

Data analysis and report by Tricia Boonstra

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Visit <https://www.skillcity.ca/eyeec> for more details

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SUMMARY

The Edmonton Youth Economic Ecosystem (EYEEC) works to improve economic conditions for youth in Edmonton (ages 15-30) who are systematically excluded. EYEEC hosted two events in October 2022, one in person and one online, reaching 100 youth traditionally excluded from these conversations, to brainstorm solutions to the barriers they identified in 2021. We heard over 300 ideas from the participants that called for their elevated involvement and increased collaborative work with workforce development organizations, private businesses, funders, educators, and other government ministries.

Specific ideas emerging from these sessions for stakeholders such as increasing diversity and inclusion in recruiting and in workplace settings, more funding for internships that lead to permanent employment, flexible and accessible programs for clients seeking career and employment support, and more consistent, relevant curriculum for career exploration and employment readiness supports in junior and senior high settings. Including youth voice and decision-making at the table was widely affirmed. Solutions for the whole economic development sector include working more collaboratively to identify gaps and opportunities. Working towards collective advocacy and changes that will have the most significant impact on youth, employers, and workforce development organizations emerged out of the conversations and research.

EYEEC sees a role in convening a cross-sector of stakeholders to have real conversations about policies, funding, programs, and focus areas that could address the long-standing youth unemployment and inequitable economic opportunities for young people in Edmonton and hopefully scale this to Alberta as well.



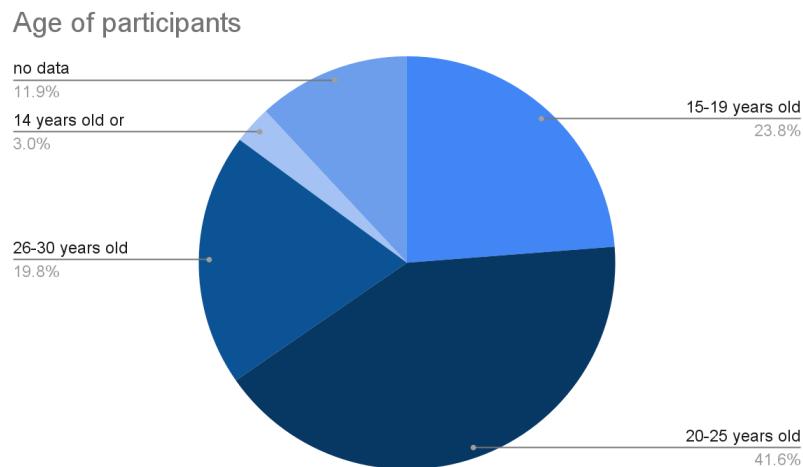
METHODOLOGY:

Professional facilitators were contracted to help create an event design that reviewed the barriers youth identified in 2021 and focused conversations on key actions and solutions that could be implemented with or by youth, the education system, workforce development agencies, government, and employers. The sessions were very interactive with technology for polling and individual responses, and large and small table group discussions. We invited various influencers to be listeners at the events. MLAs, Edmonton Public School Board Trustees, the City of Edmonton, Funders, Workforce Development agencies, and the Ministry of Advanced Education representatives attend.

Partner agencies we worked closely with, promoted the events via social media, word of mouth, and email. We targeted youth specifically from various ethnocultural backgrounds, gender identities, sexual orientations, persons of color, Indigenous, refugees, immigrants, and youth with Child & Family Services involvement. To ensure the event was inclusive and accessible, transportation to and from the event,, accommodations for dietary requests, accessibility for varying physical abilities, and interpreters, were provided. Youth were compensated \$25/1.5 hr for their participation and their lived experience knowledge.

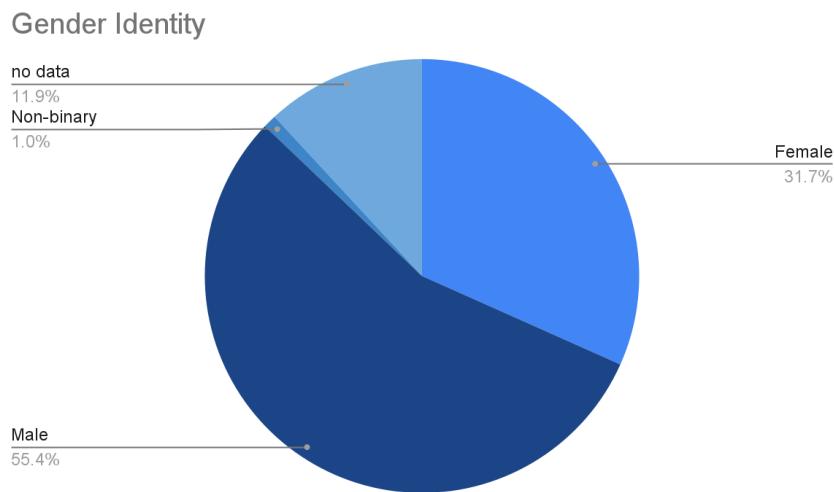
PARTICIPANTS:

There were 102 participants, 38 of which attended in person and 64 participated online. There was a range of ages present, with a higher percentage (41.6%) of participants aged 20-25 compared to 23.8% (15-19) and 19.8%, 26-30 years.



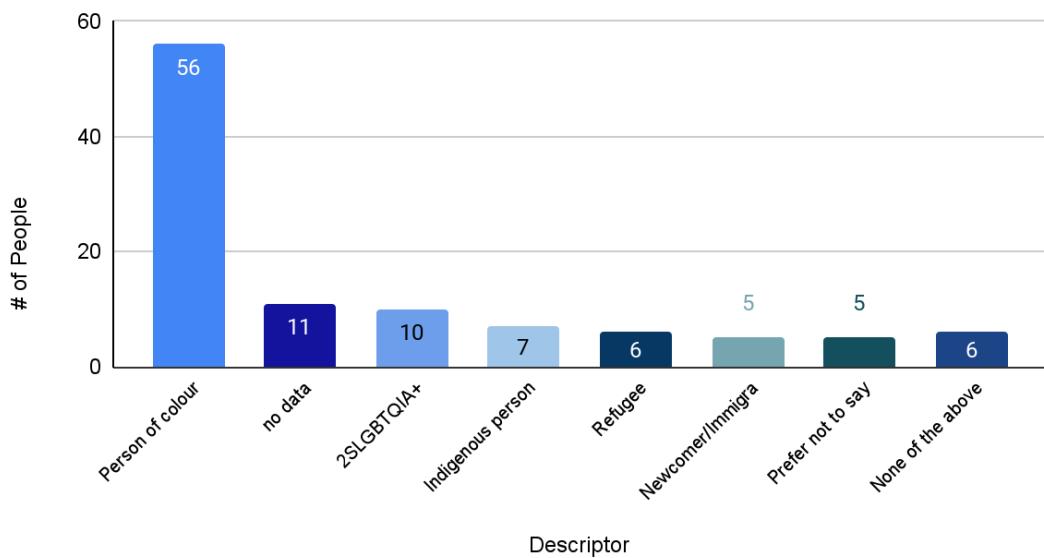
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A quarter more were males, 55.4% compared to females 31.7%, and Non-binary (1%) gender identities contribute.



The chart below reflects the participants' self-identification of systematically excluded groups. 19 of the participants self-identified with 2 or more of the intersectional identities listed.

Self Identifying as:



When asked, participants shared the ethnocultural group(s) they belonged to as reflected below. The larger the font size the more prevalent the terms used to self-identify.



FINDINGS:

102 youth provided over 300 ideas about solutions to the barriers they identified in 2021 ([report linked here](#)). They generated many important themes highlighted below as well as specific ideas for various stakeholders in the economic ecosystem; Government, Education, Employers, and Workforce Development Organizations (WDO).

Youth Involvement in Decision-making and Implementation

Youth expressed the desire to be heard and included in the decisions made that impact them (22 mentions). Many would like to be a part of the solutions and feel that they are not reflected in current strategies, policies, and programs. Many of the youth (60) made commitments to volunteer and take part in this initiative as well as to participate in other engagement activities such as focus groups, events, interviews, surveys, etc. which demonstrates a high level of dedication. Others are staying informed through an email newsletter called Youth Economic Resources Newsletter (YERN).

"Youth have a different mindset and should be involved right at the beginning; often decisions for youth are made by non-youth." - Participant

Broadening Connections and Networks for Youth:

Increased opportunities for broadening connections and increasing networking opportunities were frequently identified (32). This includes sharing information about programs, supports, and employment opportunities in age-appropriate ways (18). There are multiple suggestions about utilizing social media, participating in events, meeting new people, and mentorship opportunities. Building capacity for formal and informal, online and in-person networks and touch points of connection geared towards various ages (i.e. 15-18, 19-24, 25-30) would increase equity for youth lacking these economic ecosystem connections. Understanding what is currently available, examples in other cities, and expanding on existing tools and strategies, scaling them, and creating new pathways is a primary action area for EYEEC.

More opportunities and awareness for volunteering (21) and receiving mentorship (8) could offer this kind of investment in youth from all parties in this economic ecosystem. Access to volunteer opportunities for those under 18 is limited as well as mentors for 18 and older. Youth urged us not to underestimate the value mentorship can play in their success.

"Networking is important. All my jobs were through people I have known. You need the experience to find a job and you need a job for experience."

- Participant

Entrepreneurship

Many youth expressed a desire to be able to start their own business but lack the connections, knowledge, and funding to do so. This topic area is not often shared in their current mainstream settings unless sought out. There are a variety of programs supporting entrepreneurship for adults and in the innovation sector, and a handful of youth programs like Junior Achievement, Action for Healthy communities (for immigrants and refugees), and Futurepreneur (18+), yet they are not consistently offered in communities and schools. They seem to have strict criteria from funders, are underfunded, or are not well known. The recent Vital Signs Report (2022) demonstrates that immigrants come with strong knowledge and skill for small and medium business development, and if not burdened, can contribute to the economy by creating employment for others as seen in recent Canadian statistics and studies below:

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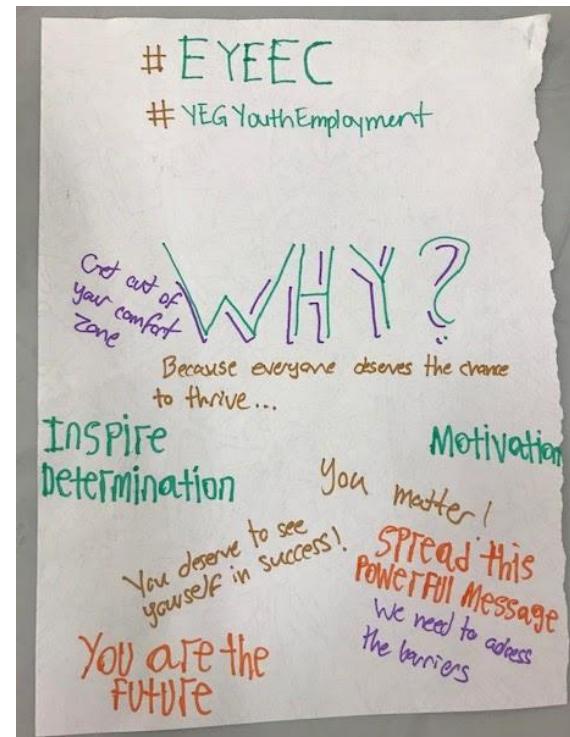
- 12.2% of small and medium enterprises in Canada were owned by visible minorities in 2017. 80.3% of this group was born outside of Canada (SME Profile: Ownership demographic statistics).
- Newcomers to Canada are more likely to start a business that grows more quickly and creates more net jobs per enterprise than the Canadian-born population. The entrepreneurial rate among newcomers is more than double the rate for people born in Canada. (Thevenot, S. 2019).

"I believe that we need entrepreneurial skills plowed in our education system so that we do not depend on getting employed but also creating employment by ourselves"

- Participant



Images youth participants created when asked why this issue is important to them.



EYEEC believes that success lies in the collaboration of youth and other stakeholders, specific ideas from youth pertain to employers, government, workforce development organizations, and the education system are seen below.

Employer Involved Solutions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase volunteer or job shadowing opportunities available to youth. (21) • Address discrimination in recruitment and in the workplace. (20) • Improve the recruitment process through group interviews, better communication with applicants, providing constructive feedback to applicants when they are not successful, and taking valuing volunteer experiences. (17) • Just take a chance on youth. (15) • Improve onboarding, training once hired, proper and supportive supervision & opportunities for mentorship. (15) • Provide better wages and benefits for youth. (8) • Improve working conditions and hours. (7) • Foster more friendly work environments with co-workers. (5) • Partner with schools more often. (1) • Hire people after internships. (3) • Accept or streamline the transfer of credentials & experience from other countries of origin (3) 	Government Involved Solutions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide programming for employer-led approaches, skill-building, and training opportunities for youth. Existing training and skill development are lacking; youth still feel unprepared. (10) • Integrate some existing initiatives with junior & senior high schools. • Include youth in decision-making that impacts them, Youth need to see themselves, their challenges, and aspirations represented in the narrative of policies funding, and programming. (8) • Increase funding for basic skills training, business start-ups, and incentives for employers to hire youth. (9) • Improve accountability with existing funds such as real outcomes from the workforce development agencies and employers. (2) • Provide more internships opportunities and employment after completion. • Support community and community agencies to provide mentorship opportunities. (8) • Increase access to post-secondary, through affordable tuition, especially for underprivileged youth. (4) • provide incentives for volunteer opportunities with employers (2)
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<p>Education System Involved Solutions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Update curriculum to include 21st-century skills, digitization, entrepreneurship, labor market information, career pathways, etc. (21) • Provide more entrepreneurship exposure, learning, and funding. (19) • Provide employment supports or partnerships with community agencies in school settings where youth spend most of their time. (10) • Make more internships available with permanent employment after completion. (13) • Better prepare students for transitioning to post-secondary or work experience. (5) • Encourage career exploration (professionally training staff and effective curriculum (3) • Acknowledge and leverage schools, teachers and parents as playing a major role in sharing information about opportunities. • Provide skills-based learning. (4) • Organize consistent career fairs and hiring events. (2) • Partner with employers more often. (1) 	<p>Workforce Development Organization (WDO) Involved Solutions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide youth-relevant and age-appropriate ways of connecting youth to programs, mentors, networks, employers, and each other (50) • Organize and support youth-focused career fairs and hiring events (i.e. not just during the day for example) (3) • Include youth in decision making and program development (22) • Provide labour market and private sector-led programs and initiatives. (21) • Provide more entrepreneurship exposure, learning, connections, and funding. (19) • Partner with schools to offer support and program in those spaces. (10) • Increase collaboration among WDO and other stakeholders in the ecosystem. (5) • Increase skills-based learning and experiences. (4) • Develop communities of practice and learning for demand-led approaches. (Redekopp, 2022) • Develop harm reduction, trauma-informed programs with easy flexible entry and exit points. (Redekopp, 2022)
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SHINING A SPOTLIGHT ON SYSTEMIC CONCERNs AND OPPORTUNITIES:

Discrimination in Employment:

Discrimination in obtaining employment and in workplace settings was underlined by youth. The statistics for Canada, Alberta, and Edmonton concur with what the youth have said. Students in schools and employment experience this inequity on a daily basis. Without focus and attention on challenging this issue with all stakeholders, inequity of economic opportunities will continue. There is not enough disaggregated data available to understand the true state but the following information still reveals a sad story:

Systemic racism in employment is intended to uphold systems of power. Barriers are put in place that makes it hard for Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour to do well economically. Unemployment rates in Edmonton (race is self-identified) are shown below and the data includes individuals of all levels of education and length of time in Canada:

- South Asian 9.2%
- Chinese 8.4%
- Black 13.9%
- Filipino 6.2%
- Latin American 8.5%
- Arab 11.9%
- Southeast Asian 9.6%
- West Asian 11.3%
- Korean 8.9%
- Japanese 4.6%
- Not a Visible Minority 8.1%

- Vital Signs 2022

Employment Inequities

- 50% of South Asian women intend to quit their current role.
- 60% of South Asian women reported their skills were underutilized – compared to 46% of all women.
- 59% of South Asian women say they sometimes feel out of place culturally at their job, compared to 35% of all women.
- 57% of South Asian women report feeling they are treated less fairly at work compared to peers, in comparison to 33% of all women.

Income Inequality

Racialized Canadians make less than non-racialized Canadians:

- The biggest gap is in management occupations, where racialized Canadians make an average of \$82,364 and non-racialized Canadians make \$120,663.
- Racialized women managers made an average of \$67,420 and non-racialized men managers made \$177,122. 2016
- For every dollar a white male earns ... White women earn 67¢ Racialized men earn 78¢ Racialized women earn 59¢

- Vital Signs 2022

Canada's Black Population: Education, Labour & Resilience

According to data from the 2016 General Social Survey, Black employees aged 15 or over were more likely than their counterparts in the rest of the population to report having experienced unfair treatment or discrimination at work in the 12 months prior to the survey.

- At the same time, 85% of Black women and 90% of Black men reported a high level of job satisfaction.
- 21% of the Black population aged 25 to 59 living in a low-income situation, compared with 12% of their counterparts in the rest of the population

- Stats Canada, 2016

Whitening of Resumes

Resumes containing minority racial cues, such as distinctively African American or Asian names, lead to 30–50 percent fewer callbacks from employers than do otherwise equivalent resumes without such cues. Many people are forced to “whiten” their resumes – by changing their names, and removing experience with racial cues to improve their labor market chances.

- Kang, S. K., DeCelles, K. A., Tilcsik, A., Jun, S., 2016

Employment in Edmonton In 2021:

The employment rate was 64.1%. Males (68.3%) had a higher rate than females (60.0%)

- The unemployment rate was 9.0%
- Youth experienced double the rates of unemployment – 17.3% Statistics Canada, 2021.
- 53% of Edmontonians agree that there are adequate job opportunities in Edmonton
- 22% of people from minority groups disagree with the above statement – double the rate of those who are not in a minority group (12%) Leger.

- Edmonton Vital Signs 2022

Racism and Discrimination in Education:

Much work is underway in Alberta schools through the development of an [Antiracism and Equity Policy](#), [Anti-racism and Equity Action Plan](#), and the work of the Anti-racism and Equity Advisory committee such as

- More support for schools, teachers, and staff for training, support in connecting with community members and understand their lived experiences, as well as how to address incidents within classrooms and school settings
- Reviewing staff hiring practices, professional development programs, and new staff training to reflect anti-racism and diversity lens
- Collecting additional student demographic data will help us gain a deeper understanding of students and their needs.

Still, systemic racism comes from ingrained beliefs that cultures different from one's own are inferior and do not deserve the same rights and privileges. Laws and beliefs led to the systemic racism we see in Edmonton today. Even when laws or policies are changed, the systems and practices that came from those laws and policies are. Awareness and acknowledgment are the first steps in order to take steps to eliminate discrimination.

Racialized students in Alberta schools experience:

- Microaggressions
- Being incorrectly placed in ESL programs
- Lack of staff diversity and representation of BIPOC in teaching and administrative staff
- Low expectations from teachers stemming from prejudiced assumptions
- Teachers and administrative staff downplaying acts of racism in schools
- Inequitable punishment against Black students
- Race-based bullying

These experiences have psychological, emotional, social, and mental impacts on students and parents including anger, insecurity, low self-esteem, questioned identity, frustration, inferiority complex, and poor academic performance.

- Vital Signs Edmonton 2022

In fact, a number of the youth who identified as a person of color or Indigenous, who participated in the events, revealed that low mental and physical health, no or limited access to funds for post-secondary education, low confidence, frustration with discrimination and inequitable opportunities, are major barriers to accessing career and employment opportunities.

"Mental health challenges can make it harder to get a job, I don't even know where to start."
- Participant

Much research has been done to highlight the experiences of Indigenous and students of color in schools as seen below:

- 58% of students in Canadian schools said they've witnessed someone being bullied, excluded, or insulted based on their race or ethnicity in their school
- 14% said it happened to them personally
- Indigenous and visible minority students are, respectively, 2 and 3 times more likely to say they have experienced race-based bullying

-Vital Signs Report 2022

Indigenous People Living Off-Reserve

- 42.3% completed post-secondary education, 25% had less than a high school diploma (provincial average -14.3%). Alberta, 2019
- The draft UPC curriculum has been criticized by Indigenous leaders, arguing it was Eurocentric and perpetuated systemic racism, and that they were not properly consulted.

- Vital Signs Report 2022

Education Attainment in Black Youth

- A study looking at Black youth in Canada aged 9 to 13 in 2006 were as likely as other Canadian youth to obtain a high school diploma (approximately 90%). But, less likely to attain a post-secondary qualification
- Only 51% of males had a post-secondary diploma 10 years later (62% for non-Black males) • 34% of Black females had a university degree 10 years later (41% for non-Black females) Educational barriers for Black Youth • 94% of Black youth aged 15 to 25 wanted to get a bachelor's degree, but only 60% thought they actually could.

- Statistics Canada, 2016

Collective Advocacy:

Collective Advocacy from all parties is necessary for change to the system that is not benefiting young people. 20 of the participants came up with many ideas around working together, elevating their voices, talking to leaders, sharing information and key messages on social media, writing letters, or creating petitions, to name a few. 60 Youth expressed their desire to be involved in the project going forward, and 250 currently subscribed to an email newsletter sharing resources and opportunities.

YOUTH EXPRESSED A BELIEF IN A FUTURE WHERE....

- All people have access to training that is needed & desired
- All can contribute to society in a positive way
 - Equality of opportunity for all (Education, training, employment)
 - Everyone has the confidence to pursue their dreams
 - People can start their own businesses ideas
 - Youth find their dream career
 - Youth are able to help their parents and family
- Youth will have rich networks/connections

Follow-up Comments from Influencers at the events:

"The biggest takeaway was the reminder of what we all need to continue to do to make space, and include the voices of youth. It was truly a great reminder of what being a good ally looks like. Within the groups I had the opportunity to engage with the value of mentorship and networking opportunities really came to the forefront. Youth seem to really want more of these opportunities for their own development, but raise the barriers and lack of opportunities that exist to them." - Influencer

"I appreciated the interactive dialogue and hearing the youth voice their thoughts, concerns, and ideas. There was good engagement and informative discussion. The main takeaway for me was the role schools can play. Seeing the importance of providing opportunities for high school students to gain work experience in their field of interest. Connecting with community partners to provide this necessary

internship and apprenticeship programs so students gain not only work experience but mentorship and for some, dual credit." - Influencer

"There is a disconnect happening between employers and young people. There are definitely jobs that need to be filled but we are not as successful as we would like to be in reaching our target audience. Youth are much more engaged than what we give them credit for. There isn't the apathy that I often hear people talk about, it is that things have changed and employers are not meeting the expectations of youth as far as what is important." - Influencer

"The comments from last night's meeting are a good reminder that not all students will, can or want to attend post-secondary education (ever, or right out of high school). Takeaways for me were:

- CALM class- theory vs. practical
 - "career literacy" (this was a new and useful term for me) and knowing where jobs are
 - teaching creative and innovation skills (I heard teaching, but I'd like to add valuing)
- Job readiness
 - meaningful opportunities for students to gain experience while in school - paid and/or volunteer
- The role schools can play in making connections / finding placements/internships for students with employers - particularly beyond retail and restaurant industry
 - the role dual credit courses might play
- ways to shift the perception of youth - both their perceptions of self (they spoke about boosting their confidence) and how employers see them
 - they have valuable knowledge, skills, and competencies to share - even as students
 - they can be and ARE, leaders - today - not only for the future
 - unfortunately their ideas for change and innovation are often dismissed or met with hostility by employers/industry
 - youth are facing discrimination and ageism in the workforce"

- Influencer

"The student facilitators were excellent and I found the meeting insightful and the content quite relevant to our work here in Advanced Education. I was especially interested to hear how keen youth are to gain job skills and formal training while still in high school, and the discussion around potential school/employer partnerships to support this training."

- Influencer

LABOUR MARKET & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT CONTEXT:

The future economic and social prosperity of Alberta depends on the success of our youth transitioning into employment. There are labor and skill shortages, outmigration of employees, and an aging workforce. Targeting youth facing systemic barriers to employment expands the available talent. It can be a competitive advantage for businesses, leading to higher retention rates, and expanded workforce diversity. Most employers, though, are not connected or equipped to recruit and retain young people sustainably. This is where workforce development organizations and career development professionals (CDP) come into play.

A recent scan by End Poverty Edmonton, identified over 35 WDOs in Edmonton, providing employment support in workforce development. "The employment support community is robust, with many organizations providing employment-related support to marginalized communities. However, due to funding, policies, and other systems-level barriers, there is often little room for coordination or collaboration. Employers say that it is very confusing to know which of these organizations they should be working with based on their specific challenges" (Endpoverty Edmonton, 2022). Furthermore, just over half of businesses (53%) are aware of career development practitioners, while fewer (12%) have actually worked with one, even though CDPs at WDOs can aid businesses and job seekers in many ways (CERIC, 2022). There is a lack of awareness of these services and the depth of support they can provide to job seekers and employers as well as complicated criteria and funding arrangements.

The Canadian Council for Youth Prosperity (2021) suggests "there is a need for promoting, in collaboration with employer associations, alternative career pathways available to high-school students in addition to post-secondary education. For example, skilled trades carry a negative cultural connotation despite the career advancement opportunities available and digitization in industry requiring strong numeracy and digital skills. There is a need for promoting such careers in high schools in order to eliminate the stigma and to better inform the students of possible career pathways." An example for interested students could be to provide a project-specific, micro-credential course and after the completion of the course, move on to a formal apprenticeship program,

creating an entry pathway that can be generated.

Delicate and Hoyt (2022) recently published a book about the current realities of the employment sector in Canada. Through research and consulting experience, they found that existing funding systems foster competition, not collaboration, creating a lack of innovation and tailoring to the job seeker's specific needs and goals. Because each agency has different definitions and measurements of success, it becomes difficult to measure overall outcomes of success at a systems level. The end result is a workplace ecosystem that disincentivizes workforce development groups from working collaboratively and creams those who are employable rather than being able to make an impact on those who need these services the most. This system of silos makes it harder for job seekers to easily find employment, and for workforce development groups to know about and offer options and alternatives resulting in positive impacts on Edmontonians and Albertans.

From a labour market perspective, 75% of Canadian businesses report there are labour and skill shortages (CERIC, January 2022), especially in healthcare, trades, trucking, and food and beverage/tourism industries. 66% of employers found it even harder than 10 years ago, to find young employees (CERIC, 2022). At the same time, we see reports about young people struggling to find jobs. It seems that there is a need for someone to play the role of "broker" and bring employers and youth together to make that connection. The Business Council of Alberta recommends that the government of Alberta and Canada fund a single, clear, accessible one-stop window, administered by a non-profit organization, to help individuals, businesses, and community organizations access government and third-party support for upskilling and training programs (2022). They also recommend consolidating training support programs into a central ministry that guides the Government of Alberta's workforce development strategy and coordinates the allocation of funds.

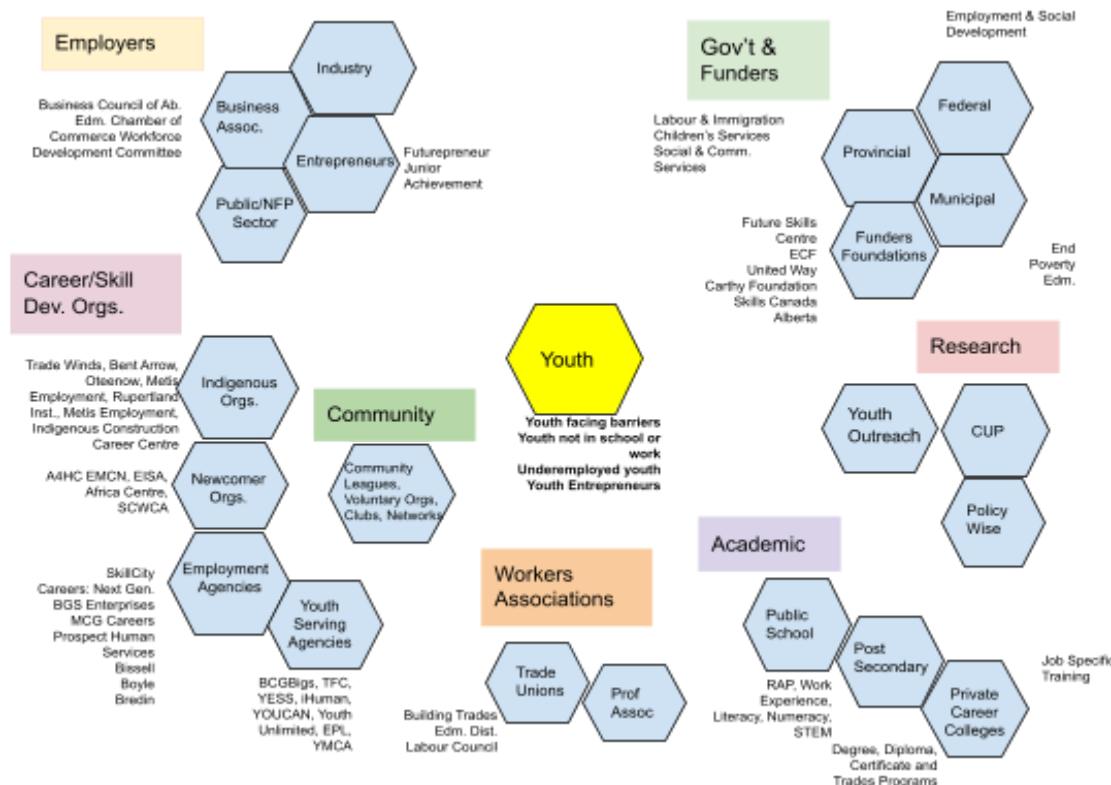
EYEEC has been rooted in participatory research and engagement, led by and with youth with lived experiences which will continue to influence the project moving forward. We heard from hundreds of youth who are motivated to be involved and willing to share their ideas and knowledge, and we have employers struggling to fill positions and desiring to incorporate diversity and inclusion into their businesses. As we are about to go into a recession and with mental health and addiction concerns at an all-time high the target youth group could further fall through the cracks if we do not act now. Inaction will have economic (long-term poverty), health, and social costs (Canadian Mental Health Association 2014, Urban Institute 2013, EYEEC 2021).

By convening these cross-sector partners, we can better understand the systemic

barriers to employment and look for ways to address them effectively. This is the path that EYEEC will strive towards in the near future.

YOUTH ECONOMIC SECTOR MAP

This is not an exhaustive map of the ecosystem. It is a glance into the many stakeholders involved and influencing outcomes for young Edmontonians who could potentially be involved in future conversations and solutions.



WHAT IS NEXT FOR EYEEC:

The Edmonton Youth Economic Ecosystem Collaborative has a good grasp on what the barriers are for youth, and we had broad calls to action from our past engagement sessions (report and snapshot linked here). After the recent engagement sessions reflected in this report, we now have actionable strategies and partnerships to move forward together. We know youth want a seat at the table, and that they are eager to be a part of the change that impacts them. We know that the system lacks coordination and collaboration between youth-serving organizations, youth, government policies and funding, the education system youth, and economic programs serving youth.

We believe that demand-led approaches and cross-sector collaboration between employers, workforce development agencies, education, youth, and government ministries are crucial. These collaborations are often ad hoc and work in isolation from other initiatives. There is little to no local or regional coordination and shared learning. There is limited data collection to understand what works in Alberta and our Edmonton context. We believe that convening, knowledge sharing, and co-creating strategies will result in system changes that will make it easier for youth to access and sustain meaningful employment, career pathways, and entrepreneurship.

Based on what we heard from youth, as well as relevant research we aim to increase capacity and opportunity through the following key tasks:

- Cross-sector collaboration, learning & employer engagement
- Collective Advocacy: Leading and supporting systems change as priorities emerge with cross-sector learnings
- Broadening youth connections and access to job opportunities, WFD programs, and more
- Elevating youth voice and involvement in the solutions that impact them

Effectively, this project will support, strengthen, and expand industry collaboration in Edmonton, and will provide a plan for:

- the scale and spread of effective, cross-sector, youth employment initiatives
- an evaluation framework for measuring education and employment outcomes for youth and
- recommendations for integrating employer-workforce development initiatives more directly into provincial policy on youth employment.

HOW TO GET INVOLVED...

- Stay connected by subscribing to our Youth Economic Resources Newsletter (YERN) [HERE](#)
- Share this report and the EYEEC on social media, word of mouth, and by email.
- Invite us to present for your team or organization.
- Be a part of solutions by joining us in creating solutions.
- Use your communication skills to help us start a social media platform.
- Apply for our upcoming job opportunities in early 2023.

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