



SHARING PERSPECTIVES ON 'SOFT SKILLS'

A Canada-Wide Survey of Key Stakeholders

June 2018

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1.0 Introduction and Background

Futureworx Society is currently supporting a project called “Integrating Soft Skills into the Essential Skills Framework – Building a National Consensus” funded by the federal Office of Literacy and Essential Skills (OLES). The project seeks to enable movement towards a national framework to support the development and assessment of ‘soft skills’ in Canada. The objectives of the project, which are intended to be achieved by November 2018, are:

- To develop a plan to create a common assessment and development approach for ‘soft skills’ in Canada;
- To propose ideas for the integration of ‘soft skills’ into Canada’s existing *Essential Skills Framework*; and
- To identify and develop common terminology around ‘soft skills’ in Canada.

As part of the initial steps of the project, in the spring of 2018 Futureworx Society hired research and evaluation experts at Constellation Consulting Group to solicit perspectives on ‘soft skills’ and the development of a ‘soft skills’ framework from relevant stakeholders, including trainers, educators, service providers, employers etc., across the country via an online survey. The intention of the online survey was to garner information on current perspectives and practices regarding soft skills development in order to advance consensus in planning for recommendations for the integration of ‘soft skills’ into Canada’s existing *Essential Skills Framework* and common assessment and development approaches for ‘soft skills’ in Canada. To this end, the survey included questions on stakeholder perspectives around ‘soft skills’ as well as an opportunity to indicate interest in participating in a collaborative planning session of key stakeholders to be held in August 2018.

The current report highlights results from the Canada-wide survey and provides insights into current stakeholder perspectives on ‘soft-skills’ in Canada. The information presented here can be leveraged towards consensus-building and planning as part of the project going forward.

2.0 Methods

An initial set of desired online survey questions were developed by Futureworx and refined in collaboration with research and evaluation experts at Constellation Consulting Group in March 2018. The survey questions were designed to seek information on:

- **Organizational demographics** (e.g. province of operation, size, sector, etc.) to ensure an appropriate cross-section of stakeholders were engaged and to provide opportunities for cross analysis;
- **Perspectives on soft skills** within organizations, including definitions, perceptions around the importance of ‘soft skills’;
- **Existing research, frameworks, and tools** to advance understanding of what is influencing perspectives on ‘soft skills’ and ensure the project can leverage and build on existing work rather than trying to create new research/tools;
- **Interest in participating in a planning group** to explore the development of a national consensus on ‘soft skills’ in Canada.

The survey included a mix of quantitative and qualitative questions, allowing participants to add comments to qualify most quantitative questions. See Appendix A for survey questions.

The survey was set up online with a web link used to submit responses. More than one individual within an organization could participate and multiple responses could be received from one IP address.

An initial list of 250 individual stakeholders with a possible interest in ‘soft skills’ development was created based on Futureworx contacts and an internet search for relevant stakeholders. Contacts included a mix of non-profits, trainers, educators, service providers and employers serving groups including youth, adults, Indigenous peoples, women and under-represented groups across the country. Individuals receiving the survey were encouraged to share the link with other relevant contacts and the survey link was available via social media platforms to encourage broad participation beyond contacts initially identified.

The survey process was introduced to contacts via an email sent by Futureworx on April 24, 2018. The survey link was subsequently sent by Constellation Consulting Group to all contacts on April 30, 2018. A reminder email was sent to all contacts on May 7, and personalized reminder emails and phone calls to contacts who had not responded were pursued on May 14. The survey was closed on May 18, 2018.

A total of 235 survey responses were received from individuals at 181 organizations. Of the initial 250 contacts, 134 responded, representing a response rate of 54%.

Survey data has been analyzed in aggregate and broken down by region¹ and organization type.² The current report presents information on the overall data set and, when relevant differences were observed, data broken down by region and/or organization type. Unfortunately, due to smaller sample sizes in regional and organizational breakdown of data, statistical tests to determine the significance of observed differences have not been possible, limiting the generalizability of the findings presented in this report.

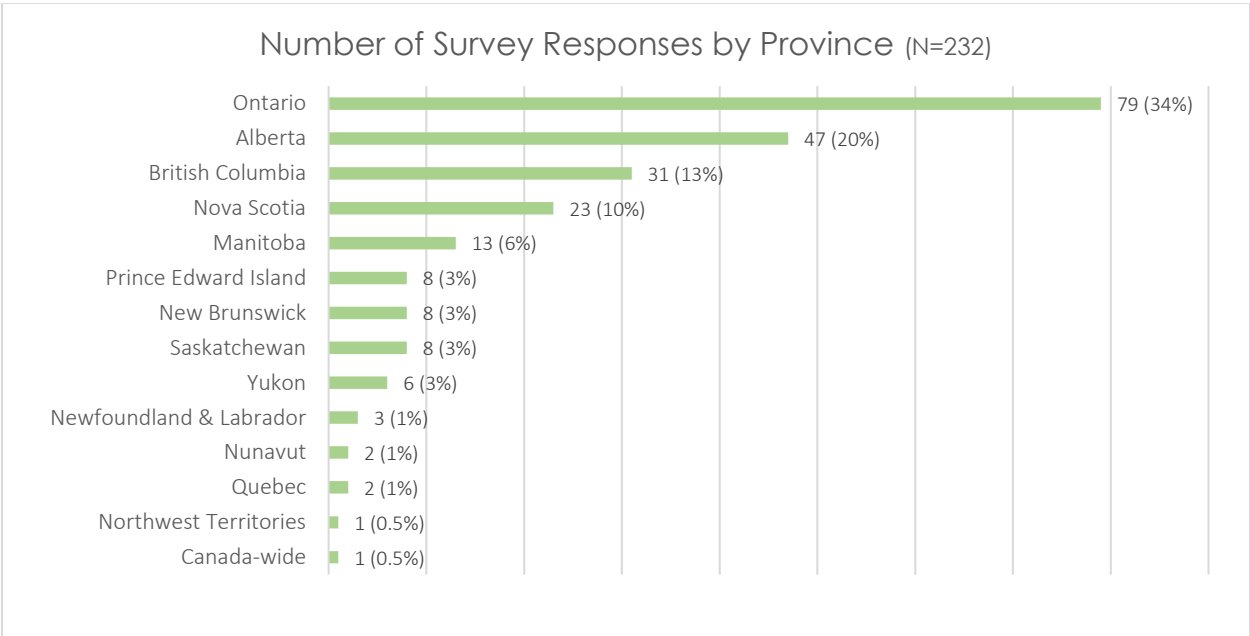
¹ 'Far West' including British Columbia; 'Prairies' including Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba; 'Ontario'; 'Maritimes' including Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland & Labrador; 'Quebec'; and 'North' including Yukon, Northwest Territories, and Nunavut. Note: Since the sample size for 'North' and 'Quebec' regions were very low (5 and 2 respondents respectively) analysis for these regions is not presented in the report.

² As listed on page 6, with 'university' and 'college' grouped as 'higher education' and those with samples below 20 respondents not included in the broken down analysis.

3.0 Survey Findings

3.1 Profile of Survey Respondents

In total, 235 unique survey responses were received from individuals at 181 organizations with representation from across Canada. While few responses were received from Quebec, this is not surprising as, due to resource constraints, the survey was not available in French. In the future, targeted engagement of Quebecois/francophone organizations through a French-language survey may be needed to ensure full representation of Canadian perspectives. Future targeted engagement may also be needed within the Northern region (Northwest Territories, Nunavut, Yukon) as the response rate in this region was quite low.

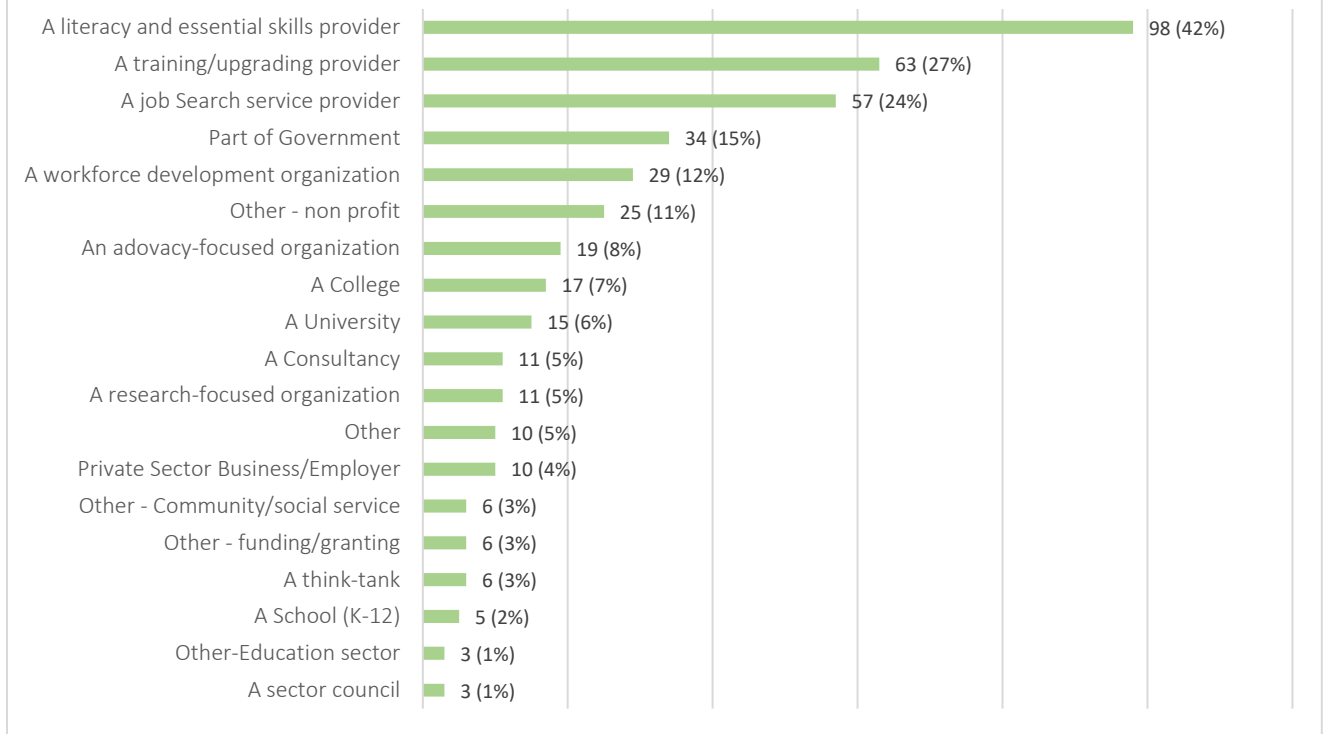


Organizations represented in the response data included groups from numerous sectors, with the most common types of organizations being:³

1. Literacy service providers (48%)
2. Training/upgrading providers (31%)
3. Job search service providers (28%)
4. Part of the government (17%)
5. Workforce development organizations (14%)

³ NOTE: Respondents could choose more than one category; N=233

Number of Survey Responses by Organization Type (Note: Groups Could be Included Under More than One Category, N=233)



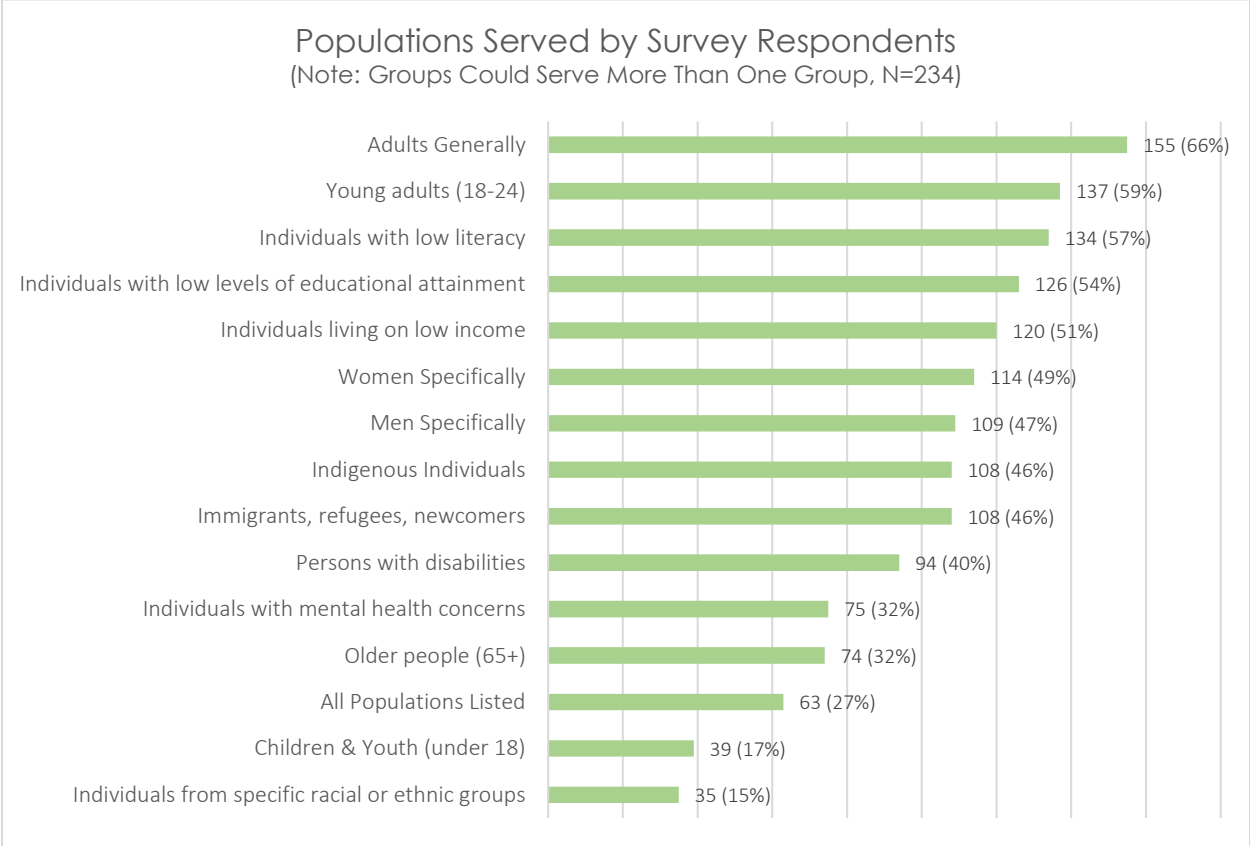
While private sector businesses/employers are somewhat underrepresented in the sample many relevant stakeholders across Canada were able to provide their perspectives through the survey. Future targeted engagement of private sector businesses/employers may increase the robustness of results and further deepen understanding in the field. Notably, there was a higher proportion of business/employer respondents from the Far West region (13% of Far West stakeholders were businesses/employers compared with 4% in the sample overall).

Other notable regional differences in types of organizations engaging in the survey included:

- Fewer Universities responding in Ontario (only 1 response received from a university despite the prevalence of universities in Ontario)
- Lower proportion of individuals from within government responding in Ontario (4% of all responses from Ontario compared with 15% overall)
- No responses from research-focused organizations based in the Prairies
- Higher proportion of individuals from within government responding in the Maritimes (28% of all responses from the Maritimes compared with 15% overall)

When considering regional differences based on the current survey results, it is important to keep in mind these differences in the survey respondent sample.

Overall, the organizations/individuals that responded to the survey serve a broad range of stakeholders, with some organizations serving any citizens or marginalized citizens, and others targeting specific populations. Most groups indicated that they serve adults (66%) and young adults (60%), including individuals with low literacy (57%) and/or low educational attainment (54%). Nearly half the organizations (46%) responding to the survey indicated that they have specific services for Indigenous individuals. Similarly, nearly half (46%) indicated they serve newcomers specifically, though only 15% indicated they have specialized services for particular ethno-cultural groups. 40% identified specifically serving individuals with disabilities. Overall 27% of survey respondents indicated that they serve all citizens, including marginalized individuals, non-marginalized individuals, special populations, and individuals with specialized needs/experiences.



Overall, representation within the survey sample covers a broad range of stakeholders across Canada, though ongoing efforts for engagement with private businesses, Northern and francophone organizations could create a more representative sample in the future.

3.2 How Are Organizations Talking About 'Soft Skills'?

While many use the term 'soft skills' to refer to things like attitude, accountability, motivation, adaptability, time management, teamwork, and good communication, in initiating this project it was recognized that different terminology may be used in different contexts. To better understand what terminology is most commonly being used in practice, we asked survey respondents to indicate what terms they most often use to refer to things like attitude, accountability, and so forth. According to survey respondents, the four most common terms they are 'always' or 'often' using are:⁴

1. 'Employability skills' (78% always or often use this term)
2. 'Essential skills' (74% always or often use this term)
3. 'Soft skills' (72% always or often use this term)
4. 'Life skills' (60% always or often use this term)

Other commonly used terms across the survey respondent cohort as a whole were, 'personal competencies' (43% always or often use this term), and 'personal management skills' (42% always or often use this term). Terms like 'personal attributes', 'life management competencies', and 'personal behaviours' were reported as being less commonly used.

Respondents from all regions indicated they were 'always' or 'often' using these same four most common terms. In the Far West and the Prairies, a greater proportion of survey respondents indicated that they use the term 'life skills' over 'soft skills', with 'soft skills' represented as the fourth most common term used. Prairie region respondents indicated that the most common term that is 'always' or 'often' used is 'essential skills' while in the Far West, 'employability skills' was most common. In Ontario, the most common term 'always' or 'often' used was 'soft skills' and this had the greatest proportion of respondents indicated they are using the term 'soft skills' (84%).

Across sectors, the same four most common terms were also used, though government employees, literacy and essential skills practitioners and workforce development practitioners indicated they use the term 'essential skills' 'always' or 'often'. Though the sample of private sector survey respondents was relatively small (N=9), interestingly these stakeholders indicated they were most likely to use the term 'soft skills' (followed by 'employability skills' and 'life skills'/'essential skills'). Within higher education organizations and job search services, the proportion of respondents indicating they use the term 'employability skills' was the highest.

'Other' terms listed by survey respondents included:

- 'Transferrable skills'
- 'People skills'
- 'Social skills'

⁴ N=183; 'most common' meaning more than 50% of survey respondents indicated that they use the term 'always' or 'often'

- ‘Human skills’
- ‘Permanent skills’
- ‘Foundational life skills’
- ‘Self-management skills’
- ‘Coping skills’
- ‘Workplace skills’
- ‘Leadership competencies’
- ‘Career readiness competencies’
- ‘Teachable learnable competencies’
- ‘Social and emotional competencies’
- ‘Career management competencies’

One survey respondent provided some insights on the use of the ‘soft skills’ terminology, saying “I don't really like the term 'soft skills' because it implies that it is not really important relevant and almost like it is a second class skill”. Considerations like these should also be taken into account when deciding on the most appropriate and widely-applicable terminology moving forward.

Overall, the survey results indicate that, while the term ‘soft skills’ is commonly used to refer to things like attitude, accountability, motivation, adaptability, time management, teamwork, and good communication, ongoing debate about terminology may emerge, with ‘essential skills’ being a possible alternative term organizations would be comfortable using. In the context of employment, ‘employability skills’ may also be a readily adopted and graspable term for organizations.

For the purposes of the current report, we are using the term ‘soft skills’, recognizing that as the project progresses a change in terminology may be warranted based on group consensus.

3.3 Perspectives on ‘Soft Skills’

After being asked to indicate the terminology most commonly used in their organization, survey participants were informed that, for the purposes of the survey, the term ‘soft skills’ would be used throughout the remaining survey questions. Survey participants were then asked to rate, on a scale from 1 to 10 (with 10 being ‘very important’), how important they felt ‘soft skills’ are for maximizing individual potential within today’s society. On average, survey participants rated ‘soft skills’ at 9 out of 10, indicating:⁵

Overall, survey respondents felt ‘soft skills’ are very important for maximizing individual potential within today's society.

⁵ N=184

Going into the future, nearly all respondents indicated that they think ‘soft skills’ will be as important as they are today, if not more important. In total, 39% of survey respondents indicated that ‘soft skills’ would continue to be important within Canadian society, while 60% felt the importance of ‘soft skills’ would increase in the future.⁶ When asked about which ‘soft skills’ were most important for their organization, the most commonly cited skills were:⁷

- Communication (78% listed as one of the five most important ‘soft skills’)
- Teamwork (56% listed as one of the five most important ‘soft skills’)
- Analytical skills (including problem solving and critical thinking) (41% listed as one of the five most important ‘soft skills’)
- Time management (41% listed as one of the five most important ‘soft skills’)
- Attitude (31% listed as one of the five most important ‘soft skills’)
- Adaptability/flexibility (30% listed as one of the five most important ‘soft skills’)
- Motivation (26% listed as one of the five most important ‘soft skills’)
- Accountability (22% listed as one of the five most important ‘soft skills’)
- Work ethic (11% listed as one of the five most important ‘soft skills’)
- Emotional regulation/personal management (10% listed as one of the five most important ‘soft skills’)
- Confidence (9% listed as one of the five most important ‘soft skills’)
- Willingness to learn (9% listed as one of the five most important ‘soft skills’)
- Conflict resolution (8% listed as one of the five most important ‘soft skills’)
- Leadership (7% listed as one of the five most important ‘soft skills’)
- Reliability (7% listed as one of the five most important ‘soft skills’)
- Cultural awareness (6% listed as one of the five most important ‘soft skills’)

While ‘soft skills’ were identified as very important, most survey respondents (80%) observed that the clients/program participants they work with struggle with respect to ‘soft skills’. Another 42% felt that they had observed ‘soft skills’ difficulties amongst employees, and 17% felt volunteers struggled with ‘soft skills’.⁸

3.4 How Are Organizations Fostering the Development of ‘Soft Skills’?

In recognizing the simultaneous importance of ‘soft skills’ within Canadian society and struggles employees, volunteers and citizens may face related to ‘soft skills’ many organizations who participated in the survey indicated that they intentionally seek to foster ‘soft skills’ amongst clients, program participants, employees, and/or volunteers. In total, 93% of survey respondents

⁶ N=181

⁷ N=179

⁸ N=173

indicated that their organization undertakes some form of intentional activity to develop ‘soft skills’.⁹

Most commonly, respondents indicated that their organizations provide:

- Short-term, as-needed support (e.g. mentoring, referrals to resources) (64%)
- Coaching/counselling support (e.g. behavioural counselling) (59%)
- Group workshops (59%)
- Short talks or sessions (46%)

Fewer organizations indicated that they offer long-term, in-depth support (e.g. training over three months or more) around ‘soft skills’ (24%). Despite the general popularity of online learning, only 37% of groups indicated they use online learning opportunities for fostering ‘soft skills’. ‘Other’ types of intentional activities listed by survey respondents included:

- Supporting ‘soft skills’ development programming of other organizations
- Embedding ‘soft skills’ development in curriculums and programming
- Group mentoring
- Team building
- Mentorship
- Creating organizational policies that support strong ‘soft skills’

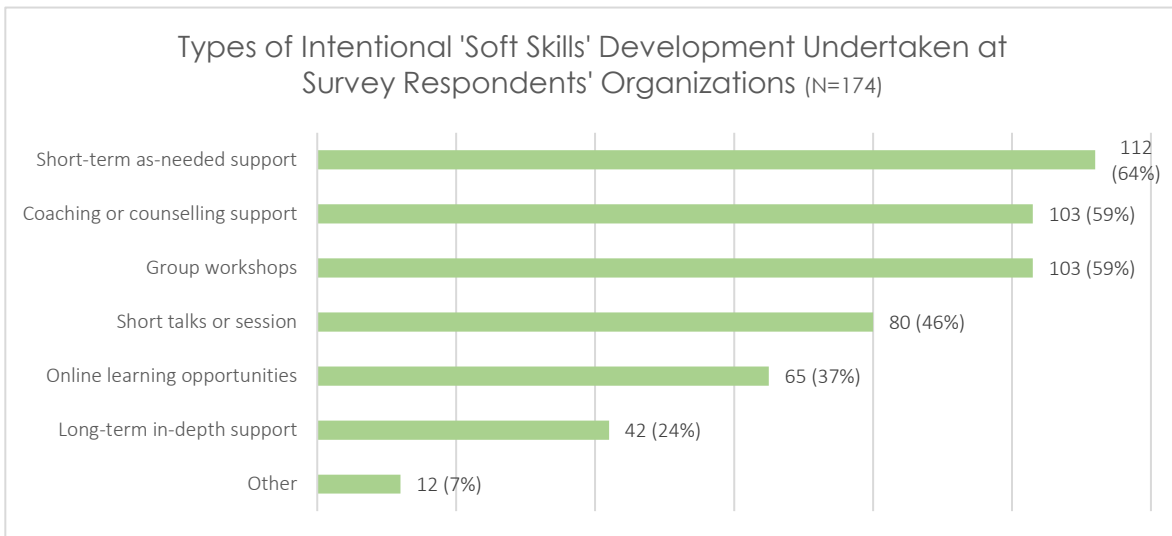
Overall, 54% of organizations indicated that they have their own structured training program for ‘soft skills’ development while 37% indicated they use a training program developed by another organization.¹⁰

Regionally, respondents located in the Maritimes reported a higher proportion of in-house training programs offered, while those in the Far West region reported a higher proportion of no intentional ‘soft skills’ development activities. A greater proportion of survey respondents across the West (Prairies and Far West regions) reported offering ‘short-term as-needed support’ around ‘soft-skills’ compared with other regions and the cohort overall.

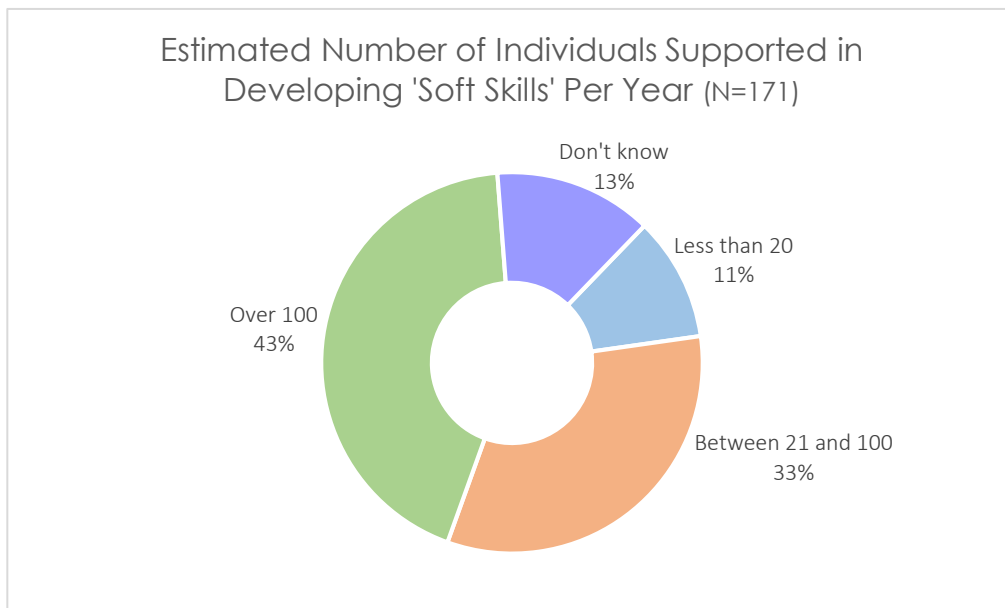
When asked to describe the intentional ways in which their organization supports the development of ‘soft skills’ survey respondents provided a wide range of responses, from general lists of activities like coaching, workshops, training, etc. to detailed descriptions of activities, including activities targeted towards specific populations (e.g. youth, unemployed adults, etc.). Survey respondents listed a variety of formats (e.g. coaching, mentoring, workshops, etc.), formality (e.g. formal or informal support), and depth of involvement (e.g. one-off contacts to 12-week long programs). Overall, it was apparent that groups are dedicating significant time and resources towards ‘soft skills’ development, though no one common activity or best practice approach was apparent within the response set.

⁹ N=174

¹⁰ Note: 9% of respondents did not indicate whether their intentional activities are developed ‘in-house’ or externally



Survey respondents estimated that, as a percent of all the training and other intentional development undertaken at their organization each year, 'soft skills' development accounted for as little as 1% of their training and as much as 100% of their training. On average, respondents estimated that approximately 40% of their intentional training and development activities are dedicated to 'soft skills'.¹¹ Of those organizations providing intentional 'soft skills' development activities, 42% indicated that more than 100 individuals per year are involved, with some survey respondents commenting that the number of individuals they support with 'soft skills' development each year can be in the thousands.¹²



¹¹ N=141

¹² N=171

Approximately half (51%) of all survey respondents indicated that their organization has specific tools or methods that they use for assessing 'soft skills'.¹³ When asked what types of tools or methods they were using, respondents articulated a plethora of methods and standardized/non-standardized tools. They indicated that many of their methods are informal, such as observation, anecdotal, interview, and performance review measures. The most common standardized tools that survey respondents indicated they are using were the *Employability Skills Assessment Tool (ESAT)*¹⁴ and the Employment Readiness Scale¹⁵. Several survey respondents indicated that they have yet to find/develop one tool that is appropriate for assessment. For example, one respondent said "We have found no one tool that is appropriate for assessing competencies, but we feel that certain tools could be developed as limited indicators of wellbeing."

When asked what, if any, factors limit their organization's ability to undertake effective intentional activities to develop 'soft skills', survey respondents most commonly identified:¹⁶

1. A lack of tools or resources (60%)
2. Insufficient funding opportunities (59%)
3. A lack of time amongst practitioners (58%)
4. A lack of staff knowledge/capacity (52%)
5. A lack of best practices (33%)

Approximately a quarter (26%) of survey respondents also indicated that they felt that a lack of connection to a community of practice was limiting their organization's ability to undertake effective 'soft skills' development activities. Only 16% of respondents felt that need/demand for 'soft skills' development was too high, and only 7% identified lack of program space as a limiting factor. Other identified factors included things like:

- A lack of long-term funding commitment
- A lack of government policy commitment
- Remote location
- Disinterested staff, organizational leadership or participants

While survey respondents across regions indicated similar limitations to their 'soft skills' development work, a greater proportion of respondents from the Far West region indicated concerns around time, funding, tools/resources, and knowledge/capacity than those in other regions. Prairie region respondents were more likely to indicate that a 'lack of connection to a

¹³ N=175

¹⁴ 20 respondents indicated they use this tool. For more information see: <https://futureworx.ca/employability-skills-assessment-tool/>

¹⁵ 5 respondents indicated they use this tool. For more information see: www.EmploymentReadiness.info

¹⁶ N=149; NOTE: respondents could choose more than one answer.

community of practice’ was limiting their organization’s ability to undertake effective intentional activities to develop ‘soft skills’.

Overall, individuals commented that they are committed to advancing ‘soft skills’ development, despite possible challenges. For example, one survey respondent commented: “While everyone is operating at full capacity we recognize the importance of updating to skills for the future and finding frameworks for this and so our organization is making the time to dedicate to this activity.”

3.5 Key Research and Best Practices Around Soft Skills Development

While some respondents felt a lack of best practice research was a limiting factor for ‘soft skills’ development activities, others suggested that there is an abundance of research upon which programs and organizations can draw. When asked to provide suggestions for soft skills research and best practices, approximately 50 respondents provided suggestions (see list of suggested research in Appendix B and a list of suggested best practice resources in Appendix C).

When asked what research on soft-skill development and/or assessment they would like to see emerge, survey respondents had a number of suggestions:

- Research to support concrete definition of ‘soft skills’
- Research on best practices and effective approaches for ‘soft skill’ development (e.g. specific program structures that promote effective achievement of positive outcomes)
- Research on best practices and effective approaches to ‘soft skill’ development for specific populations (e.g. newcomers, individuals with low literacy, etc.)
- Research on the impact of ‘soft skills’ development activities (e.g. trainings, workshops, coaching, etc.)
- Research on the consequences of ‘soft skills’ deficiencies, and research on the benefits of well-developed ‘soft skills’
- Standardized ‘soft skills’ assessment tools, and ‘soft skills’ assessment tools for specific populations
- Curriculum/learning materials for ‘soft skills’ development
- Resources to promote ‘soft skills’ recognition and recognition of the importance of ‘soft skills’
- Research on ‘soft skills’ as they apply to different contexts (e.g. specific occupations, work, volunteering, etc.)
- Research on the implications of changing technologies and workplace trends with respect to ‘soft skills’ (e.g. cell phone use, automation in the workplace, etc.)

Overall, while survey respondents identified numerous resources already available in the field of ‘soft skills’ they nevertheless felt that ongoing research, standardization and advancement of

knowledge could support the evolution towards even more effective practices in ‘soft skills’ development.

3.6 The Future of ‘Soft Skills’ Development in Canada

Currently in Canada, several provinces have strategies/frameworks that relate to ‘soft skills’ (see Appendix D). At the national level *Essential Skills Framework* outlines nine key skills that enable citizens to thrive in Canadian society. The nine ‘essential skills’ identified by the Canadian government within the *Essential Skills Framework* are:

- Reading
- Document use
- Numeracy
- Writing
- Oral communication
- Working with others
- Thinking
- Computer use
- Continuous learning

In initiating the project, it was recognized that some may feel the current *Essential Skills Framework* already incorporates ‘soft skills’ while others may see gaps in the framework with respect to ‘soft skills’. As stakeholders working closely with ‘soft skills’, survey respondents were asked to consider whether future strategic direction related to ‘soft skills’ development in Canada could be accomplished within the current *Essential Skills Framework* (or the current framework with some modifications), or whether a separate ‘soft skills’ framework would better serve the objective of advancing Canadians’ ‘soft skills’ capacity.

Only 6% of survey respondents felt that Canada’s current *Essential Skills Framework* already adequately incorporates ‘soft skills’.¹⁷ These respondents pointed to essential skills like ‘oral communication’ and ‘working with others’ as areas where the current framework incorporates what would be considered ‘soft skills’. For example, one respondent wrote “These categories are broad enough to include the skills I would classify as ‘soft’ - working with others, thinking, oral communication and continuous learning.”

Most survey respondents (61%) felt that ‘soft skills’ could be more explicitly included within the *Essential Skills Framework* to ensure recognition of the importance of ‘soft skills’ and to add ‘soft skills’ that might not be related to the existing ‘oral communication’ and ‘working with others’ essential skills. For example, survey respondents said things like:

¹⁷ N=181

“Some of the [essential skills] I would classify as soft skills. More could be added to make the list comprehensive.”

“I think it's good to keep them within the Essential Skills [Framework] to reinforce the importance so they don't get forgotten.”

“My suggestion would be to include the soft skills in the Essential Skills Framework in a more concrete way. We don't need yet another framework to pay attention to.”

“I feel a focus on soft skills could enhance [the *Essential Skills Framework*]. There's also lots of overlap: oral communication working with others thinking continuous learning. Having both separate may be confusing and I don't feel it would serve much purpose.”

“I think there could be an increase in the soft skills included in the framework and perhaps more emphasis on them but I think that there is still a stigma around the idea of soft skills so separating them out may cause them to be seen as 'less than'.”

Approximately a quarter (24%) of survey respondents felt that a separate framework should be developed for ‘soft skills’ indicating that they felt that would add emphasis on the importance of ‘soft skills’ and would enable greater depth of understanding. 9% of survey respondents indicated that they were ‘not sure’ whether ‘soft skills’ should be added to the *Essential Skills Framework* or developed into a separate list/framework.

Regionally, a greater proportion of respondents from the Prairie region believed ‘soft skills’ should be included within the existing *Essential Skills Framework* (76%), while a smaller proportion of respondents from the Far West region believed the same (57%).

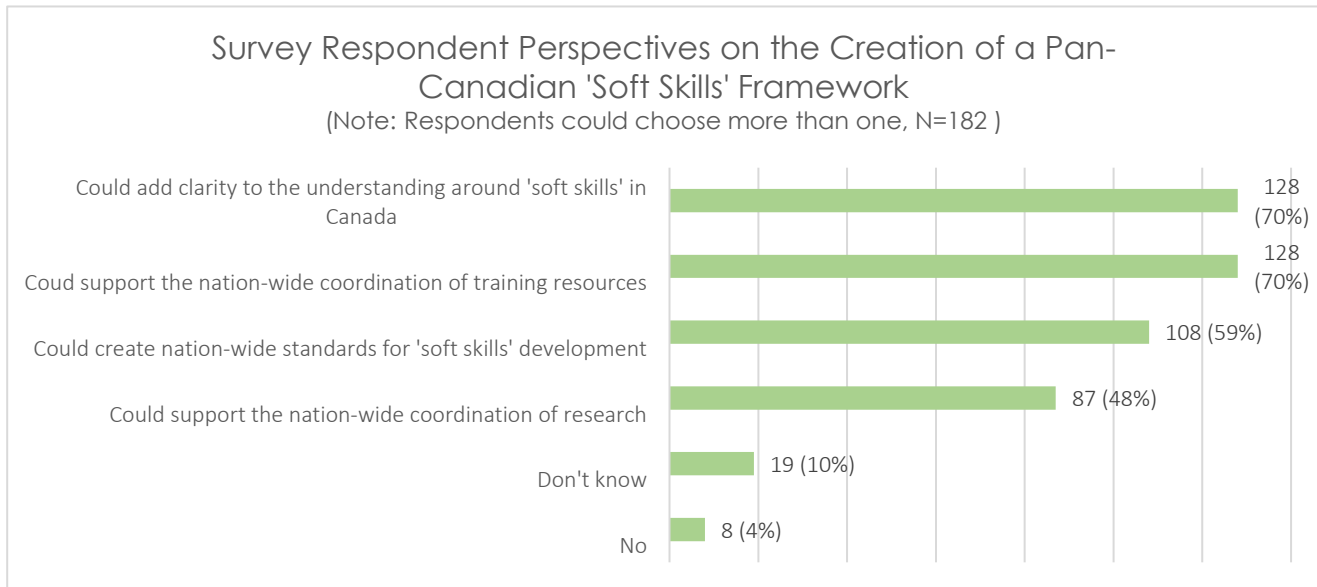
Overall, when asked whether they felt pan-Canadian strategic planning around ‘soft skills’ in Canada would be beneficial, 86% of respondents felt that it would be beneficial in some way.¹⁸ 70% of respondents felt that a pan-Canadian ‘soft skills’ framework could support the nation-wide coordination of training resources; and 70% felt that it would add clarity to the understanding of ‘soft skills’ in Canada. 59% felt such a framework could create nation-wide standards for ‘soft skills’ development and 48% thought it could support the nation-wide coordination of resources.

10% of respondents were unsure about whether a pan-Canadian strategy would be helpful, and 4% indicated that they did not think it could benefit Canada. Some of these respondents indicated that they felt the *Essential Skills Framework* is already sufficient while others indicated a need/desire for more regionalized strategies to respond to local needs and contexts.

Regionally, a greater proportion of Maritime region respondents felt that a pan-Canadian strategy would add clarity to the understanding around ‘soft skills’ in Canada while in the Prairie

¹⁸ N=182

region a smaller proportion of respondents felt it could support nation-wide coordination of resources and/or research.



When asked whether a consensus-based decision making process would be appropriate for the possible development of a pan-Canadian 'soft skills' framework, two thirds (67%) of survey respondents felt that it would. Conversely, the most common reason why survey respondents felt a consensus-based method *would not* work was a perception that there are too many stakeholders/opinions involved and that consensus would be hard to foster. Others felt there may be limitations around seeking consensus due to the amount of time and resource fostering consensus may consume. Comments amongst those in support of a consensus-based model echoed some of these concerns with respondents saying things like:

"I fully support consensus decision-making in principle but the specific process used and its management would be critical to whether this approach would work for such a complex project with so many stakeholders. This must be balanced with evidence-based research."

"Collaboration is a good idea but it would take a lot of time and involve a lot of stakeholders. I also fear that sometimes when "scholars" and/or government gets involved the decisions and definitions miss the mark. As close to front line as possible will give the best input as to definition assessment and creation of material/programming to develop the skills."

"Some degrees of Consensus Decision-making could be used but on a bigger picture this would take too much time. It could be a component but not the master way to decide something."

"I think consensus decision-making would be valuable IF there are a core group of stakeholders willing to lead and pilot this process. Consensus at scale - with stakeholders who may not be willing to invest time in immediate work - is not a functional process."

4.0 Conclusions and Recommendations

The survey results presented in this report begin to provide some insight into directions for moving forward with the “Integrating Soft Skills into the Essential Skills Framework – Building a National Consensus” project facilitated by Futureworx. Information provided by survey respondents can be leveraged as the project moves forward towards developing a plan to create a common assessment and development approach for ‘soft skills’ in Canada; proposing ideas for the integration of ‘soft skills’ into Canada’s existing *Essential Skills Framework*; and identifying and developing common terminology around ‘soft skills’ in Canada. The significant response to the survey and nation-wide representation within the survey respondents suggests that many organizations and individuals are keenly interested in this work. Based on the survey results and in the context of the project agenda, the following recommendations are put forward:

1. Continue to seek opportunities to define and standardize the definition of ‘soft skills’. The survey revealed that there are a variety of terms used to talk about so called ‘soft skills’ and that survey respondents are interested in opportunities for creating common understanding around the concept of ‘soft skills’ in order to advance strategic opportunities in Canada and enable knowledge sharing and development across regions and between stakeholder groups. Awareness of the terms used most commonly by different types of organizations and within different regions of Canada can be leveraged to facilitate the development of mutual understanding.
2. Provide opportunities that enable further discussion about ‘soft skills’ and the advancement of ‘soft skills’ development in Canada. The interest demonstrated by survey respondents through the survey suggests that there is currently an appetite for discussing the topic of ‘soft skills’ and that stakeholders are ready to advance action towards pan-Canadian opportunities for ‘soft skills’ development. This suggests that the current project is well-timed and has the potential to garner significant engagement in the anticipated consensus-building process.
3. Leverage existing research, best practices, and progress towards consensus to avoid duplication of efforts and enhance consensus building. Stakeholders who participated in the survey shared a wealth of knowledge that can be taken forward and built upon to avoid recreating existing efforts such that knowledge and resources are effectively leveraged to advance practice. At the same time, survey respondents repeatedly emphasized a desire to build on past work to move forward into the future.
4. Seek opportunities to further engage francophone, Quebecois, Northern and business/private sector stakeholders. Since the survey sample had less representation from these key groups, it is recommended that further targeted engagement is undertaken to ensure consensus-building involves the right range of key stakeholders representing all regions and relevant sectors.

Appendix A: Survey Questions

Futureworx Society is reaching out to organizations across the country with an interest in the development of ‘soft skills’ for the workplace as part of a project funded by the federal Office of Literacy and Essential Skills (OLES). The project seeks to explore the development of a national framework to support ‘soft skills’ in Canada.

To initiate the project, we are soliciting perspectives regarding ‘soft skills’ and development of a ‘soft skills’ framework through the current survey.

The survey includes questions on your perspectives around ‘soft skills’ as well as an opportunity to indicate interest in participating in a planning session for moving forward in the development of a ‘soft skills’ framework, organized by Futureworx in August 2018.

The survey should only take about **XX minutes** of your time to complete. Your responses will be kept confidential and won’t be shared publically with your name or any identifying information attached. You are free to stop the survey at any time, and can skip any questions you are not comfortable answering.

The survey is being administered and analyzed by Constellation Consulting Group, a third party Calgary-based research group. For more information on Constellation Consulting Group see: www.constellationconsulting.ca. The results of this survey, without organizational/personal reference, will be shared on the Futureworx website, www.futureworx.ca, in September 2018.

We are seeking a broad base of input and encourage you to pass this survey along to others in your network who may be interested in participating.

If you have any questions or would prefer to engage via phone interview, please contact Anne Miller at anne@constellationconsulting.ca or 403.923.7611.

We’d like to begin by asking you a few questions about you/your organization:

1. Your name (for survey tracking purposes only): <open-ended text box>
2. Name of your organization: <open-ended text box>
3. Province: <open-ended text box>
4. Town/city: <open-ended text box>
5. Email: <open-ended text box>
6. Phone number: <open-ended text box>
7. My organization could be described as: (please check all that apply) <multi-select multiple choice>
 - Part of government
 - A private sector business/employer
 - A university
 - A college
 - A school (k-12)
 - A training/upgrading provider
 - A literacy and essential skills service provider
 - A job search service provider
 - A research-focused organization
 - A sector council
 - An advocacy-focused organization
 - A think-tank
 - A workforce development organization
 - A union
 - A consultancy
 - Other (please specify)_____

8. Please briefly describe your organization's work: <text box>
9. Approximately what is the size of your organization: <single select multiple choice>
- A. 1 to 9 employees
 - B. 10 to 49 employees
 - C. 50 to 249 employees
 - D. 250 employees or more
 - E. My organization is part of the government
 - F. Don't know
- Comments _____
11. My organization primarily focuses on supporting: (please select all that apply) <multi-select multiple choice>
- Children and youth (under 18 year of age)
 - Young adults (ages 18-24)
 - Adults
 - Older people (ages 65+)
 - Women
 - Men
 - Immigrants, refugees, newcomers
 - Indigenous individuals
 - Persons with disabilities
 - Individuals from specific racial or ethnic groups (please provide details in comments space below)
 - Individuals with mental health concerns
 - Individuals living on low income
 - Individuals with low levels of educational attainment
 - Individuals with low literacy
 - All of the above
 - Other (please specify) _____
- Comments _____

<New Page> Now we would like to ask you some questions about perceptions and work within your organization. Your answers will help us to better understand how people are working on 'soft skills' and where consensus might be fostered towards the development of a 'soft skills' framework in Canada.

10. People use different terms to talk about things like 'attitude', 'accountability', 'motivation', 'adaptability', 'time management', 'teamwork', 'good communication' and so forth. Please let us know how often you use the following terms to talk about these things within your organization: <Rating scale: Always use this term; Often use this term; Sometimes use this term; Rarely use this term; Never use this term>
- Soft skills
 - Employability skills
 - Personal management skills
 - Life skills
 - Essential skills
 - Personal attributes
 - Personal competencies
 - Life management competencies
 - Personal behaviours
 - No consistent terminology used <no rating scale>
 - Other (please specify) _____

While different organizations use different terminology to talk about things like attitude', 'accountability', 'motivation', 'adaptability', 'time management', 'teamwork', 'good communication' and so forth, for the purpose of this survey, we will call these things 'soft skills'.

11. On a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is the least important and 10 is the most important, how important do you feel 'soft skills' are for maximizing individual potential within today's society? <rating slider scale>

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

12. Does your province/region currently have a 'soft skills' framework in place? <single select multiple choice>

- A. Yes
- B. No
- C. Don't know

If yes, could you please provide a link to the framework? _____

13. For you/your organization, what are the five most important 'soft skills' for employment? <multiple text boxes>

- i. _____
- ii. _____
- iii. _____
- iv. _____
- v. _____

14. Within your organization, have you noticed any common deficiencies in 'soft skills'? (please select all that apply) <multi-select multiple choice>

- A. Yes, amongst employees
- B. Yes, amongst volunteers
- C. Yes, amongst clients/program participants
- D. No
- E. Don't know
- F. Other (please specify) _____

Comments _____

15. 'Soft skills' can be developed in many ways. Please select any of the ways your organization intentionally seeks to develop 'soft skills' amongst employees, clients, program participants, volunteers, etc.: (please select all that apply) <multi-select multiple choice>

- A. Our own structured training program
- B. A structured training program developed by someone else
- C. Group Workshops
- D. Short talks or sessions (e.g. lunch n learn sessions, presentations)
- E. Coaching or counselling support (e.g. behavioural counselling)
- F. Long-term, in-depth support (e.g. training over three months or more)
- G. Short-term, as-needed support (e.g. mentoring, referrals to resources)
- H. Online learning opportunities
- I. We do not intentionally seek to develop these things
- J. Other (please specify) _____

16. If relevant, please describe the intentional ways in which your organization is supporting the development of 'soft skills'. Please be as specific as possible, letting us know about things like the length and structure of your activities: <text box>

17. Each year, approximately how many individuals would you estimate are intentionally supported in developing 'soft skills' through your organization?

- A. None
- B. Less than 20
- C. Between 21 and 100
- D. Over 100
- E. Don't know

Comments _____

18. Thinking about all the training and other intentional development activities undertaken by your organization in a year, approximately what proportion would you estimate is dedicated to 'soft skills' development? (Your best guess is fine) <text box validated for % only> _____

19. At your organization, do you use any tools or methods for assessing 'soft skills'? <single select multiple choice>

- A. Yes
- B. No

Please explain/provide details: _____

20. Is there any research on 'soft skills' development that you feel we should be aware of? If yes, please provide any titles, links, or contacts you feel we should know about: <text box>

21. Do you think research on soft-skill development and assessment is required? If yes please provide details on research topics you would recommend. <text box>

22. Do you know of any best practices in 'soft skills' development that you feel we should be aware of? If yes, please provide any program names, links, or contacts you feel we should know about: <text box>

23. What factors, if any, limit your organization's ability to undertake effective intentional activities to develop 'soft skills'? (Please select all that apply) <multi-select multiple choice>

- Practitioners do not have enough time
- Funding does not provide sufficient opportunity
- Not enough tools or resources
- Lack of staff knowledge/capacity
- Demand/need is too high
- Lack of space
- Lack of best practices
- Lack of connection to a community of practice
- Other (please specify) _____

<New Page> Part of the objective of this project is to plan for a consensus around 'soft skills' development in Canada. The following questions ask about your perspectives on 'soft skills' in general and the possibility of a nation-wide effort to coordinate soft skills development practices.

24. In the future, how important do you think having strong 'soft skills' will be within Canadian society?

- A. As important as they are today

- B. More important than they are today
- C. Less important than they are today
- D. Don't know

Comments: _____

25. Currently, the federal government's Essential Skills Framework identifies nine essential skills for Canadians: reading, document use, numeracy, writing, oral communication, working with others, thinking, computer use, and continuous learning. Do you feel 'soft skills' should: <single select multiple choice>
- A. Be included more explicitly in the existing Essential Skills Framework
 - B. Be a separate list of 'skills'
 - C. Not sure

Comments: _____

26. Do you feel it would be beneficial to develop a pan-Canadian 'soft skills' Framework? (Please check all that apply) <multi-select multiple choice>
- Yes, it could support the nation-wide coordination of training resources
 - Yes, it could support the nation-wide coordination of research
 - Yes, it would create nation-wide standards for 'soft skill' development
 - Yes, it would add clarity to the understanding around 'soft skills' in Canada
 - No
 - Don't know

Comments: _____

27. Consensus decision-making is a group decision-making process in which group members develop, and agree to support a decision in the best interest of the whole. If a pan-Canadian Soft Skills Framework was developed, do you feel a consensus decision-making process involving all stakeholders would be an appropriate approach? (Please select all that apply) <multi-select multiple choice>
- Yes, it would be a good approach
 - No, it would take too much time
 - No, it would take too many resources
 - No, there are too many stakeholders/opinions
 - No, it should be a government-directed undertaking
 - No, for other reasons
 - Don't know

Comments: _____

28. With funding from OLES, in August 2018 Futureworx will be gathering together a group of individuals/organizations to form a planning group to explore the development of a national consensus on 'soft skills' in Canada. Would you/your organization be interested in possibly being a part of this initial planning group?
- A. Yes
 - B. Maybe
 - C. No
 - D. Don't know

29. If you would like to be included, in what capacity would you like to be involved?
- A. As a researcher

- B. As a reviewer
- C. As a regional contributor/representative
- D. As a national backbone organization
- E. Don't know
- F. Other (please specify)_____

30. Anything else to share?

This is intended to be a process with broad inclusion of multiple stakeholders. We encourage you to pass this survey along to others in your network so that we can garner a nation-wide dataset on soft skills development in Canada.

Thank you for your time and commitment in completing this survey! The results from the survey and planning meeting in August 2018 will be posted on the Futureworx website at www.futureworx.ca (expected to be posted in September 2018). If you have questions about this survey, please contact Anne Miller at anne@constellationconsulting.ca.

Appendix B: Research Recommended by Survey Respondents

In response to the question: “Is there any research on ‘soft skills’ development and/or assessment that you feel we should be aware of?” survey respondents provided the following suggested resources to explore:

Research/Resource	Web Link (if available)
AWES	http://www.awes.ca/
Brookfield Institute – The Talented Mr. Robot	http://brookfieldinstitute.ca/research-analysis/automation/
Business/Higher Education Roundtable – Navigating Change	http://bher.ca/publications/2018skillssurvey
Canada West Foundation	http://cwf.ca/
CBC – Potential hires coming up short in ‘soft skills,’ employers say	http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/sudbury/potential-hires-need-soft-skills-1.4206639
Centre for Literacy – Embedding Literacy and Essential Skills in Workplace Learning	http://www.centreforliteracy.qc.ca/sites/default/files/Embed_LES_J_Derrick.pdf
Centre for Literacy – Meeting Expectations	http://www.srdc.org/media/199687/mos-final-report-en.pdf
CERIC	http://ceric.ca/
Conference Board of Canada – Getting to Work	http://www.conferenceboard.ca/e-library/abstract.aspx?did=9463
Employment Readiness – Summary of Research	http://www.employmentreadiness.info/sites/employmentreadiness.info/files/files/Organizations/ERS%20Research%20Results_cdn.pdf
Employability Skills Assessment Tool (ESAT)	https://futureworx.ca/employability-skills-assessment-tool/
ERIC – Development of a Proposed Global Work-Integrated Learning Framework	https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1131540
Essential Skills Ontario – Elevating Ontario’s Workforce	http://www.essentialskillsontario.ca/research/elevating-ontario
FYA – The New Basics	https://www.fya.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/The-New-Basics_Update_Web.pdf
Grass Roots Press – Soft Skills	https://www.grassrootsbooks.net/ca/catalogsearch/result/?q=soft+skills
HEQCO – The Great Skills Divide	http://www.heqco.ca/SiteCollectionDocuments/Skills%20Part%201.pdf
HEQCO – Learning Outcomes	http://www.heqco.ca/en-ca/OurPriorities/LearningOutcomes/Pages/Home.aspx
Jane Forward – Sociocultural Competency	https://bctcal.files.wordpress.com/2018/04/jane-forward-sociocultural-competency.pdf
Learning Networks – Soft Skills and Literacy and Basic Skills	https://learningnetworks.ca/wp-content/themes/Ino/files/resources/SoftSkillsandLBS-Feb2018-Final.pdf
LMI Canada	http://www.lmicanada.ca/

Research/Resource	Web Link (if available)
Morneua Shepell – Navigating Change: 2018 Business Council Skills Sruvey	https://www.morneaushepell.com/ca-en/insights/navigating-change-2018-business-council-skills-survey
National Children’s Bureau – A rapid review to inform development of tools for project evaluation	http://www.partners4value.lt/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Measuring-Employability-Skills.pdf
National Literacy Secretariat	http://publications.gc.ca/site/eng/92148/publication.html
NWT Literacy Council – Storying Progress	https://www.nwtliteracy.ca/sites/default/files/research/non-academic_outcomes_final_report.pdf
Office of Literacy and Essential Skills	https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/literacy-essential-skills.html
OSPE – Kickstart the Careers of the Next Generation of Ontario Engineers	https://www.ospe.on.ca/public/documents/advocacy/submissions/OSPE_Submission_to_Ontario_2018_Budget.pdf
OSPE – Premier’s Highly Skilled Workforce Strategy Expert Panel	https://www.ospe.on.ca/public/documents/advocacy/submissions/2016-OSPE_Submission_Premiers_Expert_Panel.pdf
Overseas Development Institute – A Comparative Overview of Resilience Measurement Frameworks	https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/9754.pdf
People for Education - Assessment and measurement: Beyond testing	https://peopleforeducation.ca/mwm-sharing-the-thinking/assessment-measurement-insight/
People for Education - Beyond the 3Rs: Competencies that matter	https://peopleforeducation.ca/mwm-sharing-the-thinking/competencies-insight/
People for Education - Citizenship domain paper	https://peopleforeducation.ca/report/citizenship-domain-paper/
People for Education - Creativity domain paper	https://peopleforeducation.ca/report/creativity-the-state-of-the-domain/
People for Education - Defining what matters: A common lexicon to support learning	https://peopleforeducation.ca/mwm-sharing-the-thinking/common-lexicon-insight/
People for Education - Equity: Developing competencies, changing trajectories	https://peopleforeducation.ca/mwm-sharing-the-thinking/equity-insight/
People for Education - Health domain paper	https://peopleforeducation.ca/report/health-domain-paper/
People for Education - Social-emotional learning domain paper	https://peopleforeducation.ca/report/sel-domain-paper/
People for Education - Quality learning environments: Creating conditions for learning	https://peopleforeducation.ca/mwm-sharing-the-thinking/qle-insight/
People for Education - Quality Learning Environments domain paper	https://peopleforeducation.ca/report/qle-domain-paper/
Psychometrics – Strong Interest Inventory	https://www.psychometrics.com/assessments/strong-interest-inventory/
RBC – Humans Wanted	http://www.rbc.com/newsroom/_assets-custom/pdf/03-2018-rbc-future-skills-report.pdf

Research/Resource	Web Link (if available)
Rehabilitation Counseling Bulletin – Construction and Field Testing of the Job Seeking Self-Efficacy Scale	http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/00343552060490040201
Simcoe Muskoko Workforce Development Board – Soft Skills Solutions	https://www.smwdb.com/soft-skills-solutions
Skills Competency Canada	https://www.skillscompetencescanada.com/en/
TRACOM – The Social Style Model	https://www.tracomcorp.com/social-style-training/model/
University of Guelph – Job Search Self-Efficacy and the influence of Social support	http://seanlyons.ca/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/Quinn-et-al-2014.pdf
University of Kentucky – Cultivate Self-Efficacy for Personal Organizational Effectiveness	https://www.uky.edu/~eushe2/Bandura/Bandura2009Locke.pdf
University of Kentucky – Guide for Constructing Self-Efficacy Scales	https://www.uky.edu/~eushe2/Bandura/BanduraGuide2006.pdf
UvA-DARE – Job Search Self-Efficacy	http://dare.uva.nl/search?identifier=751f4632-2eb2-4a27-ba76-6b4ba71fae32
VIA Institute on Character	http://www.viacharacter.org/www/Character-Strengths-Survey
World Economic Forum – Fourth Industrial Revolution	https://www.weforum.org/agenda/archive/fourth-industrial-revolution
World Economic Forum – Towards a Reskilling Revolution	https://www.weforum.org/reports/towards-a-reskilling-revolution
World Economic Forum – What are the 21 st century skills every student needs?	https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/03/21st-century-skills-future-jobs-students/
Workplace Education Manitoba	https://wem.mb.ca/

Book: Rutherford, D. & Laroche, L. (2011) *Recruiting, Retaining and Promoting Culturally Different Employees*. Routledge Taylor & Francis Group.

Comment on internally produced research: Yes - we developed our own paper on soft skills in Ontario's Literacy and Basic Skills programs. It's called "Soft Skills and LBS" (March 2018) and we have a good list of soft skills and how often they are mentioned by various provincial, national and international publications. To access these documents, contact Tamara Kaattari at literacylink@bellnet.ca

Appendix C: Recommended Best Practices from Survey Respondents

In response to the question: “Do you know of any best practices in ‘soft skills’ development and/or assessment that you feel we should be aware of?” survey respondents provided the following list of programs, frameworks, and contacts to explore:

Suggested Best Practice Resource	Web Link (if available)
ASPECT – Employability Skills Curriculum	https://aspect.bc.ca/product/employability-skills-curriculum/
Boys and Girls Club – Skilled4Success	http://fmbgc.ca/skilled4success-youth-program.html
Consulting Resource Group	https://www.crgleader.com/
COPIAN	http://library.copian.ca/
Employ!	http://www.futuresbc.com/employ/
Employment Journey on PEI – Helping youth get a new start in life	http://employmentjourney.com/helping-youth-get-new-start-life/
Employment Journey on PEI – Moccasin Ladies Employment Project	http://employmentjourney.com/getting-encouragement-support-starting-new-path-employment/
Employment Journey on PEI – Summer Youth Programs	http://employmentjourney.com/summer-youth-programs-prove-everyone-winner/
Employment Journey on PEI – Three year plan to help youth enter construction field	http://employmentjourney.com/three-year-plan-help-youth-enter-construction-field-pe/
Employment Readiness Scale	https://www.employmentreadiness.org/
Employability Skills Assessment Tool (ESAT)	https://futureworx.ca/employability-skills-assessment-tool/
EPWIC	www.facebook.com/EPWIC
Essential Skills Group	http://www.essentialskillsgroup.com/
GIZ – The Life Skills Approach	https://www.giz.de/expertise/html/12727.html
Human Resources and Skills Development Canada	http://www.ccsd.ca/index.php/friends-partners/item/human-resources-and-skills-development-canada
LEADS employment services	https://leadsservices.com/skills-development/
McBride Career Group - Rebrand	https://www.mcbridecareergroup.com/programs-offered/show/edmonton-rebrand-career-and-employment-initiative-for-youth/6
OSPE – Bridging Programs	https://www.ospe.on.ca/ite-bridging-program
OSPE - Upcoming Courses	https://www.ospe.on.ca/courses#970/PE301-0618
Oxford County Public Health and Emergency Services – Mapping a Pathway for a Strengths-Based Approach	http://www.oxfordcounty.ca/Portals/15/Documents/Public%20Health/Partners%20and%20Professionals/Reports%20and%20Publications/Final%20Report%

Suggested Best Practice Resource	Web Link (if available)
	20Mapping%20A%20Pathway%20For%20A%20Strengths%20Based%20Approach%20In%20Public%20Health%20Practice.pdf
People for Education – Assessment and Measurement	https://peopleforeducation.ca/mwm-sharing-the-thinking/assessment-measurement-insight/
Simcoe Muskoka Workforce Development Boards	https://www.smwdb.com/soft-skills-solutions
SkillsAdvance Ontario	http://www.tcu.gov.on.ca/eng/eopg/eo_programming_opportunities/skillsadvance.html
Soft Skills Solutions	www.smwdb.com
SSS Soft Skills	http://www.ssssoftskills.com/
UP Skills For Work	https://upskillsforwork.ca/
VIA Institute on Character	http://www.viacharacter.org/www/
Women’s Economic Empowerment Project	https://www.wnpei.org/Women-s-Economic-Empowerment

In addition to the above resources, survey respondents suggested:

- The Self Esteem Workbook by Glenn Schiraldi
- Contact: Norm Amundsen
- Contact: Gray Poehnell
- Catching Confidence by Jan Elridge (UK)

Appendix D: Relevant Provincial Frameworks

Province	Relevant Framework/Strategy Web Link
British Columbia	https://www.workbc.ca/Employer-Resources/Skills-Training/Essential-Skills-Literacy.aspx
Alberta	http://www.learnalberta.ca/content/kes/pdf/or_ws_tea_life_02_employ.pdf https://alis.alberta.ca/tools-and-resources/resources-for-employers/workplace-essential-skills/
Saskatchewan	http://saskliteracy.ca/pdf_links/SLn%20Enviro%20Scan%20Sept%202012%20Web%20&%20email%20version.pdf
Manitoba	https://www.gov.mb.ca/wd/ites/is/skills.html
Ontario	http://www.tcu.gov.on.ca/pepg/audiences/colleges/progstan/essential.html
Newfoundland	http://www.aesl.gov.nl.ca/empservices/default.html
Nova Scotia	https://novascotia.ca/government/accountability/2016-2017/2016-2017-LAE-Business-Plan.pdf
PEI	http://www.gov.pe.ca/development/strategy/index.php3
New Brunswick	http://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/services/services_renderer.200971.Workplace_Essential_Skills_Program_(WES).html
Yukon	http://www.education.gov.yk.ca/pdf/training_and_work_experience/Foundational_Skills_Program_Guidelines.pdf
NWT	https://www.ece.gov.nt.ca/sites/ece/files/resources/skills_4_success_-_10-year_strategic_framework.pdf
Nunavut	http://assembly.nu.ca/library/Edocs/2007/001482-e.pdf