

2025 - 2028



BUSINESS
+ HIGHER
EDUCATION
ROUNDTABLE

STRATEGIC PLAN

BUSINESS + HIGHER EDUCATION ROUNDTABLE

LETTER FROM THE CEO

To BHER's members, partners, and team,

Ten years ago, business + higher education leaders from across the country came together to launch a bold experiment: a new organization dedicated to bridging sectors, aligning systems, and creating opportunities for learners, workers, employers, and educators.

That experiment became BHER. Today, we're proud to mark a decade of cross-sector collaboration and impact.

Over the past ten years, BHER has:

- Built nearly 100 partnerships and secured more than 70,000 work-integrated learning (WIL) opportunities.
- Established a research and development team focused on translating evidence into action and thought leadership.
- Convened a powerful national network of institutions, companies, and leaders committed to building a better future.
- Now, we're entering a new chapter and we're raising our sights even higher.

This strategic plan outlines our roadmap for the next three years. It's informed by insights from our members, as always, as well as a national series of roundtables we convened in 2025 with leaders from post-secondary institutions, industry, and government.

From Halifax to Vancouver, Canada's leaders are calling for bold reforms to unlock agility, alignment, accountability, and growth across Canada's skills, talent, and innovation systems.

The need for cross-sector conversations and collaboration has never been greater. BHER's role is to help Canada not only respond to what's changing, but to shape what happens next – by turning insight into action, partnerships into systems change, and member voices into national impact.

We will:

- Deepen our work on skills, talent, productivity, and innovation – expanding beyond WIL to support lifelong learning, upskilling, and inclusive economic growth.
- Strengthen research and innovation partnerships to power productivity and prosperity.
- Amplify our national voice and influence to shape systems, inform policy, and unlock change.
- Invest in our internal capabilities so we can meet the moment with agility, creativity, and resolve.

Above all, we'll continue to do what BHER does best: connect, convene, and collaborate – with purpose.

We are so proud of what we've built together. But the work is far from done. With this plan, and with you by our side, we are ready for what's next.

Thank you for your continued partnership, leadership, and support.



Val Walker, PhD
CEO, Business + Higher
Education Roundtable

OUR VISION:

A thriving Canada where everyone has an opportunity to reach their potential.



WHO WE ARE:

BHER is the only organization in Canada that brings together leaders from the country's top companies and post-secondary institutions to build a better social and economic future. We collaborate with our members to tackle some of Canada's biggest skills, talent, innovation, and productivity challenges.

OUR MISSION:

CREATING OPPORTUNITY THROUGH COLLABORATION

OUR VALUES:

WE TAKE ACTION.

We move quickly from insight to decision – piloting and scaling solutions that matter.

WE ACT ON EVIDENCE.

Data, experience, and lived insight shape everything we do – from policy to partnerships.

WE LEAD WITH CONFIDENCE.

We are bold in our opinions and outputs – unafraid to challenge assumptions and rethink what's possible.

WE DRIVE CHANGE.

We are future-focused and systems-minded. We don't do things the old way if there's a smarter path forward.

WE BUILD IN PARTNERSHIP.

We're collaborators by design – connecting people and co-creating across business, education, government, and community.

WE WORK FOR ALL.

Equity and inclusion are at the core of our work. We aim for outcomes that serve everyone in Canada – not just those already at the table.

OUR STRATEGIC PILLARS

CONNECT AND CONVENE WITH PURPOSE

Our core mandate. We will continue to connect, convene and lead the conversation on skills, talent, productivity, and innovation with our members and other leaders from across the country.

SKILLS AND TALENT

We will build capacity and drive change in Canada's skills and talent ecosystems, especially work-integrated learning, to help businesses navigate the future of work.

PRODUCTIVITY, INNOVATION, AND RESEARCH PARTNERSHIPS

We will create a stronger culture of innovation and research partnerships in Canada to leverage existing strengths, deepen collaboration, and support sustainable economic growth.

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

We will continue to strengthen and scale organizational capacity, communications, and revenue streams to better serve members.

THE BIG PICTURE: BHER'S NEXT 3 YEARS

GOAL 1

LEAD NEXT GENERATION CONVENING.

We will establish BHER as Canada's foremost cross-sector convener, thought leader, and driver of change on skills, talent, productivity, and innovation – shaping national dialogue, informing policy, building coalitions, and translating insights into action.

GOAL 2

TRANSFORM CANADA'S SKILLS AND TALENT ECOSYSTEMS.

We will accelerate systems change in Canada's skills and talent development ecosystems through innovative, employer-informed learning, and workforce pathways.

GOAL 3

STRENGTHEN RESEARCH AND INNOVATION PARTNERSHIPS FOR NATIONAL IMPACT.

We will facilitate collaboration between business + higher education to accelerate productivity, fuel innovation, support sustainable economic growth, and help solve Canada's big challenges.

GOAL 4

SCALE BHER'S INFLUENCE, AGILITY, AND SUSTAINABILITY.

We will invest in the tools, people, and strategies needed to lead boldly and grow sustainably, increasing our reach, diversifying revenue, and ensuring we continue to deliver impact for our members across the country.

GOAL 1: LEAD NEXT GENERATION CONVENING

Establish BHER as Canada's foremost cross-sector convener, thought leader, and driver of change on skills, talent, productivity, and innovation – shaping national dialogue, informing policy, building coalitions, and translating insights into action.

Strategy 1A: Expand BHER's Influence Through Strategic Convening

OBJECTIVE:

Use BHER's convening power to build coalitions, surface solutions, and shape the national agenda on skills, talent, and innovation, turning dialogue into direction and conversation into coordinated action.

KEY ACTIONS:

- **Position BHER's annual Executive Summit as Canada's flagship cross-sector gathering** and a national forum where leaders from post-secondary institutions, industry, and government co-create strategies to align education, workforce, innovation systems, and drive economic growth.
- **Co-host regional roundtables with members and provincial partners** to facilitate locally-grounded conversations that reflect regional priorities, surface barriers to reform, and build momentum for place-based solutions, while also informing national action.
- **Design high-impact events on key themes** organized around timely, high-stakes topics, such as higher education reform, AI and work, international student retention, and climate workforce transitions, drawing diverse actors into meaningful dialogue.
- **Drive systems reform through strategic initiatives** by convening Presidents, CEOs, and policy leaders around the structural reforms required to increase Canada's competitiveness and economic growth.



Strategy 1B: Build and Animate BHER's Community of Members

OBJECTIVE:

Strengthen engagement across BHER's cross-sector membership by creating platforms for connection, co-creation, and shared leadership, unlocking collective insight, innovation, and impact.

KEY ACTIONS:

- **Create more structured opportunities through convening for members to share insight and foresight** with each other and more broadly, which will position BHER as a connector and amplifier of member-led innovation.
- **Convene sector- and region-specific roundtables** to surface shared solutions and facilitate collaboration among members who share geographic, industry, or thematic priorities.
- **Identify and spotlight member-driven models, pilots, and reforms that others can learn from** through thought leadership, case studies, and communications.

Strategy 1C: Be the Go-To Source for Evidence-Based Dialogue

OBJECTIVE:

Strengthen BHER's role as a trusted voice on the future of work, learning, productivity, and innovation.

KEY ACTIONS:

- **Curate, synthesize, and share insights on emerging issues** by translating complex research into clear and actionable takeaways on critical trends that align with BHER's key initiatives.
- **Publish high-impact, member-informed thought leadership** in the form of research deliverables, thought leadership pieces, op-eds, and case studies co-developed with BHER members, offering practical insights and timely perspectives for employers, institutions, and policymakers.
- **Launch an annual flagship report** that tracks progress, highlights gaps, and spotlights promising practices across Canada's education-to-employment ecosystems informed by BHER's member network, convening, and partnerships.

Strategy 1D: Grow and Diversify BHER's Partner Network

OBJECTIVE:

Strengthen and expand BHER's relationships across sectors, regions, and communities to ensure the voices, expertise, and priorities of a broader range of partners inform and shape Canada's skills, talent, and innovation agenda.

KEY ACTIONS:

- **Deepen engagement with federal and provincial policymakers** by continuing to build trusted relationships with public sector leaders to advance shared policy goals, act as a knowledge broker, and position BHER as a resource across jurisdictions and mandates.
- **Tailor outreach to underrepresented and underserved communities** by designing targeted strategies to engage Indigenous organizations, rural and remote regions, equity-deserving groups, and to ensure smaller institutions and employers aren't left out of national conversations and initiatives.
- **Engage learners and workers as co-creators, not just end users** by embedding the lived experience of students, jobseekers, and workers in BHER's research, policy design, and programming.



GOAL 2: STRENGTHEN CANADA'S SKILLS AND TALENT ECOSYSTEMS

Accelerate systems change in Canada's skills and talent development ecosystems through innovative, employer-informed learning and workforce pathways.

Strategy 2A: Expand the Scope of Work-Integrated Learning (WIL)

OBJECTIVE:

Transform Canada's WIL landscape by scaling inclusive, next-generation models, deepening employer engagement, and positioning WIL as a core component of the nation's talent infrastructure.

KEY ACTIONS:

- **Build sustainable, resilient WIL ecosystems across Canada** by supporting employers of all sizes in delivering high-quality placements, strengthening local and national WIL ecosystems, sharing best practices, and facilitating peer learning through events, engagement, and communications.
- **Create and scale next-generation WIL formats to reflect a dynamic economy** by expanding innovative placement models that offer meaningful learning at speed and scale.
- **Pilot WIL in emerging and high-impact sectors** by forging partnerships and launching WIL initiatives in growth and priority sectors of the economy.
- **Reach underrepresented learners and employers by designing and delivering** inclusive programming that serves equity-deserving groups and hard-to-reach populations, removing barriers to participation and creating opportunity across geographies, identities, and abilities.
- **Lead with insight, not just tools by moving** from tool creation to thought leadership and events that help shape the next decade of WIL in Canada as a cornerstone of future-ready talent strategy.

Strategy 2B: Strengthen Upskilling and Reskilling Through Member-Led Models

OBJECTIVE:

Help BHER's members and partners build responsive, high-impact learning pathways for mid-career workers and displaced talent by convening employers and higher education leaders to co-design solutions grounded in real labour market needs.

KEY ACTIONS:

- **Embed transferable, future-proof skills into post-secondary programming** by partnering with members to identify core cross-sector skills and integrate them into education, training, and reskilling pathways.
- **Co-design modular, stackable, and sector-relevant credentials** by working with employers and institutions to build short-cycle learning models and microcredentials that support career transitions, lifelong learning, skills articulation, and data gathering.
- **Scale successful pilot projects to new sectors and regions** by expanding or adapting proven models, focusing on underrepresented groups (e.g., Indigenous peoples, newcomers, and women), and sharing lessons across sectors facing labour shortages.
- **Bridge the gap between continuing education and industry** by convening Canada's continuing education leaders and sector councils to improve labour market information flow, share insights on emerging needs, and coordinate workforce strategies across regions and sectors.



Strategy 2C: Advance a Bold and Inclusive Future-of-Work Agenda

OBJECTIVE:

Surface early signals to identify early indicators of disruption – from sectoral shifts to digital transformation – and turn them into actionable insights for policy and programming.

KEY ACTIONS:

- **Reinforce post-secondary education as a public good and economic enabler** by connecting, convening, and helping lead conversations about how institutional impact supports national goals, from labour market resilience to innovation, inclusion, and regional prosperity.
- **Advance accessibility through multi-year initiatives** that help students with disabilities transition to work and modernize duty-to-accommodate legislation, ensuring a future of work that works for everyone.
- **Anticipate and address talent needs in a tech-driven economy** by conducting national and regional research on AI adoption and talent needs, helping institutions and employers respond to skills shifts and automation risks.
- **Support climate and net-zero workforce transitions** by equipping members and partners to navigate the talent implications of climate policy by developing pathways into energy sectors through WIL programming, employer engagement, and sectoral intelligence.
- **Inform the modernization of immigration policies** by leveraging the expertise and experience of BHER's members and partners, to strengthen international talent recruitment and retention.

GOAL 3: STRENGTHEN CANADA'S RESEARCH AND INNOVATION ECOSYSTEMS

Facilitate collaboration between business + higher education to accelerate productivity, fuel innovation, support sustainable economic growth, and help solve Canada's big challenges.

Strategy 3A: Build partnerships between industry, post-secondary institutions, and policymakers that mobilize applied research.

OBJECTIVE:

Leverage research and innovation partnerships to address Canada's most pressing systemic priorities by aligning institutional capacity with national need.

KEY ACTIONS:

- **Convene cross-sector members and partners to co-develop applied solutions to complex challenges** at regional and national levels.
- **Support members in aligning applied research with public priorities** by helping institutions and employers build applied research capacity that contributes directly to national and sub-national goals.
- **Surface and support regional innovation cluster models** by identifying and amplifying promising place-based models that bring together post-secondary institutions, anchor employers, SMEs, and public partners.



Strategy 3B: Connect Post-Secondary Institutions and Employers Through Research Partnerships

OBJECTIVE:

Build capacity for our members and partners to simplify and scale research collaboration between institutions, industry, and innovation intermediaries.

KEY ACTIONS:

- **Build a member-driven research partnerships network** modeled after BHER's WIL ecosystems work to surface, scale, and share best practices in research collaboration, with a focus on real-world impact and systems change.
- **Curate and match high-potential collaboration opportunities** by identifying and circulating challenge statements, open calls, and (where available) strategic funding opportunities that connect members with partners across the R&D ecosystem.
- **Reduce friction for SMEs and scale-up firms** to partner with post-secondary institutions and larger firms to access research talent and infrastructure.
- **Build internal capacity to broker high-impact partnerships** by strengthening BHER's ability to match industry innovation needs with institutional expertise and research infrastructure, using trusted relationships and intelligence across sectors and regions.
- **Develop resources that help lower the barrier to partnership**, including thought leadership, playbooks, and guides that help members accelerate collaboration and reduce duplication of effort.



Strategy 3C: Advance Public Policy that Enables a More Innovative, Productive Canada

OBJECTIVE:

Inform federal and provincial policy to unlock Canada's innovation potential using member-informed insight to champion research, commercialization, and productivity as pillars of national economic growth.

KEY ACTIONS:

- **Monitor and synthesize trends in innovation and productivity performance.** Track national and global data on R&D spending, commercialization outcomes, IP retention, and talent mobility and translate it into accessible insights for members and policymakers.
- **Shape policies that incentivize co-investment in innovation** and promote public policies that reward applied research partnerships, de-risk collaboration between post-secondary institutions and employers, and align funding incentives with long-term impact.
- **Leverage member-driven research to support bold policy reform** by using publications such as *A Smarter Path* to catalyze policy and systems change, advancing new models of alignment between post-secondary research mandates, commercialization goals, and national productivity challenges.



GOAL 4: STRENGTHEN BHER'S ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY, INFLUENCE, AND SUSTAINABILITY

Invest in the tools, people, and strategies needed to lead boldly and grow sustainably, increasing our reach, diversifying revenue, and ensuring we continue to deliver impact for our members across the country.

Strategy 4A: Build a Flexible, Scalable Operating Model

OBJECTIVE:

Ensure BHER has the people, processes, and systems needed to deliver on its growing mandate, while ensuring internal operations are agile, aligned, and built to scale with strategic ambition.

KEY ACTIONS:

- **Use member feedback to shape strategy and programming** by deploying consultation and roundtable debriefs and strengthening feedback loops, while ensuring responsiveness to member needs and co-designing future initiatives with those closest to the work.
- **Expand capacity through strategic hiring and flexible resourcing strategies**, with a focus on developing a strong management team to deliver on major initiatives without overextending core staff.
- **Invest in project management infrastructure** to strengthen collaboration, accountability, and visibility across teams through tools and processes that support shared workflows, transparent planning, and cross-functional learning.
- **Embed performance, growth, and learning in team culture** through personalized professional development plans that help every team member grow with the organization and contribute to strategic goals.
- **Assess and adapt internal structure** as required through regular reviews of BHER's organizational design, resource allocation, and decision-making workflows to ensure the structure evolves in step with external demands and internal priorities.

Strategy 4B: Amplify BHER's Brand and Influence

OBJECTIVE:

Position BHER as a trusted and visible leader in national and regional conversations on skills, talent, and innovation through thought leadership, and strategic communications to shape public discourse.

KEY ACTIONS:

- **Scale thought leadership through diverse, accessible formats** that translate insights into action with a suite of outputs tailored for audiences across sectors.
- **Pursue a proactive, strategic communications approach** that elevates BHER leaders, ideas, and outputs in high-impact venues, including mainstream media, opinion forums, digital platforms, and national events.
- **Amplify member voices and successes** by leveraging BHER's network of members to share stories that highlight the impact of business + higher education collaboration.
- **Evolve BHER's narrative as it grows in scope and maturity** to position BHER as Canada's leading cross-sector convenor and thought leader.

Strategy 4C: Diversify and Grow Revenue Streams

OBJECTIVE:

Continue to build long-term financial sustainability that allows BHER to act boldly, move independently, and deliver on its national mission.

KEY ACTIONS:

- **Expand the member value proposition to drive growth and retention** by evolving BHER's offerings to meet the needs of a broader set of members.
- **Grow core revenue** by scaling contract research, strategic convening, advisory services, and knowledge products.
- **Pursue foundation and philanthropic partnerships** to secure new mission-aligned funding.
- **Develop multi-year funding agreements for strategic stability** by cultivating long-term relationships with public and private funders.

Strategy 4D: Foster a Culture of Collaboration, Agility, and Learning

OBJECTIVE:

Embed innovation, inclusion, and continuous improvement into BHER's internal culture, ensuring the organization remains adaptive, aligned, and reflective of the systems change it seeks to support.

KEY ACTIONS:

- **Celebrate learning, leadership, and cross-functional wins** by recognizing the contributions of individuals and teams who model collaboration, experimentation, and shared leadership, reinforcing the values that drive BHER's success.
- **Formalize inclusive decision-making processes** that ensure diverse voices shape priorities, and cultivate an internal culture of fairness.
- **Encourage agility** by piloting new tools, processes, and approaches in-house to iterate with intention and share what works.
- **Strengthen internal feedback and reflection practices** by conducting regular retrospectives and team check-ins to assess performance, identify friction points, and continuously improve how teams work together.



HOW BHER'S FOUR GOALS WORK TOGETHER

GOAL 1 CONVENING

GOAL 1 GENERATES THE
INSIGHTS THAT SHAPE
GOALS 2 + 3.

GOAL 2 SKILLS



GOAL 3 INNOVATION

GOAL 4 INFRASTRUCTURE

GOAL 4 SUPPORTS THE GROWTH
AND SCALABILITY OF GOALS 1-3.



BHER MILESTONES AND BIG WINS

2015

- Business + Higher Education Roundtable launched by the Business Council of Canada, with then-Governor General David Johnston serving as Honorary Patron.

2016

- Two foundational BHER reports - a survey of students and an environmental scan - highlight the role WIL can play in closing the skills gap.
- At one of the first BHER meetings, members set a goal for 100% of Canadian post-secondary students to have access to WIL.

2017

- Launch of ASPIRE and Gearing Up, BHER-supported WIL pilots in the financial services and mining industries.

2018

- BHER leads a coalition of national organizations to call for federal investment in WIL.
- BHER releases research partnerships guide, white-labeled so that institutions can customize with their institutional branding and roadmaps.

2019

- Budget 2019 invests \$800 million in WIL, including \$17 million to BHER to create 40,000 WIL placements.
- BHER CEO Val Walker named Co-Chair of the Future Skills Council.

2020

- BHER established the Student Advisory Board, a forum to connect current post-secondary students with BHER's work.
- BHER significantly expands internal research and development capacity through the creation of the R&D team. Their first project: to develop the WIL Hub and support Canada's COVID response.

2021

- Twentieth staff member joins the organization.
- BHER signs on its 42nd WIL delivery partner.
- Launch of the WIL Hub, which contains first-of-their-kind Find Your WIL tool and interactive ROI Calculator.
- Guides for financial support, mentorship, performance assessment, and EDI.

2022

- The 2022 Skills Survey, produced in collaboration with the Business Council of Canada, explores the impact of COVID-19 on worker upskilling and reskilling.
- A series of 20 national student roundtables helps identify priorities for addressing the WIL needs of equity-deserving students.
- BHER celebrates the creation of more than 40,000 WILs, and the first three-year, \$17.1 million renewal of its WIL program by the Government of Canada.

2023

- With a new WIL mandate, BHER's partnership work focuses on equity-deserving students, SMEs, the green economy, and innovative WIL formats.
- BHER brings together a Skills Working Group of 10 of Canada's biggest companies to explore how they're retraining and retaining people and publishes a report to inform Canada's emerging interest in upskilling/reskilling.

2024

- BHER releases two landmark accessibility reports – one mapping employer barriers and solutions to hiring persons with disabilities, and another offering a practical roadmap for designing inclusive, accessible WIL experiences.
- BHER continues to expand its WIL resource library with new tools, case studies, and partnership models focusing on underserved students, SMEs, and emerging sectors.
- Hosts two high-impact Members' Meetings on AI & productivity, exploring skills and adoption gaps and the human skills needed in AI-powered environments.

2025

- Convenes the inaugural Executive Summit on the "Messy Middle," bringing together 150 senior leaders from across sectors to discuss productivity and how Canada's post-secondaries and companies are getting hard things done.
- Through a combination of national partnerships, targeted RFPs, and innovative placement models, BHER surpasses a major milestone: 70,000 WILs, enabling tens of thousands of students to gain WIL experience across all regions and sectors.
- The Government of Canada renews its support for BHER's WIL mandate, recognizing its leadership in scaling access with a new three-year agreement.
- BHER launches a Thought Leadership strategy to elevate member voices, shape public discourse, and drive policy impact.



BHER MEMBERS





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