PEMBINA Institute

Sustainable Jobs in B.C.

Synthesis of workshop dialogue

April 2026

Megan Gordon, Tamara Krawchenko, and Jason Hicks

Sustainable Jobs in B.C.

Synthesis of workshop dialogue

Megan Gordon, Tamara Krawchenko, and Jason Hicks

April 2026

Contributors: Bill Killgannon, Cecilia Jaques, Brendan Glauser, Katherine Pearce, Leif Douglass, Maya Willard Stepan, Lauren Ebert

Photos: Geoff Howe

Recommended citation: Gordon, Megan, Tamara Krawchenko, and Jason Hicks. Sustainable Jobs in B.C.: Synthesis of workshop dialogue. The Pembina Institute, 2026.

The Pembina Institute
#802, 322 – 11 Avenue SW
Calgary, AB T2R 0C5
403-269-3344

www.pembina.org

x.com/pembina

bsky.app/profile/pembina.org

facebook.com/pembina.institute

linkedin.com/company/pembina-institute/

The Pembina Institute is a national non-partisan think tank that advocates for strong, effective policies to support Canada's clean energy transition. We use our expertise in clean energy analysis, our credibility as a leading authority on clean energy, and our extensive networks to advance realistic climate solutions in Canada.

Donate

Together, we can lead Canada's transition to clean energy. Your gift directly supports research to advance understanding and action on critical energy and environmental issues. Canadian charitable number 87578 7913 RR 0001; pembina.org/donate

Acknowledgements

The Pembina Institute wishes to thank the Accelerating Community Energy Transformation (ACET) initiative lead by the University of Victoria and funded by Canada First Research Excellence Fund for their generous support.

The Pembina Institute recognizes that the work we steward and those we serve span the lands of many Indigenous Peoples. We respectfully acknowledges that our office in British Columbia is located on the unceded traditional territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Sḵwx̱wú7mesh (Squamish), and səlilwətaɬ (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations.

These acknowledgements are part of the start of a journey of several generations. We share them in the spirit of truth, justice and reconciliation, and to contribute to a more equitable and inclusive future for all.

Thank you to participants

Pembina and ACET would also like to thank the workshop participants (listed in Appendix A) who generously shared their time, expertise, and perspectives to support the development of this report and future work in this area.

Disclaimer: This report represents a synthesis of dialogue held at a workshop hosted by ACET and Pembina on January 12, 2026. The views, advice, and research priorities identified in this report are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of workshop participants or their organizations.

This research received ethics clearance from the University of Victoria (25-0519).

Contents

Executive summary

British Columbia is navigating a period of significant economic, demographic, and policy change. Public priorities increasingly emphasize affordability, energy security, and economic growth, while post-secondary institutions face financial pressures that constrain training capacity. Simultaneously, shifts in key sectors, along with an aging workforce and slower population growth, are creating labour market challenges that affect the province's clean energy transition.

The provincial policy landscape has evolved, with new emphasis on economic resilience, major projects, and climate action. However, there exists a fundamental gap: a coordinated workforce strategy to mobilize the labour needed to achieve the province's climate, energy, and economic goals.

In January 2026, the Pembina Institute and Accelerating Community Energy Transformation (ACET) convened a multi-stakeholder workshop to explore workforce challenges and potential solutions for B.C.'s transition to a clean energy economy. Participants included representatives from government, labour, post-secondary institutions, Indigenous organizations, and civil society. Discussions focused on three areas: labour supply, training capacity, and job quality and inclusion.

Key findings

- **Labour supply:** Widespread shortages, an aging workforce, and limited mobility are hampering project delivery while skills mismatches persist, contributing to higher unemployment levels. Youth and new entrants often lack early exposure to careers in clean energy, while licensing, regional workforce dynamics, and workplace culture are affecting recruitment and retention.
- **Training capacity:** Financial pressures and the concentration of training providers in urban areas is limiting the ability of institutions to offer responsive, high-quality programs. Programs are sometimes misaligned with labour market needs, while mid-career workers transitioning between roles face barriers related to time, accessibility, and recognition of prior experience.
- **Job quality and inclusion:** Precarious work, unequal access to benefits, and unwelcoming workplace environments for equity-deserving groups are constricting recruitment and retention. Tools such as community benefit agreements and project labour agreements are underutilized, representing a missed opportunity to strengthen social and economic outcomes.

Solutions

Workshop participants identified both near-term and longer-term (structural) solutions to address the above challenges.

- **Near term:** Establish earlier and clearer exposure to trades; provide more responsive and accessible options for training; reduce bottlenecks, prioritizing instructor recruitment and retention; provide wraparound supports; and offer skills mapping for workers in transition.
- **Longer term:** Develop stable policy and multi-year workforce plans; strengthen coordination and governance by convening regional workforce planning tables and putting in place structures for knowledge transfer; strengthen job quality and accountability through measures such as community benefit agreements; and enhance the training system by maintaining the full-scope credentialled system while supplementing with upskilling and incorporating international best practices.

The workshop also revealed significant research and policy gaps, namely limited regional labour market data; lack of established principles on effective training approaches; insufficient analysis of the financial pressures facing post-secondary institutions; and inadequate understanding of workforce participation and career perceptions. There is also a need to examine models that support Indigenous- and community-led workforce planning. Closing these gaps and developing an integrated workforce strategy would enable B.C. to maximize the economic, social, and climate benefits from a worker-centered clean energy transition.

1. Introduction

Participants from across sectors and regions in B.C. took part in a facilitated dialogue on workforce challenges and opportunities in the clean energy transition.

Over the past decade, British Columbia's economic and policy context has changed significantly. Tackling rising concerns about affordability, energy security, and economic growth have become public priorities, while post-secondary institutions face financial pressures that limit their capacity to train and educate workers. At the same time, mill closures and a shrinking forest sector have strained many regional economies, the workforce is aging, and population growth is slowing. Skilled trades vacancies in B.C. have increased 47% over the past decade, creating a workforce shortfall that risks delaying or derailing critical capital and community-based projects.[1] This is occurring at the same time as B.C. is experiencing the highest levels of unemployment since the pandemic, with an unemployment rate of 6.7% across the working age population and 15.6% for youth aged 15 to 24.[2] Collectively, these pressures reflect a major skills

[1] Statistics Canada, "Table 14-10-0443-01: Job vacancies, proportion of job vacancies and average offered hourly wage by occupation and selected characteristics, quarterly, unadjusted for seasonality," spreadsheet, December 16, 2025. https://doi.org/10.25318/1410044301-eng

[2] Statistics Canada, "The Daily: Labour Force Survey, March 2026," April 10, 2026. https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/260410/dq260410a-eng.htm

misalignment and pose risks to labour supply and economic resilience, prompting shifts in provincial policy amid increasing domestic and global challenges.

Since the release of CleanBC in 2018 — which set a target to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 40% below 2007 levels by 2030 — the provincial policy landscape has continued to evolve. In May 2025, the province launched an independent review of CleanBC programs to assess their effectiveness and strengthen people-centered outcomes. In November 2025, *Look West: Jobs and Prosperity for a Stronger B.C. and Canada* outlined commitments to fast-track major projects, diversify the economy, and expand trades training. The province is also reviewing the public post-secondary system to ensure long-term sustainability and effectiveness. Alongside these promising initiatives, however, there is an opportunity to address a missing component: a coordinated labour market strategy to mobilize the workforce needed to deliver on the CleanBC and Look West commitments.

Against this backdrop, the Pembina Institute and the Accelerating Community Energy Transformations (ACET) convened a multi-stakeholder workshop in January 2026 to examine workforce challenges and potential solutions for B.C.'s transition to a clean energy economy. Participants from the provincial government, labour, post-secondary institutions, civil society, and Indigenous organizations discussed challenges in three areas: labour supply; training approaches and capacity; and job quality, inclusion and retention. Near-term solutions and structural changes were then proposed to address these challenges. This report summarizes the main insights, highlights recurring themes, and outlines promising pathways forward.

Why this work is important

Policy leadership to support a worker-centered clean energy transition is critical if the province wants to achieve its climate, energy, and economic objectives. Labour shortages and workforce capacity constraints, however, are barriers. A transition that prioritizes workers can support high-quality job creation, affordability, and regional diversification across B.C., but without strategic workforce planning, the province risks missing opportunities to maximize economic, environmental, and social benefits.

2. What we heard: Workforce challenges

Participants explored in breakout discussions the three areas covering labour supply, training, and job quality. The main findings are summarized below.

2.1 Labour supply

Labour shortages across sectors and regions are slowing B.C.'s low-carbon transition. Attracting, training and retaining skilled workers is key to clean energy goals.

Participants agreed that labour shortages are widespread across sectors and regions, creating bottlenecks that slow project delivery and the transition to a low-carbon economy.

Demographic shifts

The workforce is aging and retirees are not being replaced quickly enough by younger workers, creating gaps in institutional memory. In the energy and natural resources sectors, the workforce is largely composed of older white men, which can make it harder for younger

workers from equity-deserving groups to see themselves reflected in these industries or envision pursuing careers in them.

> *"Because of the older workforce in the electricity sector, there [seems to be] a lot of cultural mismatch to recruit a broader labour force including women and people of colour."*

Perceptions and choice

Youth and new market entrants lack early exposure to different occupations and often self-select out of careers, which exacerbates supply challenges. Young people often have limited information about what jobs exist that align with their values and purpose and growth expectations. Parents, counsellors, and educators play an influential role in shaping early educational pathways and career choices, and negative views about certain careers can take hold. In the skilled trades, concerns about working conditions and perceived limits on career advancement can act as a deterrent.

> *"Parents still don't encourage kids to go into trades. We need to shift this narrative at middle school and high school age."*

Regional and place-based dynamics

Workers are often attached to place, and labour market mobility can be overestimated. Regulations and licensing requirements create barriers to greater mobility when workers must secure business licences or re-certify across different jurisdictions.

> *"As a tradesperson working in 21 municipalities, you need to get business licences from every single one. We have created a lot of barriers at the local level."*

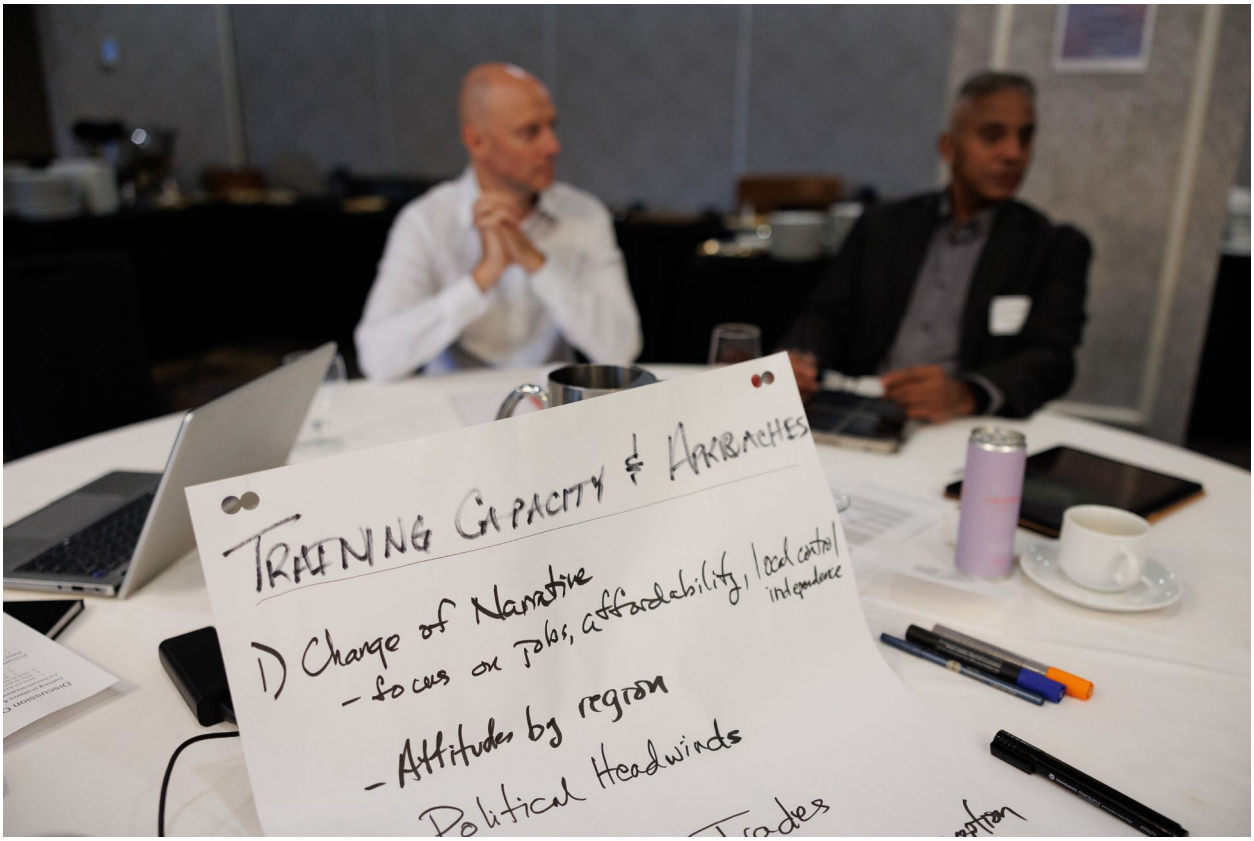
Many jobs in the clean energy economy, often those with the highest pay, are in rural places where there are smaller recruitment pools. Services, amenities, and quality of life are factors that impact a community's or employer's ability to attract workers.

> *"A lot of these jobs tend to be more rural — and it's hard to draw skilled labour to the area. A worker today considers more than their compensation package."*

Tensions and trade-offs

Communities without sufficient local workforce capacity may rely on mobile or out-of-region labour, which can conflict with goals of community stability and local economic development. Participants also emphasized that recruitment of equity-deserving groups will remain limited without structural improvements to workplace culture and other retention conditions.

2.2 Training approaches and capacity



Better alignment between training programs and actual job opportunities is critical for B.C.'s workforce.

Participants expressed diverse perspectives on optimal training models but agreed that financial pressures on post-secondary institutions require more efficient and responsive approaches while maintaining strong standards.

Capacity constraints

Capacity challenges exist across all aspects of training delivery, largely due to core funding constraints. Participants flagged several concerns, including instructor shortages, limited access to well-equipped training facilities, and insufficient apprenticeship and co-op placements. Smaller, rural institutions face additional challenges in keeping pace with technological changes,

updating curricula, and establishing industry partnerships. These issues are compounded by the concentration of training and education infrastructure in urban areas.

Misalignment with labour market realities

Participants noted that training opportunities are not consistently aligned with actual job offerings, and many institutions offer courses that provide "training for training's sake" without clear employment outcomes. Participants felt that part of this challenge stems from informal or weak coordination between employers, labour, and post-secondary institutions. Some participants noted differences in the training pathways offered by the public, private, and union systems. Those participants highlighted that unions, with their direct affiliation to sectors and companies, have a strong record of responsiveness to employer and project demand.

> *"If you know the program you are going into has jobs at the other end, it might be a better bet to go into that program. But if you don't know if it's aligned with the emerging economy or labour market, it becomes a gamble."*

Mid-career transition barriers

Participants noted mid-career workers looking to transition to other roles face unique barriers to retraining as many have financial obligations and family commitments. Reskilling opportunities may not be available in the communities or regions where these workers are established, which is compounded by rigid training calendar cycles that require in-person attendance. Retraining that involves full-time schooling for weeks, months, or years requires workers to forego a wage or travel away from their homes.

> *"There is no part time on the side option. What if you have kids, a mortgage? You can't just run off and get trained."*

Many workers lack clear paths to upskilling, moving into a new industry, or transitioning to leadership, management, or entrepreneurship. Moreover, employers may not recognize prior training or experience that is employer specific or decades old.

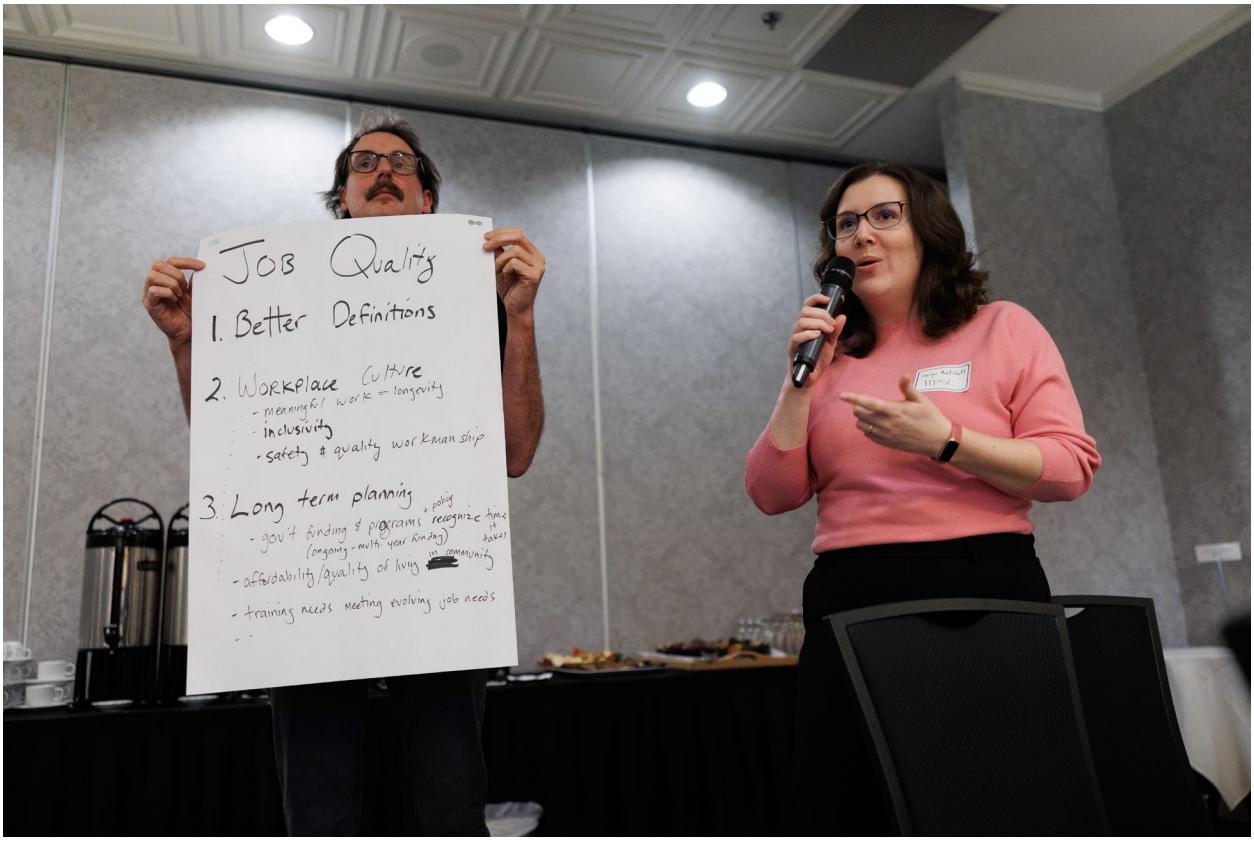
Tensions and trade-offs

While some participants emphasized the merits of shorter-term, more agile training models that prioritize competencies over credentials, others felt strongly that "full-scope" trade training systems must be preserved. Most participants were aligned on the need to maintain and expand

compulsory trades and cautioned against overly specialized, for-profit training, which can limit flexibility, mobility, and long-term employment in the labour market. Many agreed that micro-credentials and upgrading courses are an important complement to traditional trades and college education, rather than an alternative.

> *"To get at these challenges, we have to think differently about the job system we have been working with. The current frameworks we have for training are set for jobs of the past, and the solutions we had when it comes to training are outdated."*

2.3 Job quality, inclusion, and retention



Focusing on job quality and inclusion is essential for workforce stability, equity, and shared economic and social benefits.

Participants dissected the notion of job quality, including compensation, workplace treatment, quality of life, union representation and purpose. While many job quality challenges are cultural and societal, participants noted strategic policy tools to improve job quality.

Job quality and values

Participants shared the feeling that job quality is often an overlooked aspect of workforce development that has a direct link to retention, equity outcomes, and workforce stability. Enhancing job quality in key industries can improve recruitment and retention. Participants indicated that this is especially true for youth who have higher expectations of work–life balance and who seek values-aligned work.

> *"People need to be able to see themselves in the work that they're doing. They need to see fulfillment or reflection of values."*

Participants indicated that job quality might vary due to the nature of work. Clean energy jobs are considered to be more geographically dispersed, making them harder to unionize. Greater unionization could strengthen workers' access to collective bargaining, wage premiums, and other benefits. In the skilled construction trades, work in the residential context is less unionized than industrial work; however, employment in the latter is often more transient.

> *"Access to labour supply is one of our competitive advantages as a union."*

Job quality indicators and equity

Discussions delved into the role of precarious work in shaping worker decisions about career paths. Gig work, short-term contracts, and unpredictable hours were noted as deterrents to those seeking meaningful and stable employment. Workers value fair wages, benefits, pensions, and access to training, as well as clear advancement opportunities. Participants noted that small businesses may lack the resources to offer these kinds of benefits.

A lack of reliable data on job quality indicators makes addressing job quality more difficult.

Participants recognized that women, Indigenous workers and other equity-deserving groups face higher levels of harassment and discrimination in many work sectors, particularly in construction and resource industries. One worker noted that the presence of women on job sites fostered better workplace culture, safety and respect.

Systemic gaps

Participants observed a lack of policies explicitly tied to job quality outcomes. Tools such as community benefit agreements and project labour agreements are often underused or seen as adding complexity, time and costs to projects. This represents a missed opportunity to

strengthen the social licence of projects, securing the trust of local workers and ensuring that the local community benefits from major capital spending. Participants highlighted the need for project agreements to include provisions that go beyond revenue sharing to support comprehensive community development, local employment, and quality of life improvements, based on assessed local priorities.

3. What we heard: Solution pathways

After the discussions about the workforce challenges, workshop participants were encouraged to identify solutions, as well as leading practices. Participants felt that a fragmented approach to workforce development was a foundational issue, and that a comprehensive strategy to respond to these intersecting and cumulative challenges was absent. Drawing on their personal and professional expertise, participants shared their problem-solving ideas, which are summarized below.

3.1 Near-term solutions

Near-term solutions can tackle workforce fragmentation across training, policy and career pathways.

Participants noted several “low-hanging-fruit” ideas that could be scaled up and deployed in the near term to address acute labour market challenges affecting the clean energy economy.

Establish earlier and clearer pathways

Recognizing that early exposure is essential to informing career decisions, participants highlighted the need to establish better literacy about careers in trades through the K–12 curriculum, engaging school districts in this effort. High school programs that offer dual credit and trade sampler courses could be expanded to ignite curiosity and offer practical avenues for early job experience and training. Engaging parents, guidance and career counsellors, and community leaders on the benefits of skilled trade career paths would be an important catalyst to success.

Best practice: Youth Climate Corps and Insulators Union pilot

B.C.'s Youth Climate Corps is a non-profit that connects young people to employment and training opportunities focused on community-based climate action and sustainability activities. In 2024, they provided coaching and training to a cohort of students over a three-month period to kickstart their careers in insulation in partnership with the B.C. Insulators Union.[3] This program framed insulators work explicitly as climate work, increasing diversity of participation. The program resulted in high retention rates, and workshop participants noted that mentorship was a key success factor.

Improve training delivery

Participants believed that a wide range of training delivery models are essential to ensuring fair access to education, training, and re-skilling opportunities across diverse populations. Approaches such as mobile training, cohort-based training, remote learning, and work-integrated learning could be expanded to meet learners' needs and respond to regional differences. Supplemented income could also support training accessibility for those facing financial barriers.

Some participants believed that refining training content could improve learning outcomes. It was also suggested that technical training be complemented with soft-skills development such as problem solving, adaptability and leadership.

The sharing among training institutions of lessons learned and best practices on program development and modernization could support more responsive training delivery.

[3] Youth Climate Corps British Columbia, *Youth Climate Corps British Columbia Annual Report 2024–25* (2025). https://www.youthclimatecorps.com/post/bc-insulators-and-youth-climate-corps-bc-join-forces-to-tackle-the-climate-crisis

Best practice: Electrical Joint Training Committee (EJTC)

The EJTC is an electrician training and apprenticeship organization jointly governed by representatives from the construction industry and organized labour.[4] They provide foundational electrical trades training, apprenticeships, and programs for journeypersons, as well as a women in trades program. The EJTC also operates an electrical green skills campus, where pre-apprenticeship students can develop emerging skills and learn about clean energy products.[5]

Participants highlighted the EJTC as a successful model for adapting training programs to differing worker needs and regularly providing upskilling opportunities to ensure that workers are prepared to navigate technological advancements.

Reduce bottlenecks

Participants highlighted practical ways to strengthen the training and education system, focusing first on instructor recruitment and retention since retirements are looming among this group. Solving the salary imbalance between instructors and trades people could promote more workers to transition into teaching positions, passing their skills and knowledge to the incoming workforce. In addition, employers could be motivated to embed training and skills development in their business model through better use and promotion of existing tax credits and incentives.

Provide wraparound supports and skills mapping

Participants agreed that a more inclusive and equitable workforce starts with access to training. Programs that offer support for travel, housing, childcare, and income supplementation can reduce barriers to training. More flexibility in systems such as EI can help apprentices and trainees during their training.

For workers transitioning from vulnerable industries, there is a near-term opportunity to proactively assess their experience and capabilities, highlight transferable skills, and identify potential career bridging opportunities.

[4] Electrical Joint Training Committee, "About." https://www.ejtc.org/about

[5] Electrical Joint Training Committee, "Electrical Foundation Overview." https://www.ejtc.org/eltt/electrical-foundation

3.2 Long-term solutions

Structural reforms can ensure skilled, high-quality and inclusive jobs in B.C.'s clean economy.

Participants discussed some of the underlying structural challenges cutting across the themes discussed during the workshop, and the ways in which longer-term reforms could be implemented to improve the broader approach to economic and workforce planning.

Develop stable policy and multi-year planning

Effective workforce planning requires long-term policy and investment signals. Participants stressed the need for multi-year planning that extends beyond electoral cycles and addresses the full workforce continuum, including recruitment, training, assessment, employment, and retention, rather than focusing on isolated interventions.

Best practice: Aboriginal Community Career Employment Services Society (ACCESS) and job readiness

ACCESS is a Vancouver-based organization that designs and delivers training and employment readiness supports to urban Indigenous people in the lower mainland to help increase their participation in the labour market.[6] Its employment services include career counselling, financial supports for short-term certification programs, and labour market readiness training focused on literacy and numeracy. ACCESS also offers trades training and apprenticeship support, with a particular emphasis on youth programs. One such program is BladeRunners, which connects inner-city youth with job opportunities in construction and provides career readiness supports and wraparound services.[7] Participants noted that the program enhances training experiences by assessing skills, competencies, and employment readiness and offering training that leads to better employment outcomes.

Strengthen coordination and governance

Regional workforce planning tables, convened by government and involving labour, employers, Indigenous partners, and community organizations, were widely supported. Such tables could improve coordination, reduce duplication, and strengthen relationships across the training and employment ecosystem. Structures also need to be in place that enable the transfer of knowledge between incoming and outgoing employees to promote business continuity.

Best practice: Columbia Basin Trust model

The Columbia Basin Trust manages a share of the benefits and revenue of the Columbia River Treaty, an agreement between Canada and the U.S. on the development of dams in the region.[8] Governed by a board of basin residents, the trust engages with other residents, communities, and Indigenous nations in the region, and develops grants and programs for residents in a wide variety of areas. These include sustainability, transportation, entrepreneurship, housing, arts, retrofits, clean energy, and internet connectivity.[9] The trust was identified as an innovative model that facilitates local control over energy production and investment.

[6] ACCESS, “About Us.” https://accessfutures.com/about-us/

[7] ACCESS, “BladeRunners.” https://accessfutures.com/bladerunners/

[8] Columbia Basin Trust, “Our Story.” https://ourtrust.org/about/our-story/

[9] Columbia Basin Trust, “Grants and Program Directory.” https://ourtrust.org/grants-and-programs-directory/

Promote job quality and accountability

Participants agreed that higher expectations should be placed on public investment. Policy tools such as community benefit agreements, project labour agreements, and procurement strategies requiring the use of domestic labour and goods could be leveraged to deliver greater community benefits and better job quality. These agreements facilitate more local control over economic planning and embed clearer labour standards that promote higher wages and benefits, greater inclusivity, and safer workplaces, leading to improved diversity and equity.

Enhance the training system

Many participants emphasized the importance of maintaining a credentialling system that prioritizes full-scope training for skilled trades that are recognized by regulatory bodies like Skilled Trades BC. Competency-based training may be appropriate for upskilling and career advancement, but these programs should not replace full-scope models and should be developed with care to avoid duplicating or undermining credential-based training models. Many participants also cautioned against the use of for-profit training programs that "take short cuts" and may not serve workers' best interests in the labour market. Improving data collection and program evaluation are also key to continual improvements in training delivery.

Best practice: Lessons from international training models

Participants noted that B.C. could learn from international models for training. Ireland and Germany were highlighted as jurisdictions with transferable lessons and best practices.

Ireland has a Green Skills 2030 strategy that aims to align its training system with the clean energy transition. A main focus is on integrating green skills into all apprenticeship programs, including skills around modern sustainable methods and technologies and soft skills like digital literacy, climate literacy, and critical thinking. This approach gives tradespeople the tools to make sustainable choices.[10]

Skillnet Ireland, the national workforce development agency, runs Green Tech Skillnet, a program that assists cleantech and renewable energy businesses in identifying present and future skill needs, provides education on best practices, and subsidizes workforce upskilling programs.[11]

[10] OECD, *Employment and Skills Policies for the Green Transition: Review of International Good Practices* (OECD, 2025). https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2025/12/employment-and-skills-policies-for-the-green-transition_3f63c303/f0c558fa-en.pdf

[11] Skillnet Ireland, "Green Tech Skillnet." https://www.skillnetireland.ie/skillnet-business-network/networks/green-tech-skillnet

The Government of Germany has followed an integrated approach to green job development, with many jobs incorporating green skills, rather than creating new environmentally focused occupations.[12] Accordingly, apprenticeship programs have been upgraded to include green skills, and staff have been given additional training and teaching tools to deliver the new curriculum.[13] Germany's "dual" vocational training system, with students attending school and workplace training at the same time,[14] fosters a strong relationship between industry and the educational system, allowing them to be responsive to one another's needs and making it easier to integrate environmental skills development.[15]

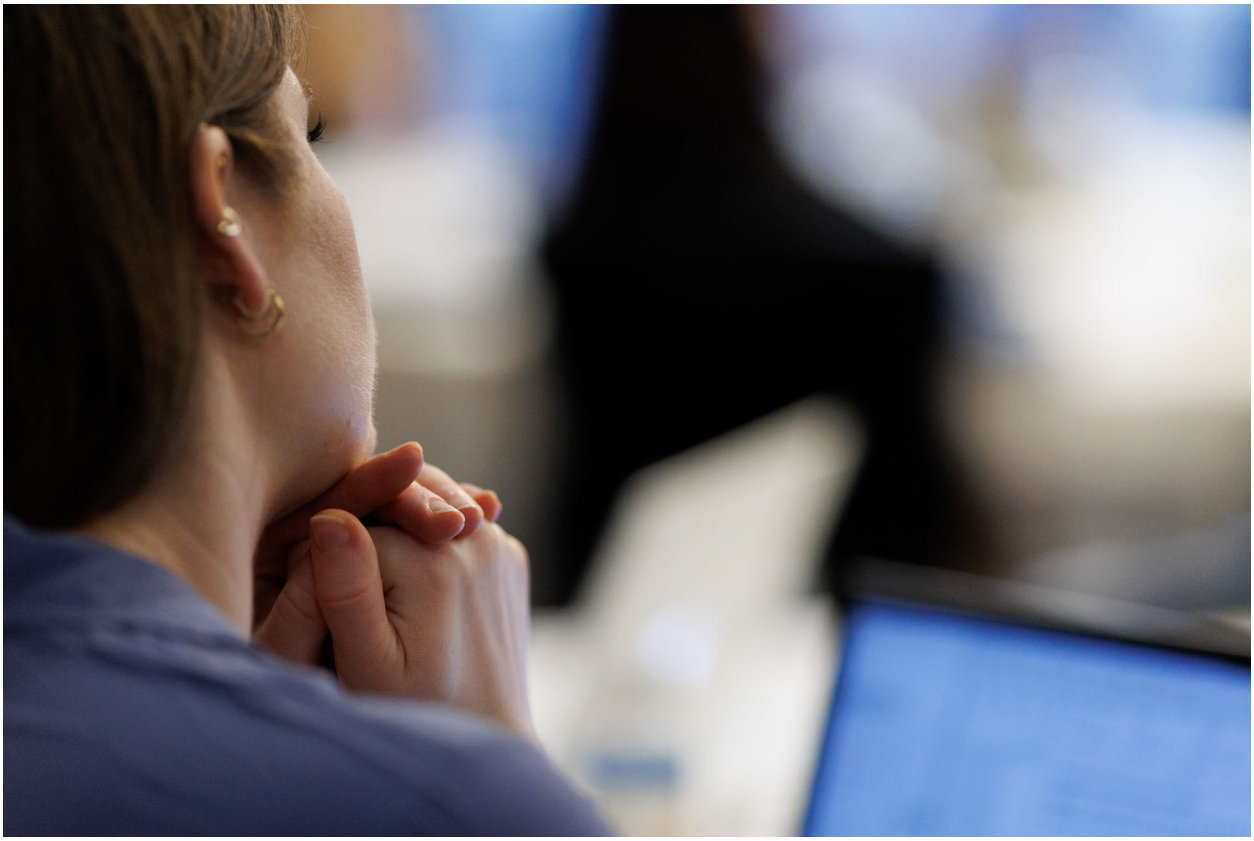
[12] European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop), *Skills for Green Jobs – Country Report: Germany*. https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/country_report_germany.pdf

[13] *Employment and Skills Policies for the Green Transition*.

[14] Deutschland.de, "Facts about the dual vocational training system," January 27, 2025. https://www.deutschland.de/en/topic/business/how-germanys-dual-vocational-training-system-works

[15] *Skills for Green Jobs*.

4. Research and policy implications



Closing policy gaps and aligning workforce, economic and climate strategies is essential for building a skilled, inclusive and future-ready clean energy workforce in B.C.

Participants, drawing on their insights and expertise, unearthed gaps in research and policy. Filling these gaps can guide future research and policy analysis and help launch new ideas to strengthen workforce development approaches in B.C.

Policy gaps

Attendees pointed to several policy gaps that limit B.C.'s ability to align workforce development with energy, climate and economic objectives. A central challenge is fragmentation across policy frameworks, which reduces policy coherence and weakens outcomes. While CleanBC set ambitious emissions reduction targets and included commitments to develop a labour market strategy, a comprehensive workforce framework was never fully realized, representing a missed opportunity to align climate ambition with labour market readiness. Greater clarity on the province's vision for a clean energy economy could support better cohesion.

More recent initiatives, including the Look West economic strategy, introduce important investments in workforce development and trades training. However, these efforts remain

disconnected from climate policy and broader training system adjustments, revealing a potential opportunity for integration. Similarly, the ongoing review of the public post-secondary system offers a chance to reassess how institutions adapt to evolving labour market demands and highlight the need for secure stable funding for post-secondary institutions and union training centres. Without stronger alignment between economic priorities, workforce planning, and education policy, B.C. risks continuing a piecemeal approach rather than pursuing a coherent, coordinated strategy.

Participants also identified misalignment between policy timelines, project implementation and workforce development realities. Implementing training systems, developing institutional plans, and following career pathways requires multiple years, yet many workforce and climate programs are delivered through short-term funding cycles. This creates uncertainty for training providers, employers, and workers, limiting the ability to scale programs, recruit instructors, or invest in long-term capacity. The absence of stable, long-range policy signals was seen as constraining proactive workforce planning and discouraging sustained employer participation in training. Relatedly, participants noted gaps in coordination and governance, including the lack of structures capable of bringing together government, labour, employers, Indigenous partners, and education institutions to support regional planning and anticipate labour market needs before shortages emerge.

A further policy gap relates to the limited use of public policy tools to enhance job quality and workforce outcomes. While significant public investments are made in major projects, mechanisms that help improve employment outcomes such as community benefit agreements, project labour agreements, and strategic procurement policies remain underutilized or inconsistently applied. As a result, opportunities are missed to embed expectations around local hiring, training participation, inclusive workplaces, and quality of employment.

Participants also highlighted broader gaps in labour market data and program evaluation frameworks, making it challenging to determine whether public investments are producing durable employment benefits. Filling these gaps is crucial to ensuring that public spending meets long-term social and economic objectives.

Across discussions, a common theme emerged: while many individual policies and initiatives exist, the absence of a workforce strategy that encompasses energy, climate and economic plans leaves critical issues such as regional labour mobility, equitable participation, training system responsiveness, and employer responsibility insufficiently addressed. Establishing a comprehensive workforce strategy would help position workforce development as a foundational pillar of B.C.'s clean economy transition.

Areas for future research

Workshop discussions revealed several areas where limited evidence, fragmented data, or insufficient analysis is hindering effective workforce planning.

Participants emphasized the need for a better understanding of the current clean energy labour market, including what jobs exist today, how they are distributed across regions, and where the most acute skills shortages are emerging. Moreover, a more extensive assessment of clean economy employment and training, particularly at the regional level, would help identify gaps between labour demand and available education and training pathways. Improved labour market information would also support workers, educators, and policymakers to make more informed decisions about workforce development priorities, including ways to assess and improve job quality.

Participants also raised important questions about the evolution of training systems and delivery models. Further research is needed to establish principles for effective training approaches that balance efficiency, accessibility, and workforce outcomes. This includes examining when shorter, competency-based or micro-credential programs are appropriate, where they may introduce risks, and how they can complement rather than replace full-scope credentialed training.

Financial pressures facing public post-secondary institutions, especially rural and northern communities, were also identified as requiring deeper analysis given their implications for regional workforce access and economic resilience. In addition, greater examination is needed to understand how employers can be better incentivized or supported to invest in workforce training and skills development.

Participants underscored the importance of better understanding workforce participation and career perceptions. Research into how careers in clean energy and skilled trades are perceived by youth, parents, educators, and the broader public could inform more effective outreach and career pathway development. Participants also emphasized the need to examine models that support Indigenous- and community-led workforce planning, recognizing the significance of aligning workforce development with local priorities and economic opportunities.

Addressing the above research gaps would strengthen the foundation for designing a coordinated, worker-centred workforce strategy capable of meeting B.C.’s evolving economic and climate objectives.

5. Conclusion

Workforce capacity is key to B.C.'s climate and economic goals.

Workforce capacity is becoming a critical limiting factor in B.C.'s ability to fulfill its clean energy, climate, and economic ambitions. Continued inaction risks not only delaying emissions reductions, but also constraining economic growth, deepening regional disparities, and exacerbating social inequities related to access to quality employment.

Addressing these challenges will require a coherent, long-term labour market strategy that integrates climate action with workforce development, economic planning, and education policy. Done well, such a strategy would support good-quality jobs, strengthen community resilience, and ensure the sharing of transition benefits broadly across the province. Achieving these outcomes will depend not only on policy intent, but also on robust governance structures that enable coordination across jurisdictions and sectors, as well as sustained funding and clear implementation pathways.

Moving forward, targeted research to fill critical knowledge gaps and continued collaboration among governments, industry, labour, Indigenous partners, and civil society will be essential to translating the insights from this workshop into practical, durable policy solutions. In the interim, we offer an initial set of principles for a clean economy labour market plan.

Principles for a clean economy labour market plan

1. Take place-based and regional approaches to training and workforce planning.
2. Create formal structures of collaboration across government, labour, industry, and post-secondary institutions.
3. Hold employers accountable for supporting workers through training and the provision of good-quality employment.
4. Create stable, long-term policy to support investments, decision-making, job creation, and training delivery.
5. Engage and educate the next generation of workers about sustainable jobs.
6. Balance the preservation of full-scope trades training while supplementing with more adaptable training delivery models, without taking shortcuts or compromising quality.

Appendix A. Workshop participants

Al Withers, Trades Training Instructor, IBEW 213 Electrical Joint Training Committee

Ben Campbell, Chief Executive Officer, Northern Development Initiative Trust

Ben Simoni, Executive Director, Youth Climate Corps BC

Bill Kilgannon, Research Manager, Accelerating Community Energy Transformation

Brandon Dyck, Government Affairs Coordinator, International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers

Brendan Glauser, Senior Director of Communications, Pembina Institute

Cecilia Jaques, Engagement Manager, Accelerating Community Energy Transformation

Claire Sauve, Associate Director of Continuing Studies, Vancouver Community College

Dan Woynillowicz, Principal, Polaris Strategy + Insight

Dani Ferenc, Construction Industry Workforce Development Consultant

Darren Fleet, Lead Researcher, BC Federation of Labour

Davin Greenwell, Director, Regional Economic Initiatives, Ministry of Jobs and Economic Growth

George Benson, Senior Manager, Zero Emissions Innovation Centre

Jim Stanford, Executive Director, Centre for Future Work

Katya McClintock, Director of Clean Energy, New Relationship Trust

Katherine Pearce, Regional Collaboration Lead, Community Energy Association

Kenneth Porter, Manager of Climate Action Secretariat, Ministry of Energy and Climate Solutions

Laura Lurz, Chief Strategy Officer, Skilled Trades BC

Layne Clark, Director of Workforce Development, BC Building Trades

Lindsay McLaughlin, Director, Vancouver Island/Sunshine Coast, Ministry of Jobs and Economic Growth

Megan Gordon, Manager of Sustainable Workforce, Pembina Institute

Mubasher Faruki, Associate Dean – Automotive, British Columbia Institute of Technology

Ranjan Bhattacharya, Dean of the School of Trades and Technology, College of the Rockies

Scott Lunny, Director of District 3, United Steelworkers Canada

Scott McDonald, Partner, Prospero Learning Systems Inc.

Tamara Krawchenko, Associate Professor – Public Administration, University of Victoria

Tania Chaar, Economist, Electricity Human Resources Canada

Tanya Ratzlaff, Executive Director, Home Performance Stakeholder Council

Trish Garner, Director of Policy and Strategic Initiatives, BC Federation of Labour

Vashti Thiesson, Senior Director of Community and Employer Programs, Ministry of Post-Secondary Education & Future Skills

Photo: Geoff Howe

PEMBINA Institute

www.pembina.org

x.com/pembina bsky.app/profile/pembina.org

facebook.com/pembina.institute linkedin.com/company/pembina-institute/