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ROUNDTABLE



Green Work-Integrated Learning

Growing Skills Solutions for Canada's Net-Zero Economy



Table of Contents

- 3 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**
- 4 ENTRY-LEVEL TALENT PIPELINES FOR THE GREEN ECONOMY**
- 6 BUILDING CAPACITY FOR GREEN WIL THROUGH REGIONAL COLLABORATION**
- 8 DESIGNING GREEN WIL PROGRAMS FOR LONG-TERM SUSTAINABILITY**
- 10 BHER'S IMPACT ON SKILLS AND TALENT IN THE GREEN ECONOMY**
- 13 BHER IS BUILDING GREEN WIL TODAY...**
- 14 ...AND BHER IS SCALING GREEN SKILLS FOR TOMORROW**

Executive Summary

BHER and its partners have developed a suite of work-integrated learning (WIL) programs that are designed to meet the unique needs of employers in fulfilling Canada's commitment to a net zero-emissions economy by 2050.

BHER mediates national net-zero priorities and regional stakeholder needs to ensure that WIL programs are aligned with each region's unique low-carbon pathway, thereby supporting Canada's Sustainable Jobs Plan while also supporting young people's career progression in response to evolving labour markets.

By building WIL systems based on regional collaboration and program design for long-term career sustainability, BHER and its partners are creating a green skills-ready labour force, helping employers access diverse green talent more easily, and ensuring that both businesses and the workforce will benefit from new opportunities created in the net-zero transition.

BHER'S GREEN WIL PROGRAMS HAVE PROVEN BENEFITS FOR BOTH EMPLOYERS AND STUDENTS:

- **84%** of surveyed green employers report gaining new skills, ideas and knowledge from students.
- **77%** of employers report a positive return on investment from WIL.
- **69%** report that they were able to fill a skill gap through WIL, and **68%** report improved access to qualified students and recent graduates.

- **86%** of surveyed students report increased workforce readiness, and **87%** say they have the skills, knowledge, and experience to pursue their green career goals.
- **84%** believe that participating in a WIL has better prepared them for the workforce.
- **71%** say they developed foundational skills needed for the green economy.

This report reviews the successful strategies we have identified through our extensive work with green WIL delivery partners in every region of Canada, as well as the impact of BHER's WIL programming for students and businesses in Canada's green economy.



Entry-Level Talent Pipelines for the Green Economy

Canada's commitment to building a net zero-emissions economy by 2050 is a tremendous opportunity for sustainable and inclusive growth. New products and services will be needed to support the construction of a net-zero electricity system, the expansion of the EV supply chain, and to take advantage of substantial investments in clean technology.¹ These shifts will create more jobs that require different green skills across all sectors and occupations.²

Some sectors are forecast to experience more significant job gains, including construction, manufacturing, transportation, and clean energy.³ Over the coming decade, over 3 million Canadian jobs will change and between 13 and 20% of these jobs will be in new occupations to meet our net-zero goals.⁴

Building a workforce to power Canada's net-zero economy will require a continuous stream of entry-level talent. Ultimately, this means developing our work-integrated learning (WIL) infrastructure so that post-secondaries can respond to industry needs, firms can commit to investing in WIL as part of their clean growth and innovation strategies, students can be engaged in experiential training, and policy leaders can create the conditions needed for employers and post-secondaries to collaborate on developing and deploying green skills.



1 Canadian Chamber of Commerce, Building Canada's Net Zero Workforce.

2 Tobin, S., McDonough, L., Stephens, A. "Sustainable jobs for economic growth: State of Skills Report." Future Skills Centre, September 2024.

3 Mohsina, A., Coutinho, A., Islam, A., McNally, J. "Jobs and Skills in the Transition to a Net-Zero Economy: A Foresight Exercise." Smart Prosperity Institute, May 2022.

4 Colin Guldemann and Naomi Powell. "Green Collar Jobs: The Skills Revolution Canada Needs to Reach Net Zero." RBC Economics and Thought Leadership, February 16, 2022. <https://thoughtleadership.rbc.com/green-collar-jobs-the-skills-revolution-canada-needs-to-reach-net-zero/>.

Three major challenges currently hinder entry-level talent development for the clean economy:

- 1 **Green career awareness gaps.** Young people lack awareness of in-demand green jobs, the skills they require, and the education and training pathways to secure those jobs.⁵ In the clean energy sector, there's a mismatch between a growing demand for entry-level talent and a perception among many young people that it's difficult to find entry-level employment.⁶
- 2 **Green skills mismatches.** Young people are not getting adequate training on the foundations of climate literacy, sustainability, and the technical and social-emotional skills required for green jobs. Canada's leading employers say that more needs to be done to bridge current gaps and ensure students have the foundational skills required for emerging roles.⁷ Additionally, there are specific technical skills gaps in sectors like clean energy, as well as gaps in basic knowledge and awareness of clean technologies and legislation pertinent to Canada's net-zero transition.⁸ These gaps can leave entry-level talent underprepared to make contributions to firm-level projects.⁹

- 3 **Equity gaps.** Equity-deserving groups are underrepresented in many of the sectors forecasted to have significant job growth, such as the energy, construction, transportation, and manufacturing sectors. Equity-deserving students are also underrepresented and face systemic barriers to progressing in many of the STEM and Skilled Trades programs that provide much of the talent to these industries.

Canada's post-secondary institutions (PSIs) should be rising to these challenges, especially since most green jobs require a post-secondary credential – currently, 44% require a college diploma or certificate and 38% require a bachelor's degree.¹⁰

But Canada's PSIs face capacity constraints, including a lack of agility when updating programs, insufficient faculty resources, and the absence of a one-size-fits-all solution.¹¹

Scaling up green WIL opportunities can help PSIs overcome challenges related to agility and industry responsiveness, and is an effective way of integrating climate and sustainability skills across disciplines. Given the proven benefits of WIL in strengthening students' skills and employability, it has a clear role to play in reducing green skills mismatches.

It's clear that the scale of Canada's clean growth challenge requires holistic approaches to developing an effective WIL system. At a national level, there's a need to align WIL programs with Canada's industrial strengths in

5 On the awareness challenge, see World Skills UK, Learning and Work Institute, Skills for a net-zero economy: Insights from employers and young people. And CEDEFOP. Green Skills and Innovation for Inclusive Growth. Cedefop Reference Series 100. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2015. https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/3069_en.pdf.

6 Clark, A., Mathews, M. "Clean Energy and Pathways to Net Zero: Jobs and Skills for Future Leaders." Information and Communications Technology Council (ICTC). Ottawa, Canada. April 2023.

7 BHER member meeting, March 2023.

8 Clark, A., Mathews, M. "Clean Energy and Pathways to Net Zero: Jobs and Skills for Future Leaders." Information and Communications Technology Council (ICTC). Ottawa, Canada. April 2023.

9 Onyido, T., Rughani, D., Letinov, A. Embedding Sustainability in University Work Experience Placements. Education + Training, 64, 8/9, 2022. 10.1108/ET-09-2021-0356

10 The Conference Board of Canada, "Hiring Green: An Analysis of the Demand for Green Skills in Canada".

11 Holma, S-K., Higham, S., Bieler, A., El Altreyby, N., Chan, S., McKean, M., Walker, V. "Navigating Net-Zero: Faculty perspectives on Greening Post-Secondary Curricula". Business + Higher Education Roundtable. Ottawa, ON. April 2024.

hydrogen, EV supply chains, and beyond. At the regional level, the variability of job forecasts means interventions need to be place-based – attuned to the local networks of PSIs, employers, and industry associations.

In this context, BHER mediates national net-zero priorities and regional stakeholder needs to ensure that WIL programs are supporting community-level workforce development aligned with each region's unique low-carbon pathway, thereby supporting

Canada's Sustainable Jobs Plan while also supporting young people's career progression in response to dynamic labour markets.

BHER has developed a multiscale solution to developing WIL for clean growth that includes building capacity through regional collaboration, and ensuring inclusive and sustainable WIL program design to ready diverse students for green careers.



Building Capacity for Green WIL through Regional Collaboration

Through our work with our partners, BHER has identified three successful strategies for scaling up WIL for sustainable jobs within regional skills ecosystems to meet the needs of stakeholders.

1. STREAMLINED EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT

Employers in the clean economy, especially small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), often lack the capacity to navigate complex PSI systems to find the right candidates. Institutions should move towards streamlining employer engagement and WIL service delivery so that firms can work with a single liaison to access student talent from across disciplines. On a municipal level, there's a role for chambers of commerce and economic development agencies to help firms access the green talent they need from across different institutions.

EXAMPLE IN ACTION:

BHER partnered with Calgary Economic Development's TalentED YYC project to streamline employer access to diverse student talent for Alberta's growing clean energy economy through WIL. TalentED YYC offers a streamlined platform for employers looking to engage students from all 7 of Calgary's post-secondary institutions: University of Calgary, SAIT, Bow Valley College, Mount Royal University, Alberta University of the Arts, St. Mary's University, and Ambrose University. With support from BHER, TalentED YYC brought together these post-secondaries, clean energy groups, and local employers to strengthen access to diverse student talent interested in green careers. As a one-stop shop, TalentED YYC makes it easier for employers to offer green WIL opportunities for students in Calgary.



2. STRATEGIC DIVERSITY OUTREACH

Addressing the current equity gaps in entry-level talent pipelines requires extensive collaboration with equity organizations on both the student side (e.g., student clubs and associations) and the employer side (e.g., associations representing minority-led firms). Finding WIL champions within these organizations has been a helpful tactic for increasing engagement from equity-deserving students.

EXAMPLE IN ACTION:

One type of WIL opportunity through TalentED YYC is multi-day design competitions held in collaboration with FUSE Collective, a University of Calgary student organization focused on energy transition. Industry participants included the City of Calgary, Africa Centre of Calgary, Calgary Black Chambers, Mitacs, TECHNATION, BrainSTEM Alliance, and LearningCITY. TalentED YYC's inclusion efforts have been highly successful to date, with 60% of participants identifying as women, 58% as visible minorities, and 36% international students. Employers also commented on how TalentED YYC makes it easier for them to find diverse students with aligned values and interests and connect to them directly.



3. CROSS-INSTITUTIONAL COLLABORATION

Existing green WIL opportunities tend to be in education, environmental science, or green-oriented STEM programs. To deliver WIL opportunities beyond those disciplines, we need cross-institutional leadership to empower faculty and staff to integrate green skills-related opportunities into existing WIL infrastructure. BHER and its partners have utilized this approach to engage a wide range of post-secondary leaders in delivering green skills-related WIL opportunities, from Directors of Innovation to Managers of Community Service Learning, and beyond.

There is also a clear need for stronger inter-institutional collaboration to share green skills curricula and avoid potential duplication in sustainable jobs training. BHER is currently working with partners to address this challenge, and to implement what we have learned about the most important elements of successful WIL program design.



EXAMPLE IN ACTION:

BHER partnered with the Smith School of Business to develop the Queen's University Venture Creation, Experiential Learning & Net Zero Training (QVENT) program. This cross-institutional, multidisciplinary program was designed to equip students with the skills, knowledge, and networks to lead Canada's transition to a net-zero economy.

QVENT empowered faculty and staff from across business, arts and science, humanities, applied science and beyond to connect students with the green skills and professional networks required to launch a career in the clean economy. The QVENT program shows how PSIs can sidestep slow processes of curriculum change by empowering multiple leaders to build green skills-related opportunities into existing courses.

STEM and non-STEM students benefited greatly from the 1,900 WIL opportunities created through this program, and employers in mining and clean tech noted significant growth in student recruitment and the benefits of engaging diverse students from multiple disciplines.

Designing Green WIL Programs for Long-Term Sustainability

BHER's funded WIL projects focus on ensuring that diverse students are career-ready for the long term by being equipped with the foundational skills and experience to pursue entry-level jobs *and* the ability to plan careers in a fast-evolving labour market. Here are three key strategies, with examples of tactics that support each strategy, that ensure students can pursue a sustainable career.

1. COMBINE WIL AND CAREER EDUCATION TO BUILD GREEN CAREER AWARENESS

WIL opportunities should be designed in a way that integrates meaningful career development learning. The integration of career development with work-integrated learning has been shown to improve students' self-efficacy and professional identity.¹² This is especially crucial in green fields where students will have to proactively manage their careers in response to fast-changing roles. Useful tactics to achieve this integration include:

- A** **Sequencing career development learning** before, during, and after WIL opportunities. Given how quickly the skills and occupational profiles of net-zero jobs can change with emerging needs, it's important for students to continuously develop career management skills. Effective learning approaches include narrative-based reflective practice, career coaching, and informational interviews with industry professionals.

- B** **Integrating accessible labour market information (LMI) into preparatory activities** to ensure students have relevant information on emerging roles, local job opportunities, salaries, and quality of work to inform their early decisions about WILs and future roles. Pertinent approaches include LMI forecasts, dashboards, and employer presentations to share insider knowledge of local industry trends.

- C** **Connecting students to opportunities for short-term professional development** like micro-credentials before, during, or after their placement. These ongoing professional development opportunities can help tailor WIL to students' individual career development in fields with very specific technical skills needs.

2. USE EQUITY-FOCUSED DESIGN IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF WIL

Persistent equity gaps in Canada's leading WIL programs impact retention, learning, and employment outcomes.¹³ To tackle this challenge, programs must apply an equity lens to the social and physical settings, developmental supports, duration, sequencing, and scaffolding of WIL opportunities.¹⁴ We have found these two tactics to be especially important:

- A** **Inclusive mentorship opportunities** from industry partners allow equity-deserving students to see themselves in the clean economy. Mentorship programs are among the most effective ways to address barriers to promotion and retention for

12 Andrews, J., Ramji, K. Connecting Work-integrated learning and career development in virtual environments: An analysis of the UVic Leading Edge. *International Journal of Work-Integrated Learning*, Special Issue, 21(5), 2020.

13 Godden, L., Hoessler, C. (Re)designing for equity, access and inclusion in work-integrated learning. *International Journal of Work-Integrated Learning*, Special Issue, 25(1), 2024.

14 Godden, L., Hoessler, C. (Re)designing for equity, access and inclusion in work-integrated learning. *International Journal of Work-Integrated Learning*, Special Issue, 25(1), 2024.

equity-deserving groups; mentors therefore play an important role in diversifying talent pipelines in the male-dominated sectors that will most benefit from the net-zero transition.¹⁵ Check out BHER's 45-minute [Mentoring Post-Secondary Students Course](#) that equips mentors with the practical knowledge and skills needed to support students during their WIL placement.

- B Scaffolding green skills training** allows students to “taste test” green careers via shorter duration, lighter touch opportunities before the option to pursue longer duration placements. For example, our green industry partners have offered one-day hackathons as well as months-long entrepreneurial co-op placements. This type of scaffolded programming attracts diverse students by allowing them to start developing networks during initial career exploration, which often leads to securing longer term opportunities.



3. FOCUS ON FOUNDATIONAL GREEN SKILLS TO PREPARE STUDENTS FOR EARLY CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

Foundational skills include the climate literacy and human skills needed to succeed in entry-level green jobs. Students must not only know how to apply green technical skills, but also understand why Canada is undertaking a net-zero transition and have the human skills to work with diverse colleagues on net-zero challenges. On this front, we have identified two key tactics:

- A Pre-placement preparatory training** such as workshops and prep courses improve students' foundational knowledge, including in relation to clean technology, business practices, and regulation pertinent to Canada's net-zero commitments. Examples include bootcamps and scenario-based learning for students to improve systems thinking. Preparatory training is most effective when institutions commit to organizational learning and continuous improvement, constantly integrating new feedback from industry and past cohorts.¹⁶
- B Multidisciplinary and team-based models** that involve students from different disciplines working together, such as cohort-based internships and industry team projects, are highly effective in helping students to develop key human skills for green jobs like teamwork, collaboration, and systems thinking. Multidisciplinary, project, and team-based pedagogies are particularly effective in sustainable development education, including in relation to climate change.¹⁷ These approaches also allow employers to engage and learn from the insights of students from across a diverse range of disciplines and backgrounds.

¹⁵ Conboy, Kaitlyn, and Chris Kelly. “What Evidence Is There That Mentoring Works to Retain and Promote Employees, Especially Diverse Employees, Within a Single Company?,” October 1, 2016. <https://ecommons.cornell.edu/handle/1813/74541>.

¹⁶ Onyido, T., Rughani, D., Letinov, A. Embedding Sustainability in University Work Experience Placements. *Education + Training*, 64, 8/9, 2022. 10.1108/ET-09-2021-0356

¹⁷ Ann Dale, Lenore Newman. “Sustainable Development, Education and Literacy,” *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education*, December 1, 2005. <https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/14676370510623847/full/html?queryID=24%2F5412841>.

BHER's Impact on Skills and Talent in the Green Economy

To create accessible and inclusive pathways to green jobs for students and to ensure all employers have access to the talent they need to transition to net-zero, BHER has curated a Canada-wide network of 14 green WIL partnerships that have engaged 1,330+ employers and created 8,400+ WILs to date, with substantive benefits for employers, students, and Canada's economy.

SUPPORTING GREEN EMPLOYERS

Employer beneficiaries report positive outcomes from participating in BHER's green WIL programs.¹⁸ SMEs constituted a large portion (73%) of green employers, with women- or visible minority-led firms being a larger than expected contingent (55%). These organizations were often delivering WIL for the first time and building new collaborations with PSIs. Given the diversity of thought required to achieve Canada's net-zero transition, the impact of BHER's WIL programs on firms led by women and underrepresented communities is especially noteworthy. **Overall,**

- **84%** of all employers report gaining new skills, ideas and knowledge from students. **90%** of women-led firms and **100%** of minority-led firms report this benefit.
- **77%** of all employers report a positive return on investment from WIL. **85%** of women-led and **86%** of minority-led firms report a positive ROI.
- **69%** of all employers report that they were able to fill a skill gap through WIL. **86%** of minority led firms report this benefit.

→ **68%** of all employers report improved access to qualified students and recent graduates. **78%** of women-led and **93%** of minority-led firms report this benefit.

→ **75%** of women-led firms report an increase in team diversity.

→ **85%** of minority-led firms report becoming more innovative.

BHER has also facilitated impressive outcomes for employers in capacity-building:

- **76%** of surveyed employers were able to establish new partnerships with PSIs, **78%** able to reinforce existing connections, and **75%** found it easier to collaborate with PSIs.
- **35%** of those who had delivered a WIL previously indicated that BHER allowed them to offer a higher number of WIL opportunities compared to the past, and **30%** delivered WIL for the first time.
- A majority of employers indicated gaining a stronger awareness about various aspects of WIL, including WIL opportunities (**69%**) and the benefits of WIL (**68%**), with SMEs indicating a slightly stronger impact on their awareness of WIL opportunities (**70%**).

¹⁸ To capture the impact of BHER's WIL programs, partner organizations administer a standard survey to employers upon the completion of the program. As of August 2024, 14 partners have collected 91 surveys from employer beneficiaries of BHER's green skills programming.

POSITIVE IMPACT ON STUDENTS

Students developed green skills, professional networks, and more awareness of sustainable job opportunities through BHER's WIL programs.¹⁹ Most students were women (53%), with a large proportion of students identifying as a visible minority (45%) or international students (25%). Students were enrolled in a range of disciplines, with most from business management (34%), architecture/engineering (11%), math/computer science (7%), agriculture (6%), social and behavioural sciences (5%), and health (5%). This diverse, cross-disciplinary cohort speaks to the success of BHER and its partners in extending the reach of sustainable jobs training at Canadian PSIs. **Overall,**

- **71%** of students developed human skills needed for the green economy, including communication skills (**76%**), critical thinking (**74%**), problem solving (**73%**), strategic thinking (**75%**), systems thinking (**71%**), future thinking (**73%**), and interpersonal skills (**73%**).
- **86%** of students reported increased workforce readiness.
- **87%** say they have the skills, knowledge, and experience to pursue their career goals.
- **87%** feel optimistic about achieving workforce success.
- **84%** of all students believe that participating in a WIL opportunity has better prepared them for the workforce. **87%** of women and visible minority students report this benefit.
- **76%** say they can better articulate their own skills, and **75%** say they can better identify the skills they already have.

¹⁹ As of June 17, 2024, 38 partners conducted a total of 18,744 pre and 8,958 post surveys. Analysis of the surveys collected was conducted using the statistical software R. The data was then divided between green (pre surveys = 5,776 and post surveys = 1,879) and non-green cohorts (pre surveys = 1,0769 and post surveys = 4,947).



Our green WIL programs have achieved remarkable outcomes for equity-deserving groups. One student stated,

“

This was a revolutionizing experience that provided me with a true reflection of my capacity, capabilities, and unique gifts. I am leaving this opportunity feeling confident and clear of my path and my goals.”

Another equity-deserving student reported valuing the focus on foundational green skills:

“

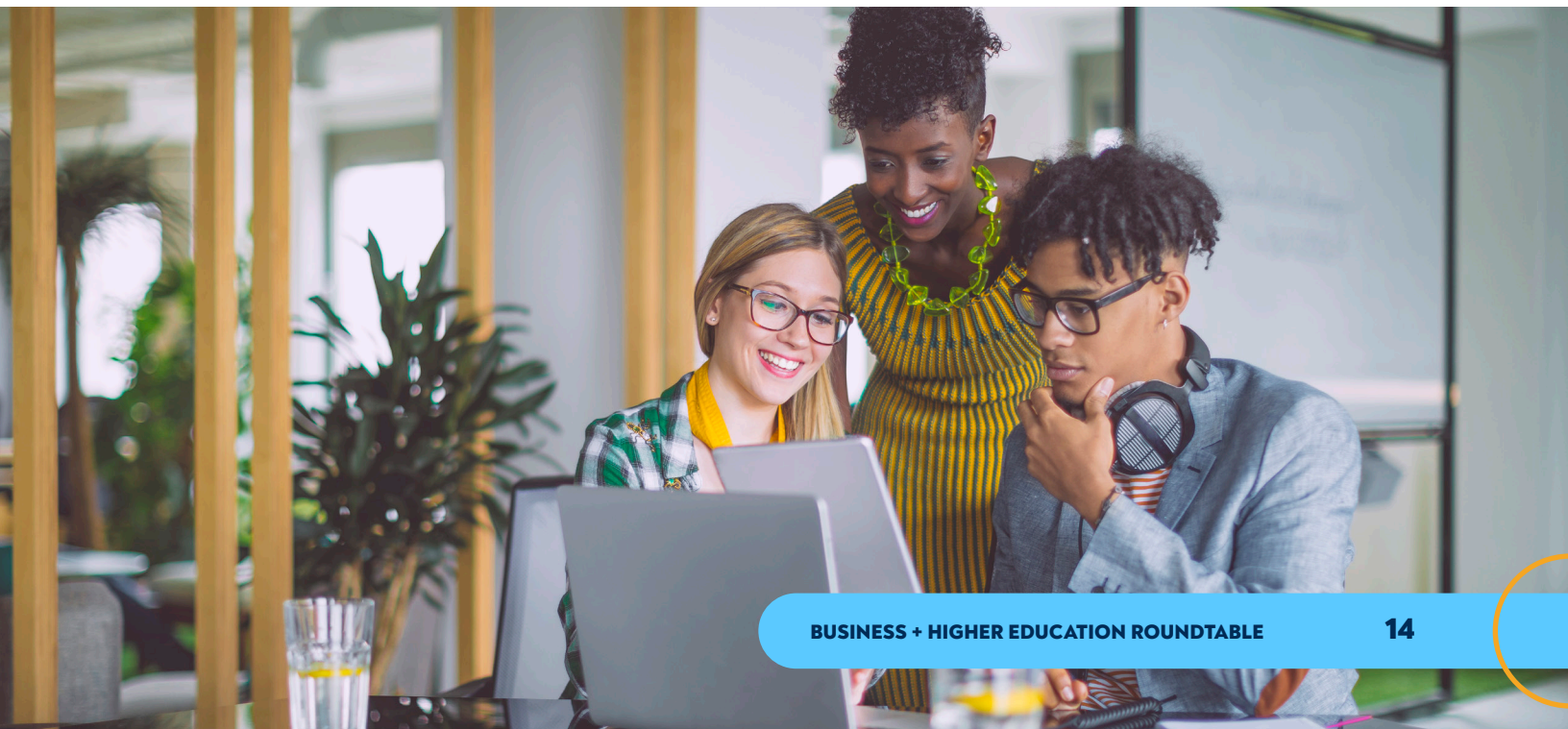
Going through the different steps of problem-solving and coming up with solutions for climate-related actions in a group setting was very new. It was a great opportunity to take a step forward in learning.”

Further, with Canada significantly behind major economies in investing in and building a clean economy, it is promising that two-thirds of students report gaining a better understanding of human impact on the natural environment and the importance of protecting it (68%), potential green careers (67%), and how their professional activities might help climate challenges (67%).

One student reflected,

“

The ROV hackathon was a very fun opportunity to learn about building ROVs, and now I realize I want to go into ocean tech engineering, so I now have an idea of what I want to do when I graduate.”



BHER is Building Green WIL Today...

BHER has invested over \$4.6 million in WIL partnerships that advance community-level workforce development aligned with net-zero pathways across Canada.

→ **Supporting SMEs and priority sectors in Ontario.**

BHER is supporting Ontario's net-zero transition through investments that help smaller organizations access green talent, and to advance green skills development in priority sectors such as construction trades, EV manufacturing, clean transportation, agriculture, forestry, mining, scientific and environmental services. Through 7 partnerships, we've delivered nearly 5,000 green-skills-related WILs across Ontario.

→ **Advancing clean energy and urban transitions in the Prairies.**

BHER is supporting net-zero transitions across Alberta, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan through building workforce capacity in sectors including clean and renewable energy, construction, mining, clean transportation, and community-based solutions. Through 5 partnerships, we've delivered over 2,000 green-skills-related WILs across the region.

→ **Strengthening clean energy and transportation in Atlantic Canada.**

BHER is supporting Atlantic Canada's net-zero transition through investments to build entry-level talent pipelines for the growing wind-to-hydrogen, clean energy and marine transportation sectors. Through 2 partnerships, we've created 527 WILs in the region.

→ **Supporting SMEs and green tourism in BC.**

BHER is supporting net-zero transitions on the West Coast through helping SMEs access green talent, supporting community-led solutions, and building the workforce needed for green tourism, construction, manufacturing, and professional and scientific services. Through 3 partnerships, we've created over 1,000 WILs across BC.

After making the initial investment in these regions, BHER is also addressing regional gaps through an additional partnership to deliver over 200 WILs in the environmental workforce across Quebec, PEI, and the Yukon.



...and BHER is Scaling Green Skills for Tomorrow

BHER will build on the success of our green WIL programming in the years ahead and continue to deliver sustainable jobs training where it's needed most. Our plan for what's next includes:

Creating and scaling green WIL by leveraging new and existing partnerships to develop new WIL experiences that align with Canada's industrial strengths and community-level workforce needs related to each region's unique net-zero pathway. We will diversify student talent pools for employers by broadening access to sustainable jobs training for diverse students across disciplines. We will also make green talent more accessible for businesses by streamlining employer engagement, creating event-based opportunities to network with student talent, reducing the costs and risks of participation in WIL. For students, this means more opportunities to explore green careers and develop the skills required for in-demand opportunities in the clean economy.

Strengthening the WIL ecosystem by drawing on BHER's extensive network of members and partners to engage more employers, including SMEs. We'll foster regional collaboration and coordinate support services that green employers need to improve their capacity for WIL. Not only will this benefit businesses and students, the streamlining of recruitment and retention and the savings on training costs will also mean big gains for Canada's growing clean economy.

Expanding sustainable jobs training for mid-career workers by delivering green micro-credentials with integrated work experience opportunities. Building on BHER's extensive experience and network of partners in the clean economy, we'll deliver experiential short-duration training to help workers upgrade or gain new skills for jobs in the green economy.

BHER is a non-profit, member-based organization that brings together leading companies and post-secondaries to create opportunities for young Canadians, foster innovation, and promote collaboration. Since 2019, we have run a federally funded WIL program that prepares students for school-to-work transitions and makes it easier for employers to collaborate with PSIs on shared skills and research priorities.

Our goal is to build capacity and drive change in Canada's skills and talent ecosystems to help businesses navigate the future of work, including in relation to sustainable jobs. We aim to scale and create resilient and sustainable WIL ecosystems across Canada where employers of all sizes have access to the support and talent they need to grow their business and contribute to clean growth. To date, we have created more than 67,000 WIL experiences for students across Canada, including 8,400+ green WILs.

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