications (diplomas or degrees); they frequently go back and forth between temporary jobs, unemployment and/or inactivity, even during periods of strong economic growth” (OECD, 2010). In *The Precariat: the New Dangerous Class*, the former director of the International Labour Organization (ILO), Guy Standing, predicts that while this first atypical or precarious job may serve as a springboard to a more skilled and/or better paid job, it is also possible that the young person will remain boxed in and get stuck in a non-optimal situation (under-employed, deskilling, impoverishment, etc.) (Standing, 2011). Given that the federal government has expressed concern about the working conditions associated with atypical jobs and the precariousness of young workers, it must improve the chances for success of poorly integrated young graduates by providing them with access to employment assistance programs to maximize their contribution to the country’s economic prosperity.

## 2. A CONTINUUM OF SERVICES WITH A GLOBAL APPROACH

With any employment integration initiative, it is essential to take into consideration an individual's work-related skills but also a number of other factors that affect their ability to find and retain a job, such as life habits, mental health and family environment. Young people who do not have enough to eat, who are experiencing anxiety or who are responsible for young children cannot devote themselves fully to a job search—or retaining a job—unless they have the necessary support to meet their needs or lighten their daily responsibilities. To help these young people achieve personal, social, economic and professional independence, it is important to offer them services that take into account all aspects of their lives and create bridges between employability organizations and other public and community sectors.

### 2.1 Services with a global approach

Effective employment services that produce long-lasting results must take into consideration all aspects of an individual, while adopting a concrete approach that leads to workforce integration or a return to school. This global approach is especially necessary when working with vulnerable youth who often have several internal or external problems that may or may not be linked directly to their integration into society or work.

Some youth have behavioural (poor life habits, poor time management, etc.), mental (mental health problems, isolation, lack of self-confidence, etc.) or physical (disability, health problems related to an illness or accident, etc.) problems. Others face contextual barriers related to their socio-economic or family environment, such as poverty, lack of family support, transportation issues or lack of accessible childcare services. Some lack education or are missing essential skills (literacy, numeracy, use of information technology, etc.), while others need to improve their job search skills.

The comprehensive services offered by employment counselling centres go beyond just job searches: they seek to improve living conditions (for example, through access to childcare services, mental or physical health services, housing stabilization, etc.) and to overcome exclusion and precariousness with an inclusive, long-term perspective. The services based on this approach make use of the expertise in psycho-social intervention of employability organizations and are part of a broader community dynamic in which other community resources are mobilized to actively support the young person.

## 2.2 Successful collaborations between different communities

To fully promote a global approach, it is important to act collectively using the resources available in the community, particularly, pre-employability, employability, psychosocial and basic assistance services. Employment and career centres have been rooted in their communities for several decades. They already collaborate with the various players working with young clients in their communities and participate in numerous local and regional collaborative forums. This holistic approach to intervention benefits young people but requires additional effort on the part of counsellors and organizations, efforts that are not always acknowledged and funded by government programs.

In this regard, AXTRA and its members welcome the willingness of the Canadian government to implement an integrated strategy that more effectively supports all young people with wrap-around services. With the goal of creating this more integrated approach, the modernized YES proposes creating a collaborative forum to support partnerships across the system, notably between service providers, the education sector and employers. In addition to this national collaboration, it is essential for federal entities to recognize the positive contribution of and to encourage collaborations among the various players at the local level by providing specific funding to develop and maintain the relationships needed to build a true continuum of services for youth.

### **X Recommendation #4: Support and develop services with a global approach by facilitating the creation of bridges between the employment, education, and health and social services sectors.**

Contrary to one school of thought, a single organization (along the lines of a “one-stop shop”) is not necessarily more efficient than a coalition of organizations that work in a complementary manner to offer a range of services. A well-organized continuum of services can maximize the expertise of each player and create an entire support network around participants. Creating this type of social fabric around young people who often have interpersonal difficulties also contributes to their integration in the community and limits the risks associated with developing one, very strong link to a single organization. It can also increase attachment bonds and enable youth to benefit from the experience of a number of stakeholders who collaborate to support them in their efforts.

## 2.3 Recognition of the expertise of employability resources

That being said, for such coalitions to work effectively and for public employment services to be delivered in an optimum manner, it is important to recognize the specialized expertise of employment and career centres and other specialized community employability organizations. These organizations represent critical players in the development of youth employability as a means to foster their personal growth and facilitate their contribution to the country's success. However, as mentioned earlier, a number of other organizations receive funding to work toward the employment integration of under-represented clients without actually having expertise in this area. These new players do not always rely on the existing expertise, do not necessarily cooperate with the networks in place and often duplicate the services offered. In so doing, they weaken the community rather than strengthen it, in particular by drawing expertise away from long-standing organizations. In contrast, the fact that employment and career centres have local roots and an ongoing presence means that they provide a safety net for youth, develop a strong network of contacts with local employers and can provide follow-ups once a young person finds employment. Consequently, AXTRA and its members believe that the federal government should rely on the expertise of employment and career centres, their proven practices and their success with socio-professional insertion.

**X Recommendation #5: Recognize the specialized expertise, significant economic impact and positive contribution of the services offered by employment and career centres by providing them with adequate funding and limiting the multiplication of new players.**

For example, it would be appropriate to add as one of the conditions for all projects funded by the federal government under YES and its other workforce programs that employment-related measures (notably job search methods, orientation sessions, etc.) be carried out by specialized employability organizations. Along the same lines, AXTRA's employment counselling centre members would like Canadian authorities to recognize them as full partners in youth employability and not just as clients or service providers. The adoption of a funding formula based on the mission, with incentives for collaboration between organizations, would contribute to the creation of a continuum of interorganizational services, putting the client at the centre of the model and coordinating services based on the client's needs.

## 3. ENGAGEMENT OF EMPLOYERS

The Expert Panel stated in its report that employers “often feel disconnected from the youth employment system, as they are considered an end-point and not a participant in the system” (Expert Panel on Youth Employment, 2017,





p. 29). In this regard, AXTRA commends the federal government's willingness to support employers more effectively through new incentive programs and tools when they hire young persons, particularly those facing barriers. The Alliance and its members believe that employers play a crucial role in the employment integration and retention of young Canadians as partners rather than as clients. Nevertheless, youth must remain at the core of the approach and services offered by YES.

### **3.1 Outreach to national and local businesses**

There are many prejudices against the younger generation, especially young people with different life profiles. The Expert Panel on Youth Employment highlighted the fact that "Myths about young people abound (e.g. uncommitted, entitled, lazy)" (2017, p.20). Similarly, a recent AXTRA report on youth and internships (prepared for the CCJ) confirms that employers sometimes have false perceptions or biases toward the younger generation:

[Translation]

Many employers say that the new generation are child kings, young people who are not focused, spend all their time on their cell phones, have an attitude... Enabling employers to see these young people during an internship shows them that a well-prepared and motivated young person is not always on their cell phone. It is simply a case of explaining to them how things work in the work environment. (Employment Counsellor, Laurentides, quoted by AXTRA, 2018, p. 27–28)

Outreach campaigns at the national or provincial level are a useful way to debunk these preconceived ideas that undermine the sustainable integration of young Canadians in the workforce. However, local, more targeted actions are also required to support these large-scale media campaigns and ground the message in reality.

The vast majority of employability organizations already work closely with employers in their region to better understand and address their labour requirements. Multi-party roundtables exist in every region and in a number of cities and municipalities, facilitating communication and collaboration between the employer and community sectors. Job fairs are also organized on a regular basis in various communities to connect those seeking employment with potential employers. While these linking activities are productive, their success is limited. The hectic schedules and various needs of company managers mean that a more personalized approach is also essential. In an effort to foster the integration of their participants in the workplace, employment and career centres need to work with companies on the ground on an almost daily basis. To this end, they encourage employers to share their labour needs, organize networking activities between an employer and a group of young job seekers, offer human resources services to support them in preparing their offers of employment, etc. These direct links also enable employers to better understand the role of these organizations and to discover the scope of services offered through government programs to support them in integrating new employees. More and more organizations are establishing liaison officer positions to create authentic and effective partnerships with companies even though there is often no direct funding for such positions.

AXTRA and its members are hoping that, through a modernized YES, the government will encourage the establishment of ongoing partnerships between employers and local organizations by allocating the necessary resources (human and financial) to establish sustainable, authentic and meaningful collaboration. To this end, it must offer service providers the means to develop job integration projects (such as internships in companies) with both supported clients and the employers who may hire them. This approach also aligns with the context of a labour shortage and makes it possible to assist employers with their issues of recruitment and retention of their employees.

**X Recommendation #6: Fund outreach activities and the development and maintenance of significant partnerships with local employers as part of all youth employment programs.**

### **3.2 A variety of incentives and supports for employers**

During the consultation, a few organizations mentioned that not all employers are looking for wage subsidies, mainly because they do not want to have to report to the government on those subsidies. Some employers do not necessarily need financial assistance and would prefer to have the support of a specialized resource when hiring a new employee. During AXTRA's research for the CCJ, a number of employers mentioned that they do not feel equipped to deal with a young person with an anxiety disorder or learning disabilities. They wanted customized support to help them supervise these young people with special needs (AXTRA, 2018).

In several regions, many employers show flexibility and hire young people who have problems with workforce integration. However, in return, these employers may experience very high turnover rates because some of these young people are unsuccessful in retaining their jobs on an ongoing basis (because of their lack of preparation). AXTRA's employment and career centres would like to be able to work more on job retention with their young clients by increasing their post-participation intervention to support the youth (and his or her employer) in the new workplace. To address the retention problems experienced by many employers, AXTRA's members would also like to be able to intervene with young employees who are at risk of losing their jobs. The Canadian government's current employment programs are solely for young people without jobs. It would thus be appropriate for the federal government to expand its service offer to include support for employment integration and retention for at-risk youth.

**X Recommendation #7: Enhance employer support services by authorizing the monitoring of youth who are already employed or recently hired in order to address retention problems experienced by employers.**

These support measures and incentives for employers could take the form of wage subsidies, a bank of hours to receive assistance from an employability resource, or a tax credit for hiring a young person who has completed an employability program. Some organizations have suggested providing employers who welcome and integrate a young participant with a certificate to give the company some visibility and thus identify it in its recruitment efforts as an “employer of choice”.

## 4. PROGRAM FLEXIBILITY

Programs funded by the Youth Employment Strategy often set very restrictive eligibility criteria as pointed out by the Expert Panel on Youth Employment:

*... and programs are frequently available only to youth who meet very specific age/income/education criteria for short bursts of time. These rigid requirements mean that employers may be challenged to invest time and resources in accessing young workers through employment programs (2017, p. 17).*

This lack of program flexibility is also a barrier to service providers because the context for deployment varies from one province, region or community to another but the rules are set at the national level and applied uniformly. While AXTRA members welcome the Canadian government’s interest in establishing a national advisory council, this pan-Canadian body will, unfortunately, not be enough to ensure an effective match between the needs on the ground and the services offered. Given the diversity of contexts and company profiles across Canada, it is also important to offer flexibility at the local level, notably to include the voice of the region’s employers.

The pace of learning and the ability to integrate into a job or make a career choice is different for each individual, as are the problems experienced. It is therefore essential to be able to tailor the content and duration of interventions to the specific requirements and degree of remoteness of the young person. In addition, since programs are designed upstream from the recruitment of participants by organizations, these organizations require the flexibility to adapt the pre-established approach to the needs of each youth actually recruited. Moreover, if the federal government wants to focus on more vulnerable youth in the modernized YES, programs need to be flexible to foster the recruitment and engagement of participants living different lifestyles. To reach youth in precarious situations, it is also important to be innovative and to offer services that differ from the norm by allowing organizations, for example, to initiative innovative and exciting projects in their regions.

Lastly, program rigidity limits the number of projects accepted (particularly in the case of innovative approaches to better meet the needs of youth), increases delays in processing applications and complicates service delivery once a project is accepted. To obtain the best possible results and optimize the efficient and effective use of funding, the

funding framework should also be relaxed to enable organizations to reinvest unused funds in the next cohort of participants (for example, if the first cohort is smaller than expected) or in the second year of the project (for example, to organize a more extensive activity with participants).

**X Recommendation #8: Allow greater flexibility in youth employment assistance programs and service agreements with employability organizations.**

## 5. MORE APPROPRIATE RESULTS INDICATORS

An increasing number of employability measures and programs require job placement outcomes without taking into account the initial degree of remoteness from the workforce and the progress made throughout the project. The success of an employment assistance program for youth cannot be measured solely by the number of job placements obtained by participants. This type of measure does not reflect all the efforts made to support youth in their socio-professional integration or the progress made by participants on their path to employment.

According to the work of the Canadian Research Working Group on Evidence-Based Practice in Career development (CRWG), it is important to document not only the end results of interventions, such as return to work or school, but also the intermediate effects, such as an increased feeling of personal effectiveness and self-esteem and improved lifestyles (Michaud et al., 2013). The inclusion of a qualitative dimension in current evaluation methods would make it possible to monitor the progress of participants and better measure a project's success. Furthermore, these intermediate results would provide a more realistic portrait of the consequences of interventions, particularly for youth who currently face more barriers to employment, for whom regular attendance at activities or even the preparation of a resume can represent an important outcome.

If the recognition of intermediate and qualitative objectives is to truly provide a means to take into account the increased complexity of the clientele, it is important for new results indicators to be defined in collaboration with employability organizations so that they reflect the reality of the clientele and do not increase the burden of the evaluation task for stakeholders. Similarly, quantitative placement targets should also be adjusted to take into account the profile of young participants.

**X Recommendation #9: Include intermediate and qualitative objectives in the results targets for youth employment programs that reflect their degree of remoteness from the workforce**



## 6. SIMPLIFIED PROJECT APPLICATION AND REPORTING PROCESSES

In addition to making programs more flexible and reviewing results indicators, it is equally important to simplify and optimize project application and reporting processes, primarily to avoid service gaps caused by long waiting times or unexplained rejections, and to minimize the administrative burden on service provider organizations.

### 6.1 Significant waiting times and unexplained rejections

According to a 2014 survey by AXTRA and RCJÉQ of 35 Quebec employability organizations, the waiting time for acceptance of applications to the Skills Link program ranged between 2 and 16 months, with an average of 9 months. In the past year, a number of organizations were once again complaining about the long delays in renewal of Career Focus and Skills Link programs. And sometimes, when the application is finally approved after several months' delay, it comes with a request to launch the project within just a few weeks.

During the consultation, a number of organizations mentioned that they had been refused several times in recent years, even though they had previously delivered Skills Link projects on a regular basis. This situation is in keeping with data collected during the 2014 survey when one-third of funding applications had been denied (36%), mainly because of a lack of funds on the part of the federal government. More than half of the organizations that had had a project rejected in 2014 expressed dissatisfaction with not receiving any clear explanation from Service Canada to justify the rejection of their funding application, a situation that still occurs in 2018 even for projects that have proven successful over the years. Lastly, some organizations also mentioned that their project applications under YES had been rejected on the pretext that certain aspects of the project were already funded through provincial public employment services. Since this justification was unfortunately unfounded in the cases reported, it seems appropriate to ensure some coordination with provincial programs to avoid gaps in services for youth.

There is no question that these many rejections, cuts in participant targets and funding, and long waiting times create instability in the service offer to youth. They also result in a loss of expertise due to the forced layoff of employees on the project and the loss of long-standing established partnerships in the field. According to several organizations, their credibility with employers and clients is considerably undermined by such delays or lack of continuity in service offer. In many areas of Quebec, these rejections by the Canadian government mean that socio-professional insertion measures for youth distant from the job market are not available.

**X Recommendation #10: Reduce the time for processing applications and ensure regular follow-ups with the lead organization to keep it informed about the progress of the file.**



## 6.2 Administrative burden on organizations

Given the complexity of the needs of young clients, it is crucial that the reporting process be as efficient and effective as possible so that organizations can focus their energies on service delivery. To this end, multi-year agreements would reduce the burden on service providers in terms of applying for projects and reporting on ones accepted. It is also important for federal government entities to take into consideration, in both project timelines and funding, all of the related but necessary tasks, such as promotion of the services offered, participant recruitment, employer outreach and support, identification of internship opportunities, and coordination with other players in the community. This would enable them to appreciate the extent of the actions carried out by service providing organizations and their positive impacts on youth and the community. In addition, members that took part in the consultation indicated that the reporting tools currently available to them are adequate and they do not want the Canadian government to provide a new database or another automated tool.

Some employment and career centres complained that communications with Service Canada officials are sometimes difficult, pointing out that the flexibility offered depends largely on the officer who manages the agreement within that department. While the relationship is running smoothly for several organizations, others are dealing with frequent changes in officers or difficulty reaching a contact person. Consequently, it is important that Service Canada officers be well informed and trained to avoid some organizations being disadvantaged compared to others because they have a certain official in charge of their file rather than another.

**X Recommendation #11: Simplify and optimize the reporting process to make it as effective and efficient as possible.**

## CONCLUSION

Modernization of the Government of Canada's Youth Employment Strategy paves the way for a greater place for youth in society. If they are to reach their full potential and participate in the social and economic growth of the country, it is essential that the development of their employability and their sustainable employment be encouraged. Employment supports the development of one's personal identity and gives the individual a professional status and the ability to develop one's own abilities and aptitudes. In this way, it has a positive influence on the psychological and physical well-being of youth, promoting the adoption of healthy lifestyles. A vehicle for self-realization and social integration, work contributes to building a feeling of belonging, while encouraging citizen participation and community engagement.



In light of the rapid changes in the labour market, employment and career centres are positioned as critical partners to maximize the potential of all young – and not so young – people and to contribute to a better match with the needs of employers. Given the many challenges that await workers and employers, now and in the future, AXTRA members are hoping that the federal strategy will give them different but complementary tools to those at the provincial level to intervene in an optimum manner with all youth seeking inclusion. Linkage with Quebec's public employment services is essential to facilitate operationalization of YES programs while respecting Quebec's areas of jurisdiction. For this reason, employment and career centres want to continue to work with federal entities to maximize the benefits of employment programs for both youth and society in general.

AXTRA members work with more than 80,000 Quebecers each year, helping them integrate or reintegrate into the workforce: their expertise and experience on the ground is a valuable asset to the Government of Canada.



## APPENDIX I – LIST OF ORGANIZATIONS INVOLVED IN THE CONSULTATION

Name of organization	Regions
Accès-Travail de Montréal	Montréal
Actions interculturelles	Estrie
ALPA	Montréal
Agence Ometz	Montréal
Alliance Carrière-Travail	Montérégie
Cijad – CJE Laporte	Montérégie
CJE Marguerite-d'Youville	Montérégie
CJE Saint-Hubert	Montérégie
CyberCap	Montréal
Émersion	Côte-Nord
Espace carrière	Montérégie
Groupe Inclusia	Saguenay-Lac-St-Jean
Horizon Carrière	Montréal
Intégration Compétences	Montérégie
La Relance Outaouais	Outaouais
Objectif Emploi	Montréal
Services de placement Horizon-travail	Montréal
Trajectoire Emploi	Chaudière-Appalaches
YES Montréal	Montréal
Zone Emploi d'Antoine-Labelle	Laurentides



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