

## **The End Goal - Employment**

**Supporting underserved youth to secure and sustain meaningful employment**

### **INTRODUCTION**

NPower Canada's mission is to alleviate poverty by addressing youth unemployment through programs that help launch young adults into meaningful, sustainable careers. Founded in 2014, NPower Canada has gained acclaim as an evidence-based, best-in-class youth employment solution, achieving social impact and demonstrating its scalability by growing from serving 87 youth in 2015 to 590 youth in 2019 and an anticipated 1,010 youth in 2020.

Employment is the ultimate goal for NPower Canada and the young adults it serves, with more than 80 percent of program participants successfully employed and/or enrolled in post-secondary education within six months of graduation. NPower Canada employs a comprehensive and holistic model, augmenting the technical training and certifications with professional and personal development, and wraparound supports to ensure that program participants are equipped to succeed long term. This holistic model, coupled with NPower Canada's sector-based approach to workforce development, ensures the program's success in helping youth to secure and retain employment.

Sustainable, quality employment is a key pathway to economic prosperity for opportunity youth and from inception in 2014, NPower Canada has partnered and collaborated with leading employers to address their IT staffing needs. NPower Canada has worked to develop robust partnerships with leading employers of tech talent who recruit its graduates for junior-level roles with strong career prospects. Employers are involved at every stage of NPower Canada's program design and delivery - from developing curriculum and assessment tools to co-delivering training to job placement and post-hire mentorship.

NPower Canada's network of employer partners has grown from an initial group of 8 firms in 2014 to more than 200 companies as of November 2019.

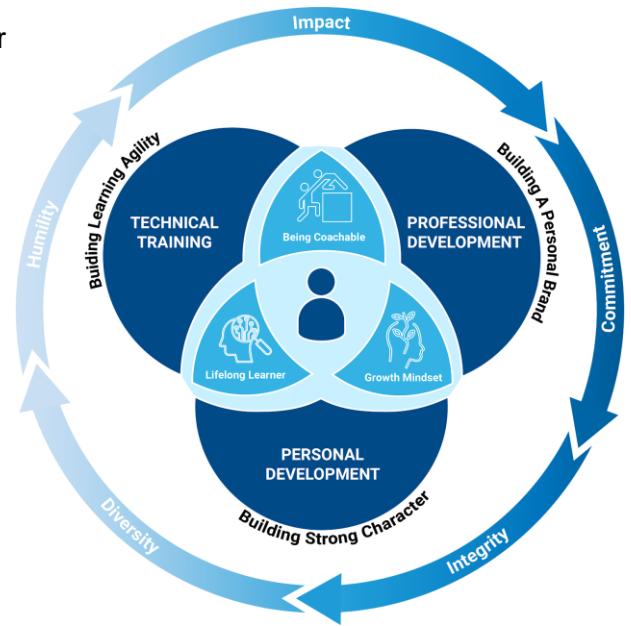
*In this paper, we will take a closer look at how NPower Canada's model employer engagement practices supports the growth of building a healthy pipeline of employer relationships in order to help youth secure entry level jobs once they are employment ready.*

## The NPower Canada Model: Supporting Employment Readiness

The youth whom we serve are at the core of the NPower Canada model and our program provides a “high touch” spectrum of holistic and comprehensive services, to support their successful transition to meaningful employment.

Key employability skills have been identified by employer partners as transferable skills necessary for individuals to secure and perform successfully in junior-level IT jobs. These are embedded within the NPower Canada Learning Model as Key Skills under the three Learning Domains.

Additionally there are three Core Competencies and embedded within each are additional Key Traits that support employment readiness and long term career success, that we work to build in program participants.



### LEARNING DOMAINS

	Technical Training	Professional Development	Personal Development
<b>Core Objectives</b>	To support and guide the participant in <b>building their learning agility</b> that carries them into the workplace.	To support and guide participants in <b>building their personal brand</b> to showcase talents that increase opportunities for employment.	To support and guide participants in <b>building strong character</b> to face challenges in both life and in the workplace head on.
<b>Key Skills</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Problem-solving</li> <li>• Teamwork &amp; Collaboration</li> <li>• Working independently</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accountability</li> <li>• Communication</li> <li>• Reliability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-regulation</li> <li>• Self-advocacy (Asking for Help)</li> <li>• Organization &amp; Time-management</li> </ul>
<b>Core skills</b> are teachable, measurable and observable abilities an individual demonstrates which supports and informs feedback and positive reinforcement throughout the duration of the program in preparation for the workplace.			

### CORE COMPETENCIES

	Being Coachable	Growth Mindset	Lifelong Learner
<b>Definitions</b>	The ability to accept constructive guidance and implement external feedback.	The ability to take on challenges and change as motivation in efforts to increase learning and self-development	The ability to carry ongoing pursuit of learning in both personal and professional areas of growth beyond the program.
<b>Key Traits</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Commitment</li> <li>• Openness</li> <li>• Willingness to Learn</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Resiliency</li> <li>• Initiative</li> <li>• Adaptability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creativity</li> <li>• Curiosity</li> <li>• Critical Thinking</li> </ul>
<b>Traits</b> are not always measurable but are still observable and teachable to an individual and can still inform feedback and positive reinforcement throughout the duration of the program in preparation for the workplace.			

## Assessing Employment Readiness During Program:

Employment readiness is a key factor in youth successfully transitioning to employment and being successful in their career over the long term. To that end, NPower Canada assesses employment readiness at several stages - before admission, during boot-camp and at several points throughout the program.

<b>Intake Interview</b>	We conduct a thorough intake with all applicants to our program to understand their story and determine their readiness for training. This is a one-on-one conversation-based interview that provides a platform for applicants to share their job search challenges, previous learning experiences, and any personal circumstances that have impacted their ability to attain/sustain employment.
<b>Bootcamp</b>	2-Week in-person assessment where applicants “ <i>try on our training</i> ” to determine if they are interested in digital career pathways, build understanding of program expectations and program model, and determine if they are ready for the commitment. Bootcamp is also an opportunity for staff to observe applicants’ ability to follow-through, arrive on time, meet deadlines, develop positive peer-to-peer/staff relationships, willingness to ask for help and seek support, receive coaching and feedback. This 2-week observation period also allows staff to triage applicants that may require more one-on-one support or additional wraparound supports to address any external barriers that may impact success in program and on the job.
<b>Employment Readiness Meetings</b>	Our Career Coordinators conduct one-on-one Employment Readiness Meetings with all of our participants. The goal of the meeting is to support our participants with setting and meeting a goal related to a real challenge that they wish to overcome or skills they sincerely wish to develop that will enhance employability during the program. The goal and action plan participants create therefore must focus on a skill or behaviours related to employability. Since it can be challenging for participants to set and meet goals on their own, especially if they’re not used to this practice, the Career Coordinator acts as a coach - someone to meet with 1-on-1, support participants in creating a realistic action plan, share ideas and resources to help participants reach their goal, and to hold participants accountable for following through on the action plan.
<b>High Touch/Ongoing Coaching and feedback</b>	All NPower Canada participants are expected to meet the performance expectations and standards of the program, which is designed to mirror the workplace. NPower Canada staff will provide participants with ongoing feedback - in various forms verbal, written, or etc. - throughout the program to help develop workplace readiness and ensure performance expectations are met. NPower Canada staff will highlight areas of competence, as well as areas which need improvement and work with participants to develop

	<p>an action plan if they are having difficulty in a certain area. There are 13 employability skills staff observe closely over the 15 weeks and work in dialogue with youth to develop every day.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Reliability</li> <li>● Communication</li> <li>● Organization/Time Management:</li> <li>● Working Independently:</li> <li>● Initiative</li> <li>● Self-Advocacy (Asking for Help):</li> <li>● Teamwork/Collaboration</li> <li>● Accountability</li> <li>● Self-Regulation</li> <li>● Coachability</li> <li>● Learning Agility (Willingness to Learn):</li> <li>● Adaptability</li> <li>● Problem-Solving</li> </ul>
<b>Project Based Learning/ Workplace Scenarios</b>	<p>We take a project-based learning approach to our technical, professional, and personal skills curriculum. Participants explore key concepts by participating in real-world challenges and solving problems to acquire deeper knowledge and practice workplace expectations.</p>
<b>Wraparound Support</b>	<p>Career Coordinators also provide wraparound supports to participants including individual counselling, life skills coaching and warm referrals to other services in areas like housing and settlement.</p>

In consultation with NPower Canada employer partners, we determine what additional skills and attributes candidates possess that best align with the junior-level tech roles that employers need to fill. Supervisors also identify key success factors that we can support when showcasing opportunity youth as talent to potential employers.

The candidate has to interview well and demonstrate that they will be a strong fit for both the workforce and the particular role. The key factors that demonstrate successful interview outcomes include:

- Was the participant prepared for the interview?
- Were they knowledgeable of key responsibilities of the role?
- Did they demonstrate ability to accomplish these specific responsibilities?
- Knowledge about the industry

### **Wrap-Around Supports and Employer Alignment**

In order to establish trust and measure how employers benefit from NPower Canada services we consult with supervisors on how the candidates are performing during their first 3 months of employment, which may include paid internship, part-time and full-time roles. The touchpoints are generally throughout the probation period, we identify areas of strength and opportunities for growth in order for youth to be confident and successful, as well as accomplishing the duties and requirements of particular IT / Digital roles.

Regular touchpoints with supervisors of new hires ensures expectations regarding performance and professionalism are being met. This, in turn, supports youth to build confidence to perform well on the job and meet or exceed their employers' expectations. NPower Canada also provides immediate on-call support to navigate challenges that may arise in the workplace. This affords both the youth and the employer opportunities to work through challenges and build trusting employee and employer relations. Ultimately, this pro-active approach to supporting workplace success helps to achieve strong job performance and retention outcomes, helping youth to emerge from poverty and supporting employers in reducing turnover and achieving greater productivity.

These regular touchpoints also give program participants the opportunity to put into practice the core competencies and key traits of the NPower Canada model.

- Being coachable: the ability to accept constructive guidance and implement external feedback.
- Having a growth mindset: the ability to take on challenges as motivation in efforts to increase learning and self-development.
- Becoming a lifelong learner: the ability to carry ongoing pursuit of learning in both personal and professional areas of growth beyond the program.

### **Educating & Sharing Findings With Employers: What Can Tech Talent Look Like**

NPower Canada advocates for non-traditional hires through a strength-based approach creating platforms for youth to compete and demonstrate diversity of thought, growth and innovation, which allows for teams to be more competitive in the technology space.

Consultation with our employer partners as well as feedback from supervisors and hiring managers on quality of candidate placement works two-fold. One, it sheds light on youth talent being driven, motivated and willing to work hard to earn their place in the tech industry. Two, it allows for employer partners to open up to a new (non-traditional) talent pool of candidates within the tech space. The results speak for themselves: 92% of employers say they would rehire NPower Canada graduates.

By demonstrating to employers that opportunity youth can perform equal to or better than hires from other, more traditional channels, NPower Canada has influenced employers' hiring practices to become inclusive of candidates with less formal education and belonging to communities under-represented in IT/STEM. For example, several employers whom NPower Canada initially engaged as hiring partners had traditionally only hired candidates with four-year Canadian post-secondary degrees.

However, upon recruiting 1-2 candidates from NPower Canada with less formal education, often for short-term paid co-ops or internships as a low-risk "try before you buy" option, most of these once-skeptical employers became won over by the work ethic, positive attitude, skills and eagerness to learn demonstrated by opportunity youth. This led to employers opening up their hiring practices to candidates without post-secondary degrees.

By proving to employers that opportunity youth represent a compelling, custom-trained pipeline of talent, NPower Canada has also helped these employers diversify their workplaces, developing more inclusive hiring practices, talent acquisition outcomes and work environments. For example, of the 182 NPower Canada graduates collectively hired by CIBC, TD and RBC since 2015, 105 (58%) identify as female, transgendered and/or non-binary, 172 (95%) are

racialized and 77 (42%) are immigrants and refugees. These inclusive hiring outcomes far surpass industry norms in what continues to be a cis white male-dominated field.

## **Employer Relationships**

NPower Canada takes intentional action by understanding the company's value proposition when building relationships with employers by understanding their individual hiring process and adapting to their needs and requests. While hiring processes are rarely simple, through understanding emerging technology and company values, NPower Canada addresses employers' talent needs and skills requirements while supporting innovation, inclusive hiring and improving employee performance. Overall, NPower Canada adds value to our employer partners' hiring strategies by facilitating recruitment services including candidate pre-screening, referral, interview scheduling and post-hire quality checks, all provided at no cost to the employer.

- **Targeted Candidates**  
We pre-screen and refer candidates whose skills and profiles best suit the employer needs. We request feedback on suitability of referrals to close any gaps and ensure strong matches.
- **Support Long-Term Success**  
We liaise with employers and graduates to assist with onboarding, request feedback and provide any additional support as needed to ensure success.
- **Diverse and Inclusive Talent Solutions**  
NPower Canada helps employers fill a wide range of junior-level IT roles with skilled, motivated and diverse talent.
- **No Service Fees**  
There is no service cost to recruit and retain NPower Canada candidates for employment opportunities.

## **Scalability and Customization**

Though the model presented above has proven to be a framework that supports program participants to secure and sustain meaningful employment, there are also challenges that arise as NPower Canada continues to grow and scale nationally. Specifically, insights from industry have been based on employment needs of organizations based in Toronto and more recently Calgary. Other regions will have distinct industry talent needs and labour market challenges, necessitating the continued adaptation of NPower Canada's program as we acknowledge that success is not a one-size-fits-all formula.

NPower Canada has recently completed a pro bono consulting engagement with Accenture to tailor its program development and talent solutions to local industry needs in Calgary. This engagement involved rigorous consultation with local industry partners of Accenture to determine how NPower Canada can continue to adapt its curriculum, partnership outreach and job placement strategies to the needs of Calgary employers.

## **Conclusion/Call to Action**

Throughout the paper we have discussed the holistic nature of the NPower Canada model and its success in equipping and placing opportunity youth into meaningful and sustainable IT

careers. Our intention for sharing our model with the broader workforce development community is for other practitioners to reflect on aspects of this model that may be applicable to their own work in supporting opportunity youth. Below are questions for reflection that can be adopted by industry that work with youth and employers that are looking into new innovative methods for acquiring young diverse talent to meet the needs of their organizations.

- Question 1: How does your organization support the successful and sustained transition of youth into the workforce?
- Question 2: What are the systemic challenges that prevent companies from hiring individuals from non-traditional sources? How might your organization address these challenges?