

STEP UP AND SUCCEED

Strengthening Apprenticeship
Pathways and Employer
Supports Across Ontario

2025-2026



Executive Summary

Step Up and Succeed was a province-wide workforce development initiative designed to strengthen apprenticeship pathways, support employers in the skilled trades, and improve awareness of apprenticeship and training supports across Ontario.

Building on the momentum of the project's first year (2024-2025), year two (2025-2026) focused on expanding employer engagement, strengthening provincial partnerships, modernizing apprenticeship resources, and improving access to practical information for small- and medium-sized businesses operating in the skilled trades.

At the centre of this work was the launch of the newly redesigned Apprenticeship Hub — an accessible online resource centre providing employers, apprentices, service providers, and training organizations with practical tools, guides, and supports related to obtaining, training, and retaining apprentices in Ontario.

Over the course of the year, the project significantly exceeded its original performance targets and achieved province-wide reach through partnerships, presentations, marketing campaigns, events, newsletters, social media, and digital outreach. Key project outcomes included

- **7,385** visits to the Apprenticeship Hub
- **618** employers engaged through events and presentations
- **165** social media posts and **thousands** of digital engagements
- **344** radio ads aired across Ontario
- **142** Training Delivery Agents reached through information packages
- **34** Workforce Planning Boards and Learning Networks engaged through the BEST Summit
- **1,225** end-user beneficiaries reached through project activities

Step Up and Succeed built valuable relationships across Ontario's apprenticeship, employment, and workforce development systems. Partnerships with Workforce Planning Boards, Service System Managers, trade unions, apprenticeship organizations, and provincial stakeholders improved labour market responsiveness and strengthened collaboration across sectors and regions.

As Ontario continues to experience skilled trades shortages, economic uncertainty, and rapid labour market change, Step Up and Succeed helped create practical, accessible, and responsive supports that strengthen workforce resilience and apprenticeship success.

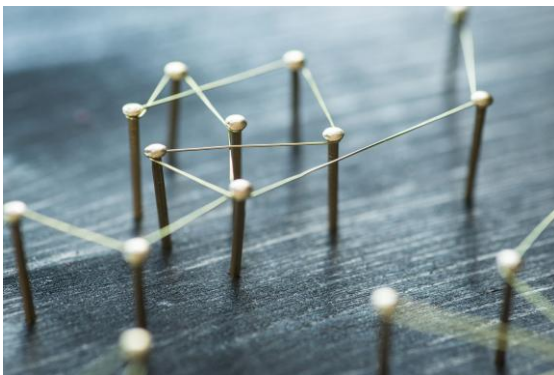
Responding to Ontario's Skilled Trades Needs

Ontario's skilled trades sector is facing significant workforce pressures. Labour shortages, changing workforce demographics, manufacturing transitions, infrastructure expansion, and evolving technology requirements are increasing demand for skilled workers across multiple sectors.

At the same time, employers, particularly small- and medium-sized businesses, often face challenges navigating Ontario's apprenticeship system, recruiting apprentices, and accessing clear information about available supports and resources.

Additional labour market changes reinforced the importance of this work throughout the past year, including

- manufacturing closures and layoffs connected to economic uncertainty and tariffs
- reduced international student enrollment and changing workforce demographics
- disruptions within Ontario's postsecondary and apprenticeship training systems
- increased demand for digital skills and adaptability in the workforce
- growing awareness of the role artificial intelligence and emerging technologies will play within the skilled trades



Step Up and Succeed was designed to help address these challenges by strengthening employer knowledge, improving apprenticeship awareness, and building stronger connections between workforce development systems across Ontario.

Building the Apprenticeship Hub

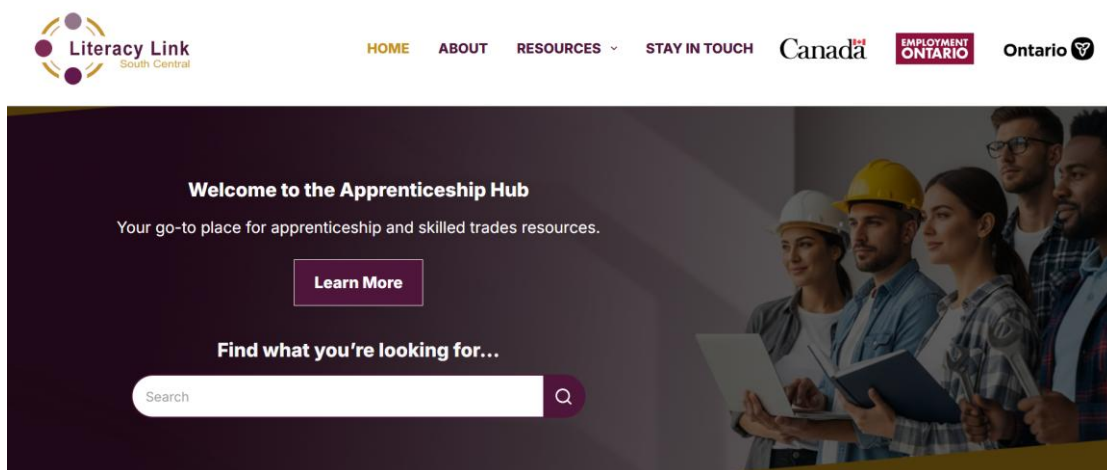
One of the project’s significant accomplishments was the development and launch of the newly redesigned [Apprenticeship Hub](#).

The Apprenticeship Hub was created to provide employers, apprentices, trainers, and workforce development professionals with a centralized collection of practical, easy-to-use apprenticeship resources.

Based on feedback from employers and apprenticeship stakeholders, the website was redesigned to improve accessibility, navigation, usability, and searchability.

The Hub includes

- step-by-step apprenticeship guides
- employer tools and templates
- videos and micro-resources
- fillable documents
- information related to apprenticeship sponsorship
- practical strategies for supporting and retaining apprentices
- workforce development resources
- resources related to accessibility and inclusive workplaces
- an “A.I. in the Trades” resource category introduced during year two



Resources in the Apprenticeship Hub are organized into practical categories including



Interest in the Apprenticeship Hub exceeded expectations, with more than **7,385** visits recorded during the project year.

Provincial Apprenticeship Navigator



Step Up and Succeed introduced an innovative support model through the creation of the Provincial Apprenticeship Navigator service.

The Navigator model provided employers with direct access to an experienced individual who understands Ontario's apprenticeship system from both an educational and employer perspective.

Through one-on-one and group support, the Navigator helped employers

- understand apprenticeship pathways
- navigate sponsorship requirements
- access available supports and resources
- connect with apprenticeship and workforce development partners
- identify practical solutions to common apprenticeship challenges

This personalized support model proved especially valuable for small- and medium-sized employers who may not have dedicated human resource capacity or familiarity with apprenticeship systems or the supports available through Get SET (Skills, Education and Training).

Strengthening Partnerships Across Ontario

Collaboration was central to the success of Step Up and Succeed.

The project brought together organizations from across Ontario's workforce development, apprenticeship, education, labour, and employment systems to strengthen coordination and improve employer supports.

Key relationships and partnerships included

- Workforce Planning Boards, which act collectively as [Workforce Planning Ontario](#)
- Service System Managers (SSMs)
- Economic Development Corporations
- Apprenticeship Training Delivery Agents (TDAs)
- Trade unions
- Provincial apprenticeship stakeholders
- The [Learning Networks of Ontario \(LNO\)](#)
- [Ontario Disability Employment Network \(ODEN\)](#)
- [Skilled Trades Ontario \(STO\)](#)

These organizations strengthened the project in multiple ways.

- ✓ **Workforce Planning organizations** provided valuable labour market information and employer trend data that helped ensure project resources remained current and responsive to changing workforce realities.
- ✓ **Trade unions** and **apprenticeship organizations** provided front-line insight into the evolving needs of apprentices, employers, and the skilled trades sector.
- ✓ **Skilled Trades Ontario** and other **apprenticeship system partners** provided expertise that helped ensure the Apprenticeship Hub contained accurate, current, and practical apprenticeship information.
- ✓ **All of our partners** also played an important role in promoting project resources, sharing information through their networks, hosting presentations, and creating opportunities for engagement with employers and workforce stakeholders.

The BEST Summit: Building Stronger Systems Together



Early in the project, Step Up and Succeed hosted the BEST Summit, bringing together Workforce Planning Ontario and the Learning Networks of Ontario to explore how Ontario’s workforce development and upgrading systems could work together support apprenticeship and skilled trades employers.

The Summit brought together representatives from

- **12** of Ontario’s 16 Learning Networks
- **22** of Ontario’s 25 Workforce Planning Boards

The Summit created opportunities for cross-system learning, collaboration, and relationship-building. Participants identified multiple opportunities to enhance coordination between systems, including

- aligning business planning processes
- sharing labour market information
- improving communication pathways
- increasing regional collaboration
- coordinating employer engagement activities

Evaluation feedback demonstrated strong positive outcomes

- **96%** of participants felt more connected to provincial counterparts following the Summit
- **85%** identified at least one opportunity for future coordination
- **91%** rated the information shared as valuable
- **81%** expressed interest in the Summit continuing annually

The BEST Summit demonstrated the value of creating intentional spaces for collaboration across Ontario’s workforce development and apprenticeship systems.

Employer Engagement and Outreach

A major focus of the second year of Step Up and Succeed was expanding employer engagement and increasing awareness of apprenticeship supports.

To achieve this, the project team implemented a broad multi-channel outreach strategy that included

- employer events and presentations
- webinars
- newsletter campaigns
- social media outreach
- radio advertising
- podcasts and streaming media promotion
- cross-promotional partnerships
- print marketing materials
- exhibitor booths and networking events

The project team delivered presentations to **10** Service System Managers and additional presentations through the [Ontario Municipal Social Services Association](#) (OMSSA), expanding awareness of apprenticeship supports across Ontario's employment services system.

Marketing and awareness efforts included

- **165** social media posts across multiple platforms
- **Thousands** of social media engagements
- **344** radio advertisements across Ontario
- **120,000** digital audio impressions through podcast and streaming media campaigns
- **Six** newsletters distributed throughout the project
- More than **160** newsletter subscribers by the end of the project year



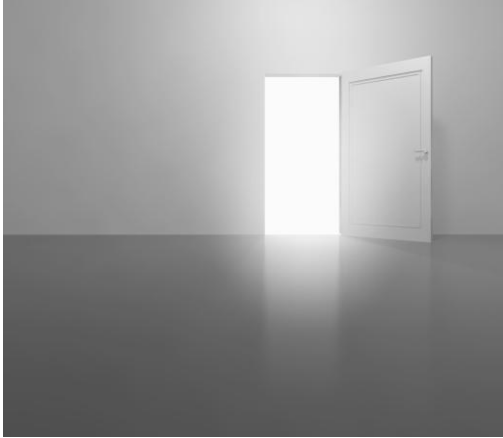
The project team also participated in employer-facing events and conferences across Ontario, including presentations at [Cannexus26](#), where apprenticeship and workforce development professionals from across Canada expressed interest in adapting or using the resource model in their own jurisdictions.

Accessibility, Inclusion, and Equity

Equity, diversity, accessibility, and inclusion were embedded throughout the project.

The Apprenticeship Hub includes resources that help employers create more inclusive workplaces and support apprentices from diverse backgrounds.

Topics addressed through project resources included



- workplace accessibility
- accommodation strategies
- inclusive communication practices
- supporting workers with literacy or language barriers
- accessible personal protective equipment
- inclusive recruitment and retention strategies

The redesigned Apprenticeship Hub was also developed using accessibility guidelines, including compatibility with screen readers and accessible website design practices.

The project further strengthened its inclusion practices through partnership and engagement with organizations like the Ontario Disability Employment Network (ODEN).

Lessons Learned



Step Up and Succeed generated valuable insights about employer engagement, apprenticeship systems, and workforce development collaboration.

One of the strongest lessons learned was the importance of meeting employers where they are.

Employers are navigating significant pressures, and successful engagement requires practical, accessible, and flexible supports delivered through multiple channels.

The project also reinforced the importance of

- strong partnerships and cross-system collaboration
- clear and consistent communication
- adaptability in response to changing labour market conditions
- accessible and user-friendly digital tools
- ongoing updates to apprenticeship resources
- multi-channel outreach strategies
- building internal organizational resilience through cross-training and shared systems

The project also highlighted the value of sustained investment in apprenticeship awareness and employer support initiatives.

Looking Ahead

The success of Step Up and Succeed demonstrates the ongoing need for coordinated apprenticeship and workforce development supports across Ontario.

The project team hopes to continue building this momentum through future initiatives that further strengthen connections between employers, apprentices, workforce development organizations, and Ontario's Get SET (Skills, Education and Training) system.

Future priorities include

- continuing to expand and update the Apprenticeship Hub
- deepening employer engagement strategies
- strengthening apprenticeship navigation supports
- increasing cross-system collaboration
- supporting workforce resilience in the skilled trades
- responding to emerging labour market needs and technologies

The relationships, tools, and resources developed through Step Up and Succeed provide a strong foundation for continued innovation and collaboration in Ontario's skilled trades and apprenticeship systems.



Conclusion

The second year of Step Up and Succeed demonstrated the power of collaboration, innovation, and coordinated workforce development.

Through strong partnerships, practical employer supports, accessible resources, and province-wide engagement, the project strengthened apprenticeship awareness and helped improve connections across Ontario's skilled trades ecosystem.

The project exceeded expectations in reach and engagement while creating tools and relationships that will continue to support employers, apprentices, and workforce partners into the future.

As Ontario continues to respond to changing labour market conditions and increasing demand for skilled trades workers, initiatives like Step Up and Succeed play an important role in building resilient, inclusive, and connected workforce development systems.

For more information about Step Up and Succeed, Ontario's Get SET (Skills, Education, and Training) system, or the Learning Networks of Ontario, please contact Literacy Link South Central.

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