

# WESTERN ONTARIO WORKFORCE STRATEGY

December 1, 2021

PLANNING FOR PROSPERITY

Canada 

**EMPLOYMENT  
ONTARIO**

Ontario 

# Acknowledgements

## Consulting Team



Aileen Murray, Ec.D. (F), Mellor Murray Consulting



David Campbell, MBA, Jupia Consultants Inc.



Lisa Prime, MCIP, RPP



Tracy John, Amplify Communications

## Project Lead

[Kate Burns Gallagher](#), Executive Director, Western Ontario Wardens Caucus, Economic Development

## Working Committee

[George Bridge](#), Chair, Wellington County, Past Warden

[George Cornell](#), Simcoe County, Warden

[Jim Ginn](#), Huron County, Past Warden

[Kevin Marriot](#), Lambton County, Warden

[Walter McKenzie](#), Perth County, Past Warden

[Garry McNamara](#), Essex County, Warden

[Darren White](#), Dufferin County, Warden

[Sonya Pritchard](#), Dufferin County

[Ron Van Horne](#), Lambton County

[Meighan Wark](#), Huron County

[Kim Wingrove](#), Grey County

[Rose Austin](#), Western Ontario Community Futures Development

Corporation Association

[Jana Burns](#), Wellington County

[Marion Fantetti](#), Invest WindsorEssex

[Karisa Downey](#), Dufferin County

[Nancy Huether](#), Simcoe County

[Rick Whittaker](#), Wellington County

[Sarah Meharg](#), Western Ontario Community Futures Development Corporation Association

[Beth Anstett](#), Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development

[Amy Britten](#), Ministry of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade

[Justin Bromberg](#), Western Ontario Wardens Caucus

[Kim Earls](#), South Central Ontario Region

[Petrusia Hontar](#), Southwestern Ontario Local Immigration Partnerships

[Jeff Kinsella](#), Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs

[Deb Mountenay](#), Workforce Planning West

[Bill Sullivan](#), Bruce, Grey, Simcoe, Regional Tourism Organization

[Megan Flaherty](#), Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing

The Western Ontario Wardens Caucus gratefully acknowledges the funding support from the Government of Canada, Province of Ontario, and Employment Ontario. Our thanks to the businesses, municipal governments, staff, stakeholders, and community groups that contributed to the development of this strategy.

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## 1 Introduction

This Western Ontario Workforce Strategy was developed at a time of massive economic upheaval. The project was initiated in April 2021 in the midst of a global pandemic. The abrupt shutdown of the economy in March 2020 and the resulting economic, health and social impacts are still reverberating around the globe and across the Western Ontario Wardens Caucus region as this strategy document is completed at the end of 2021.

Workforce shortages, a misalignment of employers' needs and workers' skills, escalating housing prices and housing shortages all existed before the pandemic but these trends were amplified and accelerated with the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic. This strategy provides practical solutions for the regional network to address the challenge with its member municipalities. This strategy will be a critical tool in ensuring the Western Ontario Warden's Caucus region's economic prosperity for the future.

The objectives of the Western Ontario Workforce Strategy are as follows:

- To strengthen the access and quality of labour market intelligence to address the needs of businesses, create opportunities to strengthen the alignment between business needs and education programming.
- To inform municipal business retention and succession planning activities.
- To improve the region's access to a skilled and talented labour pool.

The Western Ontario Wardens' Caucus (WOWC) gratefully acknowledges the funding support from the Ontario Labour Market Partnership Project to develop the Western Ontario Workforce Strategy.

### About the Western Ontario Wardens Caucus

The Western Ontario Wardens' Caucus is a not-for-profit organization representing 15 upper tier and single tier municipalities in southwestern Ontario, including: Brant, Bruce, Chatham- Kent, Dufferin, Elgin, Essex, Grey, Huron, Lambton, Middlesex, Norfolk, Oxford, Perth, Simcoe, and Wellington counties. The region is home to more than three million residents.

The WOWC was established to enhance the prosperity and overall wellbeing of rural and small urban communities across the region.

Figure 1: WOWC Region



## Creating the WOWC Workforce Strategy

The WOWC Workforce Strategy was completed in three phases. The background study in **Phase 1** provides a summary of previous regional programs and County workforce strategies that preceded this strategy. It also includes a series of case studies of regional workforce strategies from around the globe that serve as potential models for WOWC.

**Phase 2** consisted of the following components:

- **Stakeholder engagement:** a summary of stakeholder engagement techniques and the insights gained through broad community consultation.
- **Attainable housing:** a comprehensive analysis of the housing supply and demand by jurisdiction in the WOWC and case studies of programs to address housing needs.
- **Labour market and people attraction:** a detailed analysis of the demographic and economic trends and forecasts that will drive workforce demand and a review of current resident and talent attraction efforts across the region.
- **Marketing and communications:** a review of marketing tactics used by other regional organizations that could be utilized by the WOWC to support the workforce strategy.

The report includes a summary of the key findings, a SWOT analysis and strategic priorities for the development of the workforce strategy.

**Phase 3** is the culmination of the strategic planning effort, providing the blueprint for the WOWC efforts. The strategic priorities are the foundation for the vision and mission, goals and objectives outlined in this strategy. A series of strategic actions provide the practical steps that the WOWC will take to achieve its vision.

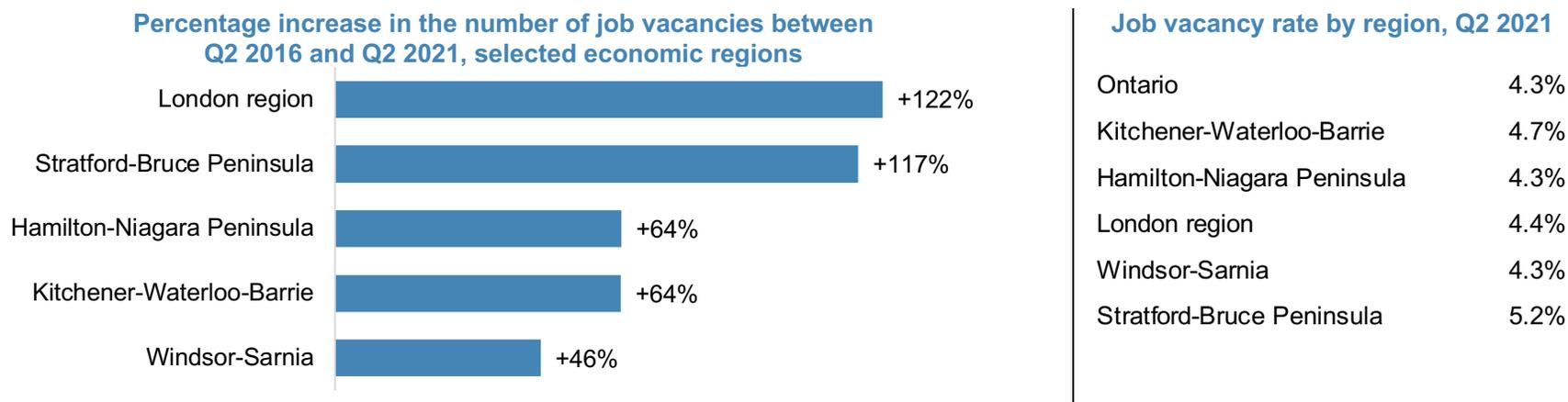


## The Role of the WOWC in Delivering the Workforce Strategy

There are many different stakeholders involved in workforce development across the WOWC region including educational institutions, industry associations, training companies and employers. Increasingly, although it is not a traditional role for local government, communities are taking on a greater role in this area as the shortage of workers is becoming a barrier to economic growth and community vibrancy.

As shown in Figure 2, the job vacancy rate in the five economic zones in which WOWC municipalities are located has increased substantially in the past five years. The Kitchener-Waterloo-Barrie Economic Region which includes Simcoe, Dufferin, Perth and Wellington Counties has seen a 64% rise in job vacancies the same increase as in the Hamilton--Niagara Peninsula Economic region, which includes Brant and Norfolk counties. The London Economic Region which includes Middlesex, Elgin and Oxford counties has seen job vacancies more than double (up 122%). The number of unfilled jobs is up 117% in the Stratford-Bruce Peninsula Economic Region which includes Bruce, Huron and Grey counties. The Windsor-Sarnia Economic Region, which includes Essex, Chatham-Kent and Lambton counties, saw the slowest increase in total job vacancies but the number is still up by 46%. The job vacancy rate in the Stratford-Bruce Peninsula region was 5.2% in the second quarter of 2021, the second highest job vacancy rate among Ontario's 11 economic regions. Some of the increase is undoubtedly related to the COVID-19 pandemic but the broader demographic trends are also pushing up the rate.

**Figure 2: Job vacancy rate and five-year increase, selected economic regions in Ontario**



Source: Statistics Canada Table: 14-10-0325-01.

There are tens of thousands of jobs that are unfilled right now across the WOWC region across a broad range of occupational groups. The concentration of employment in those sectors by economic region is reflected in the varying rates of job vacancies in the economic regions. The number of vacant health care jobs has more than tripled between Q2 2016 and Q1 2021. Trades-related job vacancies have more than doubled. Job vacancies in manufacturing-related occupations have increased by 95%. Agriculture and natural resources job vacancies are up 70%.

## Regional Focus

The WOWC Workforce Strategy recognizes the practicalities of developing a strategy for a regional non-profit organization. The WOWC is not going to provide post-secondary education nor is it going to provide micro-credential training. However, there are a number of ways the WOWC and individual municipalities can directly and indirectly support workforce development across the region. The Western Ontario Workforce Strategy outlines the roles of the WOWC related to the various aspects of workforce development as developed under four strategic priorities.

The workforce development plan includes goals, objectives and strategic actions that address those objectives and ultimately support the vision of successful and thriving labour markets across the WOWC region. For each of the strategic actions, the role(s) of the WOWC is identified. There are seven potential roles for the WOWC as listed below.

**Table 1: WOWC Roles**

	<p><b>Primary:</b> Lead partner. Not responsible for creating all the programming in that area but responsible for driving the implementation through partnership and the organization.</p>
	<p><b>Developer:</b> Creating new and/or expanding on programming or services supporting clients. Providing this service or offering to others to provide.</p>
	<p><b>Convenor:</b> Bringing key stakeholders together to discuss an issue, driving toward group consensus and alignment, resolution, and implementation.</p>
	<p><b>Connector:</b> Dedicating resources and capacity toward servicing clients by directing them toward needed resources outside WOWC.</p>
	<p><b>Advocate:</b> Vocally supporting and dedicating organizational resources towards a cause, policy or program needing political or community support.</p>
	<p><b>Supporter:</b> Signing on as a partner, perhaps via letter of support, board resolution, etc.</p>

## 2 Strategic Priorities

Strategic Priorities are those areas of focus that must be addressed if the WOWC is going to be successful in achieving its vision. These strategic priorities provide the basis for the goals, objectives and actions outlined in the subsequent pages of this strategy.



**Workforce  
Retention &  
Attraction**



**Leveraging existing  
population**



**Attainable Housing**



**Employer  
Recruitment &  
Retention**

**Workforce retention and attraction** is focused on collective efforts to attract population and workers to the region. Across the region employers are facing workforce strategies that have the potential to limit the region's economic prosperity. The municipalities must put a focus on attracting workers to fill occupations in demand. Retention is equally important. Thousands of people move out of the region every year, particularly young people. They need to be engaged and have a good understanding of the career opportunities at home.

**Leveraging the existing population** includes efforts to ensure our post-secondary education system is aligned with workforce demand and working closely with employers across the region. It also involves engaging with youth in high school and even younger to expose them to career opportunities at home. We want our young people to stay and help build strong communities for the next generation. Leveraging existing population includes supporting people who have struggled to attach to the labour market or who might start to work under the right conditions. This includes older workers and persons with barriers to employment.

**Attainable housing** is fundamental to sustainable population and economic growth across the WOWC region. Many of the jobs that will need to be filled in the coming years are not high paying jobs. Many families are already feeling the sting of high shelter costs. Attainable housing doesn't necessarily mean subsidized, but it does mean a broad mix of options to meet the demand of local families and those moving into the region. Establishing the right policy framework, coupled with an engaged and aligned real estate development community providing innovative and compelling housing options will be key.

**Employer recruitment and retention** recognizes that many of our firms need to elevate their recruitment, retention and human resources practices. Smaller firms may not have the internal capacity to address the recruitment challenges. Some employers may need to raise wages or offer better benefits. Others may need to be more flexible with work hours. Most will need to engage more with experiential learning. Employers large and small will have to do a better job if they are to recruit and retain a strong workforce and combined, ensure that the region's economy continues to grow.

### 3 Vision and Mission

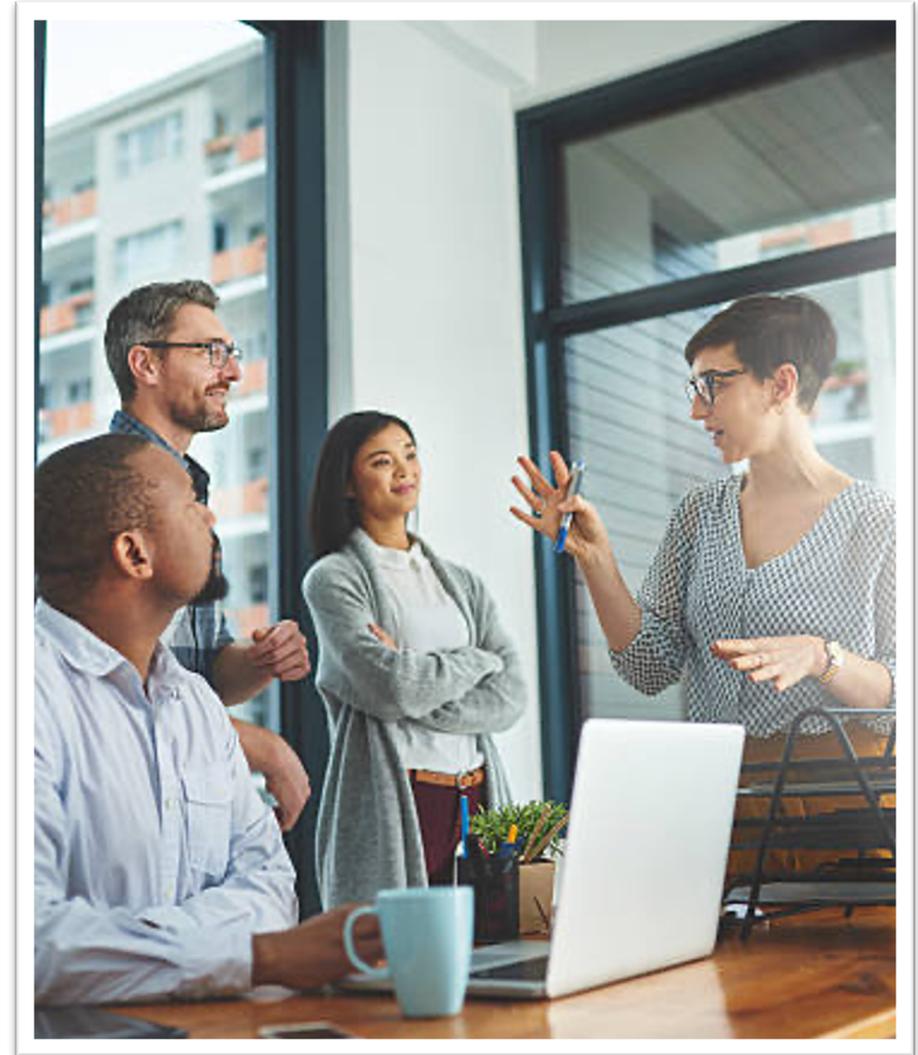
The vision statement is a short phrase describing the future that the WOWC is ultimately working towards. The mission statement is a one-sentence statement of what WOWC does and why. Together the vision and mission statements provide a picture of the WOWC's aspirations, and the efforts required to get to that desired state.

#### Vision

WOWC members have the supports and resources required to successfully address their workforce development needs.

#### Mission

To provide and advocate for regional workforce development resources and supports, build workforce development capacity and foster collaboration between member municipalities and other workforce stakeholders.



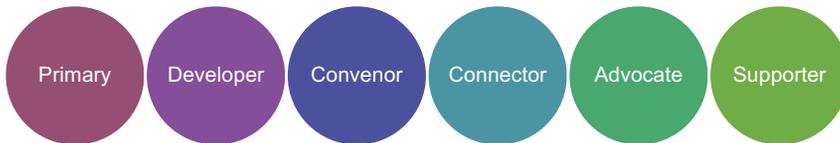
## 4 Goals and Objectives

Goals and objectives bring the vision and mission into focus. Goals are the broad end state that the WOWC wants to achieve. They provide the direction for the strategy. Objectives are the desired outcomes that the WOWC wants to achieve as a result of the goal. The following four goals and related objectives provide the framework for the WOWC Workforce Strategy.

		Goal	Objective
	1	<b>Workforce Retention and Attraction</b>	Provide member municipalities with the support, resources, and connections to address local workforce replacement demand and industry growth requirements
	2	<b>Leveraging Existing Population</b>	Assist member municipalities to engage local residents with the education and career opportunities in their communities
	3	<b>Attainable Housing</b>	Advance services and programs to assist member municipalities to increase the supply and variety of attainable housing aligned with local workforce needs
	4	<b>Employer Recruitment and Retention</b>	Enhance member municipalities' collaboration with employers to strengthen workforce recruitment and retention

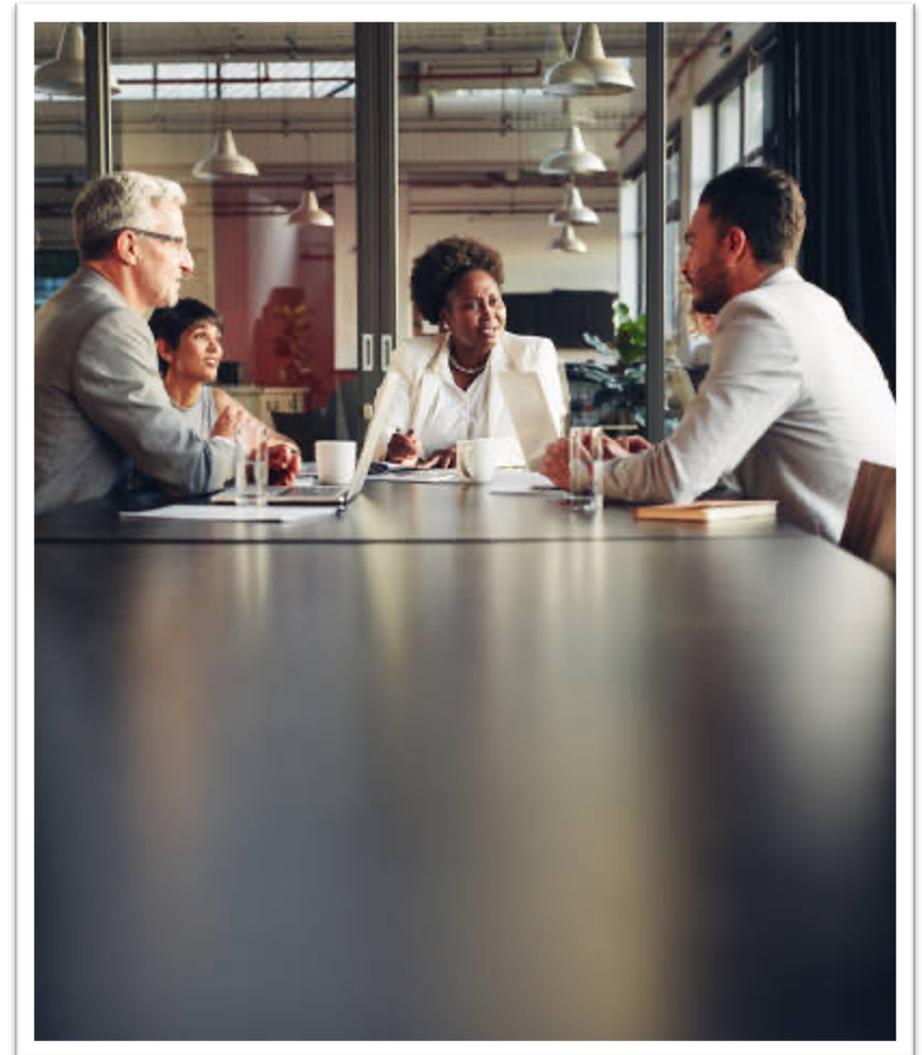
## 5 Strategic Actions

Strategic actions represent the specific activities that need to be accomplished to ensure each objective can be met and therefore support the vision of the Workforce Strategy. Most of these actions involve a variety of stakeholders across the region and, therefore, the specific role for the WOWC is identified using the seven different roles detailed earlier.



Each of the strategic actions will require a more detailed plan and initiatives as well as budget/resource allocation and success metrics. The implementation plan associated with this Workforce Strategy will provide these details.

Several strategic actions address more than one goal area. These actions are included under both goal areas and are shaded in blue.



## Workforce Retention & Attraction

	<b>1</b>	<b>Workforce Retention and Attraction</b>	Provide member municipalities with the support, resources and connections to address local workforce replacement demand and industry growth requirements.
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Every year tens of thousands of people move in and out of the WOWC region. This includes migrants to/from elsewhere in Ontario, and Canada and international population flows. As developed in the Issues and Findings report that preceded this strategy demonstrated that most of the WOWC region has a strong track record of attracting population from elsewhere in Ontario. The region has had less success with attracting population from across Canada or from the rest of the world (with some notable exceptions).

For example, 54% of the immigrants who settled in the Stratford-Bruce Peninsula Economic Region in 2013, still lived in the region in 2018. Expanding the time frame a little further, just 43% of the immigrants who settled in the region in 2010, remained in the region in 2018. Windsor-Sarnia and the Greater London regions have a higher immigrant retention rate (ranging in the 60-70% range)<sup>1</sup>. Immigrant retention must become a high priority as part of the WOWC's immigrant attraction efforts.

Attracting population from outside Canada requires communities to put more emphasis on marketing their unique assets and attributes. Tourism promotion is fairly well developed across the WOWC region, but most communities do not have a similar level of effort dedicated to population attraction. There are important synergies between tourism and people attraction. Many of the reasons people love to visit the WOWC region are the same attributes that would attract them to live in the region.

The WOWC will need compelling value propositions for the communities across the region. The value propositions should address the needs related to five personas: entry-level workers, newcomers, families, 55+ workers and temporary /seasonal workers. These value propositions should incorporate resident attraction and the retention of young people born and raised in the region.

<sup>1</sup> Source: Statistics Canada Table: 43-10-0024-01.

## Workforce Personas



**Entry-level workers** – This persona includes individuals who are at the beginning of their careers, including some older and younger individuals who may be starting out. Their income potential is significant as they emerge from entry-level positions. They may have more progressive expectations of worker experience than other workforce personas.



**Newcomers** – Newcomers' access to appropriate and affordable housing increases the longer they live in Canada, and these rates are improved if they have family already in Canada. Newcomers continue to face multiple barriers when accessing housing, including limited language skills or income levels, as well as discrimination based on ethnicity, race, or culture. They may also be individual international students looking to settle and bring other family.



**55+ workers** – This persona includes individuals exiting the workforce that may be looking for part time or more flexible work opportunities. They are workforce mentors and may provide important technical or long-range experience for companies with a younger workforce.



**Families** – Many individuals within the 25 to 55 aged workforce will be a part of families of all compositions, including couples, single parents, and multi-family households with and without children. Young growing family workers need larger housing options or opportunities to transition up in the housing market.



**Temporary and/or seasonal workers** – The current workforce includes temporary and/or seasonal workers who are employed in sectors such as agricultural and tourism. They are often employed in contractual and/or seasonal work and seek housing to accommodate shorter-term housing needs.

## 1.1 Resident/Workforce Attraction and Retention

Across the WOWC region there are a number of initiatives focused on attracting people to specific communities. The WOWC should broaden those resident attraction efforts to support all communities in the region. The WOWC can support the development and implementation of resident/workforce attraction efforts in a variety of forms such as building the regional brand, raising awareness of job and career opportunities and expanding online information to support attraction efforts. There are also many initiatives that can be taken to support retention of population including exposing young people to career opportunities, supporting under-represented populations in the workforce and strengthening the quality and quantity of labour market information available to residents and businesses across the region.

Workforce Retention and Attraction	
Resident/Workforce Attraction and Retention Recommended Actions	WOWC Role
a) Establish a secure microsite to house WOWC recruitment and retention toolkit materials for use by member municipalities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Create a self-administered resident attraction assessment tool to assist municipalities to assess their capacity to attract and retain residents and develop community-based value propositions</li> <li>ii. Provide individual fact sheets for member municipalities based on the research provided in the WOWC Workforce Strategy</li> <li>iii. Develop a communications intranet platform for member municipalities to share information, discuss and collaborate on resident and workforce attraction efforts</li> </ul>	Primary
b) Create a strong WOWC workforce attraction and retention brand that represents the collaborative efforts of the member municipalities and can be broken into municipal sub-brand items as required <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Build a campaign website to house public information to inform, build awareness of broad career opportunities, current job opportunities, community features and amenities to attract and retain workers and residents targeted to identified personas</li> <li>ii. Develop a regional WOWC workforce attraction and retention campaign to promote the features and benefits of the WOWC region and individual member municipalities</li> <li>iii. Integrate the WOWCs value propositions by persona (entry level, working families, newcomers, workers 55+ and temporary/seasonal workers) into all marketing materials</li> <li>iv. Develop and deploy an integrated regional awareness campaign targeting the personas driving traffic to the WOWC website as a venue to learn about communities and work opportunities at the various communities</li> </ul>	Developer

Workforce Retention and Attraction	
Resident/Workforce Attraction and Retention Recommended Actions	WOWC Role
c) Compile community specific data for prospective new residents	Developer
d) Support succession planning in partnership with the WOCFDCA	Convenor, Advocate
i. Explore the potential for a regional matchmaking initiative for retiring small business operators and prospective new entrepreneurs	
ii. Advocate for government funding to assist in the transition from existing owners to new owners	
e) Convene employers, member municipalities' economic developers, workforce planning boards, educators and other stakeholders to inform on local programs, support collaboration and engage in regional workforce development programs	Convenor
f) Leverage Workforce Planning Board labour market information (LMI)	Connector, Advocate
i. Compile, maintain and report on regional LMI	
ii. Establish LMI metrics for WOWC municipalities	
iii. Advocate for continued financial support for Workforce Planning Boards in Ontario	

## 1.2 Immigrant Attraction and Support

The Findings and Issues Report documented the need to attract more immigrants in the coming years to meet workforce demand. Attracting immigrants with the skills and interests to match the jobs in demand will be important to raise long term retention rates. Extending high quality settlement services across the region will also help ensure long term retention. There are many efforts underway to attract immigrants to Ontario and to meet specific industry needs. The number of international students studying in the WOWC region's post-secondary education institutions is on the rise. Much of the effort moving forward needs to be focused on aligning with activities currently underway to attract immigrants to the province.

It is important to ensure that local residents in the WOWC region understand the importance of immigration to the region's prosperity and the region's overall quality of place in the years ahead. The goal should not be population growth for population growth's sake. The WOWC will need to attract people to ensure that its strategically important industries such as agriculture, manufacturing and health care have the workers they need to thrive in the years ahead. Without an inflow of population local communities will not have the workers needed to meet workforce demand, local businesses and the economy could suffer and local residents will need to commute further and further to access needed services.

Workforce Retention and Attraction	
Immigrant Attraction and Support Recommended Actions	WOWC Role
a) Establish and maintain a resource centre on immigrant employment programs including TFW, immigrant nominee programs and internationally trained workers for WOWC member municipalities, businesses and community stakeholders	Connector
b) Develop and deliver an education campaign for communities on how they can support and welcome newcomers	Developer
c) Expand settlement services in rural communities in partnership with larger settlement agencies including support for ethnocultural associations	Supporter, Advocate
d) Participate in provincial/federal immigrant/worker attraction programs on behalf of industries and employers in the region.	Connector
e) Review and assess the regulations regarding international student employment and advocate for changes to support greater engagement across sectors	Advocate
f) Develop a video series showcasing multicultural individuals speaking in their first language (with English subtitles) about the community features & benefits & success in occupations in demand	Developer
g) Develop advertising campaign targeting multicultural communities via digital media (paid and organic, community boards and Facebook groups), utilize local ethnic newspapers and radio. Consider other traditional advertising vehicles such as direct mail, billboards, etc.	Developer, Convenor
h) Provide online translation tools to support multilingual translations of WOWC regional marketing materials	Developer
i) Engage newcomers in developing and implementing a newcomer attraction strategy, leveraging current newcomer populations and welcoming their networks.	Connector
j) Explore the potential and advocate for the transition of TFWs to permanent residents	Advocate

### 1.3 Industry Specific Attraction

The workforce analysis highlighted three industry sectors of critical importance to the regional economy: manufacturing, health care and agriculture. Each of these sectors has unique workforce challenges and opportunities. Tourism has also been highlighted because of its unique workforce development needs and the unprecedented challenges the sector has faced related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Manufacturing is the top employer in the WOWC region with an estimated 97,000 workers in 2020, or 15.1% of total employment. Within manufacturing there can be considerable differences in occupations, wages and career paths. For example, the food manufacturing sector has a substantially different workforce demand compared to the vehicle manufacturing or the pharmaceutical manufacturing sectors.

Health care is an important sector not only because it offers many high wage careers and generates substantial economic activity in the region; it is also important because it is central to the quality of life in our communities. If residents have to commute long distances to access health care, it will erode the value proposition for living in the region. Health care is a top two employment sector in seven of the 15 jurisdictions in the WOWC region. It is estimated that over 28,000 health care jobs will need to be filled by 2030, including thousands of home care workers, registered nurses and medical technologists.

Agriculture is another vital sector with significant unmet worker demand in the WOWC region. The sector has done a good job of leveraging the temporary foreign worker (TFW) program in recent years. It will need to do more to support farmer succession in the coming years as the majority of farmers are now over the age of 55 and heading towards retirement.

Tourism is another industry that could be seriously impacted if it cannot address workforce demand. Historically the industry relied heavily on student workers and on local populations seeking jobs in the sector. There are fewer young people in many communities within the WOWC region and they have far more options now than before. The tourism industry will need specific efforts to attract more student workers and possibly TFWs.

Across the board it will be important for employers to collaborate on industry focused initiatives to develop targeted workforce development efforts.

Workforce Retention and Attraction	
Industry Specific Attraction Recommended Actions	WOWC Role
a) Host sector forums to educate stakeholders and develop sector specific recruitment and retention initiatives especially in manufacturing, agriculture and health care	Convenor
b) Monitor and engage in industry association recruitment and retention initiatives	Connector
c) Work with the Regional Tourism Organizations (RTOs) to support tourism workforce initiatives, encourage operators to take advantage of workforce development programs offered to all small businesses	Supporter, Connector
d) Plan industry specific/targeted recruitment initiatives such as recruitment missions, job boards, social media, etc. such as promoting 'manufacturing careers' in the WOWC region	Convenor, Developer
e) Highlight occupations in demand in all marketing materials through case studies, photography, and industry profiles	Developer
f) Expand earn as you learn programs, internships, and other experiential learning programs to a wider range of occupations	Developer, Connector

### 1.4 Creating a Welcoming Environment for New Residents

Ensuring new residents feel welcome in their new communities will be fundamental to successful workforce development in the years ahead. Canada has a relatively high level of population mobility within and between provinces. If people are not thriving in one community, it is relatively easy for them to move to another. The mobility rates apply to Canadian born residents and newcomers alike. As noted earlier, in some communities in the WOWC region less than half the immigrants settling in the community remain in the community five years later.

Local and regional government can adopt some tangible actions to create a more welcoming environment for new residents. The WOWC can provide guidance and leadership to its member municipalities sharing best practices from one community to others across the region. It can develop marketing information that can be used by all communities across the WOWC region. It can provide tools for local employers to accelerate new immigrants' integration in the workforce and fully leverage their potential and overall contribution to the employer and the workforce. It can also develop initiatives such as equity, diversity and inclusion, and anti-racism programming to support local efforts for more welcoming communities.

Immigrant settlement capacity already exists and Local Immigration Partnerships (LIPs) are already operating across the WOWC region. The focus now needs to be on ensuring that capacity can ramp up as the demand for services grows in the coming years. The WOWC and member municipalities must ensure there is broad-based coverage across the region in both large and smaller communities. This could involve expanding urban settlement agencies services into smaller communities. Immigrants need to be supported in the communities in which they live.

The member municipalities must be a welcoming community to all newcomers. Migrants from elsewhere in Canada, immigrants, international students and seasonal/ temporary workers all have different needs that should be addressed. Local campaigns to educate residents and employers on becoming welcoming ambassadors of the community will contribute to the welcoming environment needed to attract and retain these important newcomers.

The Government of Canada recently launched the 50–30 Challenge<sup>2</sup>, which asks Canadian companies, not-for-profit organizations and post-secondary institutions to commit to achieving gender parity (50%) and significant representation (30%) of other under-represented group; including racialized persons, Indigenous people, people living with disabilities, and members of the LGBTQ2+ community; on corporate boards and in senior management positions. A culture of diversity will help the WOWC region attract and retain more population and workers. It sends a clear message that the region and its communities are open. The WOWC region should pursue a similar challenge.

<b>Workforce Retention and Attraction</b>	
<b>Creating a Welcoming Environment for New Residents Recommended Actions</b>	<b>WOWC Role</b>
a) Host regional forums to share best practices, for successfully integrating newcomers into local communities	Convenor
b) Conduct marketing research on key prospective out-of-province and international target markets for workforce/resident attraction efforts	Primary
c) Explore the demand and feasibility for expanded ESL training and industry specific ESL training	Connector, Advocate
d) Establish community education campaigns that support and welcome newcomers	Developer
i. Create a series of short videos on how to become a welcoming community for newcomers	
ii. Create multicultural information for employers and the general public	
iii. Provide case studies of newcomers' successful integration into the community and the programs and supports they accessed as part of their settlement	
iv. Develop an inventory of original photography and videos that show a diverse population for WOWC and member marketing and communications materials.	
e) Encourage and support local municipal leadership in establishing the 50-30 recruitment challenge for gender parity and under-represented groups	Advocate
f) Develop an inventory of equity, diversity and inclusion, and anti-racism training and other resources for member municipalities and local employers	Connector

<sup>2</sup> More information is available at <https://www.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/icgc.nsf/eng/07706.html>

## 1.5 Municipal Amenities

Providing a high quality of place is the secret sauce for successful communities across the WOWC region. Those communities that can address common issues such as transportation, childcare and rural broadband will be far better positioned for growth in the years ahead.

Workforce Retention and Attraction	
Municipal Amenities Recommended Actions	WOWC Role
b) Compile existing regional transportation strategies. Provide a resource hub, identifying ways to support existing transit programs and expand offerings in rural areas	Primary
c) Convene a working group to identify and pilot transportation solutions for rural employers	Convenor
d) Explore and advise members on active transportation programs that build upon municipal residential density initiatives	Developer
e) Continue to advocate for expanded access to reliable, high speed, affordable broadband services to access remote workers for local employers and create a supportive environment for residents engaged in remote work	Advocate
f) Compile and share childcare best practices information	Connector

	<b>2 Leveraging Existing Population</b>	Assist member municipalities to engage local residents with the education and career opportunities in their communities
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## Leveraging Existing Population

While attracting people to the WOWC region will be critical to addressing workforce demand, ensuring a high level of workforce participation among the local population is also a key part of the solution moving forward. Across the WOWC region (excluding the separated cities) there are approximately 100,000 young people that will reach workforce age over the next five years. There are tens of thousands of students enrolled in local post-secondary education institutions, many who will stay in the region. There are also specific population groups that have lower workforce participation such as persons with disabilities or other barriers to employment. As a wave of people aged 60 and older start to retire, there may be opportunities to retain many of them in the workforce.

### 2.1 Post-Secondary Education

There are 46,000 students enrolled in the various community colleges located throughout the WOWC region (including the separated cities) and another 89,000 in the region’s universities. The student population of 135,000 should be a primary recruiting ground for employers in the WOWC region. The WOWC can contribute to bringing employers and post-secondary institutions together to recalibrate the education system to ensure students are prepared to address workforce demand in the years ahead. The focus should start in high school and even before. Students and their advisors should be made aware of the many career opportunities right here at home.

There are now more than 23,000 international students enrolled in the various public colleges located throughout the WOWC region (including the separated cities). These students should be a primary focus for retention in local communities in the region. They should be provided experiential learning opportunities and other opportunities to get to know local employers and communities in the region.

Post-secondary education should be more flexible than ever. Employers and post-secondary education providers should be encouraged to work together to develop targeted training, micro-credentialling and bootcamps to ensure the workforce has the skills needed to thrive in the region.

Leveraging Existing Population	
Post-Secondary Education Recommended Actions	WOWC Role
a) Engage students, parents and other mentors to align education plans with industry demand	Connector
i. Explore opportunities for industry to participate in high school guidance programming	
ii. Support efforts by local PSE to increase enrollment – especially college programs – aligned with market demand	
iii. Investigate the potential to expand college offerings in rural communities, especially for in-demand occupations	
iv. Expand earn as you learn programs, internships and other experiential learning programs	

Leveraging Existing Population	
Post-Secondary Education Recommended Actions	WOWC Role
b) Host industry education forums to discuss occupations in demand and the skills required in the short and longer terms.	Convenor
c) Work with PSE providers to expand experiential learning opportunities particularly in small and rural businesses	Connector
d) Convene industry and education representatives to discuss needs for upskilling, micro-credentialling courses and bootcamps to address local demand	Convenor
e) Support post-secondary international recruitment efforts with community marketing tools	Connector

## 2.2 Youth

Retaining a greater share of the young people graduating high school across the region would go a long way to addressing workforce demand. More focus on youth will be needed to aid in this retention. Even if some of them leave after graduation for school or other opportunities, they could return at some point in the future. Every young person in the region should be exposed to job and career opportunities in their backyard. There should be more experiential learning opportunities where students get hands on experience in local careers in manufacturing, tourism, health care, agriculture and other sectors. Young people should be encouraged to see themselves advancing their careers at home. Those youth that do relocate should also be encouraged to stay connected with their home community as targets for repatriation in the future.

Leveraging Existing Population	
Youth Recommended Actions	WOWC Role
a) Create greater awareness and exposure to local career opportunities	Connector
i. Increase engagement with local employers to profile occupations and skills in demand	
ii. Create greater awareness of Internships and other experiential learning opportunities in rural communities	
iii. Convene annual (biannual) youth employment forums	Developer
b) Provide research and best practices on repatriation programs to encourage youth to return to live and work in their home communities	

## 2.3 Target Populations

There are a number of demographic groups that could be targets for a higher rate of workforce participation in the years ahead. Families with young children could have a higher workforce participation rate if there was broader access to childcare and if employers structured work hours around school day and daycare times. Older workers could be enticed to stay in the workforce longer if they were given more flexibility in their work schedules. Accommodations for workers with barriers to employment can also provide a source of underutilized and untapped talent.

Leveraging Existing Population	
Target Populations Recommended Actions	WOWC Role
a) Ensure WOWC marketing materials reflect target populations' value propositions	Provider
b) Consult with representatives of target populations to ensure marketing communications incorporate the cultural nuances and current trends relevant to their socio, ethnographic communities	Connector
c) Pilot job-sharing programs pairing older (55+) worker and youth internship	Developer
d) Explore potential to provide pre-employment training for individuals with barriers to employment with sector employers in collaboration with Employment Ontario partners	Convenor
e) Compile and provide information for municipalities to share with employers on wage subsidy programs for special populations	Developer
f) Provide resources on the rationale and steps to provide more flexible workplaces and better access to childcare for families with young children	Developer
g) Work with relevant agencies and organizations to quantify the numbers of potential workers facing barriers to employment, determine the supports needed to engage and integrate them and ensure employers are aware of the existing programs in place to support the integration	Provider, Connector
h) Provide training on the employment needs of target populations and underrepresented groups	Developer

	<b>3</b> <b>Attainable Housing</b>	Advance services and programs to assist member municipalities to increase the supply and variety of attainable housing aligned with local workforce needs
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## Attainable Housing

The strategy for attainable housing is considered through five primary areas: model policies, developer interactions, a resource centre, rental programs and overall program promotion. Through the strategic planning process, it became clear that building relationships between municipalities, the development industry and third-party participants and collaborative action would be essential to address the housing challenge. Historical collaboration provides a foundation and will need to be further enhanced through detailed sharing of information and agreement on the desired outcomes for all stakeholders. The following actions focus on the WOWC’s role in influencing change.

### 3.1 Model Policy

One of the most significant roles the WOWC can play in addressing the regional housing needs is by providing model policies for member municipalities use and adaptation to address their specific needs and aspirations. Developing model policy will include a study of best practices and establish consistency across the region to support implementation. There are some good examples within the region of policy changes at a county and local level. The WOWC can convene the appropriate groups in government and the private sector to establish the best approach for policy direction on housing. This effort should also include engagement with local community members to educate and garner support from the public on the need for changes in housing typology and support its integration within existing communities. Elected officials, the final arbitrators of any policy changes, should also be engaged in the education initiatives. Without community engagement, opposition to new housing models and policies will remain a barrier to implementation.

Attainable Housing	
Model Policy Recommended Actions	WOWC Role
a) Establish a working group for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Reviewing and sharing best practices for member municipalities’ housing strategies and resources</li> <li>ii. Inclusionary zoning model policy</li> <li>iii. Additional residential unit (ARU) policy and implementation</li> <li>iv. Expedited approvals and implementation policy to meet process requirements</li> <li>v. Community Improvement Plan best practices and options for affordable and attainable housing to promote model policy</li> </ul>	Convenor
b) Develop housing strategy resource education tools to support residential intensification and encourage acceptance of additional housing forms and density, remove barriers	Developer

### 3.2 Development Industry

The development industry is a critical delivery agent for housing. Working with their own business plans, it is essential that the WOWC engage with the development industry to work collaboratively on all aspects of housing progress that affects their approach to business planning and delivery of housing. Establishing consistency and predictability is essential. Simplifying the process for response to development on public lands and seeking partnerships is an important pathway to expedite development of available sites. The proposed action planning focuses on meeting those needs and attracting developers to new areas and new housing products to meet workforce needs.

Attainable Housing	
Development Industry Recommended Actions	WOWC Role
a) Establish a working group with the development industry to develop models for housing form, partnerships and other opportunities	Convenor
i. Collaborate on business cases to identify incentives or other program support that would encourage alternative housing forms	
ii. Encourage developers to develop innovative housing choices and building models that will align with housing goals and attract target populations	
b) Create an action plan for housing partnerships on public land focused on a range of attainable housing price and product types that target the local workforce	Developer
i. Compile an inventory of publicly owned land for attainable housing projects	
ii. Prepare marketing strategy to target housing needs, opportunities, and incentives to the development industry	
c) Identify and leverage housing funding solutions from all levels of government	Primary, Advocate
d) Establish a regional housing data center including an inventory of lands, brownfields, incentives, zoning, rental rates, average home sales by category, funding programs directory, etc.	Primary, Developer
e) Pilot industry specific dormitory housing models in key industry sectors	Developer
f) Advocate for funding to address student housing demand	Advocate

### 3.3 Rental Programs

Expanding rental housing options identified as a key component of the Workforce Strategy to address the workforce housing needs. Also key was the need to support the transition to home ownership. The strategic planning exercise provided examples of established rental housing models and non-profit organizations who are successfully addressing these needs. The WOWC need to work with these experts and convene stakeholders to support

partnerships and innovation based on these successes. The strategy needs to include programs to increase the type and number of rental units, increase the lower cost options for tenants and support the transition to home ownership.

Attainable Housing	
Rental Programs Recommended Actions	WOWC Role
a) Establish a rental housing working group including non-profit organization support and liaison	Convenor
i. Establish directory of non-profit organizations and rental developers	
ii. Engage and update interested parties on WOWC's efforts to expand rental stock in the region through regular contacts and a regional newsletter	
iii. Host networking/matchmaking events where non-profit organizations and hosting municipalities can explore opportunities to collaborate	
b) Develop strategy for transition models from rental to ownership, consider co-housing and promote tools to support tenant to become owners	Developer
c) Incorporate rental housing and entry-level housing demand into housing strategy plans	Developer

### 3.4 Program Promotion

It will be important to maintain continued engagement with aligned provincial ministries, especially the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing to support WOWC's housing efforts. Regular engagement with the province will ensure that WOWC continually discuss the progress and barriers towards implementation and contribute to further provincial changes and support programs. The province should be an active partner in reviewing progress, sharing data and supporting program needs.

Attainable Housing	
Program Promotion Recommended Actions	WOWC Role
a) Convene municipal planning and building staff with the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing to review provincial frameworks including policy support, building code changes, funding and federal partnerships like the CMHC and FCM	Convenor, Advocate
b) Review and develop WOWC policies and advocacy priorities on issues impacting housing supply and affordability including inclusionary zoning, blind bidding, investment properties, taxation and building code requirements.	Advocate

	<b>4</b>	<b>Employer Recruitment and Retention</b>	Enhance member municipalities' collaboration with employers to strengthen workforce recruitment and retention
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## Employer Recruitment and Retention

Historically, most employers in the WOWC region did not struggle to recruit workers. Now WOWC employers report that they are having significant challenges finding the staff they need to operate effectively. As outlined in the Workforce Strategy Findings and Issues Report, the number of job vacancies across the region (including the separated cities) has nearly doubled in the past five years. Smaller employers are particularly challenges because they do not have the dedicated resources to expand recruitment efforts outside the region, provide experiential learning to attract young recruits or to offer more flexible workplaces. Across the WOWC region, 76% of employers have fewer than 10 employees.

The strategy includes a number of actions that can support the individual employers in the WOWC region. The employers will also need to take a greater role in these worker recruitment and retention efforts if they are to be successful in this new, more competitive environment.

Municipal engagement with employers as purveyors of information and connections to regional or sector efforts will contribute to the employers' success.

### 4.1 Recruitment and Retention Support

Larger employers have an advantage because they have the scale to develop recruitment campaigns, develop strong human resources policies and in many cases offer higher wages or more comprehensive benefits. The WOWC and its partners should look at ways to support small and medium enterprises (SMEs) with training opportunities to collaborate on employee recruitment and retention activities. The WOWC can also support employers to provide more welcoming and flexible workplaces with greater potential to attract and retain the workers they need.

Employer Recruitment and Retention		
Recruitment and Retention Support Recommended Actions		WOWC Role
a) Explore potential to assemble the County online job postings at the regional level		Convenor
b) Provide training for employers on digital recruitment tools and methodology		Developer
c) Explore opportunities for regional workplace learning such as upskilling programs for local employers		Convenor
d) Engage employers in the wide range of WOWC recruitment and retention initiatives, tools, training and programs		Connector
i. Provide train the trainer programs for employers on career paths		

## 4.2 Temporary Foreign Worker Programs

The agriculture sector in the WOWC region has a track record of successfully leveraging the temporary foreign worker (TFW) program to address short term workforce demand. This source of workers could be a solution for other sectors that have short term demand needs. The WOWC can support local employers by identifying and documenting the need for TFWs in other sectors and advocating for the required changes to regulations on approved sectors for the program. The WOWC can also help businesses who are unfamiliar with the program navigate the regulator and operational requirement of recruiting and incorporating TFWs.

Employer Recruitment and Retention	
Temporary Foreign Worker Programs Recommended Actions	WOWC Role
a) Provide resources to small businesses to educate and assist them in hiring workers through the Temporary Foreign Worker (TFW) program	Connector
b) Advocate to expand the sectors and roles that qualify for TFW program.	Advocate

## 6 Next Steps

The Western Ontario Wardens' Caucus is an important platform for addressing issues and opportunities that impact the entire region. The WOWC can benefit from the scale that comes from serving a population of more than two million people, but it is critical in an area as strategically important as workforce development that roles and responsibilities are clearly defined for all the partners including all levels of government, industry groups, the education sector and other stakeholders.

This strategy outlines the broad goals to ensure the region can meet workforce demand in the years ahead and it assigns a specific role for the WOWC such as leading, convening, connecting and advocating. A common thread throughout the strategy is collaboration: Universities and colleges collaborating with industry and government, the housing development sector engaging with local and regional government to advance innovative solutions and all stakeholders collectively working together to better promote the WOWC region within Canada and around the world.

The role of province in the support of this strategy is a very important consideration. WOWC will need to work closely with the following ministries:

- Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs
- Colleges and Universities
- Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade
- Education
- Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries
- Indigenous Affairs
- Labour, Training and Skills Development
- Municipal Affairs and Housing
- Transportation

Engaging with these ministries, leveraging existing provincial programs, accessing provincial funding, and advocating for support for issues specific to WOWC will be critical to the successful implementation of the Western Ontario Workforce Strategy.

Once this strategy is finalized and the implementation plan is developed, the WOWC should start right away by allocating budget, finding the resources needed to deliver on the strategy and addressing those “low hanging fruit” items that can be addressed quickly and easily. The implementation plan will identify many initiatives that can be started in the short term that will yield significant benefits and other items that will take longer and need more resources but will create major impacts that will ensure that WOWC members have the supports and resources needed to successfully address their workforce development needs.

