



**WORKFORCE  
PLANNING  
WEST SCENARIO  
PLANNING PROJECT**

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As the project lead, Workforce WindsorEssex on behalf of Workforce Planning West, would like to extend gratitude to the partners that contributed their time, ideas, and expertise to this project: Libro Credit Union, Ontario Tourism Innovation Lab, and Western Ontario Wardens' Caucus.

Workforce Planning West would also like to thank the various stakeholders who contributed their time, ideas, and expertise to the nine local and one regional Scenario Planning projects. Your contribution was valuable in creating this regional Scenario Planning report.

Workforce WindsorEssex would like to thank project leads and executive leaders from the eight Southwestern Ontario Workforce Planning Boards that participated in the project: Chatham-Kent Workforce Planning Board, Elgin Middlesex Oxford Workforce Planning and Development Board, Four County Labour Market Planning Board, Niagara Workforce Planning Board, Sarnia Lambton Workforce Development Board, Workforce Planning Board of Grand Erie, Workforce Planning Board of Waterloo Wellington Dufferin, and Workforce Planning Hamilton.

Thanks are also due to the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development for their support.

# WHY WE ARE DOING THIS PROJECT

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused economic and social disruption throughout the world. The impacts felt provincially, nationally, and internationally have been well documented since early 2020. This report looks at the effects of the pandemic locally and regionally in Southwestern Ontario.

Scenario-based planning is a collaborative systems and design-thinking framework for facilitating strategic planning by identifying and managing the possible outcomes of a set of future scenarios affecting a focal issue. Applying this framework in workforce planning in Southwestern Ontario is an innovative strategy that ensures regional stakeholders are prepared to act proactively in probable local and regional post-pandemic labour market scenarios.

The nine Workforce Planning Boards in Southwestern Ontario that comprise Workforce Planning West<sup>1</sup> each undertook a local scenario planning exercise beginning in August 2020. With assistance from project partners Libro Credit Union, Ontario Tourism Innovation Lab, and Western Ontario Wardens' Caucus, the Boards worked with local stakeholders in each of the nine regions to examine the impact on their labour market. The goal was to develop four probable future scenarios for each region by exploring local level impacts on the labour market. Programs, practices, and interventions that can be put into place to mitigate these impacts were developed based on these four scenarios.

This project provides the Workforce Planning West consortium with an opportunity to align data and labour market insight as we contribute both to our local economic recoveries and to employment recoveries across Southwestern Ontario as a whole. We identify trends and unprecedented changes in the local labour market. Our collaboration toward positive changes

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1. Chatham-Kent Workforce Planning Board, Elgin Middlesex Oxford Workforce Planning and Development Board, Four County Labour Market Planning Board; Niagara Workforce Planning Board, Sarnia Lambton Workforce Development Board, Workforce Planning Board of Grand Erie, Workforce Planning Board of Waterloo Wellington Dufferin, Workforce Planning Hamilton, and Workforce WindsorEssex.

to the workforce allows for long-term planning that is the foundation for the future. There has not been a time in recent memory when changes to the workforce have been more important.

This report is for multiple audiences. The project addresses the severe labour market disruption that has impacted Southwestern Ontario since early 2020. Labour supply and demand fluctuations through the pandemic and recovery are identified. Specific actions and initiatives that can be taken by employment and training services, government, education, and community leaders can be implemented to bridge skills gaps emerging from each scenario.

This project consists of ten post-pandemic workforce scenario plans based on the Scenario Plan of each of the nine Workforce Planning Boards, as well as a regional report. Each post-pandemic Scenario Planning Report is accompanied by an interactive online dashboard of key scenario indicators that determine the scenario-based labour market outcomes.

A special thanks to all of the organizations involved in this project



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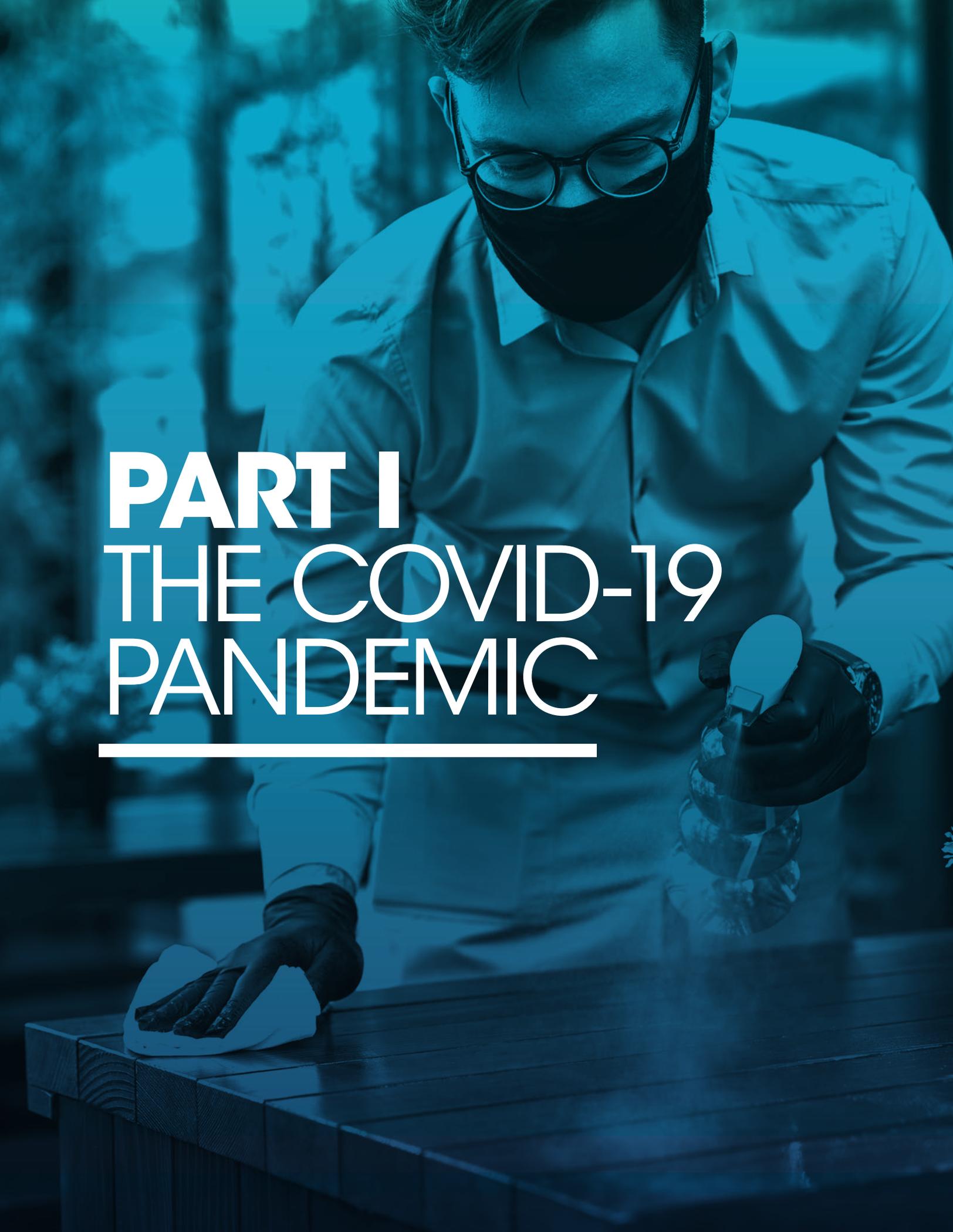
## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

As we pass the one-year anniversary of the start of the pandemic in March 2021, COVID-19 continues to impact how we live and work. Uncertainty about the SARS-CoV-2 virus in early 2020 resulted in unprecedented restrictions on people and organizations. As more was learned about the virus, these restrictions were gradually eased. However, there have been structural changes to the workforce and society over the past year. The scale of these changes is the foundation of the four probable future scenarios discussed in this report. Structural changes in society will permanently change how we engage in everyday activities. Structural changes in the workforce will impact where, when, and how we work.

Regardless of the post-pandemic level of changes to society and the workforce, two major themes emerged across all four scenarios presented in this report. First, the post-pandemic economy will require a workforce of lifelong, continuous learners. Where and how we work will not return to the way things were before March 2020. We will have to adapt to a changing labour market in an economy more dynamic than the one pre-2020. Investments in training will result in a cultural shift with an increased focus on skilling, reskilling, upskilling, and lifelong learning.

Second, stakeholders across the nine Workforce Planning West Boards indicated the pandemic is having a major impact on mental health in our communities. Public health measures restrict work and social activities. We are juggling school closures, online working and learning, and not regularly seeing family and friends. This is increasing anxiety, fear, and uncertainty around employment, finances, and health (CAMH, 2020). As organizations plan for post-pandemic opportunities and challenges, community action plans and strategic plans will need to consider how the impacts of both these themes will be felt in the short- and long-term. Are people permanently changed from their pandemic experience?

The nine Workforce Planning West scenario plans that informed this regional report demonstrate how local the impacts of the pandemic are across Southwestern Ontario. Due to public health restrictions, the hardest hit industries over the past year have been Accommodation and Food Services; Retail Trade; and Information, Culture and Recreation (Statistics Canada, 2021). Each of the nine regions that comprise Workforce Planning West has a unique mix of these industries, so the impact of the pandemic has been different for each community. Post-pandemic community action and strategic plans will need to consider local factors and uncertainties, and work with local stakeholders, to develop local workforce development solutions.

A man wearing a black face mask and glasses is shown from the chest up, leaning over a wooden table. He is wearing a light-colored, long-sleeved button-down shirt. He is holding a clear spray bottle in his left hand and a white cloth in his right hand, appearing to be cleaning the table. The entire image has a blue color overlay. The text 'PART I THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC' is overlaid in white, bold, sans-serif font on the left side of the image.

# PART I THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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# INTRODUCTION

A viral pneumonia in Wuhan, China first came to the attention of the World Health Organization (WHO) on December 31, 2019 (World Health Organization, n.d.). This novel coronavirus became known as severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2, or SARS-CoV-2, and the disease caused by this virus was named coronavirus disease, or COVID-19 (World Health Organization, n.d.). It has unexpectedly and suddenly upended society and the economy around the world, unlike anything we have ever seen. In contrast to SARS-CoV-1 which impacted Ontario in 2003, SARS-CoV-2 is more contagious and causes more severe illness. Moreover, the higher incidence of severe infection has led to a higher incidence of lives lost to COVID-19. However, early research indicates SARS-CoV-2 has a lower Case Fatality Rate<sup>2</sup> than SARS-CoV-1 (Petersen, MD et al., 2020, E238-E244).

The first case of COVID-19 was diagnosed in Canada on January 25, 2020 (Bronca, 2020). On March 11, 2020, the WHO characterized COVID-19 as a pandemic (World Health Organization, n.d.). On March 17, 2020, Ontario declared a state of emergency (Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion [Public Health Ontario] 2020). Schools and businesses were directed to close so the spread of the virus could be brought under control. Ontario was in uncharted territory.

Infection rates and active cases decreased in Summer 2020 and parts of the public health and government restrictions on organizations and people began to be relaxed. However, infectious disease and medical professionals warned infection rates would again peak in Fall 2020. By January 25, 2021, one year after the first case was detected, Canada had over 750,000 cases and 19,000 deaths (Kim, 2021). Ontario was again under a state of emergency and stay at home order with schools and non-essential businesses closed.

These restrictions have a significant negative impact on society and the economy. This report looks at the regions of Southwestern Ontario covered by the nine workforce planning boards that form Workforce Planning West. It takes a local and regional look at the impact COVID-19 has had on the workforce.

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2. The CDC defines Case Fatality Rate as "the proportion of persons with a particular condition (e.g. patients) who die from that condition. The denominator is the number of persons with the condition; the numerator is the number of cause-specific deaths among those persons." (Centers for Disease Control (CDC), 2014)

# REPORT STRUCTURE

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Part I of the report discusses the timeline of the COVID-19 pandemic that started in early 2020 and continues into 2021. It examines the origins of the virus and its impact on society and the workforce. It also discusses the methodology of the eight-step Scenario Planning process used in this project. Lastly, it outlines how stakeholders can benefit from using the information in this report.

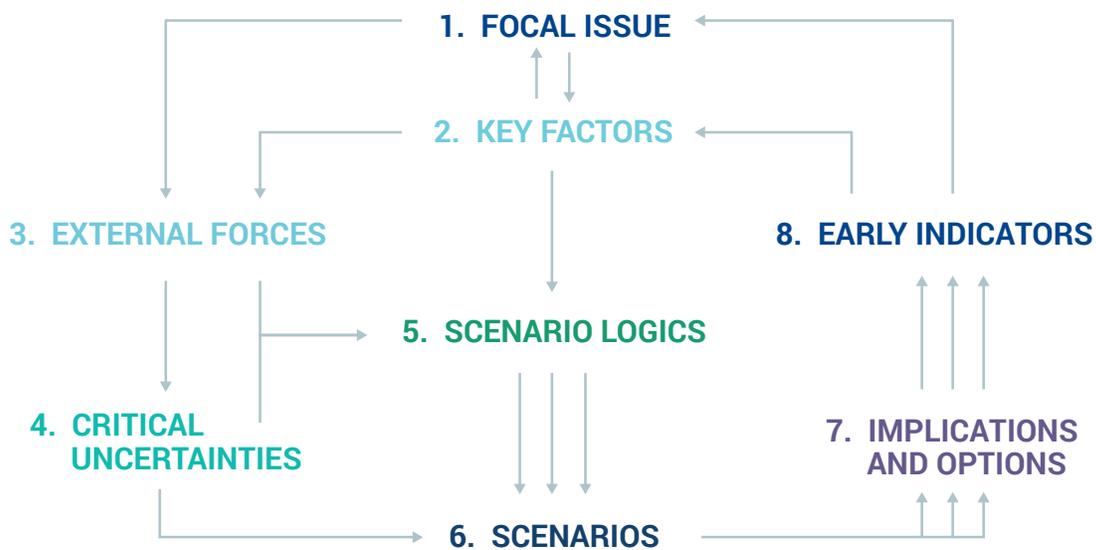
Part II of the report looks at a four-step recovery timeline of **REACT, RESTART, RECOVER** and **RESILIENCY**. Each of the four scenarios look at the post-COVID-19 world in the context of the **REACT, RESTART**, and **RESILIENCY** stages. Part II also examines the past, present and future of the pandemic. It provides the context for the scenarios based on where we have been, where we are, and where we expect to be by 2022. Scenario planning is used to develop four possible futures. Focusing on the workforce, these scenarios can be used in developing community action plans and strategic plans to help organizations identify and plan for opportunities and challenges.

Part III of the report provides recommendations for government, education and training providers, local and regional service providers and stakeholders, and employers that address the focal issue for the project - What new practices, programs, and other interventions will need to be put in place in order to address the needs of the labour market in 12 - 24 months (June 2021 - June 2022)?

# METHODOLOGY

Scenario planning is a tool used by economic development, economists, and businesses to plan in uncertain times. The scenarios tell a story of alternate futures that are impacted by current decisions. There are several scenario planning models. This project uses the scenario planning methodology first used by Royal Dutch/Shell in the 1970's. This was discussed in detail by Jay Ogilvie in Forbes magazine in January 2015 (Ogilvy, 2015).

The process consists of eight steps:



Copyright Stratfor 2015

The first step is to determine the focal issue. This is the focus of the project and it was the same for all nine boards:

What new practices, programs, and other interventions will need to be put in place in order to address the needs of the labour market in 12 - 24 months (June 2021 - June 2022)?

The goal of this focal issue is to determine recommendations for policies, investments, programs, and supports that are needed in each of the four possible future scenarios.

**Questions to consider are:**

What skills gaps, job loss, and new opportunities will emerge?

What will the labour market look like?

What are our action plans?

What parts of our organization will be permanently changed?

What are our limitations to thriving in each scenario and how do we overcome them?

Once a focal issue was identified, each Workforce Planning Board worked with stakeholders to discuss internal key factors impacting the focal issue. These included local economic conditions and dynamics. Typically, these were things that would be found in a business plan. External forces were then identified. These are things outside of an organization such as broader economic outlooks and social factors. This brainstorming and discussion can result in a list of over one hundred key factors and external forces.

From here, each group narrowed down the list of key factors and external forces into themes to identify up to ten critical uncertainties that impact the focal issue locally. This list of critical uncertainties was discussed in terms of what were the most uncertain items that are out of their control. This also included identifying performance indicators to track how the critical uncertainties evolve.

The top two critical uncertainties were chosen by each working group for each of the nine workforce planning boards. These became the foundation for each of the local scenario plans where four scenarios are plotted on an axis. The scenarios are the outcomes of the critical uncertainties. The 18 critical uncertainties identified by the nine Workforce Planning Boards were assessed to determine which two would inform the regional scenario plan. They are listed in Part II of this report.

The sixth step is telling the story of each of the four scenarios. What will happen economically, socially, environmentally, and politically in the scenarios that will impact the focal issue? What is each future scenario anticipated to look like? These are fictional narratives that tell a story of what the future could look like. The scenario stories are not forecasts or predictions.

## WORKFORCE PLANNING WEST SCENARIO PLANNING PROJECT

Step seven involves considering workforce-focused strategies for each of the four possible futures through discussing options for action and interventions. In our nine local and one regional scenario plans, we consider current and projected skills shortages and recommendations for businesses to consider. New policies, investments, programs, and supports are also discussed.

The eighth step in the process is determining which scenario we are trending toward by tracking measurable indicators related to the four identified scenarios. These are used to monitor how the two critical uncertainties are trending and which of the four scenarios may become reality. This will be done through a Google Data Studio dashboard that accompanies the nine local and one regional report. Examples of indicators identified by the Boards include employment levels, economic activity, and level of spread of the COVID-19 virus.

Each Workforce Planning Board worked with its own local stakeholders on their local project, independent from the other boards. The nine local and one regional project leads met bi-weekly to discuss project logistics. A regional steering committee consisting of the regional project lead, nine workforce planning board Executive Directors, and a representative from each of the three project partners met monthly.

By March 2021, each Board and the southwestern Ontario partnership will have identified which scenario is most likely based on current data, and be able to make recommendations for short- and medium-term actions. The partnership will seek to continuously monitor these indicators, maintain stakeholder engagement, and provide insight on employment recovery and change through new project initiatives from April 2021.

In addition to the Scenario Planning eight-step process, each Board and the regional report also considers four steps of the recovery timeline: **REACT, RESTART, RECOVER**, and **RESILIENCY**. Recommendations for businesses based on where they are in this recovery timeline are also provided in each of the four scenarios.

Exploring a range of possible futures provided stakeholders the opportunity to consider four possible workforce-related outcomes caused by the pandemic, achieve consensus on the most likely to emerge, and take action to meet the employment challenges that arise. These can then be used as part of strategic planning by non-profits, educational institutions, government, businesses, service providers, and other community stakeholders.

A list of Steering Committee members, Workforce Planning Board project leads, and stakeholder organizations that contributed to this project can be found at the end of this report.

# HOW TO USE THIS REPORT

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The nine local and one regional report provide stakeholders and project partners tools to be better equipped to strategically plan. They will assist decision makers to lead changes that proactively address challenges and opportunities that arise through four probable future scenarios and as the COVID-19 situation evolves. Government, economic development organizations, community stakeholders, educators, employers, employees, and jobseekers can use this report as part of their strategic planning and decision-making process related to workforce, training, jobs, and careers. The terms employer, business and organization are used interchangeably in this report.

Scenarios tell a story of what the future could look like under certain circumstances. They are a world in which different, unexpected outcomes are possible. They are not policy choices but an opportunity to consider how you would react if this future scenario were to occur.

In each of the four scenarios, discuss how your organization would be impacted if this scenario occurred. Consider how you would manage the current and projected skills shortages. Plan how your organization would navigate through the **REACT, RESTART, RECOVER**, and **RESILIENCY** stages. Questions to consider are:

What stage are you currently in?

What programs and supports do you need to support you in this new reality?

How would you mitigate the problems in each of these scenarios?

What are the challenges?

Where are the opportunities?

What recommendations will help your organization?

## WORKFORCE PLANNING WEST SCENARIO PLANNING PROJECT

The report's accompanying dashboard includes pertinent labour market intelligence that will help decision makers:

- Gain knowledge, review evidence, and examine community-supported recommendations for actions that improve labour market conditions across Southwestern Ontario.
- Identify current and projected skills shortages resulting from the economic impacts and government investments in Healthcare, Manufacturing, Construction, Public Administration, and other industries specific to the nine Southwestern Ontario regions.
- Identify current and emerging issues impacting labour market adjustment in key sectors including Accommodation and Food Services, Manufacturing, and Information, Culture and Recreation.
- Identify areas for potential value-added growth and innovation that emerge as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and its restructuring of consumer and business needs.
- Recommend potential initiatives that will bridge the gaps between labour market supply and demand up to June 2022.

Some of the scenarios discussed may seem unlikely. However, it is important to think outside of the box and consider how your organization would react. If anyone said in November 2019 that there would be a highly contagious, deadly airborne virus that would result in worldwide economic shutdowns, travel restrictions, stay at home orders, states of emergency, and physical distancing, no one would have believed them.<sup>3,4,5,6</sup> A failure of imagination is not a good strategy. Dr. Lynora Saxinger, an infectious disease specialist at the University of Alberta, said on Twitter on January 25, 2021, "We can start to strategize our way out and apply what we've learned. (And fade back into obscurity). So 2020 is a year of losses and learnings and 2021 is the year of strategy, recovery, building, and opportunities." (Saxinger, 2021).

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3. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/more/scientific-brief-sars-cov-2.html>

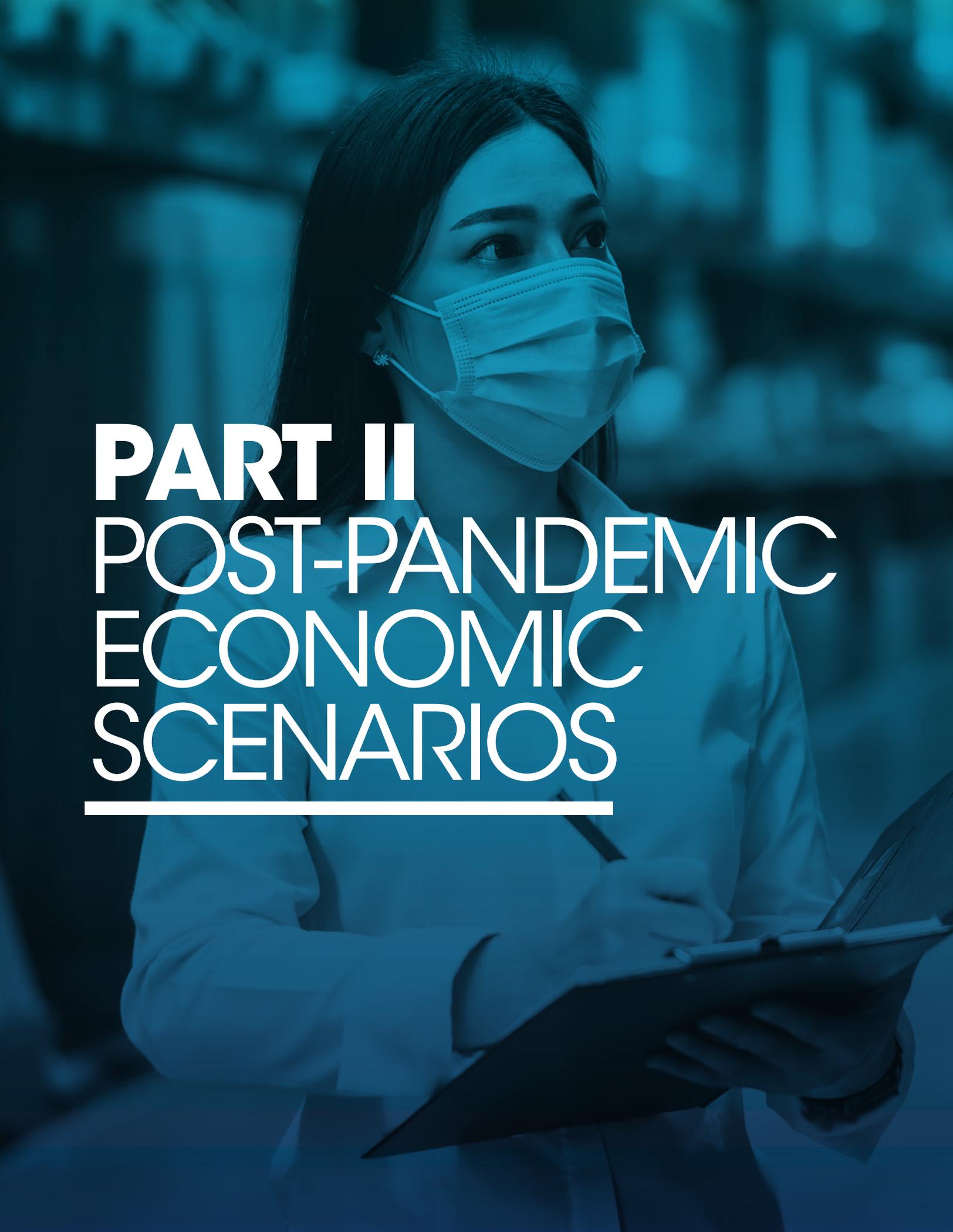
4. <https://www.who.int/news-room/commentaries/detail/transmission-of-sars-cov-2-implications-for-infection-prevention-precautions>

5. [https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/health-professionals/main-modes-transmission.html#\\_How\\_COVID-19\\_spreads](https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/health-professionals/main-modes-transmission.html#_How_COVID-19_spreads)

6. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/health/coronavirus-canada-aerosol-transmission-covid-19-1.5789906>



The COVID-19 pandemic situation changes daily. This report is current as of February 2021 and focuses on the Southwestern Ontario region. For detailed information on the impacts of COVID-19 on the local Chatham-Kent, Elgin Middlesex Oxford, Four County, Grand Erie, Hamilton, Niagara, Sarnia Lambton, Waterloo Wellington Dufferin, and Windsor-Essex regions, please refer to their individual Post-Pandemic Scenario Planning reports. Contact information can be found at the end of this report.

A woman with long dark hair, wearing a white surgical face mask, is looking off to the side with a thoughtful expression. She is holding a clipboard and a pen, suggesting she is a professional or researcher. The entire image has a blue color overlay.

# **PART II** POST-PANDEMIC ECONOMIC SCENARIOS

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# PROJECT OVERVIEW

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This section of the report is intended to broaden and deepen conversations about next steps in addressing the present and future economic and social impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic in Southwestern Ontario. **It provides:**

- 1** An overview of the recovery timeline, describing four stages of recovery that are our conceptual basis for how the economy as a whole, individual sectors, and individual businesses will progress through the crisis.
- 2** A summary of the past, describing issues since the start of the pandemic that are not relevant to the current situation but provide important historical context.
- 3** An overview of the present, describing the impacts that have already been felt, impacts we can anticipate, initiatives that have already been launched, and other ideas for potential actions that are being explored in the region.
- 4** A discussion of the future, describing a set of preliminary socio-economic scenarios that have been developed by considering the nine scenarios produced by each of the Workforce Planning Boards in Southwestern Ontario and consulting with the Workforce Planning West Scenario Planning Project Steering Committee.
- 5** Recommendations and the preliminary design of potential labour market and workforce initiatives up to June 2022.

Workforce Planning Boards in Southwestern Ontario will continue to use this current status overview and set of preliminary future scenarios and consult with stakeholders to identify initiatives that can be put in place today and in future scenarios.

The next step is to elaborate the scenarios and their indicators further to account for impacts on specific industries, and then to identify scenario-based recommendations for action to overcome the challenges and identify opportunities that each of these scenarios could present to our communities and region.

# SCENARIO-BASED PLANNING TIMELINE

## THE STEPS OF SCENARIO PLANNING

- Identify key factors
- Identify critical uncertainties and scenario matrix
- Build out scenarios and action plans with stakeholders
- Revise and validate scenarios and action plans
- Publish and incorporate into Strategic Plan
- Track scenario indicators, continuously adapt plan

## RECOVERY TIMELINE

Economic recovery, for our region and for individual sectors or businesses, can be divided into four stages: **REACT**, **RESTART**, **RECOVER**, and **RESILIENCY**. They are defined as followed:

### REACT

Adjusting to lockdown conditions and new restrictions, accessing remedies, taking short-term and reactive actions. Priority is staying afloat.

### RESTART

Adjusting to new, more stable conditions that permit a certain level of business activity, while still relying on temporary remedies and preparing for potentially serious threats including new lockdowns. Priority is reaching a new steady state.

### RECOVER

A new steady state, or new normal, is sustainably achieved. Depending on the sector, this may represent a return to pre-COVID-19 levels of activity. Businesses may still be dealing with the impacts of downturn in other sectors or in the economy as a whole. Priority is long-term investments and changes to business models that enable success in the new normal.

## BENEFITS OF SCENARIO-BASED PLANNING

Provides framework for **managing the unprecedented uncertainty** posed by COVID-19.

Supports **proactive decision-making** by identifying challenges, opportunities, and potential actions well in advance.

Encourages a **holistic and collaborative approach** to planning that manages system complexity and ensures the COVID-19 Economic Recovery Plans will be robust, comprehensive, and capable of withstanding all future scenarios.

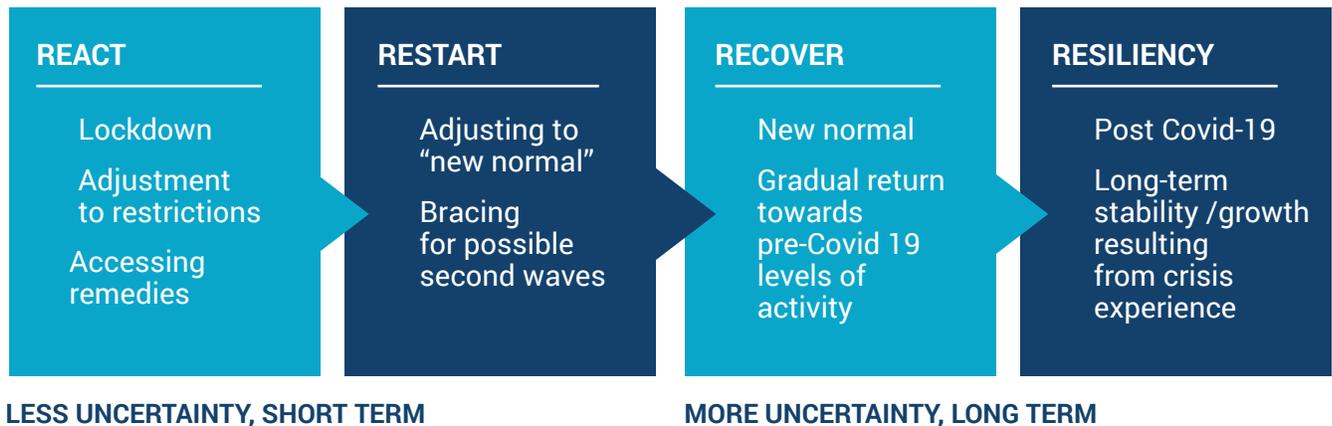
**RESILIENCY**

The benefits of investments and long-term changes made in the **RECOVER** phase are felt. Whether as a result of these changes, or the end of the COVID-19 crisis as a whole, businesses become impervious to negative impacts related to COVID-19. Priority is growth beyond the COVID-19 crisis.

Through previous discussions with local and regional stakeholders, we have identified and acted upon recommendations for the **REACT** and **RESTART** phases, which are summarized in the next section of the report. While we continue to identify immediate challenges to overcome and opportunities to seize, the next step in developing a recovery plan is to begin planning for **RECOVER** and **RESILIENCY** phases, which could span from today to 3+ years into the future. Continued uncertainty about the progression of the COVID-19 pandemic as well as its long-term impacts on the global economy mean that a scenario-based approach is required to plan proactively for these stages of recovery.

**PRESENT-BASED PLANNING**

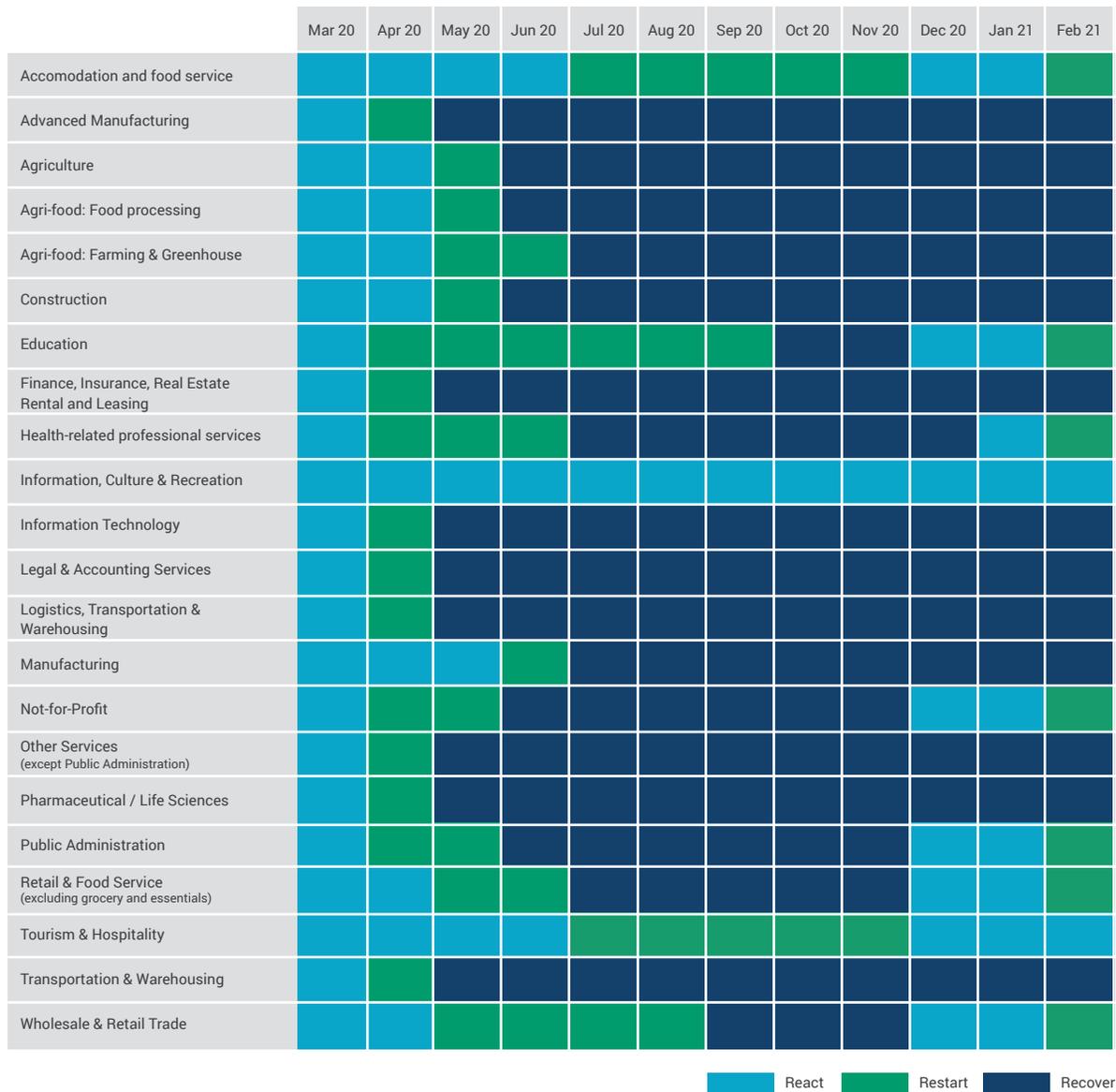
**SCENARIO-BASED PLANNING**



Not every sector will progress through these stages at the same rate. As of February 2021, some may still be transitioning from **REACT** to **RESTART**, while others are entering the **RECOVER** stage. In March 2020, organizations were faced with a province-wide lockdown and state of emergency that put them into the **REACT** stage overnight. Essential businesses remained open and any employee who could work remotely began to work from home.

# WORKFORCE PLANNING WEST SCENARIO PLANNING PROJECT

Below is a timeline of how key sectors in Southwestern Ontario have progressed through the **REACT**, **RESTART**, and **RECOVER** stages of the crisis from March 2020 to date, based on knowledge from discussions with local industry stakeholders. Organizations will not enter the **RESILIENCY** stage until after the World Health Organization has declared the pandemic is over.



# THE PAST

## The historical context of how far we have come

### Impacts we have already felt

The uncertainty around the pandemic in early 2020 caused unprecedented restrictions on people and organizations. As more was learned about the virus and the amount of community spread decreased, restrictions were slowly lifted so businesses could begin to reopen and the economy could begin to recover.

In March-April 2020, Workforce Planning West conducted a survey of over 2,000 individuals across southwestern Ontario. At the time, more than 30% of respondents who were employed prior to March 2020 were no longer working due to the pandemic.<sup>7</sup> By the middle of April, approximately six million people (one-third of Canada's workforce) had applied for the federal Canadian Emergency Response Benefit (CERB).<sup>8,9</sup> The survey results indicated that individuals expected their unemployment to be temporary. The sectors impacted the most were Accommodation and Food Services, Retail and Wholesale Trade, and Manufacturing.

In April 2020, Statistics Canada reported over 3.1 million people experienced a reduction in hours or job loss due to the pandemic (Statistics Canada, 2020). Two months later, the Government of Canada reported this number had grown to over 5.5 million people (Statistics Canada, 2020).

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7. <https://datastudio.google.com/u/1/reporting/ff9a604d-5b6b-436c-a893-0164eae348bc/page/yLH7>

8. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/covid19-benefits-cerb-1.5530722>

9. The CERB benefit was \$500 per week, paid every four weeks. Each payment was \$2000 and tax was not deducted. Recipients were informed it was taxable income and they may have to pay taxes after completing their 2020 income tax return.

# THE PRESENT

## Impacts and actions in the short-term

### Impacts felt in Southwestern Ontario

Prior to the pandemic, Southwestern Ontario employment was doing well. As the diagram on the next page indicates, February 2020 data shows that unemployment rates were between 4.4% and 8.7%, labour force participation rates were between 58.6% and 67.1%<sup>10</sup>, and employment rates were between 53.6% and 64.1%<sup>11</sup>. During the shutdown in May 2020, these numbers saw a drastic change from where we started the year. As Ontario continued in its second shutdown, the numbers a year later in February 2021 show unemployment rates between 7.1% and 12.8%, labour force participation rates between 51.5% and 66.6%, and employment rates between 46.3% and 61.6%. Although numbers have improved since May 2020, they are still not back to February 2020 levels.



10. Statistics Canada defines the participation rate as the ratio of employed and unemployed people to the total working aged population aged fifteen years and older.  
11. Numbers provided from monthly data tracked by the nine Workforce Planning West Boards.

	Unemployment Rate			Participation Rate			Employment Rate		
	Feb 20	May 20	Feb 21	Feb 20	May 20	Feb 21	Feb 20	May 20	Feb 21
Workforce Planning Board									
Chatham-Kent Workforce Planning Board	8.6%	12.5%	9.5%	58.6%	52.1%	55.7%	53.6%	45.6%	50.4%
Elgin Middlesex Oxford Workforce Planning & Development Board	4.4%	11.0%	7.1%	62.0%	59.9%	63.6%	59.2%	53.3%	59.1%
Four County Labour Market Planning Board	4.9%	9.2%	7.1%	66.2%	63.8%	62.5%	63.0%	57.9%	58.1%
Niagara Workforce Planning Board	5.9%	13.2%	12.8%	58.6%	53.5%	55.4%	55.1%	46.5%	48.3%
Sarnia Lambton Workforce Development Board	8.7%	15.1%	10.0%	57.3%	51.4%	51.5%	57.6%	51.2%	46.3%
Workforce Development Board of Grand Erie	5.0%	10.3%	7.6%	65.6%	64.2%	66.60%	62.3%	57.5%	61.6%
Workforce Planning Board of Waterloo Wellington Dufferin	4.5%	10.6%	8.97%	67.1%	63.8%	65.7%	64.1%	57.1%	59.8%
Workforce Planning Hamilton	4.9%	10.6%	7.10%	66.0%	62.2%	65.1%	62.7%	55.6%	60.4%
Workforce WindsorEssex	8.3%	16.7%	10.7%	61.2%	54.4%	56.9%	56.1%	45.3%	50.8%

Source: Monthly employment data provided by Workforce Planning West Workforce Boards. February 2021 data for Chatham-Kent is the Windsor-Sarnia economic region data from the February 2021 Statistics Canada Labour Force Survey.

In November 2020, Toronto and Peel entered their second lockdown. By early December, Hamilton, York, and Windsor-Essex were also placed under these restrictions. A second province-wide lockdown came into effect on December 26, 2020. Non-essential businesses were ordered to close with only virtual services, delivery, and curbside pick-up permitted. By mid-January, hospital capacity was under considerable strain across the province and infection rates continued to climb. To address this, the provincial government declared a second state of emergency and implemented a stay at home order effective January 14, 2021. Residents were advised that travel should be restricted to essential needs: grocery shopping, medical appointments, and work at essential businesses.

Industries such as tourism and hospitality experienced large job losses that bounced back slightly over the summer months as the province-wide infection rates declined and public health restrictions were eased. This rebound did not persist into the Fall, when job losses climbed again. In contrast, the manufacturing sector experienced employment declines during the initial shutdown in the Spring of 2020, but has since rebounded to pre-pandemic levels. Organizations within the Information, Culture and Recreation sector continue to struggle because they are so dependent on in-person, often interactive, events. Whereas a retail or food services establishment have the capacity to pivot to curbside and delivery and we are encouraged to support restaurants, the Information, Culture and Recreation sector found itself with few options



## WORKFORCE PLANNING WEST SCENARIO PLANNING PROJECT

to provide alternate delivery channels able to capture the experiences traditionally associated with their events. This sector has not gotten the attention that others have. Its employees are more likely to be part time, freelance, and precarious, so government support programs may not be available (OECD, 2020). These sectors are not expected to move out of the **REACT** stage until the health crisis is brought under control and people are able to safely gather in groups. Businesses in the hospitality and accommodations sectors are in a similar situation. With large gatherings not permitted and people discouraged from travelling for business or pleasure, sectors that depend on the health of the tourism sector will also struggle until the pandemic subsides.

Despite high levels of unemployment and huge job losses in some sectors, employers in a subset of sectors continue to struggle to find workers. There continues to be a mismatch between labour supply and demand. Consultations with stakeholders across the nine regions found that in-demand occupations in manufacturing, healthcare, retail and wholesale trade, and construction continue to have the most job postings. Employers in these areas had difficulty in finding new staff prior to the pandemic and the issue has not been resolved, despite mass unemployment.

There are several significant factors to consider when developing our regional scenarios. Although they are not the critical uncertainties that informed the nine local and one regional scenario, they are major factors to consider when developing and implementing strategies:

- Household and business debt
- Inequality
- Housing prices and availability
- Mental health
- Inflation
- Workplace automation
- Access to education for workforce: all levels

## Impacts we can anticipate through the RESTART phase

Employers across the region indicated challenges in filling vacant roles in the **RESTART** phase. Stakeholders consulted for the local scenario planning projects indicated government income supports, such as CERB, were a disincentive to work. Recipients of the benefit could receive enough income to pay their bills without the uncertainty of going to the workplace during a pandemic, especially if the work involved being in close proximity to other people. In addition, these jobs paid low wages and often did not have benefits such as paid sick days. The Canada Recovery Sickness Benefit pays \$450 after taxes for a maximum of four weeks.<sup>12</sup> If someone were to get sick while at work, they would lose some of their income. With a lot of unknowns about the COVID-19 virus and the danger it posed, some people opted to stay home and receive CERB. This resulted in historic levels of people staying home from work, causing worker shortages for essential businesses. At the same time, the pandemic was forcing companies to layoff workers due to changing demand for their products and services.

A concern raised across all nine local regions was how the pandemic is affecting mental health in communities. The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) released a policy paper in July 2020 that addressed the impact of the pandemic on the mental health of Canadians and the need to allocate more resources. According to CAMH, stress levels had doubled by the time we were four months into the pandemic. A mental health crisis that existed before COVID-19 was made worse by additional anxiety, fear, and uncertainty around employment, finances, and health (CAMH, 2020). Whether a person is working from home, going to work, or not working at all, the impacts on individuals will need to be addressed. As businesses adjust to a new normal, providing physical and mental health support will become essential to the long-term wellness of their workforce.

Non-essential workers in Ontario were told to work from home during the first and second province-wide lockdowns. The overnight transition to remote work has led to a permanent shift in how and where we work. While some organizations have embraced this remote work model, taking steps to make this a permanent transition to a work from home model, others are eager to return to their traditional work environments. Employees have shown they can be productive working remotely while juggling school closures, online learning, not seeing family and friends,

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12. For more information on the CRSB, see <https://www.canada.ca/en/revenue-agency/services/benefits/recovery-sickness-benefit.html>

and the stress that comes with all of this. The flexibility is something that will be expected by job applicants going forward and employers may find they will have to adopt some sort of work from home model, full time or hybrid, if they want to attract talent. It remains to be seen which industries and organizations will instill remote work as part of their operations on a permanent basis and which will return to their pre-COVID working conditions.

Prior to the pandemic, employers struggled to find people with the skills needed. This skills mismatch continues to be a problem as companies move through the **RESTART** phase. If anything, the drop in the participation rate of the labour force since the onset of the pandemic has exacerbated the skills shortage reported by employers since the pool of available workers considering employment opportunities is smaller. Skills misalignment is experienced differently across sectors and geographies. In February 2021, the average participation rate across the nine Workforce Planning West regions was 60.4%, versus 62.5% in February 2020.

Between 2014 - 2019, the 17 census divisions in Southwestern Ontario showed a net migration gain of 194,812 people.<sup>13,14</sup> The pandemic seems to have accelerated this migration. Project stakeholders indicated that residents are moving out of cities, favouring the space provided in rural areas. As a result, medium-sized metropolitan areas and rural communities are seeing a sharp increase in the cost of housing and a strain on the supply. This will bring challenges to these communities as they will need housing, transportation, and digital infrastructure to support an increase in population. A positive consequence of this population shift is the increase in the tax base of many smaller communities that have for generations been losing populations to the urban centres of the province.

As businesses enter the **RESTART** phase, consumer behaviour will not immediately return to pre-pandemic levels. Public health measures are anticipated to be in place for most of 2021 as people remain wary of contracting the virus through community spread and being in close proximity to others making them susceptible to viral exposure. As more contagious variants of the virus emerge and spread, consumer confidence is anticipated to remain low until the mass-vaccination campaign, which is anticipated to begin in April 2021.

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13. Source: Statistics Canada, Tax Filer.

14. The 17 census divisions in Southwestern Ontario are Brant, Bruce, Chatham-Kent, Dufferin, Elgin, Essex, Grey, Haldimand-Norfolk, Hamilton, Huron, Lambton, Middlesex, Niagara, Oxford, Perth, Waterloo, and Wellington.

## Existing, ongoing, and planned REACT and RESTART initiatives

Financial support in Ontario has been provided by the federal and provincial governments. These are provided to individuals, businesses, support organizations, sectors, and municipalities. Federally, the workforce is supported through the Canadian Emergency Wage Subsidy (CEWS), a program available until June 2021 that covers up to 75% of an employees' wages. The Work Sharing income support program has been extended from 38 to 76 weeks. To support youth in the workforce, the 2021 Canada Summer Jobs program has funding for up to 120,000 job opportunities (Government of Canada, 2021). Each program is designed to assist businesses in maintaining their workforce as they go through the **REACT** and **RESTART** stages.

The federal government has provided the following financial support programs to assist businesses with the costs associated with their operations (Government of Canada, 2021):

- Canada Emergency Business Account (CEBA) interest free loans

- Canada Emergency Rent Subsidy (CERS)

- Loan Guarantee for Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises

- Co-Lending Program for Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises

- Regional Relief and Recovery Fund

- Canada United Small Business Fund

- Black Entrepreneurship Loan Fund

- Mid-Market Financing Fund

- Mid-Market Guarantee and Financing Program

- Large Employer Emergency Financing Facility (LEEFF)

- Sector specific support in academic research; agriculture; agri-food; air transportation; construction; culture, heritage and sport; energy; infrastructure; mining; and tourism

## WORKFORCE PLANNING WEST SCENARIO PLANNING PROJECT

Small businesses in Ontario are supported through the **REACT** and **RESTART** phases through the following provincial funding programs (Government of Ontario, 2020):

- Ontario Small Business Support Grant
- Ontario Mainstreet Relief Grant (PPE support)
- Property tax deferrals
- Energy cost rebates

For details on specific local initiatives offered across Southwestern Ontario, please refer to the local Post-Pandemic Scenario Planning reports.

### Ideas for additional **REACT**, **RESTART**, and early **RECOVER** initiatives

- Additional support for local and regional projects with a focus on entrepreneurship and small business. Expand Digital Main Street support and involve students in post-secondary programs to assist in organizations in creating an online presence. This can be a work-integrated (WIL) learning opportunity for students.
- Demand-led training initiatives through partnerships between organizations, industry groups, and training providers to develop rapid training opportunities to prepare people for current and future jobs. These opportunities must include a work placement to give hands-on, real world training.
- Local essential worker registries can facilitate the fast matching of labour supply to immediate in-demand opportunities.
- Conduct an inventory of available training opportunities in the region so gaps and overlaps can be identified. Catalogue these opportunities into a user friendly, searchable database so individuals can easily map their current skills and determine where to get the skills they need for future opportunities. This includes developing programs to assist individuals to better understand the skills they have and how these can transfer to new roles.

# THE FUTURE

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## A range of realities, impacts, and responses

The public health crisis will continue to impact the economy, which cannot fully recover until the health crisis is brought under control. Whether people are under a stay-at-home order or just wary of going to public places, consumer confidence and spending will be negatively impacted. This will affect levels of employment in sectors that rely on in-person interactions. It will influence business' willingness to invest. Normalcy is out of reach when there is a health crisis caused by a contagious airborne virus that is spread through close contact between people. Our day-to-day life involves close contact with other people, so the economy or public health is not an either-or decision. Economic recovery depends on a robust public health response.

Vaccines and improved therapeutics provide a light at the end of the tunnel for the pandemic. However, it will take months for the vaccines to be distributed nationally. Once the public health crisis can be brought under control, economic recovery will begin.

In November 2020, Statistics Canada indicated 25.6% of all unemployed people - 443,000 Canadians - were long-term unemployed, defined as 27 weeks or more (Statistics Canada, 2020). In December 2020, a Royal Bank of Canada (RBC) report indicated long-term unemployment had increased a staggering 250% since the start of the pandemic (Royal Bank of Canada, 2020).

As RBC indicates in their report *Navigating 2021: 21 Charts for the Year Ahead*, an economy that was built around a centralized consumer and workforce has become decentralized and redistributed, "where anything can be done anywhere at any time" (Royal Bank of Canada, 2020). It is still too early to know how big and how permanent this shift will be. Individuals and organizations need to consider it in their planning.

An RBC Economics report in December 2020 indicated a disconnect exists between employers and their employees with respect to work from home expectations after the pandemic. More workers indicated a preference to continue to work from home than employers indicated a willingness to allow it (Royal Bank of Canada, 2020). However, if employers struggle with talent acquisition, they will likely seek to accommodate this new working model. Moreover,

if organizations are unable to attract or retain local talent with the required skills without the flexibility to provide a remote work option, employers will be faced with the need to change their views to fit the new workforce climate.

The pandemic has affected the mental health of many Canadians. A Statistics Canada report released in October 2020, COVID-19 in Canada: A Six-month Update on Social and Economic Impacts, Canadians reported their lowest level of life satisfaction since this data first became available in 2003, with youth reporting the largest declines (Statistics Canada, 2020). Improving employee wellness with an increased focus on health and well-being through expanded mental health supports and resilience training will be a necessity for organizations. Pfeffer and Williams indicate, “if companies make mental health services more accessible and intervene in the workplace in ways that improve well-being, they will simultaneously make investments that will provide real improvements in employee outcomes and consequently in company performance” (Pfeffer & Williams, 2020).

Prior to the pandemic, employers across Southwestern Ontario were reporting difficulty in finding employees for roles in general labour, agriculture and farming, manufacturing, food processing, and construction. Skilled trades, information technology, engineering, and frontline healthcare were also roles that were difficult to fill. These shortages have continued since the pandemic started with some, such as those in healthcare, exacerbated by the demands of the health crisis.

The post-pandemic economy will require a workforce of lifelong, continuous learners who are able to recognize how their skills transfer across an adapting labour market for an economy more dynamic than the one pre-2020. An understanding of how to market broad and diverse skill sets will be a crucial asset of the post-pandemic workforce.

### **Critical uncertainties**

The nine Workforce Planning Boards in Southwestern Ontario each narrowed their list of critical uncertainties to two, which they then used to develop their scenarios. The regional scenario plan examined these 18 local critical uncertainties to determine two regional critical uncertainties. The 18 local critical uncertainties are:

Availability of people with basic skills for employers and industry  
Business cash flow and the ability to stay open  
Consumer behaviour/habit changes  
Employment level in Niagara's tourism sectors  
Impact of remote working  
Impact of the pandemic  
Level of structural changes to society<sup>15</sup>  
Pandemic resolution  
Prolonged virus resurgence  
Public support  
Severity of health and economic crisis  
Severity of health and unemployment crisis  
Strategic responsiveness  
The degree of structural change in the workforce  
The state of the public and economic health crises  
Women's participation in the workforce  
Workforce resilience

These 18 local critical uncertainties coalesce into two major themes. Looking at Southwestern Ontario at the regional level, the two critical uncertainties identified to inform the regional scenario plan are Structural Change in the Workforce and Structural Change in Society.

### **Structural change in the workforce**

Changes in where and how we work need to be considered in each of our four future scenarios. The pandemic has enabled people who can perform their jobs virtually to work from home on a regular basis. Organizations where workers have to be onsite have had to make health and safety

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15. Two workforce planning boards identified this as a critical uncertainty

changes to protect workers from an airborne virus. New protocols were introduced rapidly and every worker and workplace has been impacted. Job duties shifted for some workers overnight: cashiers became order pickers, servers became food delivery drivers, new technologies were implemented, and everyone had to learn new health and safety protocols. Technology helped facilitate a lot of these changes. Will things return to how they were before the pandemic, will there be drastic permanent changes to the workforce, or will we end up somewhere between these two extremes?

We are tracking the following indicators:

- Employment rate
- Level of structural change to society
- Unemployment rate
- Participation rate
- Percentage of part-time employment
- Percentage of full-time employment

### **Structural change in society**

Restrictions on individuals and businesses have resulted in changes in how we do everyday activities. We work from home instead of commuting. We shop online instead of in-store. We meet virtually instead of in-person. We order take-out and delivery of meals instead of dining in restaurants. Gatherings have stopped, resulting in people not attending sports or cultural events. We stopped travelling. It is difficult to know how many of these shifts will be permanent. We are unsure of how many consumers will return to their previous behaviour. This is important to the economy because consumer spending is one of its major drivers.

The changes we have seen over the past year could tip the economy into a new equilibrium. The level of structural change in society needs to be considered in every scenario we plan for in the future.

We are tracking the following indicators:

Acceleration toward a green economy

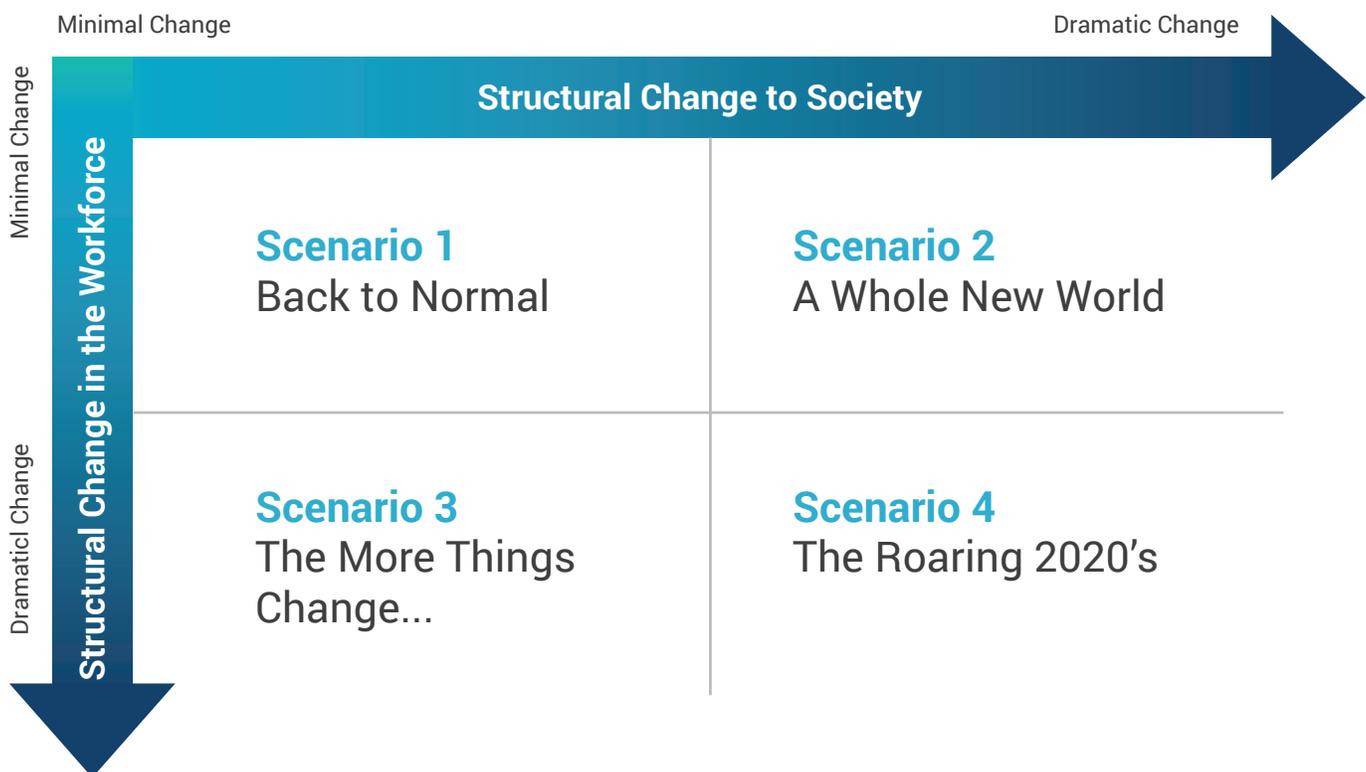
Increase in automation

Increase in online commerce and the digital marketplace

Change to consumer and business preferences impacting in-person events and mobility, such as a decrease in going to movies, restaurants, events, vacations, etc.

### Scenario matrix

Based on the possible interactions between the two identified critical uncertainties, Workforce Planning West has drafted the four following scenarios



# FOUR SCENARIOS

## In detail

### These scenarios ARE:

**Stories - hypothetical narratives** that represent probable realities.

**Descriptive of the entire economy**, not just a specific sector. Within each of these scenarios, each sector will experience varying levels and types of impacts, contingent on the global evolution of the COVID-19 crisis, and also contingent on the impacts of other local sectors.

The **outcome of global and national trends that are beyond our control**. What would be within our control is how we, as a community, react to the challenges and opportunities that emerge in each scenario.

A **first version** of scenarios. They are meant to start a conversation about how Southwestern Ontario could overcome challenges and seize opportunities in each of these potential futures.

### These scenarios ARE NOT:

**Predictions about the future**. For now, we are not suggesting which of these scenarios is more likely.

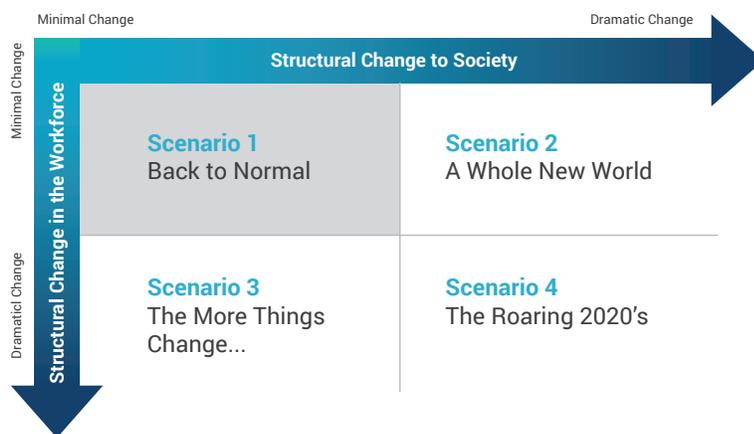
**Complete**. We rely on community and industry partners to complete the image of what these possible scenarios might look like.

**Final**. We will adapt these as the situation evolves. Specific scenarios may be reformulated, ruled out, or added in the future.

**Attributions of value or likelihood**. We are also not suggesting which scenario is better than the other. All scenarios present opportunities for growth. Depending on the scenario, economic growth for the region is simply a matter of how, when, and in what activities.

# SCENARIO 1

## BACK TO NORMAL SCENARIO STORY



In the **Back to Normal** scenario, there is minimal change to the workforce and society. After 18+ months of pandemic-based restrictions, people are anxious to get back to the way things were in early 2020. The federal government's commitment to provide a vaccine to every Canadian who wants one by September 2021 is achieved. As we move into Fall 2021, things slowly begin to return to normal. Non-essential businesses are open, but still with some health and safety, physical distancing and capacity restrictions remaining in place. People are returning to stores, restaurants, and cultural and sporting events. We can finally travel to attend NHL, NBA, MLB, CFL, and MLS games in-person!

Businesses are also anxious to get back to normal. As public health measures are relaxed, they quickly shed the extra burden of physical distancing and the costs associated with these measures. Industries aim to return to their pre-COVID operations instead of adapting and innovating.

Due to the uncertain status of the pandemic outside Canada, international travel is still restricted. The United States successfully achieves its vaccination commitment by late

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Summer 2021, leading the federal governments to permit the border to reopen to non-essential travel in September 2021. Although international tourism did not occur in 2021 and is not expected to return until the second quarter of 2022, the Fall shoulder season is able to welcome Canadian and American tourists. Tourism in Ontario does very well over the summer months due to Ontario travellers vacationing in the province. In the Fall 2021 and Winter 2022, the industry has rebounded due to the pent-up demand of Americans and Canadians not being able to travel for almost two years. However, some businesses in hospitality and tourism were not able to weather the storm and closed permanently.

Organizations in the Information, Culture and Recreation sector are able to restart with reduced capacity for fans and attendees. Outdoor events are more popular as people are still wary of being inside. Public health guidelines are relaxed for indoor events and large crowds for games and concerts are not permitted until more is known about the effectiveness of the vaccine in reducing the impact and spread of the virus.

Some workers are able to continue to work from home, but many are anxious to get back to their workplaces. People restart their daily commutes to work. The exodus out of urban centres slows as people realize they like being close to the amenities offered by big city living. Housing prices stabilize and builders catch up with demand for new construction. Vacancy rates begin to rise above 1% and prices begin to stabilize.

The availability of training, upskilling and reskilling is inadequate. Prior to the pandemic, there was a problem of skills misalignment. This will still be an issue when the pandemic ends. Although the federal government has invested in the future of work and future skills, there is still not a widespread culture of lifelong learning and career development.

Long-term unemployment continues to be a problem post-pandemic. Although the hardest hit sectors are beginning their recovery by the Fall of 2021, they will not be able to scale-up and rehire everyone in the short-term. Government support programs for individuals like Employment Insurance and the Canada Recovery Benefit (CRB) were exhausted for people in the hardest hit sectors. This will lead to people turning to the gig economy for income. However, it also creates an increased interest in entrepreneurship and helps fuel the resurgence of small businesses. Although the pandemic restrictions and shutdowns resulted in a lot of small businesses closing,

it also caused an increased interest in people looking to start their own businesses. Living through 18 months of a pandemic causes major mental health issues that impact the workforce. Demand for mental health services outstrips supply and the problem worsens, leading to increased sick time and lower productivity.

Government subsidies to support individuals and organizations are decreased. However, investments in economic growth continue as part of the federal government's Build Back Better initiatives.

## Current and Projected Skills Shortages

Businesses that struggled to find staff prior to March 2020 continue to struggle. The biggest gaps continue to be in soft skills where businesses identify interpersonal, customer service, communication, conflict resolution, time management, and teamwork skills to be lacking.

Training opportunities are difficult to access because education providers have not expanded their online offerings. Training that is offered online does not include basic computer skills to assist those who do not have the digital literacy skills required. The digital gap excludes people in rural communities who may not have reliable internet access. It also excludes people who do not have access to technology required for online learning. Reskilling and upskilling opportunities are difficult to access because they are not offered when and where people can learn.

Healthcare saw an exodus of talent out of the sector after the pandemic. Workers reported stress and burnout as the reason they were transitioning to new careers and retirement. Nurses and personal support workers (PSWs) were positions that were difficult to recruit prior to the pandemic and this problem is worsened by the number of people leaving these professions.

Manufacturing continues to expand and increase hiring. However, businesses are still challenged to find talent with the skills they need, from entry level to skilled tradespeople to management. In addition, the shift toward the green economy due to the new administration in the United States recommitting to the Paris Climate Accord means that the skills needed for this transition are not available in the marketplace. If Southwestern Ontario wants to be competitive, an investment in training, skilling, and reskilling for this new reality will be required. Automotive companies like General Motors in Ingersoll and Stellantis (formerly Fiat Chrysler Automobiles/FCA) in Windsor

have shown their commitment to these innovations.

Green energy firms and technology become a priority. Several of the large oil and gas corporations in the United States look to pivot operations to be green-friendly. The labour force in the energy sector transitions to technology-based jobs in green energy processing.

Public Administration saw job losses throughout the region during the pandemic. It has recovered in some regions but other areas continued to employ fewer people in 2020 than in 2019. Since these jobs are funded by the government, it is difficult to know if there will be program or service cuts, or government spending cutbacks. This is a sector where a lot of roles transitioned to work from home. Training in technology to support continued remote service delivery will be needed. The uncertainty around funding will make it difficult for these organizations to plan for medium- and long-term service delivery and determine what skills will be required.

Employers in the tourism sector are worried about finding staff once business begins to recover. Several training programs targeting people in hardest hit industries have provided new opportunities in different industries for people who had lost their jobs when their industry laid off a lot of staff.

### **RECOVER Stage** (September 2021 – June 2022)

A new steady state will occur in the **Back to Normal** scenario once Canadians receive the COVID-19 vaccine and things begin to return to how they were prior to the pandemic. This will occur in time for the 2021 holiday shopping season, so there will be an increase in consumer activity. Businesses will increase hiring to prepare for the pent-up demand. The border reopens to non-essential travel. Although restrictions are not completely lifted on indoor gatherings, people are able to gather in larger groups. Later in the RECOVER stage, public health will begin lifting distancing, masking, and capacity restrictions.

Spending by the Government of Canada begins to slow, but investments are still being made in innovation, technology, the environment, and artificial intelligence. The United States federal government is moving ahead with their Build Back Better campaign. They are focused on four priorities: American manufacturing and innovation, modern infrastructure and clean energy, a caregiving and education workforce, and the advancement of racial equity. Their policies focus

on families and workers.<sup>16</sup> These investments by the U.S. help shape Canadian government policy so we can be competitive internationally.

Businesses will assess the post-pandemic normal and adjust to any changes that are permanent. For the most part, society and the workforce are largely how they were in early 2020.

### **Early RESILIENCE stage:** (June 2022 - December 2022)

Recovery is strong and organizations are moving back to a stage of resilience. Companies that borrowed during the pandemic are able to begin paying down this debt. Organizations are concentrating on growth.

The international COVID-19 crisis is under control in most countries and the vaccine effort continues in countries with populations that are more difficult to reach. International travel resumes and the tourism season has a strong year.

### **Recommendations for businesses in this scenario**

Scenario 1 tells the story of things getting as close to back to pre-pandemic levels as possible. Although people are also going back to their pre-pandemic patterns of work and life, many will continue to have physical and mental challenges from the experience. Businesses will need to be prepared to support people as they get back to their daily routines. Businesses will also need to consider doing the following:

- [ Conduct an analysis of the impact the pandemic had on business operations and workforce. Determine what worked and where improvements need to be made. Revisit business and strategic plans to make necessary adjustments.
  
- [ Review talent acquisition and retention strategies. Consider any lessons learned in the pandemic and what best practices to adopt going forward.

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16. For more information on the plans of the Biden-Harris administration, see <https://joebiden.com/build-back-better/>

## WORKFORCE PLANNING WEST SCENARIO PLANNING PROJECT

- Consider resolving talent gaps and skills mismatches through employee training, upskilling, and reskilling opportunities. This includes training on soft skills such as communication, organization, teamwork, collaboration, problem solving, customer service, computer literacy, time management, resiliency, adaptability, data-driven decision-making, and being detail oriented.
- Support training through straightforward tuition reimbursement policies and partnering with training providers to deliver curriculum in the core skills needed in your organization.
- Be prepared to scale up to meet the demand in anticipation of people returning to their previous patterns of consumer behaviour quickly.
- Ensure your digital marketplace is ready to adapt to any changes in customer shift to online shopping.
- Update your emergency/crisis plans to include lessons learned through the pandemic.  
Remove information no longer relevant.
- If one does not already exist, create a succession plan that is reviewed every year.

### Recommendations for new policies, investments, programs, and supports

Although the workforce and society experience the least amount of change in this scenario and things largely return to normal, changes are still occurring. Technology advances that started before the pandemic continue. Jobs that were difficult to fill in healthcare and manufacturing are still difficult to fill. There is still a shortage of people starting and completing apprenticeships. Jobs in Accommodation and Food Services, and Information, Culture and Recreation are slow to return as things go back to normal. Training for people and industries impacted the most are still required.

Apprenticeship programs will need to be a focus. Promoting apprenticeships as a career option in intermediate and secondary grades<sup>17</sup> will help youth and parents see it as a great career

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17. In Ontario, intermediate is grades 7 and 8; secondary is grades 9, 10, 11, 12 (<https://www.oasdi.ca/k-12-education-in-ontario/infographic/>)

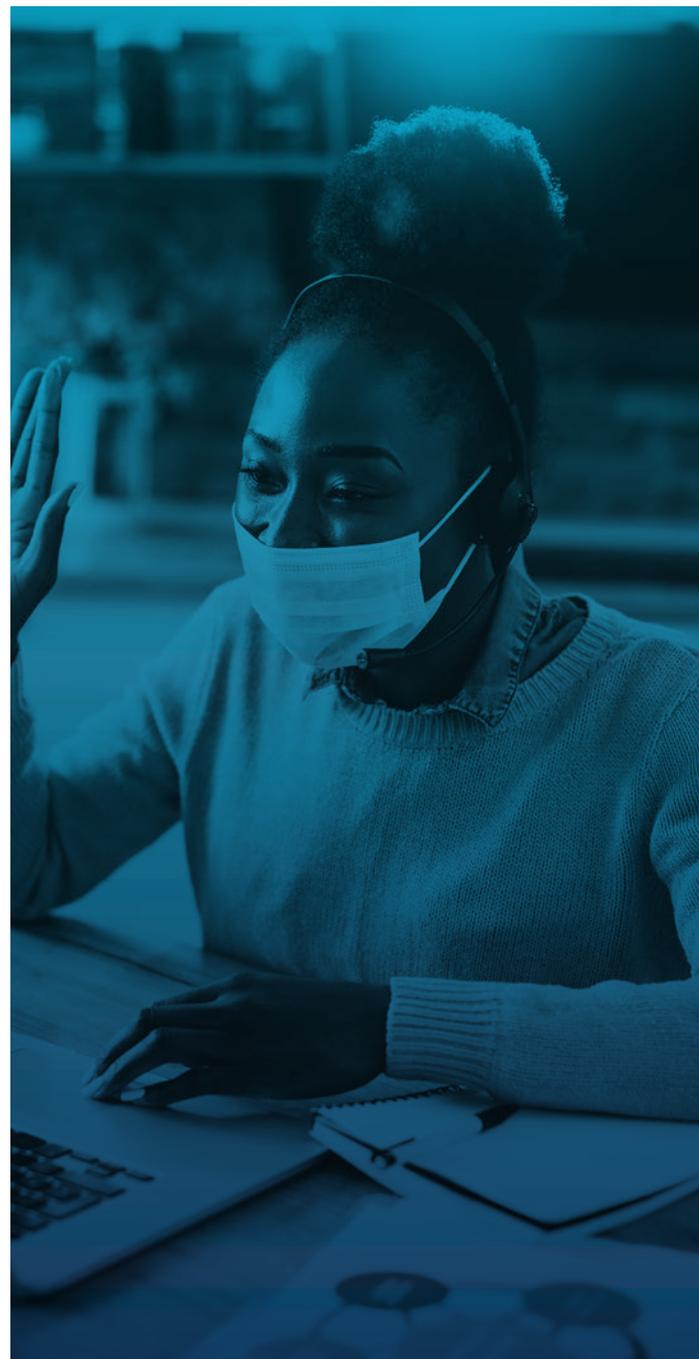
option. The process of becoming an apprentice needs to be streamlined and made less complicated and cumbersome for people and organizations to understand.

Work-integrated learning outside of apprenticeships needs to be expanded. Promoting WIL opportunities to business so they begin to make it a regular part of their business cycle is necessary. Providing this hands-on experience will also help develop soft skills in youth.

Prior to the pandemic, organizations regularly expressed concerns about the lack of soft skills in the marketplace. Training in communication, conflict management, curiosity, customer service, motivation, and team work will be needed. Expanded soft skills training needs to be offered.

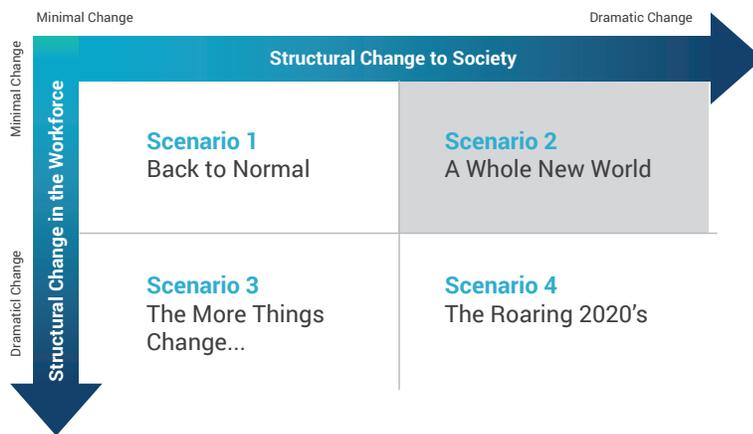
Training in digital skills will be required. This includes tools for working remotely, cloud computing, virtual meeting applications, social media literacy and marketing, the digital marketplace, virtual service delivery, and cybersecurity. Although an individual's organization may not move to a work from home model, other organizations will and most people will interact with others using these tools and platforms at some point.

Most importantly, there needs to be a multi-channel advertising campaign so the general public is aware of all of these services and programs.



# SCENARIO 2

## A WHOLE NEW WORLD SCENARIO STORY



In this scenario, there are dramatic changes to society but minimal changes to the workforce. There is a huge shift in consumer behaviour that impacts how and where we consume goods and services. Household net worth rose by more than \$600 billion in the first six months of the pandemic (Hagan, 2021), and there is pent-up demand to spend some of this money.

Businesses will have to adapt and invest in the digital marketplace, warehousing, delivery, and solving the last mile. This is particularly true for rural areas, which shifts to more online shopping and curbside service models.

People are permanently changed from their pandemic experience. The vaccine targets set by the Government of Canada are completed on schedule with any Canadian who wants a vaccine receiving one by September 2021. Individuals focus more on their health and well-being. People had 18 months to focus on home and immediate family, while not getting to spend time with friends and extended family. This has shifted their focus from *live to work to work to live*. Work-life balance becomes a must-have because of a new focus on family and social interactions to make up for lost time during the pandemic. People are more aware of their time, how they spend it and

who they spend it with, in part due to balancing work from home with home life. Birthdays, family reunions, dinner with friends, family visits, and holidays become more important than ever.

Because of a new focus on the quality of people's time, they will spend less time on things that can be done more efficiently. This includes commuting to work when they can work from home, virtual meetings in place of in-person gatherings, online and curbside pick-up instead of in-person shopping, and spending free time in leisure pursuits instead of obligations they don't enjoy. They will also spend more time and money attending sporting and cultural events.

People will increasingly look at their own values compared to the values of their employer. This is not a new trend, but the pandemic will bring it into focus for more people. This will go beyond corporate social responsibility initiatives. Employees will want to work for an organization that believes in the same social and environmental issues (Kropp, 2021).

The effects of mental health and the adjustment of going back to the workforce have an impact. Workforce participation rate is down from 62.5% in February 2020 to 60.4% in February 2021 because people dropped out of the labour force. This was for a variety of reasons: people in industries hardest hit who could not find employment stopped looking, some people decided to retire, or caregiving for family became a priority, as examples. Structural employment changes occur due to a shift from the future of work to the future of living, where strengthening connections with people takes priority over working.

The skills gaps and talent acquisition challenges that were occurring before the pandemic worsen. Organizations do not invest in training and expect everyone else to do the training for them. People decide to pursue their passions and many leave jobs that they do not find personally and professionally fulfilling. Entrepreneurial pursuits increase. Included in this is an exodus away from urban centres with more people moving to rural areas. This results in the urbanization of some of these centres. Digital infrastructure and rural connectivity prevent some people from being able to work remotely, despite employer flexibility to do so.

## Current and Projected Skills Shortages

As in Scenario 1, the skills shortages that existed prior to the pandemic around digital literacy, soft skills, and skilled trades will persist in Scenario 2. As people focus more on health and

wellness, they will increasingly use virtual service delivery, online shopping, and will work from home more often. For people who continue to work and shop in-person, they will want a more personalized experience where relationships are more important than transactions. People will want convenience and connection.

An increased focus on health and wellness, especially mental health, will require more mental health professionals. In addition, the healthcare positions that were in-demand prior to the pandemic will continue to require more people. This includes personal support workers and nurses.

Construction labour shortages will continue in Scenario 2. Manufacturing is continuing to grow and expand. People are continuing to move from large urban centres to smaller towns and cities. This will require housing construction and expansion of services to meet the needs of a growing population.

### **RECOVER Stage** (September 2021 – June 2022)

With the majority of Canadians vaccinated and cases declining sharply from early in 2021, it appears herd immunity is achieved and the pandemic is ending. A drastic change in society means people have a different focus than they had 18 months prior. However, the workforce reverts to how things were in early 2020.

### **Early RESILIENCE stage:** (June 2022 - December 2022)

The global pandemic is under control as vaccinations are more widespread. Organizations are quick to discontinue their pandemic-related practices and return to how they conducted themselves prior to the pandemic. In contrast, society has shifted to one that is more focused on personal and community health and well-being.

### **Recommendations for businesses in this scenario**

In Scenario 2, businesses will need to increase training on customer experience, relationship building, interpersonal, and communication skills, as consumers are demanding more personal service, convenience, and connection.

Organizations will need to provide flexible service options as the new normal is established in Scenario 2. Some people will want to continue the convenience of online service delivery and curbside pickup, while others will prefer the in-person experience. Be prepared to offer both.

Society has an increased focus on health and wellness and work-life balance. Because of this, workers may want to work from home some or all of the time. Businesses may need to accommodate this for individual contributors and those who can work from anywhere if they wish to attract talent.

People choosing to work from home more often will impact businesses that rely on in-person consumers. Businesses will need to adjust if any of their customer base is no longer regularly in physical proximity to their location.

### **Recommendations for new policies, investments, programs, and supports**

As society shifts its focus toward health, wellness, and quality of life, investments in lifelong career development will be required. As people focus more on the quality of their personal and professional lives, they will have a stronger focus on their own personal and professional development. They will be more aware of their own interests and strengths and move toward careers that are a better fit with their lifestyle.

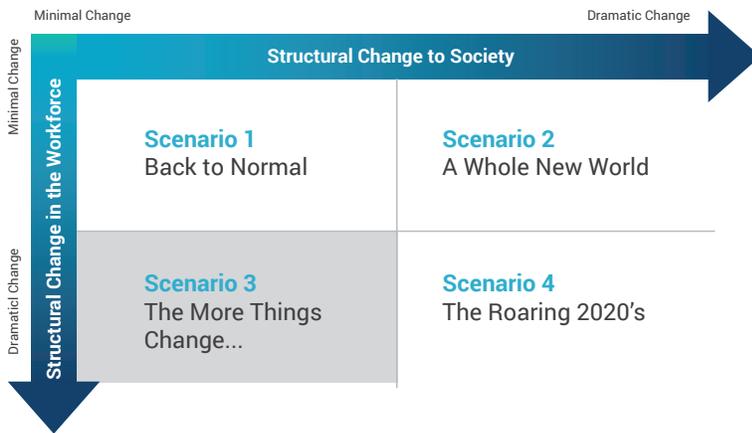
In the short-term, these changes will require expanded educational opportunities that are flexible in their delivery. People will want to learn what, where, when, and how it best suits them. Flexible, online offerings will be at the core of this.

In the long-term, there will need to be a focus on lifelong learning and career development. People will continue to train, upskill, and reskill as the economy changes, skills and knowledge become outdated, and people's interests and priorities change. Prior to the pandemic, we had already begun the shift away from one person, one career, where people were changing jobs and careers more frequently. This will accelerate in Scenario 2.

Real estate agents have considerable insight into who is looking for a new home from outside the area and who is selling their current home. Include real estate boards and realtors in researching who is moving in and out of your area. If people who are relocating are already employed and will be working remotely, this does not necessarily increase the talent pool for your community.

# SCENARIO 3

## THE MORE THINGS CHANGE SCENARIO STORY



In Scenario 3, businesses continue to drive change in automation, the digital marketplace, the green economy, harnessing technology, and artificial intelligence. The government commitment to Build Back Better in Canada and the United States provides funding and resources in partnership with private enterprise as these changes accelerate. Strategic investments are made to advance technology and infrastructure. The culture of innovation becomes more widespread.

COVID DID NOT CRUSH THE  
FUTURE. IT MERELY BROUGHT  
IT FORWARD

- STACKHOUSE 2020

Prior to the pandemic, technology advancements were often talked about as being the Fourth Industrial Revolution. These innovations did not stop in 2020. “If anything, we’re emerging from this crisis with even a greater desire to harness smart technologies, artificial intelligence and vast pools of data to transform pretty much everything we do. COVID did not crush the future. It merely brought it forward” (Stackhouse, 2020).

Organizations learn from the supply chain issues faced during the pandemic. There is a renewed focus on this skill set in the workforce and companies identify alternate channels for sourcing and selling. Supply chain moves from just-in-time to just-in-case. This means increasing simplicity, collaboration, resiliency, and innovation, and decreasing redundancy (Pittelli, 2020).

This transformation in the world of work results in career transitions happening more frequently. There is an urgent need to upskill and reskill. Lifelong learning becomes the norm as structural changes in the workforce become common. Work and job duties evolve with technology and fast, efficient training programs offered through more flexible channels are required so people can keep their skills current and relevant.

This change to how and where training is delivered means training needs must be quickly understood so programs can be developed and delivered as soon as possible. Companies that need staff urgently but cannot find the talent with the skills they need begin hiring part-time workers and sending them to paid training for the remainder of the work week. Training delivery channels will more frequently include online learning, LinkedIn Learning, Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), and private career colleges.

Organizations and governments learned the lessons from the impact of the 2009 economic crisis on the workforce. People lost their high paying manufacturing jobs and did not have the skills to transition into jobs that paid the same rates. A recognition that society cannot afford the cost of going through this every decade changed the way society addresses career development and lifelong learning. Employers recognize “But if you’re only skilling for today’s shortage - you’re missing what you’ll need in the future” (McKinsey & Company, 2020).

Employers recognize the importance of talent attraction and retention because of the high cost of turnover. More companies move to employee ownership models to increase

employee engagement and morale. They provide talent mobility opportunities for employees to rotate through the organization and learn new skills in different roles. An example is the Government of Canada Free Agency program.<sup>18</sup>

Organizations recognize the need to develop skill plans for employees and provide more frequent training so they are not constantly faced with lack of skills, turnover, and never-ending talent acquisition cycles. Workforce development is realigned so people are proactively given the opportunity to develop and grow skill sets instead of waiting for them to be underemployed or unemployed.

Organizations recognize the costs of both an inadequately trained workforce as well as one in which employees' well-being and mental health is not supported. Workplace wellness becomes a necessary focus post-pandemic with resiliency and the health of the worker being a priority.

In contrast, society reverts to its pre-pandemic ways while the workforce changes drastically. People crave normalcy as a consumer, worker, and socially. Consumers return to in-person transactions. Workers go back to the office. People are anxious to reconnect with friends and family.

## **Current and Projected Skills Shortages**

As businesses change drastically but society does not, skills shortages will result. As in the other Scenarios, training in digital technology and soft skills will be needed. However, as companies innovate and adopt new and efficient ways of doing business, training that keeps pace with these changes will be needed. This will be the case across any sector that innovates and evolves.

## **RECOVER Stage (September 2021 – June 2022)**

Once the vaccine is widely distributed and transmission rates of the virus decline substantially, government restrictions and public health guidelines will be decreased. Society and the workforce will begin to emerge from the crisis.

Organizations that have been waiting for the end of the pandemic to expand their hiring and grow

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18. For more information, please see [www.canada.ca/en/government/system/digital-government/living-digital/roaming-coast-to-coast-coast-life-free-agent.html](http://www.canada.ca/en/government/system/digital-government/living-digital/roaming-coast-to-coast-coast-life-free-agent.html)

their business will begin this process. The demand for labour will decrease the unemployment rate, and increase participation and employment rates. Individuals who do not have the skills needed for these jobs will need assistance finding and accessing training, upskilling, and reskilling programs.

### **Early RESILIENCE stage:** (June 2022 - December 2022)

The infusion of financial supports made by the federal and provincial government during the pandemic decreases as the economy is reinvigorated and no longer needs the money to be sustained. The government continues to provide considerable support to the business community in its continued commitment to innovation, though the level of financial investment is less than provided during the pandemic. However, these investments made over a two-year period have enhanced Canadian competitiveness in new and emerging technologies and economic sectors, leading to the production of more well-paying jobs needing skilled workers. Training efforts are starting to catch up to the growing demand but are still not sufficient to meet the demand for labour.

### **Recommendations for businesses in this scenario**

This scenario sees society wishing to get back to the way things were prior to the pandemic while businesses are forging ahead with structural changes to their workforce.

Businesses struggling to find talent will need innovative training and development and talent acquisitions programs. This will help in recruitment and retention where employees are offered professional development and career advancement opportunities. A succession plan will help organizations grow talent internally instead of having too much reliance on external recruitment.

As workers go back to the office for the first time in over a year, organizations will need to update their health and safety programs to ensure they are compliant with government regulations.

### **Recommendations for new policies, investments, programs, and supports**

In this scenario, government investment in small business, research and development, and innovation have paid off. Organizations are putting the pandemic behind them and are moving forward with plans for growth and expansion.

## WORKFORCE PLANNING WEST SCENARIO PLANNING PROJECT

Training in digital literacy and soft skills is also a need in Scenario 3. People who find their skills obsolete, especially those who are mid- and late-career, will need training, reskilling, and upskilling offered where and when it is convenient. People established in their communities cannot relocate to where the program they want to take is located. Post-secondary institutions and training providers will have to offer programs that are flexible and virtual so people can learn where and when they need to.

Universities will need to look at shifting their course offerings to increase flexibility, such as offering individual course offerings outside of a degree or diploma. University program development is a time-consuming process in comparison to colleges and smaller training providers. Stackable micro-credentials are an option where learners can take courses that build on each other from certificate to diploma to degree. This does not necessarily require the addition of new courses, but a realignment of the credentials that are awarded for doing groups of courses across several departments or faculties.

Colleges may need to consider a modular model that will allow people in the workplace to choose training as they need it in response to shifts in their workplace.



# SCENARIO 4

## THE ROARING 2020'S SCENARIO STORY



In Scenario 4, the health and economic crises begin to resolve by Fall 2021. Vaccines in the United States and Canada are provided to everyone who wants one by September 2021. The Canada-United States border opens to non-essential travel by October 2021. People begin travelling within Canada and the United States, but international travel is still restricted as the vaccination programs are not complete worldwide.

The Future of Work was a topic of much discussion prior to 2020. An increase in jobs that were no longer full-time permanent; a shift toward the gig economy; cloud computing that allowed work to be done from anywhere; and the need for lifelong learning, reskilling, and upskilling contributed to the Government of Canada making large investments in workforce development. These include billions of dollars combined for the Future Skills Centre, Canada Training Benefit, Workforce Development Agreements (WDA), and Labour Market Development Agreements (LMDA).

The pandemic highlighted the need to accelerate a focus on workforce development. A scenario where the workforce and society change drastically will change where and how we work, where and how companies do business, and the focus individuals have on their own lives and well-being.

A future with these dramatic structural changes to the workforce and society would mean an increased need for affordable housing and infrastructure in smaller communities as people move out of large urban centres.

These changes to how businesses have to react to drastic changes in society also result in workers not having the skills for this new world of work. Workers feel left behind and their current skill sets will not be adequate in permitting them to catch up. Training programs wherein people can learn how, where, and when they are able are required.

Productivity is the focus, not where people physically do the work. Individual contributors can work from anywhere. Company policies move away from business first to workforce first, resulting in human(e) leadership for the new world of work. The focus is not just on workers, but on growing organizational partnerships and the community at large.

Organizations recognize the hardships brought to the forefront by the pandemic. One size fits all will have a harder time being successful. Authentic, empathetic leadership that reflects the diversity of every workforce will become necessary in adapting to the new normal. Holistic well-being is a focus where a healthy, productive employee is a healthy human first. There is a move from working hard to working well.

Conscious capitalism emerges more where organizations move from being solely profit-oriented to also purpose-driven. They look at the business operations through the lens of the employee. Employees actively participate in co-creation of solutions, rather than being subjected to surveys and focus groups whose inputs are not considered or followed up on.

### **Current and Projected Skills Shortages**

As more work can be done remotely, employers will have access to a larger talent pool. Jobs that require people to be on-site will still see skills shortages in the short-term. In addition, people moving to smaller urban and rural settings will create a local demand for affordable housing. Skilled trades shortages will persist as there are not enough people entering and completing apprenticeship programs to meet the demand for their labour. Organizations with jobs that were previously hard-to-fill will continue to struggle to find talent.

Government investment in training will result in a cultural shift to a society and workforce with an increased focus on reskilling, upskilling, and lifelong learning. More people will gain skills for

in-demand occupations where there are most readily jobs available. This includes Healthcare, Manufacturing, Construction, and Public Administration.

### **RECOVER Stage** (September 2021 – June 2022)

The pace of workforce and societal change will be accelerated. As in Scenario 3, **The More Things Change**, organizations that were waiting for the end of the pandemic to expand their hiring and grow their business will begin this process. The demand for labour will decrease the unemployment rate and increase the participation and employment rates. Individuals who do not have the skills needed for available jobs will need assistance finding and accessing training, upskilling, and reskilling programs.

### **Early RESILIENCE Stage** (June 2022 – December 2022)

Summer 2022 will be the first summer since 2019 that is not impacted by COVID-19. Most international travel resumes and the tourism sector is recovering. Hiring increases to levels not seen since summer 2019.

### **Recommendations for businesses in this scenario**

This is the scenario with the most structural change for business and people, creating unlimited opportunity for innovative entrepreneurs, businesses, and workers. Businesses will evolve or fold. People will need to upskill. There is a desire for changes in how we work and live that are driven by the workforce and society. The result will be a pace of change faster than in the three other scenarios. Purpose is a focus for individuals and organizations. It will be important to not only understand the purpose of your organization, but also the purpose of employees and customers/clients. Once you have this understanding, you also have to grasp its impact on society, your organization, and your industry.

In addition to the changes outlined in Scenario 3, businesses will focus more on the health and well-being of their communities. As society shifts its focus to holistic wellness, businesses will move in the same direction. Employers will need to incorporate healthy workplaces as a tool for the recruitment and retention of labour. Well-being will be part of workplace cultures.

The future of work is human-centred and about relationships. Management will need soft skills such as empathy and communication. Training in workplace wellness is also needed. This is

## WORKFORCE PLANNING WEST SCENARIO PLANNING PROJECT

not only for current leaders, but for those in the succession process within organizations. This ensures that those moving up the ranks due to technical knowledge are also equipped with the human skills required to lead.

### Recommendations for new policies, investments, programs, and supports

New financial supports need to be developed to support people who are considering professional development and career shifts that are unrelated to their current employer. This would provide support to people who are working but cannot afford to take courses to upgrade their skills. They make too much money to qualify for Canada Student Loans or the Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP). They are looking for training unrelated to opportunities in their current organization, so they do not qualify for Canada-Ontario Job Grant (COJG) funding.

Timely labour market information can be provided by the Workforce Planning Boards in digital formats, so it can be collected, maintained, and disseminated in real time. In this scenario, it's critical that every person in the province has reasonable access to place-based digital labour market tools for career development and planning. Workforce Planning Boards can play a key role in supporting digital labour market tools and strengthening the alignment between industry and education, while publicly reporting on the skills gap. In-demand jobs and skills can be shared widely by local stakeholders to keep occupational and sectoral training initiatives relevant.

A member of Workforce Planning West completed an internal survey of workers for employment partners in 2020. When asked why they leave jobs, respondents indicated the **number one reason** was their **supervisors were not supportive, lack soft skills.** The **second reason** was **health concerns, including mental health.** Workers also indicated the number one thing that would make them successful in their job was **ability to learn new things** and **feel challenged in my role.** This was followed by **being treated with dignity and respect, positive relationships with co-workers and supervisors,** and **feeling my work is valued and recognized by supervisors/employers.**

A man wearing a cap and a face mask is looking at a tablet in a market setting. The background shows various market items like baskets and produce. The entire image has a blue tint.

# **PART III**

# RECOMMENDATIONS

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Extensive consultations with over 250 stakeholders across the nine regions served by Workforce Planning West identified several recommendations for government, education and training providers, local and regional service providers and stakeholders, and employers. These are outlined below.

Examining what other jurisdictions are doing with their post-pandemic recovery will be required when making policy decisions locally, regionally, and nationally. It is unlikely the way we live and work will go back to exactly the way it was pre-COVID.

## **GOVERNMENT**

The following interventions are recommended for the government to consider implementing. These will help address the post-pandemic needs of the Ontario labour market.



**Include a Career Day in the grade 10 Career Studies curriculum.**<sup>19</sup> This would be held at the end of the school year after students have written their Individual Pathways Plan (IPP), had the opportunity to consider post-secondary paths that match their interests and goals, and completed the course curriculum. Designed as a full-day event, it would provide concurrent one-hour sessions presented by professionals working or studying in the top post-secondary paths identified through the students' IPPs. Each student chooses six sessions to attend throughout the day. A one-hour networking lunch with presenters is also part of the event. This gives students a chance to learn about pathways from people with direct knowledge of the occupation or program of study.

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19. For more information on the Ontario Career Studies curriculum, see <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/secondary/career-studies-grade10.pdf>

2

**Strand B of the grade 10 Career Studies course** includes learning about local, provincial, national, and global labour market information through looking at the websites of organizations that provide this data. Enhance the participation of the workforce planning boards, government agencies, industry associations, and human resource and career development organizations in this part of the curriculum. This can be through in-person presentations, videos, and other interactive events.

3

**Career guidance for adults is needed.** The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) published *Career Guidance for Adults in a Changing World of Work* on January 26, 2021. This publication discusses the critical importance of adults needing the skills required in a world of work that is greatly impacted by digitization, globalization, and an aging population (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2021). Adults that cannot keep their skills up-to-date will not be able to find and keep employment. This applies to all adults, including those who already have post-secondary credentials. They will need career guidance to help them through these transitions. The grade 10 Career Studies curriculum contains a lot of the topics that could be covered in this program. The Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) program also provides training in these areas. Their training could be expanded to include training in these core skills. Their name should reflect the extensive programming they offer.

4

A component of a lifetime career guidance system is a **standardized framework/employment support system that allows individuals to explore how to use their transferable skills**. Workforce Planning Boards can support a suite of public-facing digital labour market resources and tools in our communities, while referring people to organizations that deliver in-person employment supports. These digital labour market tools need to be able to identify the transferable skills between occupations and industries, so people can prepare for a rapidly-changing landscape of in-demand skills while at the same time helping jobseekers understand their existing skills and develop alternate career paths that use these skills.

**5**

**A database of training and support resources is needed for every community in the province** so programs can more easily be found by the people who need to use them. Currently, people have to know who offers training before they can begin to look at what training is available. They spend time visiting countless websites trying to discover what is relevant to their needs. This makes training unnecessarily difficult to access and more expensive to market. The measurement of training needs to evolve beyond program effectiveness and learner outcomes so that training can be measured, reported on, and acted on at a community level in the form of training supply and training demand. This will ensure local labour market information is used to help training and service providers keep their offerings current. The co-location of jobs and training in a single destination website within each community is an ideal solution, especially if that same website already has place-based occupational and sectoral data and research. Workforce Planning Boards can play an active role in achieving this recommendation.

**6**

**Wrap around supports in health and well-being, including mental health, are needed** if people are going to be able to meet the needs of the labour market. This includes investments in breaking down the stigma of mental health and the perceived weakness in seeking supports. Mental health well-being includes resiliency, supportive environments, support for isolation, mental health leave policies, and paid sick leave available to all workers. Affordable, accessible childcare is also a necessary wrap-around support. More Early Childhood Educators (ECEs) and childcare spaces are part of this.

**7**

**Coordination and investments in professional development for all ministry-funded service providers**, including Employment Ontario, Workforce Planning Boards, and Literacy and Basic Skills organizations, would ensure the strong alignment of services with provincial priorities and lead to the delivery of better client service outcomes. This includes additional training to assist clients with different and complex needs.

# EDUCATION AND TRAINING PROVIDERS

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The following interventions are recommended for education and training providers to consider implementing. These will help address the post-pandemic training, skilling, and reskilling needs of Ontarians.

1

Job losses have been concentrated in positions that are often part-time, seasonal, precarious, and/or requiring less experience and education. **People who have lost their employment can benefit from targeted and focused micro-credentialing training for local in-demand occupations.** Training programs need to match employer needs. Partnerships between businesses, industry groups, and training providers can target training to in-demand opportunities. This can assist displaced workers' transition back to work relatively quickly. Training programs that are flexible in their delivery need to be provided when, where, and how people learn. In addition, more focus needs to be placed on the training, reskilling, and upskilling needs of mid-career workers. More for-credit options need to be available online so completed courses can be applied toward a certificate, diploma, or degree.

2

**Significant investments are needed in training for future jobs** in automation technology, auto-mobility transition, cyber security, artificial intelligence, internet of things, big data analytics, green technology, mechatronics, engineering, science, and the skilled trades. Training, reskilling, and upskilling needs to be available where, when, and how people need to learn. Expanded online learning options are needed, including building and nurturing partnerships between secondary and post-secondary institutions and local industry. Workshops focused on technology and skilled trades will help youth make more informed career plans.

3

**Career guidance in post-secondary institutions needs a greater focus.** Consider making career education part of work-integrated learning programs. In addition to a for-credit paid work experience, students also go through resume development, job search and interview process, networking, and understanding how the skills and knowledge they obtain in their program are transferable to the workplace.

Human Resources professionals and Career Development Practitioners should be involved in the development of the curriculum, up to and including course delivery. The new grade 10 Career Studies curriculum does this well. This post-secondary programming can build on the Career Studies work integrated learning component, but presented in the context of skilled trades, college, university, or other post-secondary education programs.

## **LOCAL AND REGIONAL SERVICE PROVIDERS AND STAKEHOLDERS**

The following interventions are recommended for local and regional service providers and stakeholders to consider implementing. These will help address the post-pandemic needs of employment services clients, job-seekers, and employers.

**1**

The core skills that displaced workers in Hospitality, Tourism, Information, Culture, and Recreation possess are the same skills most in-demand by employers. These include customer service, interpersonal skills, conflict management, team work, flexibility, sales, communications, and resiliency. **Career coaching can assist workers in identifying and communicating their skills to potential employers.**

It can also help them determine what additional technical training can help them transition to a new career, sector, or industry. Employment Ontario service providers can assist with this recommendation.

**2**

**Workforce Planning Boards play a key connector role between the supply and demand sides of their local labour market.** Education, training, employment, literacy services, labour, and industry require informative labour market research, tools, guides, and data to do their work. The Workforce Planning Boards are positioned well to play this role because of their extensive experience and knowledge of

the local employment, training, and labour sectors, as well as deep stakeholder relationships. The Workforce Planning West consortium has developed a deep understanding of Southwestern Ontario's labour market. It shares labour market data, research, and tools, as well as professional knowledge, information, and opportunities with one another.

**3**

**Develop a Local Labour Market Council** consisting of representatives of employers, educational and training institutions, government, service providers, and industry groups to work on labour market research and data, as well as talent attraction, retention, and development strategies for the local area. Subgroups consisting of organizations from each of these groups would meet regularly to focus on sector-specific issues and bring this information to the main working group to discuss local and regional solutions to problems. For example, a subgroup of micro-, small-, and medium-sized employers could discuss challenges they face in their local region. This group will provide information on specific challenges in areas including talent acquisition and retention, including skills and labour shortages, training requirements, succession planning, and human resources policies. This information will help inform the discussion around employer-specific challenges.

**4**

The 26 Workforce Development Boards in Ontario consist of networks, relationships, and knowledge of the employment, training, and workforce sectors and information about local and regional projects. This is an opportunity for knowledge sharing and exchange across the province. **A forum to be better connected to each other**, including an interactive website and an annual conference that brings province-wide stakeholders of the 26 boards together, provides opportunities to showcase their work and share projects, successes, knowledge, and best practices.

# EMPLOYERS

The following interventions are recommended for employers to consider implementing. These will help address post-pandemic workforce needs.

1

The pandemic has given everyone a chance to re-evaluate and recalibrate as required. Organizations are no different. **This is an opportunity to review who you are, how you operate, and what growth will look like post-pandemic** (De Smet et al., 2021). Recognize there is opportunity in all three. Consider where your company did well and thrived and where there were shortcomings to be addressed. What did your competitors do? What did success and failure look like in other industries? Consider all of this in the context of the scenarios.

2

**Increase the focus on talent development to address skills and talent gaps.**

This includes training in soft and essential skills including interpersonal, communication, teamwork, adaptability, customer service, and resilience. Employers need to embrace micro-credentialing as a solution to their skills shortages and an asset to their business growth. This will both develop your current workforce talent, but also shift the organizational culture to one of engagement and support. Other talent development policies include opportunities for mentoring, reverse mentorship, job rotation, professional development, training support, and opportunities for internal networking.

3

**Implement sector-focused talent solutions.** A popular anecdote is, “What if we train our people and they leave?” with the response “What if we don’t and they stay?”. This recommendation involves organizations that may be competitors working together to pool their resources to offer training for in-demand skills and skills shortages.

4

**Develop training programs to help people understand their transferable skills and how they fit in the jobs of the future.** Help them understand their gaps so they can continue a path of lifelong learning to prepare them for the next opportunity when their current one ends. “High-performing companies promote a mindset of continuous learning that encourages and supports people to adapt and reinvent themselves to support shifting needs” (De Smet et al., 2021). This may be done through industry groups or clusters so resources are pooled and employees are sent off-site for training at least once a year. This can be a competitive advantage for companies having difficulty attracting and retaining employees.

5

Demonstrating a commitment to staff is a recruiting competitive advantage. The organization benefits from a workforce that possesses the skills that competing companies regularly indicate are lacking and unable to recruit. **Organizations also need to provide management with training on talent attraction and management, change management, and business planning.** These skills should not be reserved to a Human Resources department, especially given that many smaller businesses may not have the designated human resource specialist on staff.

6

**Expand universal health and safety training to all employees** as there is a greater focus on public health and safety guidelines. Mental health issues can lead to physical health issues, which will lead to increased absenteeism and decreased productivity (Pfeffer & Williams, 2020). Therefore, it will be crucial to ensure employees are supported. This includes an increased focus on well-being, mental health, childcare support, workplace flexibility, paid sick days, and transportation assistance. Focusing on stability, accessibility and benefits will attract and retain employees. Ensure employees are aware of supports available in their area. Employers can learn about these resources through reaching out to the Canadian Mental Health Association, Local Health Integration Networks, Workforce Development Boards, Employment Ontario, Literacy and Basic Skills service providers, industry associations, and the local offices of government representatives.

# List of participating individuals and organizations

(listed alphabetically by organization)

## **Steering Committee:**

### **Chatham-Kent Workforce Planning Board:**

Kristy Jacobs, Project Manager

### **Four County Labour Market Planning Board:**

Gemma Mendez-Smith, Executive Director

**Libro Credit Union:** Brian Aalbers, Executive Vice President, People and Culture

### **Niagara Workforce Planning Board:**

Vivian Kinnaird, Chief Executive Officer

### **Ontario Tourism Innovation Lab:**

Justin Lafontaine, Program Lead

### **Sarnia Lambton Workforce Development Board:**

Mikelle Bryson-Campbell, Interim Executive Director

**Western Ontario Wardens' Caucus:** Kate Burns

Gallagher, Executive Director Economic Development

### **Workplace Planning and Development Board Elgin**

**Middlesex Oxford:** Debra Mountenay, Executive Director

### **Workforce Planning Board of Grand Erie:**

Danette Dalton, Executive Director

### **Workforce Planning Board of Waterloo Wellington**

**Dufferin:** Charlene Hofbauer, Executive Director

**Workforce Planning Hamilton:** Sue Vattay, Interim

Executive Director

**Workforce WindsorEssex:** Justin Falconer,

Chief Executive Officer; Tashlyn Teskey, Manager of

Projects and Research; Trudy Button, Research and

Policy Analyst

## **Workforce Planning West Project Leads:**

### **Chatham-Kent Workforce Planning Board:**

Corey Shenken, Project Coordinator & Researcher  
(on secondment from Workforce WindsorEssex)

### **Four County Labour Market Planning Board:**

Tingting Zhang, Researcher/Labour Market Analyst

### **Niagara Workforce Planning Board:**

Adam Durrant, Project Manager

### **Sarnia Lambton Workforce Development Board:**

Meghan E. Realesmith, Research Associate

### **Workplace Planning and Development Board Elgin**

**Middlesex Oxford:** Emilian Siman, Senior Data Analyst

### **Workforce Planning Board of Grand Erie:**

Wynona Mendes, Labour Market Analyst

### **Workforce Planning Board of Waterloo Wellington**

**Dufferin:** Sohrab Rahmaty, Manager of Employer

Relations and Research

**Workforce Planning Hamilton:** Viktor Cicman, Senior

Consultant, Projects and Data

**Workforce WindsorEssex:** Samantha C. Dalo, Research

Associate

**Contributing organizations:**

Adidas Group  
 Adult Basic Education Association (ABEA) Hamilton  
 Adult Learning Centres: Bruce-Grey-Georgian  
 Agilec  
 Agilus Work Solutions of Sarnia  
 Ancaster Business Improvement Association  
 ArcelorMittal  
 Avon Maitland District School Board  
 The Centre for Employment and Learning  
 Aylmer & Area Chamber of Commerce  
 Barton Village BIA  
 BDC  
 Bluewater District School Board  
 Bluewater Health  
 Bluewater Wood Alliance  
 Besseling Mechanical Inc.  
 Bob Bailey, MPP Sarnia-Lambton, Constituency Office  
 Boston Pizza, Woodstock  
 Boys and Girls Club of Hamilton  
 Brant Haldimand Norfolk Catholic District School Board  
 Brant Skills Centre  
 Brantford-Brant Business Resource Centre  
 Brantwood Community Services  
 Brave Control Solutions  
 Brock University, Co-op, Career and Experiential  
 Education  
 Bruce County  
 Bruce County Federation of Agriculture  
 Bruce-Grey Catholic District School Board  
 Business Centre Guelph-Wellington  
 Canadian Skills Training and Employment Coalition  
 CentreLine (Windsor) Limited  
 Chamber of Commerce Brantford-Brant  
 Chatham-Kent Chamber of Commerce  
 Chatham-Kent Council  
 City of Brantford  
 City of Guelph Economic Development  
 City of Hamilton  
 City of Hamilton Business Improvement Area  
 City of Hamilton Economic Development  
 City of Kitchener  
 City of London  
 City of Niagara Falls, Business Development  
 City of Owen Sound  
 City of Woodstock Economic Development Office  
 Collège Boréal Hamilton  
 Community Employment Choices  
 Community Employment Services - Settlement  
 Services, Oxford County  
 Community Futures Oxford  
 Community Living Brant  
 Community Resource Service Brantford  
 Conestoga College  
 Conseil scolaire catholique Providence  
 County of Brant  
 County of Grey  
 County of Lambton  
 County of Wellington Economic Development Office  
 Dufferin County Economic Development  
 Earthmama Farms  
 Economic Development & Culture - Town of Orangeville  
 Economic Development & Tourism Corporation - Town  
 of Fort Erie  
 Elgin Business Resource Centre  
 Elgin County  
 Elgin-St. Thomas Small Business Enterprise Centre  
 Employment and Social Services Chatham-Kent  
 Employment Hamilton  
 Employment Sector Council  
 Enterprise Brant  
 Excellence in Manufacturing Consortium  
 Express Employment Professionals  
 Explore Waterloo Region

## WORKFORCE PLANNING WEST SCENARIO PLANNING PROJECT

Family Services Windsor-Essex  
Fanshawe College Community Career and  
Employment Services  
FedEx  
Georgian College  
Goodwill Career Centre, Hamilton  
Goodwill Industries Ontario Great Lakes Career Centre  
Government of Canada  
Government of Ontario  
Grand Bend & Area Chamber of Commerce  
Grand Erie District School Board  
Grand Valley Educational Society  
Greater Essex County District School Board  
Greater Niagara Chamber of Commerce  
Greater Niagara Chamber of Commerce, Not for Profit  
Council  
Green Lea  
Grey Agricultural Services  
Grey-Bruce Labour Council  
Grey Bruce Public Health Unit  
Grey County Federation of Agriculture  
Guelph-Wellington Local Immigration Partnership  
Haldimand County  
Haldimand & Norfolk Social Services  
Hamilton Area Steelworkers Adjustment Committee  
Hamilton-Brantford Building & Construction Trades  
Council  
Hamilton Chamber of Commerce  
Hamilton Halton Brant Regional Tourism Association  
Herzing College  
Holiday Inn Express Sarnia - Point Edward  
Human Resource Professionals Association (HRPA),  
Chatham-Kent Chapter  
Huron Manufacturing Association  
Immigration Waterloo Region  
Immigrants Working Centre  
Inovata Foods  
Innovation Guelph  
Institute for Border Logistics and Security  
Integral HR Solutions Inc.  
International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW)  
Local 105  
International Village BIA  
Kelly Services  
Kissinger HR Services  
Lambton College, Department of Technology and  
Trades  
Lambton College, Department of Research and  
Innovation  
Lambton Federation of Agriculture  
Lambton Public Health  
LaunchIt  
Libro Credit Union Haldimand Norfolk  
Libro Credit Union Huron Perth  
Libro Credit Union London  
Libro Credit Union Windsor  
Lisa Isaac HR Professional Services  
Literacy Link South Central  
Local 2222. Carpenters and Allied Workers  
London Economic Development Corporation  
Mabe  
Marwood International Inc  
Mary Brown's Chicken, Sarnia  
McMaster University  
Middlesex County  
Middlesex County Social Services, Employment and  
Homelessness  
Millards Chartered Professional Accountants  
Minto-Mapleton Family Health Team  
Mohawk College  
Mohawk College Apprenticeship Community Hub  
Mohawk College Cooperative Education  
Mohawk College Enterprise  
Mohawk College Human Services

Mohawk College Skilled Trades & Apprenticeship	Regional Municipality of Niagara, Economic Development
Molesworth Farms Supply Ltd.	Robert Walters, Consultant
MP Marilyn Gladu Office	Rural Oxford Economic Development Corporation
Municipality of Bayham	SAF-HOLLAND Canada Limited
Municipality of Central Elgin	Sarnia Construction Association
Municipality of Chatham-Kent Economic Development Services	Sarnia Lambton Business Development Corporation
Municipality of Chatham-Kent Tourism	Sarnia Lambton Chamber of Commerce
Niagara Casinos	Sarnia-Lambton Economic Partnership
Niagara Peninsula Aboriginal Area Management Board (NPAAMB) Indigenous Youth Employment and Training	Sarnia Lambton Industrial Alliance
Norfolk County	Saugeen Economic Development Corporation
Orlick Industries Ltd.	Scotty's Refrigeration Inc
Ontario Federation of Agriculture	Service Canada
Ontario Greenhouse Vegetable Growers	Simcoe and District Chamber of Commerce
Ontario Restaurant Hotel & Motel Association	Six Nations of the Grand River Development Corporation
Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA)	Six Nations Polytechnic
Ontario Ministry of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade	Skills Ontario
Ontario Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development	SMART Centre at Conestoga College
Ontario Pork	South Essex Community Council
Ontario Tourism Education Corporation (OTEC)	South Central Ontario Regional (SCOR) Economic Development Corporation
Ontario Tourism Innovation Lab	Southwest Ontario Tourism Corporation
OSIM	St. Clair College
Oxford County - Community Employment Services	St. Clair College Employment Centre, Wallaceburg
Oxford County	St. Leonard's Community Services
PATH Employment Services	St. Thomas Economic Development Corporation
Pathways & Transitions	Stelco
Pelee Island Winery	Stoney Creek Chamber of Commerce
People Management Group	Stratford and District Chamber of Commerce
Project READ Literacy Network	Taste Real
QUILL Learning Network	The Career Foundation
R&W Metal Fabricating & Design	The Corporation of the City of Sarnia
Region of Waterloo	The Downtown Mission of Windsor
	The Health Centre Mohawk College
	The Hospice of Windsor and Essex County Inc.
	The Planning Group

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The Thornton Group  
Theatre Orangeville  
Tillsonburg and District Multi-Service Centre  
Timberland Group  
Tourism Hamilton  
Tourism Industry Association of Ontario (TIAO)  
Tourism Sarnia-Lambton  
Tourism Windsor Essex Pelee Island  
Town of Aylmer  
Town of Erin  
Town of Ingersoll  
Town of Lincoln, Economic Development  
Town of Minto  
Town of Orangeville Economic Development  
Town of Shelburne Economic Development  
Town of Tecumseh  
Town of Tillsonburg  
Township of Centre Wellington  
Township of East Zorra-Tavistock  
Township of Mapleton  
Township of Wellington North  
Toyoteysu Canada Inc  
TransForm Shared Service Organization  
Transit Windsor  
Tulsar Canada  
Unemployed Help Centre of Windsor Inc.  
United Way Oxford  
University of Western Ontario Research Park  
University of Windsor  
Uptown Waterloo BIA  
Venture Norfolk  
VPI Working Solutions, Hamilton  
Walters Group  
Waterloo Catholic District School Board  
Waterloo EDC  
Wellington Federation of Agriculture  
Wellington Waterloo Community Futures

Wentworth-Halton X-Ray and Ultrasound Inc  
Wesley Urban Ministries Inc  
Western Ontario Wardens' Caucus  
WEtech Alliance  
Wilfrid Laurier University  
Windsor-Detroit Bridge Authority  
Windsor Essex COVID-19 Economic Task Force  
WindsorEssex Economic Development Corporation  
Windsor-Essex Catholic District School Board  
Windsor Service Canada Centre  
Woodstock Hospital  
Woolwich Township  
YMCA of Owen Sound Grey Bruce - Employment  
Services  
YMCA of Hamilton Burlington Brantford  
YMCA of Niagara Employment and Immigrant Services  
YMCA of Windsor and Essex County

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