ESSENTIAL SKILLS FOR ATLANTIC FISHERIES (ESAF) PROJECT

FINAL EVALUATION REPORT

MARCH 2021

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PROJECT OVERVIEW

A proactive and innovative project to address labour market and workforce challenges in the fisheries sector in Atlantic Canada was launched on February 1, 2018. The Essential Skills for Atlantic Fisheries (ESAF) project was funded by the Government of Canada's National Essential Skills Initiative through Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC). The ESAF project was led by the Literacy Coalition of New Brunswick (LCNB) in partnership with Literacy Nova Scotia (LNS), Newfoundland and Labrador Laubach Literacy Council (NLLLC) and the Prince Edward Island Literacy Alliance (PEILA).

The initiative was intended to benefit two groups of participants: unemployed individuals who are interested in working in the fisheries sector and supervisors and managers currently working in the fisheries industry. The ESAF program training model included six weeks of classroom/virtual training, up to four weeks of on-the-job-training, and six to 12 weeks of paid work placement for unemployed individuals at an ESAF participating fisheries employer. Participating employers identified and allowed supervisors and middle managers to participate in unique essentials skills classroom training for workplace mentors that was tailored to the fisheries sector and to support ESAF participants through their on-the-job training and workplace experience.

The purpose of the Project was to "examine and test the effectiveness of the ESAF program workforce training project that integrates job-specific skills and literacy and essential skills."

PROJECT GOALS

As per the ESAF project description, the ESAF goals were:

- To increase the pool of skilled labour available in the fisheries sector;
- To connect unemployed individuals in rural communities to available jobs in the fisheries sector;
- To strengthen the attachment of low-income individuals to the labour market by improving their literacy and essential skills and providing them with job-related training, thereby providing a better skill match with available jobs in their community;
- To increase the essential skills of supervisors and middle-managers and establish workplace essential skills mentors/coaches to support the application of literacy and essential skills in the workplace and improved employee performance and retention; and
- To develop and test an innovative and highly contextualized blended learning approach to essential skills training for the fisheries sector using a community partnership approach that is focused on rural, coastal regions, targeted to low-income Canadians, and customized to needs of the fisheries sector.

EVALUATION APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

A multi-site evaluation was conducted for the ESAF project from June 2018 to March 2021 (the project ended in October 2020). This final report focuses on the key evaluation findings for both English language cohorts and the

French language cohort. The evaluation is descriptive in nature and focuses on multiple lines of evidence on relevance, implementation, and short-term and intermediate outcomes.

The primary objectives of the evaluation were as follows:

1. To determine achievement of project outcomes
2. To facilitate discussion and learning regarding best practices
3. To leverage the evaluation to inform organizational learning and continuous improvement

Data for the evaluation included:

- Document review
- Project intake form data for participants and mentors
- Project manager, coordinators, facilitators, and stakeholder interviews
- Participant interviews
- Employer manager interviews
- Employer supervisor/mentor interviews
- Employer surveys

PURPOSE OF FINAL EVALUATION REPORT

This final evaluation report is intended to summarize the key evaluation process and outcome findings from all types of evaluation data including document review, interviews, surveys, and project intake forms.

WHAT WORKED WELL

Employer representatives (managers and mentors), project manager, coordinators, facilitators, and partners interviewed (combined for analysis purposes), and participants interviewed described what worked well, including:

- There was positive feedback on project staff including applying their experience; being flexible; developing relationships with employers, mentors, and participants; etc.
- The participant and mentor training content and delivery included relevant topics and resources, effective learning approaches, and improvements in the Cohort 2 participant curriculum
- Mentors supported positive participant workplace experiences
- There was an effective move to virtual training for Cohort 2 participants as a result of Covid-19, which had a positive effect of building participant digital technology skills
- Flexibility in project delivery supported effective project implementation by adjusting to meet participant learning needs, adapting to available community needs and resources, moving to virtual participant training in Cohort 2 as a result of Covid-19, etc.

CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED

Key implementation challenges were described by employers (managers and mentors); project manager, coordinators, facilitators, and partners (combined for analysis purposes); and participants interviewed. Understanding challenges can explain the context of project implementation and can contribute to identifying suggestions for improvement in future projects. The challenges included:

- Mentors having to juggle competing work demands with their completion of ESAF training
- Challenges with the curriculum in Cohort 1, which were successfully addressed with a revised curriculum in Cohort 2
- Challenges presented by Covid-19, which necessitated a switch to virtual training for Cohort 2 participants. The switch to virtual training delayed project implementation slightly but the project moved rapidly to virtual delivery. This switch required adjustment by some participants.
- Learning barriers and behaviour issues among a few participants
- A variety of practical challenges for participants such as lack of transportation, childcare, and/or internet availability (with virtual training in Cohort 2) though the project provided assistance

ACHIEVEMENT OF INTENDED OUTCOMES

The intended project outcomes were as follows.

Category	Intended outcome	Summary of actual outcomes
Access to supports	Increased number of individuals accessing essential skills supports (e.g., find an example in an ESAF project doc)	73 participants completed classroom/virtual essential skills and employability training in both cohorts combined
Improved essential skills for participants	Improved essential skills for individuals participating in the project	Participants interviewed gained a variety of skills including specific literacy and numeracy skills, learning about employer expectations, time management, communication, working with others, digital technology such as Chromebooks and virtual learning; and stress and anger management.
Further training and education	Increased rate of individuals seeking further education and/or additional training	Some participants interviewed in both Cohorts noted the project motivated them to continue to learn by searching for information online or to go back to school.

Category	Intended outcome	Summary of actual outcomes
Improved essential skills for mentors (managers / supervisors)	Improved essential skills for mentors (managers / supervisors) (e.g., working with others, oral communication, thinking skills, etc.) contributing to their ability to be effective in their roles as managers / supervisors and capacity to retain employees, as part of wrap-around supports for vulnerable individuals	Mentors interviewed noted they gained skills that they applied working with ESAF participants and with other employees such as listening, communication, confidence building, people management, and problem solving any issues or situations that arose in the workplace. Employers interviewed noted that mentors were better prepared to effectively communicate with employees, deal with employee challenges and issues in a professional manner, and helped them with a more tailored approach to engaging employees.
Integration of essential skills in workplaces	Improved integration of essential skills into employer workplaces practices (e.g., recruitment, onboarding, and people management)	Employers and mentors interviewed felt that participants were better prepared for what to expect in the workplace; learned workplace skills; were better prepared for their main job duties; and gained the skills to advance in the workplace.
Participant wellbeing	Improved participant wellness and wellbeing (e.g., health, psycho-social capital, self-efficacy, self-confidence, resilience)	Participants and other interviewees felt the project gave them confidence, motivation, helped them set goals and think of their own possibilities, supported a determination and perseverance to succeed, and made them feel good about themselves.
Employer business outcomes	Improved employer business outcomes (e.g., satisfaction, return on investment, reduced error rates, reduced accidents, increased retention, and improved productivity and customer service)	Employers and mentors interviewed noted that ESAF provided a pool of new employees and helped address staff shortages. They also felt that participants were better prepared for the workplace, their job duties, and workplace rules and policies, and participants were better able to meet employer expectations. Employers and mentors interviewed noted that mentors gained skills that they applied working with the ESAF participants and with other employees such as listening, communication, people management, and problem solving which helped employees be more productive. They also noted that the project supported a tailored and longer term approach to engaging and developing employees.

Category	Intended outcome	Summary of actual outcomes
Essential skills capacity	Increased number of organizations with capacity to offer essential skills supports	The partner literacy organizations expanded their essential skills and workplace training and resources, developed classroom and virtual training curricula and capacity, and developed community relationships and partnerships to address workplace essential skills.
Labour market attachment	At least 76 low-income job-seekers have a stronger attachment to the labour market through improved literacy and essential skills and job-related training (for both cohorts)	73 participants completed classroom/virtual essential skills and employability training (out of 103 enrolled) in both cohorts combined. A total of 58 of those participants completed on-the-job training and 48 completed work placements.
Skilled labour pool	A pool of skilled labour available in the fisheries sector (a minimum of 76 job-seekers for both cohorts)	A total of 76% of Cohort 1 and 2 participants who completed all three ESAF components were employed at 3 and/or 6 months after project completion with their project employer.

EVALUATION CONCLUSIONS

The following conclusions were based on Cohort 1 and 2 data collection with employer representatives (managers and mentors), participants, and the project manager, coordinators, facilitators, and partners.

ESAF goal	Progress toward goal
To increase the pool of skilled labour available in the fisheries sector	The project successfully completed classroom/virtual training component in essential skills relevant to the fisheries sector and broader employability skills for the workplace with 71% of participants in both cohorts combined.
To connect unemployed individuals in rural communities to available jobs in the fisheries sector	The project successfully completed the on-the-job training component with a fisheries and aquaculture employer for 56% of participants (79% of those that finished classroom training) in both cohorts combined. The project successfully completed the work placement component with a fisheries and aquaculture employer for 47% of participants (83% of those that finished the on-the-job training) in both cohorts combined. [Note: The Covid-19 pandemic led to a decreased proportion of completion of all three components in Cohort 2.]

ESAF goal	Progress toward goal
To strengthen the attachment of low-income individuals to the labour market by improving their literacy and essential skills and providing them with job-related training, thereby providing a better skill match with available jobs in their community	Through the provision of classroom and virtual training, on-the-job training, and workplace experience in the ESAF Model and through the support of project personnel and mentors, the project led to a variety of improved participant essential skills relevant to the fisheries sector; broader improvements in workplace preparedness; and stronger self esteem and confidence to apply those skills in the workplace. It led to successful employment in the industry after completion of project components for many participants. A total of 76% of Cohort 1 and 2 participants who completed all three ESAF components were employed at 3 and/or 6 months after project completion with their project employer.
To increase the essential skills of supervisors and middle-managers and establish workplace essential skills mentors/coaches to support the application of literacy and essential skills in the workplace and improve employee performance and retention	The project supported 41 mentors to complete their training (98% completion rate). The training provided skills that they subsequently applied in their supervisory work with ESAF participants and with other employees in their company such as listening, confidence building, and problem-solving issues or situations that arose in the workplace. In some employers, it supported transformative change resulting in an improved approach to engaging and supporting employees moving forward.
To develop and test an innovative and highly contextualized blended learning approach to essential skills training for the fisheries sector using a community partnership approach that is focused on rural, coastal regions, targeted to low-income Canadians, and customized to needs of the fisheries sector	The project successfully developed and implemented the ESAF model in all four Atlantic provinces, working with employers and a variety of community partners. The project partners and the interim evaluation identified improvements in the ESAF Model and broader project implementation that was successfully applied in Cohort 2 and expanded to include a French language cohort.

INTRODUCTION AND PROJECT DESCRIPTION

ESSENTIAL SKILLS FOR ATLANTIC FISHERIES

BACKGROUND

A proactive and innovative project to address labour market and workforce challenges in the fisheries sector in Atlantic Canada was launched on February 1, 2018.

The Essential Skills for Atlantic Fisheries (ESAF) project was funded by the Government of Canada's National Essential Skills Initiative through Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC). The ESAF project was led by the Literacy Coalition of New Brunswick (LCNB) in partnership with Literacy Nova Scotia (LNS), Newfoundland and Labrador Laubach Literacy Council (NLLLC) and the Prince Edward Island Literacy Alliance (PEILA).

An Atlantic Advisory Group provided guidance and advice on the planning and implementation of the project. Community Advisory Committees provided advice and assistance to identify participants and address barriers to employment.

The ESAF initiative, which was intended to serve as a template for training in other sectors in the future, was intended to benefit two groups of participants: unemployed individuals who are interested in working in the fisheries sector and supervisors and managers currently working in the fisheries industry.

The ESAF training model included six weeks of classroom/virtual training, up to four weeks of on-the-job-training, and six to 12 weeks of paid work placement for unemployed individuals with a participating fisheries employer. Participating employers identified and allowed supervisors and middle managers to participate in unique essentials skills training for workplace mentors tailored to the fisheries sector and for mentors to support ESAF participants through their on-the-job training and workplace experience project components. Training was in person in Cohort 1 (English language cohort) and primarily virtual in Cohort 2 (English and French language cohorts).

The intention of the project was to increase the pool of skilled labour for the fisheries sector, which is impacted by an aging workforce and a younger workforce that is migrating out of rural coastal communities. Contributions were made by the project, employers, and various community organizations who collaborated on the ESAF project.

PROJECT PURPOSE

The overall ESAF Project began in February 2018 and ended in October 2020. The project included a Cohort 1 (English language) and Cohort 2 (English and French language) which involved employers in the fisheries sector and unemployed individuals in a variety of rural coastal communities in Atlantic Canada. The purpose of the Project was to "*examine and test the effectiveness of the ESAF project workforce training project that integrates job-specific skills and literacy and essential skills.*" This intervention was intended to bring about change by addressing workforce challenges in the fishing industry (in Atlantic Canada rural coastal communities) through the development and testing of a 'contextualized blended learning approach' to essential skills training. Cohort 1 project learnings and evaluation findings were used to update the approach used in Cohort 2.

PROJECT GOALS

The ESAF goals were:

- To increase the pool of skilled labour available in the fisheries sector;

- To connect unemployed individuals in rural communities to available jobs in the fisheries sector;

- To strengthen the attachment of low-income individuals to the labour market by improving their literacy and essential skills and providing them with job-related training, thereby providing a better skill match with available jobs in their community;

- To increase the essential skills of supervisors and middle-managers and establish workplace essential skills mentors/coaches to support the application of literacy and essential skills in the workplace and improved employee performance and retention; and

- To develop and test an innovative and highly contextualized blended learning approach to essential skills training for the fisheries sector using a community partnership approach that is focused on rural, coastal regions, targeted to low-income Canadians, and customized to needs of the fisheries sector.

INTENDED OUTCOMES

The intended project outcomes were as follows.

Access to supports	Increased number of individuals accessing essential skills supports (e.g., find an example in an ESAF project doc)
Improved essential skills for participants	Improved essential skills for individuals participating in the project
Further training and education	Increased rate of individuals seeking further education and/or additional training
Improved essential skills for mentors (managers / supervisors)	Improved essential skills for mentors (managers/supervisors) (e.g., working with others, oral communication, thinking skills, etc.) contributing to their ability to be effective in their roles as managers/supervisors and capacity to retain employees, as part of wrap-around supports for vulnerable individuals
Integration of essential skills in workplaces	Improved integration of essential skills into employer workplaces practices (e.g. recruitment, onboarding, and people management)
Participant wellbeing	Improved participant wellness and wellbeing (e.g., health, psycho-social capital, self-efficacy, self-confidence, resilience)
Employer business outcomes	Improved employer business outcomes (e.g., satisfaction, return on investment, reduced error rates, reduced accidents, increased retention, and improved productivity and customer service)
Essential skills capacity	Increased number of organizations with capacity to offer essential skills supports

Labour market attachment	At least 76 low-income job-seekers have a stronger attachment to the labour market through improved literacy and essential skills and job-related training (for both cohorts)
Skilled labour pool	A pool of skilled labour available in the fisheries sector (a minimum of 76 job-seekers for both cohorts)

These intended outcomes are summarized at the end of the findings section. See Appendix A for the project logic model.

PROJECT GOVERNANCE AND STRUCTURE

The project governance and structure were as follows.

Atlantic Advisory Group	Multi-stakeholder group that worked collaboratively to provide advice to the LCNB regarding the planning, delivery, and evaluation of the ESAF project.
Steering Committee	Forum for the provincial partners to provide oversight, guidance, and input on all aspects of the project and facilitate communication, problem solving, and information sharing amongst the partners.
Community Advisory Group (CAG) in each province	Advisory body to provide ongoing advice to the project team. The primary goal was to bring together government agencies and community organizations that work with low-income target groups on a regular basis. They helped identify appropriate project participants and community resources to support job-seekers in overcoming employment barriers and provide logistic support.
LCNB Executive Director	The LCNB Executive Director provided oversight, expertise, and guidance to the project and acted as an additional line of communication and observation with the team members, external consultants, the funder, and other stakeholders.
ESAF Project Manager	Overall project manager across all provinces.
Provincial project coordinators	Coordinate ESAF project planning, implementation, and reporting for each province.
Local classroom/virtual training facilitators	Facilitated classroom/virtual training for participants and employer supervisor/manager mentors, and related duties for each province.

ESAF MODEL COMPONENTS

PARTICIPANTS

The original ESAF Model had the following three components for participants.

Literacy essential skills and workplace skills training	6 weeks of literacy essential skills and workplace skills offered in an adult learner classroom environment (Cohort 1)and primarily virtual in Cohort 2 (due to Covid-19 public health restrictions)
On-the-job workplace learning	2 to 4 weeks of on-the-job workplace learning (with flexibility of duration determined with the participating employers)
Workplace	6 to 12 weeks workplace experience with a participating ESAF employer

MENTORS (MANAGERS/SUPERVISORS)

The five-day ESAF Mentor Training was made available to supervisors, managers, and others selected by their ESAF participating employer to be mentors to support participants in the workplace. It was offered in the classroom environment in both Cohort 1 and Cohort 2. Each participant was to be matched with an employer and that employer's ESAF trained mentor(s) for their O-J-T and workplace experience.

General mentoring	General mentoring skills training
Essential skills mentoring	Training on mentoring in the workplace on the essential skills and competencies related to core/generic skills, group/level skills, and job-specific skills with a concrete learning plan related to individual work performance

ESSENTIAL SKILLS DEFINITION

As defined for employment and social development programs by the Government of Canada,[1] the "*nine essential skills are seen as 'building blocks' because people build on them to learn all other skills. They are needed for work, learning and life, and allow people to grow with their jobs and adapt to changes in the workplace.*" The project also provided employability skills training, which was embedded in the essential skills training. Essential Skills are defined by ESDC as follows.

1. Reading	Reading refers to the skills needed to understand and apply information found in sentences and paragraphs.
2. Document use	Document use refers to the skills needed to find, enter, and use letters, numbers, symbols, and images in electronic and paper formats.

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[1] Retrieved on January 11, 2019 from https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/essential-skills/profiles/guide.html

3. Writing	Writing refers to the skills needed to compose handwritten or typed text to communicate information and ideas.
4. Numeracy	Numeracy refers to the skills needed to make sense of and apply mathematical concepts and information.
5. Oral communication	Oral communication refers to the skills needed to exchange thoughts and information with other people by speaking, listening, and using non-verbal cues, such as body language.
6. Thinking	Thinking refers to the skills needed to solve problems, make decisions, think critically, plan, remember details, and find information.
7. Digital technology (skills) (formerly, computer use) – New	Digital technology refers to the skills needed to understand and use digital systems, tools, and applications, and to process digital information.
8. Working with others	Working with others refers to the skills needed to interact with other people (one or more).
9. Continuous learning	Continuous learning refers to the skills needed to continually develop and improve one's skills and knowledge in order to work effectively and adapt to changes.
Additional information	For additional information on essential skills, see: https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/essential-skills/profiles/guide.html

ESAF PROJECT PHASES

The completed project phases were as follows.

Phase 1	Planning (February to June 2018)
Phase 2	Development (July to December 2018)
Phase 3	Implementation (January 2019 to August 2020) • Cohort 1: January 2019 to September 2019 o English language Cohort • Cohort 2: January 2020 to August 2020 o English and French language cohorts
Phase 4	Ongoing evaluation • Interim evaluation report: February 2020 • Final evaluation report: March 2021 (this report) • Dissemination and sustainability strategies (to March 2021)

PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT

This final evaluation report is intended to summarize the key evaluation findings from Cohort 1 and 2 evaluation data collection and the project data management system (project intake forms).

EVALUATION METHODS

OVERALL EVALUATION APPROACH

A multi-site evaluation was conducted for the ESAF project from June 2018 to March 2021. The evaluation focused on multiple lines of evidence on project relevance, implementation, and short-term and intermediate outcomes, as outlined in the logic model in Appendix A. Long-term/ultimate outcomes from the logic model were not assessed during the time frame of this evaluation.

EVALUATION OBJECTIVES AND QUESTIONS

EVALUATION OBJECTIVES

The primary objectives of the evaluation are as follows:

1. To determine achievement of project outcomes
2. To facilitate discussion and learning regarding best practices
3. To leverage the evaluation to inform organizational learning and continuous improvement

Note: Evaluation relates to a project, program, policy, or initiative and not to individual performance (e.g., not to human resource performance).

EVALUATION QUESTIONS

The following evaluation questions guided the evaluation (abstracted from project evaluation framework).

1. What are the needs of the ESAF project's targeted participants and employers for job-specific skills, literacy, and essential skills; and the relevance of the project model?
2. What activities were completed for ESAF overall, and by local projects?
3. What were the perceived strengths in project implementation by ESAF overall, and by local projects? Was the project implemented as intended?
4. What challenges or risks were encountered in project implementation by ESAF and by local projects?
5. How can the project and future literacy and skills development for the fisheries sector be improved?
6. What external factors or events affected project implementation?
7. What were the lessons learned during project implementation that would inform future efforts in the fisheries sector?
8. What were the key outputs produced?
9. How were the intended target populations (individual participants and employer) identified and involved?

10.   What was the level of participant uptake, attendance, and completion of 3 project components (Model) and employer manager/supervisor completion of workplace mentoring training?

11.   What short-term outcomes were achieved?

12.   What intermediate outcomes were achieved?

13.   What were the unintended outcomes of the project (either positive or negative)?

14.   What is the sustainability of the project model for future implementation across the four Atlantic provinces?

EVALUATION STANDARDS, ETHICS, AND CONFIDENTIALITY

The ESAF project coordinators used a general project consent form at project entry for participants and mentors that covers any feedback on the project including the evaluation. The evaluation consultants also obtained informed verbal consent from participants in the various interviews. The evaluation also follows the Canadian Evaluation Society (CES) professional evaluation competencies and standards (www.evaluationcanada.ca). The evaluation team maintains confidentiality of personal information collected in accordance with and the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act.

EVALUATION DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

ESAF COHORT 1 (ENGLISH LANGUAGE) DATA COLLECTION

Evaluation data collected for Cohort 1 included:

- Project intake form data for participants and mentors
- 35 interviews
    - 10 project manager, coordinator, facilitator, and stakeholder interviews (1 NL where the facilitator/coordinator position was combined, 2 NB, 2 NS, 2 PEI, 3 overall project)
    - 13 participant interviews (4 NL, 5 NS, 4 NB)
    - 12 employer manager/supervisor/mentor interviews (1 NL, 5 NS, 5 NB, 1 PEI)
- 5 employer follow up surveys approximately 6 months after Cohort 1 completion to capture Cohort 1 participant employment outcomes at 3 and 6 months after program completion
    - Surveys were received from 5 of the 6 Cohort 1 employers in 3 of the 4 provinces. Employers (project employer only) in those three provinces were surveyed for 23 of the 32 participants who completed the ESAF program. The other 9 Cohort 1 participants in those three provinces dropped out and were lost to evaluation follow-up.

In addition to the planned evaluation activities for Cohort 1, the evaluator data gathering also included:

- 4 site visits in NB and NS completed to meet employers and observe work processes to get a better understanding of project implementation to further develop the evaluation

ESAF COHORT 2 (ENGLISH AND FRENCH LANGUAGE) DATA COLLECTION

Evaluation data collected for Cohort 2 included:

- Project intake form data for participants and mentors
- 41 interviews
    - 14 project manager, coordinator, facilitator, and stakeholder interviews (1 NL where the facilitator/coordinator position was combined, 1 NB English language, 1 NB French language, 4 NS, 2 PEI, 5 overall project)
    - 19 participant interviews (3 NL, 3 NS, 7 NB English language, 4 NB French language, 2 PEI)
    - 8 employer manager/supervisor/mentor interviews (3 NL, 1 NS, 2 NB English, 2 NB French language, 0 PEI)
- Employer follow-up surveys approximately 6 months after Cohort 1 completion to capture Cohort 2 participant employment outcomes at 3 and 6 months after program completion

DATA ANALYSIS

Numerical (quantitative) information was analyzed using descriptive statistics (e.g., proportions). Qualitative interview thematic analysis were carried out to identify the main themes that emerged for each evaluation question.

LIMITATIONS AND HOW ADDRESSED

During the planning for this ESAF project evaluation and prior to the project start-up, three significant evaluation limitations were identified, assessed, and addressed jointly with the project.

1. **Administrative/operational data**

    As this ESAF pilot project was new, no administrative/operational data capture tools or data management system existed to collect data about ESAF participants and employers/mentors (supervisors/managers) in order to support monitoring and evaluation. To address this, the evaluators engaged with project management and the Evaluation Committee to determine what data was needed and what could be collected by local project coordinators during Cohort 1 and 2 implementation (e.g., demographics, characteristics, occupational codes, challenges, goals, learning plans developed, supports, duration in training, results, etc.). A Participant Intake/Exit Form and a Mentor Intake/Exit Form were designed, reviewed, and refined. Then, a 'companion' data system/dashboard was developed, tested, and revised. Project coordinators collected and uploaded the Intake/Exit information in a timely manner. For the pilot project, the external evaluator generated periodic individual project reports and roll-up reports which were used for various purposes.

2. **No comparison group and how addressed**

    The funder had no requirement for the ESAF project to have a control group to compare results and which would have supported the analysis of the impacts. Also, within federal funding, all potential participants who want and are eligible for programs and services generally receive them, there are not

any naturally occurring local groups with matching characteristics to use for comparison. As a result, this limits the sources of some information to evaluate the achievement of outcomes.

In order to manage this, the evaluation utilizes multiple data collection strategies and methods using a combination of data collection methods and both quantitative and qualitative sources, and related data analysis procedures. For both Cohort 1 and 2, making a direct connection with participants and employers/mentors was deemed key to telling the real story. Methods included participant interviews and focus groups, employer/mentor interviews, employer site/job observation, key informants (KIs) interviews among project management and partner organization directors, project coordinators, training facilitators, industry, community referral organization, committees, and others. Post-project employer surveys were also part of the methodology for each cohort. Systems data reports, management reports and documents were also used to inform evaluation findings. To strengthen the evaluation of this new project, three to five lines of evidence were utilized to address key evaluation questions. Up to five attempts were made to reach participants including by direct phone, text (if phone not answered), messages through household members or project coordinators. This resulted in a high reach and uptake. Almost all participants were keen to share about their learning and experience. Their qualitative input supported other evidence of results.

3. **Other**

As anticipated due to the timelines of the evaluation, long-term outcomes were not able to be captured. It is possible for the project to glean some of these outcomes over the longer period of involvement with some key informants. Also, the evaluators (who have extensive labour market performance related experience) are willing to engage with ESDC or Pan-Can committees to further define, develop and validate workplace literacy and workplace skills social and other performance measures related to intermediate outcomes - particularly psycho-social.

EVALUATION FINDINGS

PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION OVERVIEW

OVERVIEW OF PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION INCLUDING CHANGES FROM COHORT 1 TO 2

The following chart provides an overview of project implementation timelines and changes made from Cohort 1 to 2 (curriculum redesign to add industry examples and better match participant literacy levels and changes to virtual learning due to Covid-19).
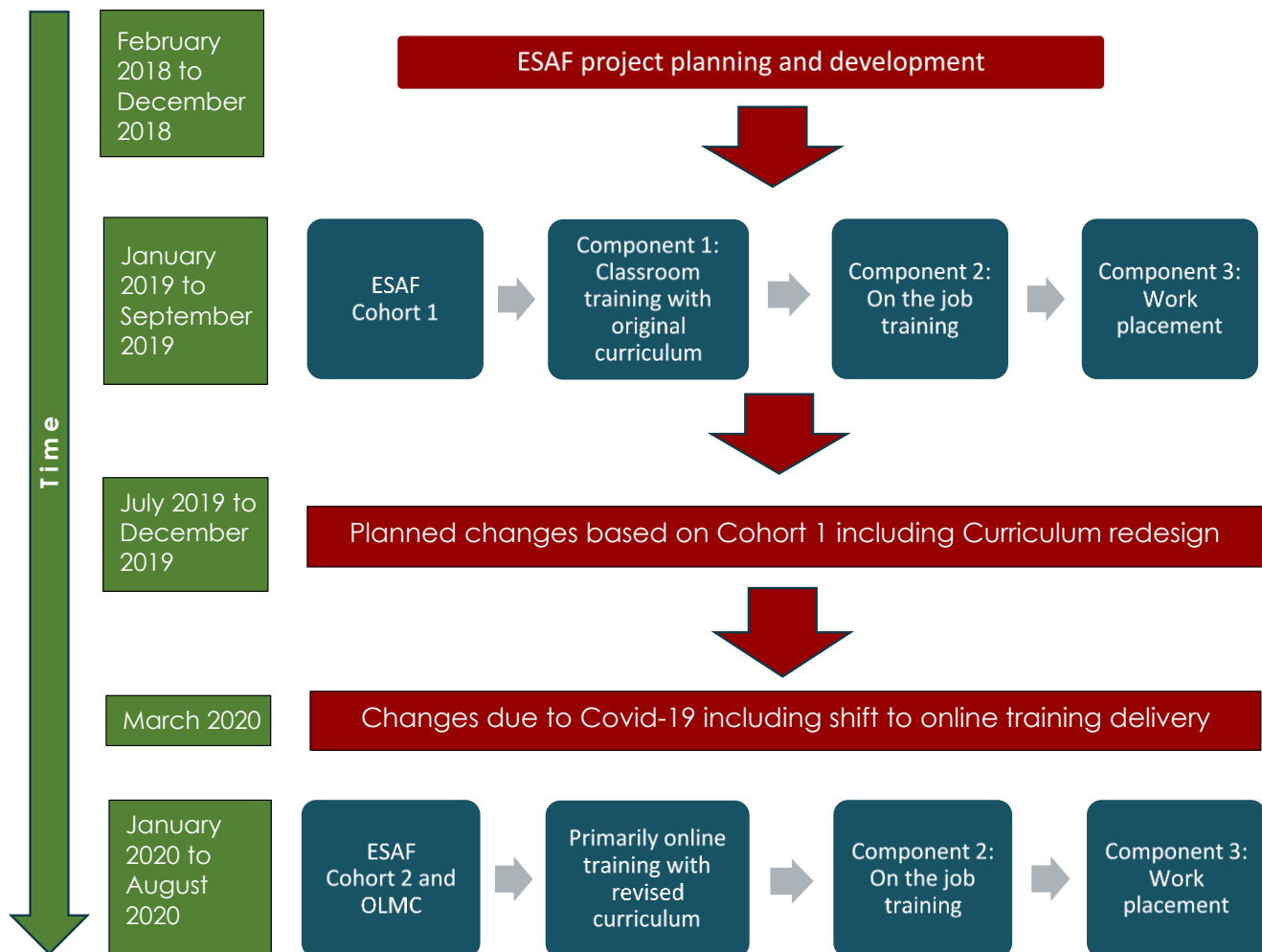
EMPLOYER, MENTOR, AND INDIVIDUAL PARTICIPANTS

ESAF Cohort 1

The following table outlines the number of employer sites, mentors, and participants who started the program. See later for

- 7 employer sites (2 NS, 1 NL, 3 NB, 1 PE)
- 26 mentors
- 43 participants

ESAF Cohort 2 (English and French language)

The following table outlines the number of employer sites, mentors, and participants.

- 10 employer sites (2 NS, 2 NL, 4 NB (English and French), 2 PE)
- 15 mentors
    - 10 mentors (English language)
    - 5 mentors (French language)
- 60 participants
    - 52 participants (English language)
    - 8 participants (French language)

COVID-19 AND OTHER FACTORS THAT AFFECTED IMPLEMENTATION

Some minor external factors or events that affected project implementation in Cohort 1. Union input prevented one potential employer from participating. Some local issues affected the specific provincial start times but did not affect overall implementation.

There were two external factors or events that affected project implementation in Cohort 2. Covid-19 public health restrictions, which caused delays as the project switched from classroom to virtual training for participants (except the training already completed prior to public health restrictions). It also caused issues for employers altering work schedules and timing of project involvement. As well, the project partner in Nova Scotia deviated from the previously agreed upon ESAF Training Model. They permitted participants to begin their on-the-job training and work placements without completing their classroom training and they were also unable to train any mentors. These deviations adversely affected the project implementation and had negative impacts on both the Nova Scotia provincial results and the overall Atlantic Canada project's collective impact.

EMPLOYER, MENTOR, AND PARTICIPANT PROFILE

ESAF COHORT 1

Participant characteristics

Participant characteristics were based on intake forms compiled by provincial coordinators. Both gender and all age groups from age 18 to 64 were represented. Most participants had employment goals and had an

employability action plan completed. Similarly, most participants completed the workplace literacy and job experience model components.
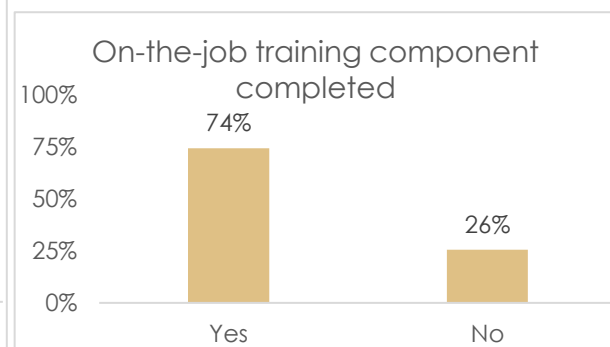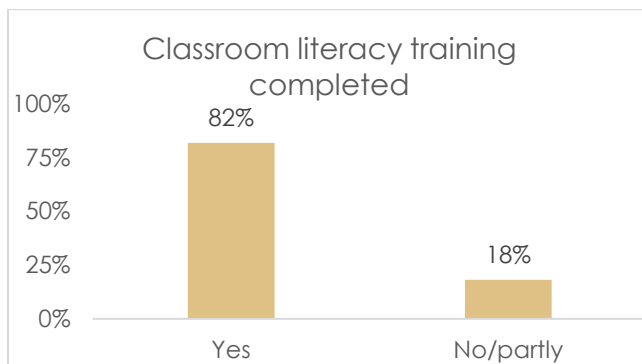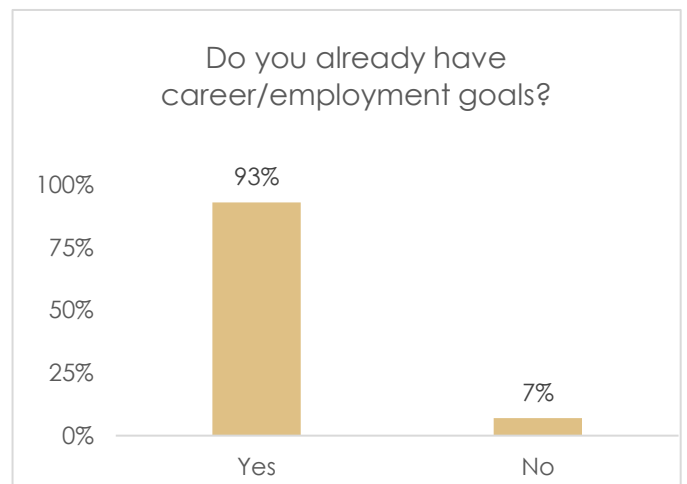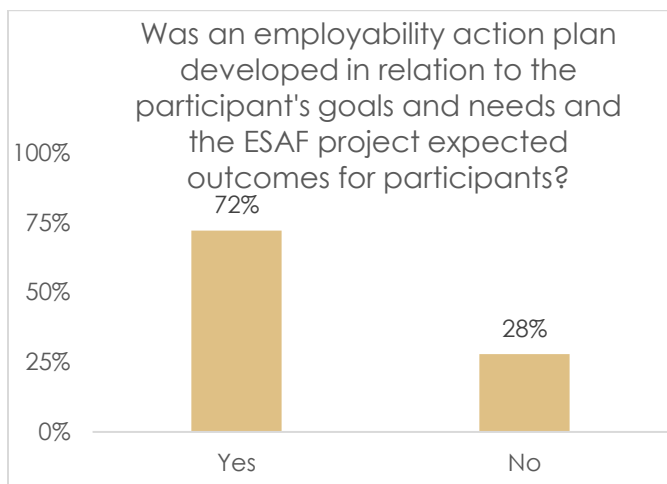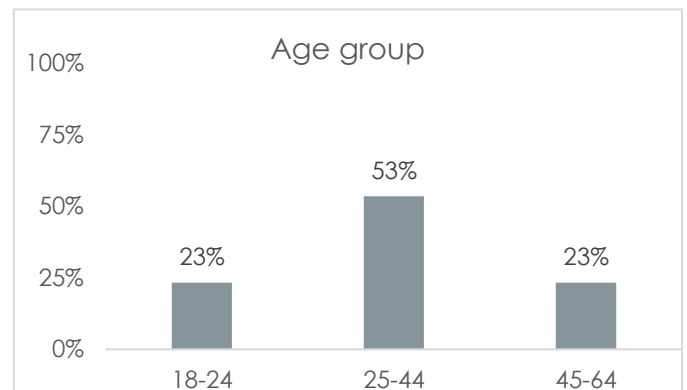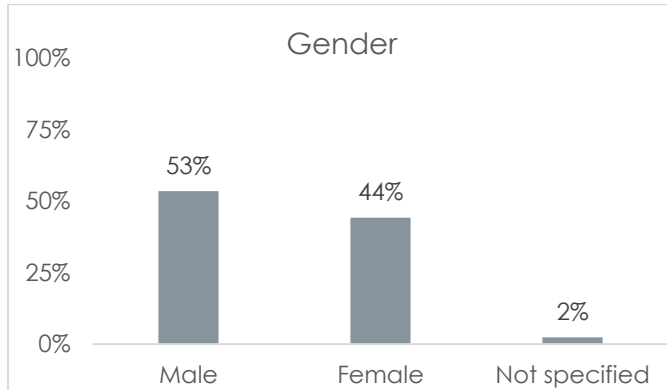
Gender

	Percentage
Male	53%
Female	44%
Not specified	2%

Age group

	Percentage
18-24	23%
25-44	53%
45-64	23%

Was an employability action plan developed in relation to the participant's goals and needs and the ESAF project expected outcomes for participants?

	Percentage
Yes	72%
No	28%

Do you already have career/employment goals?

	Percentage
Yes	93%
No	7%

Classroom literacy training completed

	Percentage
Yes	82%
No/partly	18%

On-the-job training component completed

	Percentage
Yes	74%
No	26%

Mentor characteristics

Mentor characteristics were summarized based on intake forms compiled by provincial coordinators, as follows. Both gender and the age groups from age 25 to 64 were represented (no mentors were under age 25) as were several job position titles. Almost all mentors completed their mentor training.
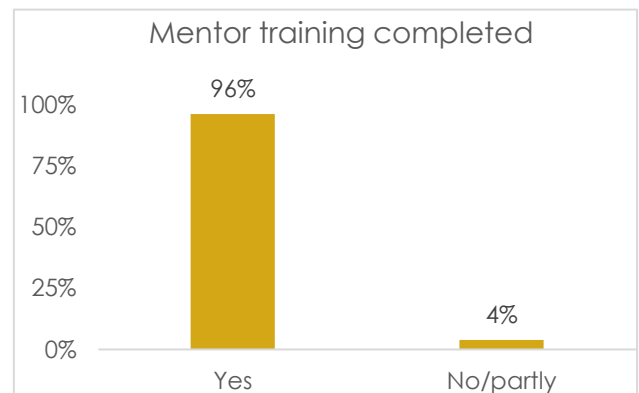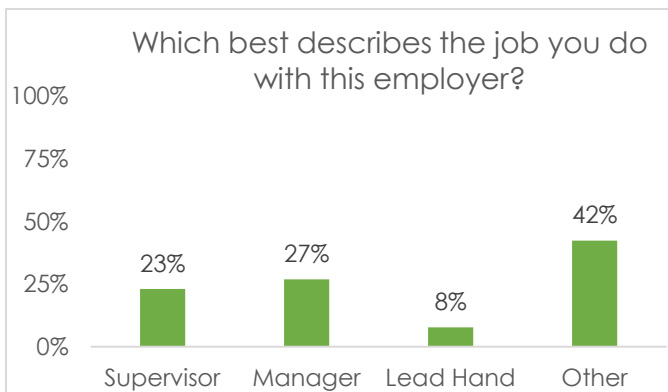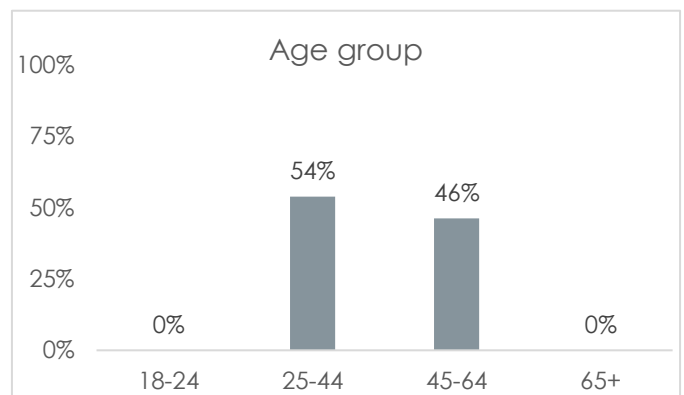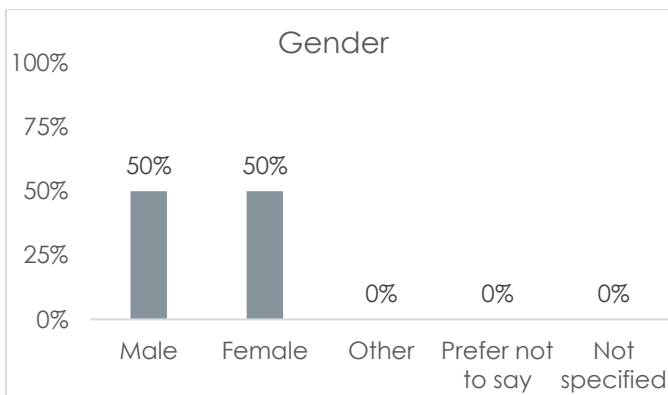
ESAF COHORT 2 (ENGLISH LANGUAGE)

Participant characteristics

Participant characteristics were based on intake forms compiled by provincial coordinators. Both gender and all age groups from age 18 to 64 were represented. A majority of participants had an employability action plan completed and most had career/employment goals. Finally, just under one-half of participants completed the workplace literacy component but most of those that started the job experience component completed it.
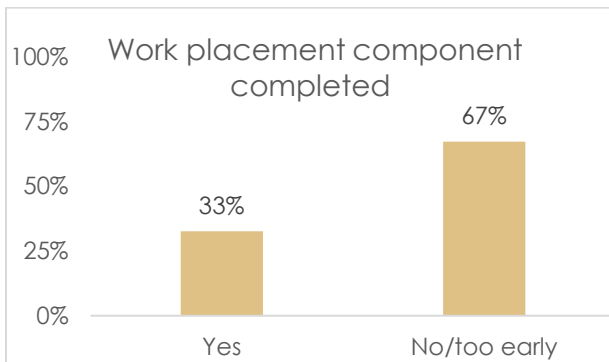
Gender

- Male: 75%
- Female: 25%
- Not specified: 0%

Age group

- 18-24: 27%
- 25-44: 46%
- 45-64: 27%

Was an employability action plan developed in relation to the participant's goals and needs and the ESAF project expected outcomes for participants?

- Yes: 54%
- No: 46%

Do you already have career/employment goals?

- Yes: 81%
- No: 19%

Classroom literacy training completed

- Yes: 56%
- No/partly: 44%

On-the-job training component completed

- Yes: 40%
- No: 60%

Work placement component completed

Mentor characteristics

Mentor characteristics were summarized based on intake forms compiled by provincial coordinators, as follows. Both gender were represented though most were male. Age was not included in the Cohort 2 mentor intake form. Mentors held several job position titles. All mentors completed their mentor training.

Gender

Which best describes the job you do with this employer?

Mentor training completed
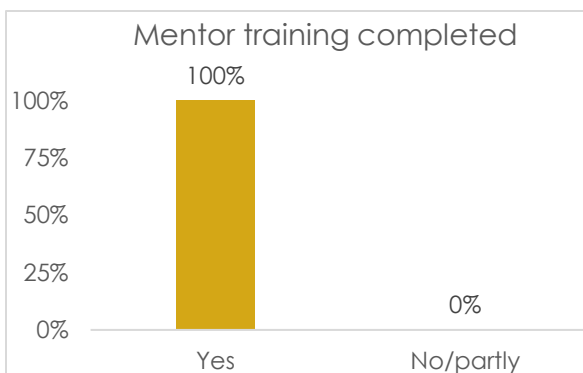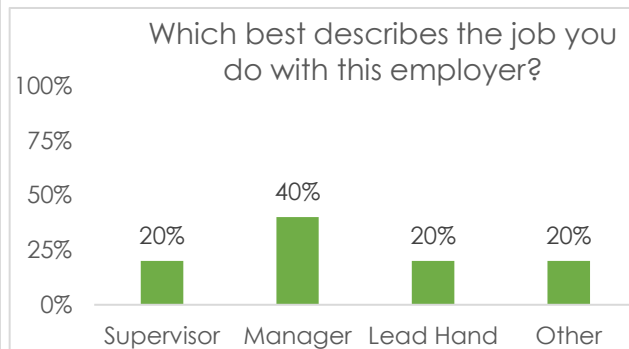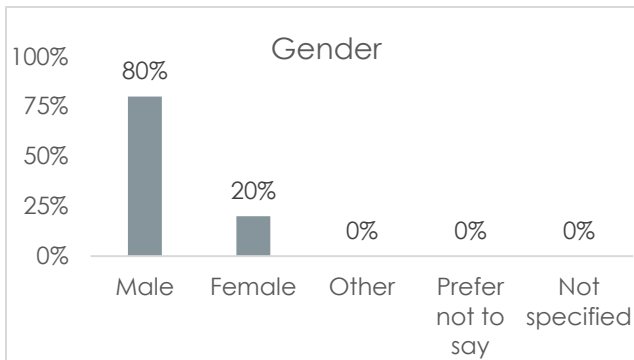
ESAF COHORT 2 (FRENCH LANGUAGE)

Participant characteristics

Participant characteristics were based on intake forms compiled by provincial coordinators. Both gender and several age groups were represented. All participants had an employabilit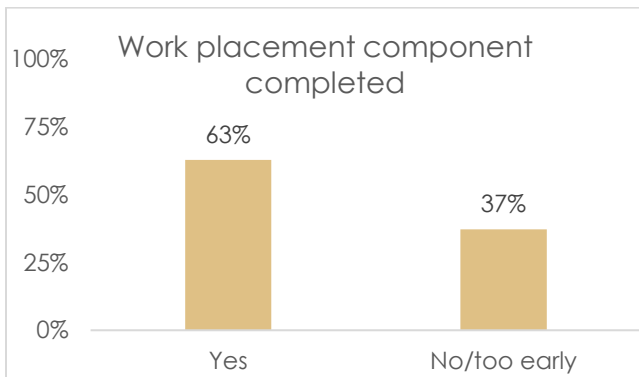y action plan completed and most had career/employment goals. Finally, almost two-thirds of participants completed the workplace literacy component and one-half of those that started the job experience component completed it.
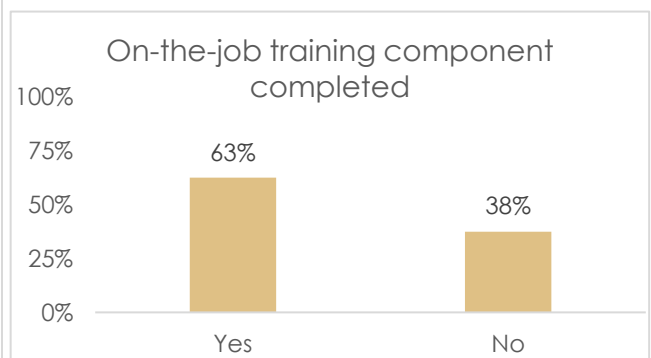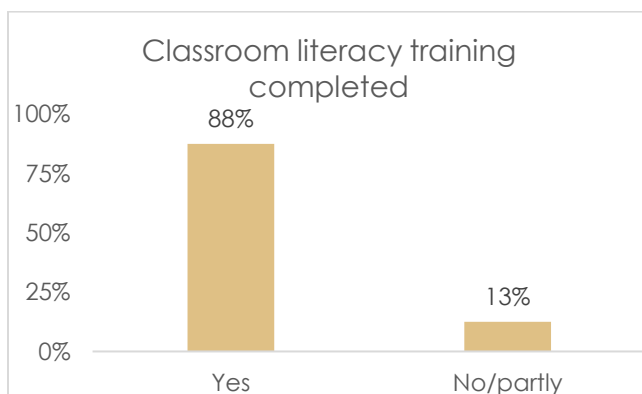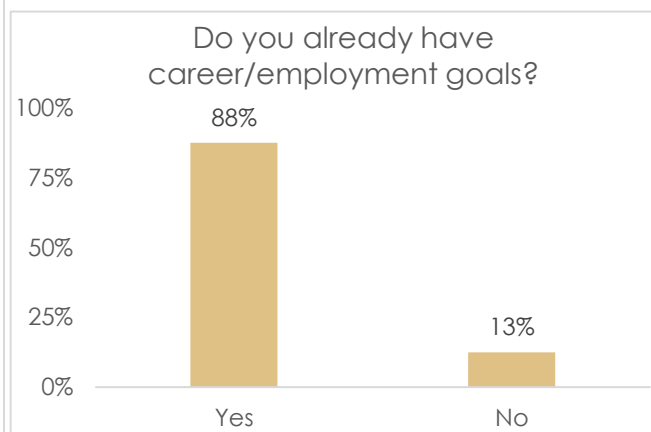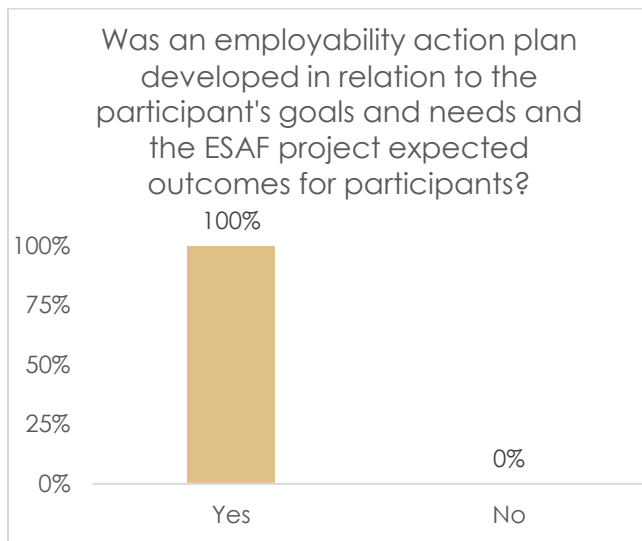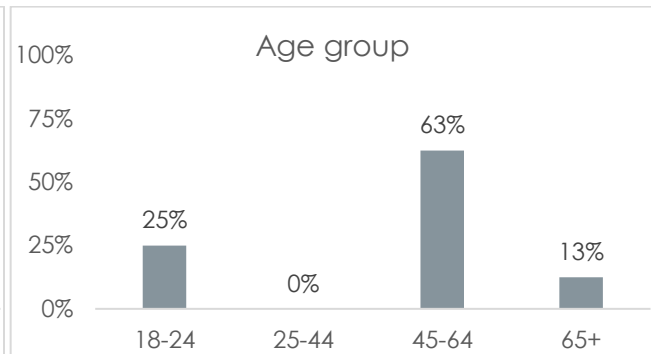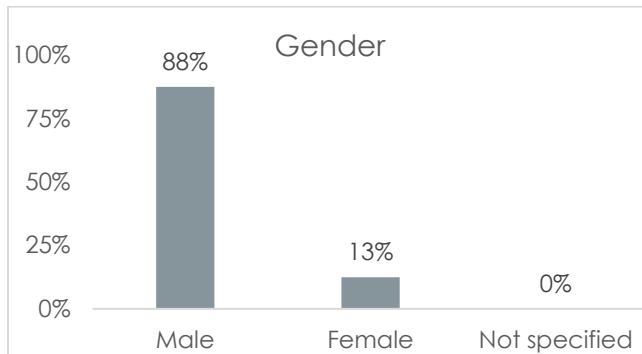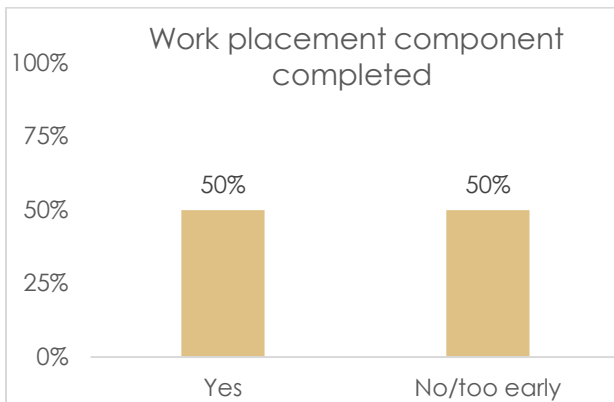
Gender

- Male: 88%
- Female: 13%
- Not specified: 0%

Age group

- 18-24: 25%
- 25-44: 0%
- 45-64: 63%
- 65+: 13%

Was an employability action plan developed in relation to the participant's goals and needs and the ESAF project expected outcomes for participants?

- Yes: 100%
- No: 0%

Do you already have career/employment goals?

- Yes: 88%
- No: 13%

Classroom literacy training completed

- Yes: 88%
- No/partly: 13%

On-the-job training component completed

- Yes: 63%
- No: 38%

Work placement component completed

Mentor characteristics

Mentor characteristics were summarized based on intake forms compiled by provincial coordinators, as follows. Both gender were represented though most were male. Age was not included in the Cohort 2 mentor intake form. Mentors most frequently held the job of lead hand. All mentors completed their mentor training.

Gender

Which best describes the job you do with this employer?

Mentor training completed
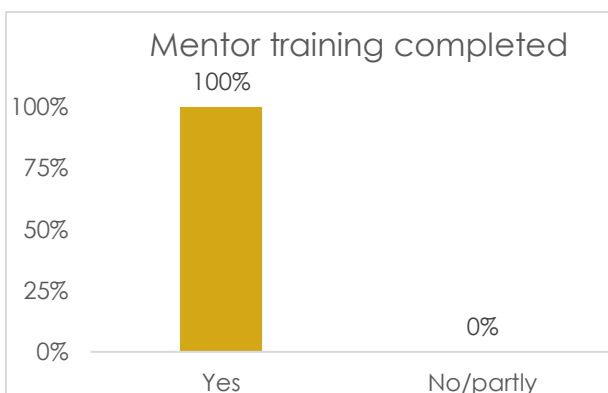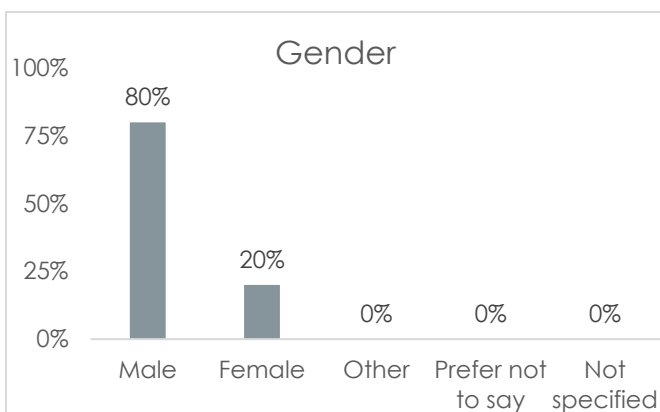
PROCESS EVALUATION FINDINGS

All findings below apply to the overall project or were found in both English cohorts (Cohort 1 and the English language portion of Cohort 2) and the French language portion of Cohort 2 except where noted. An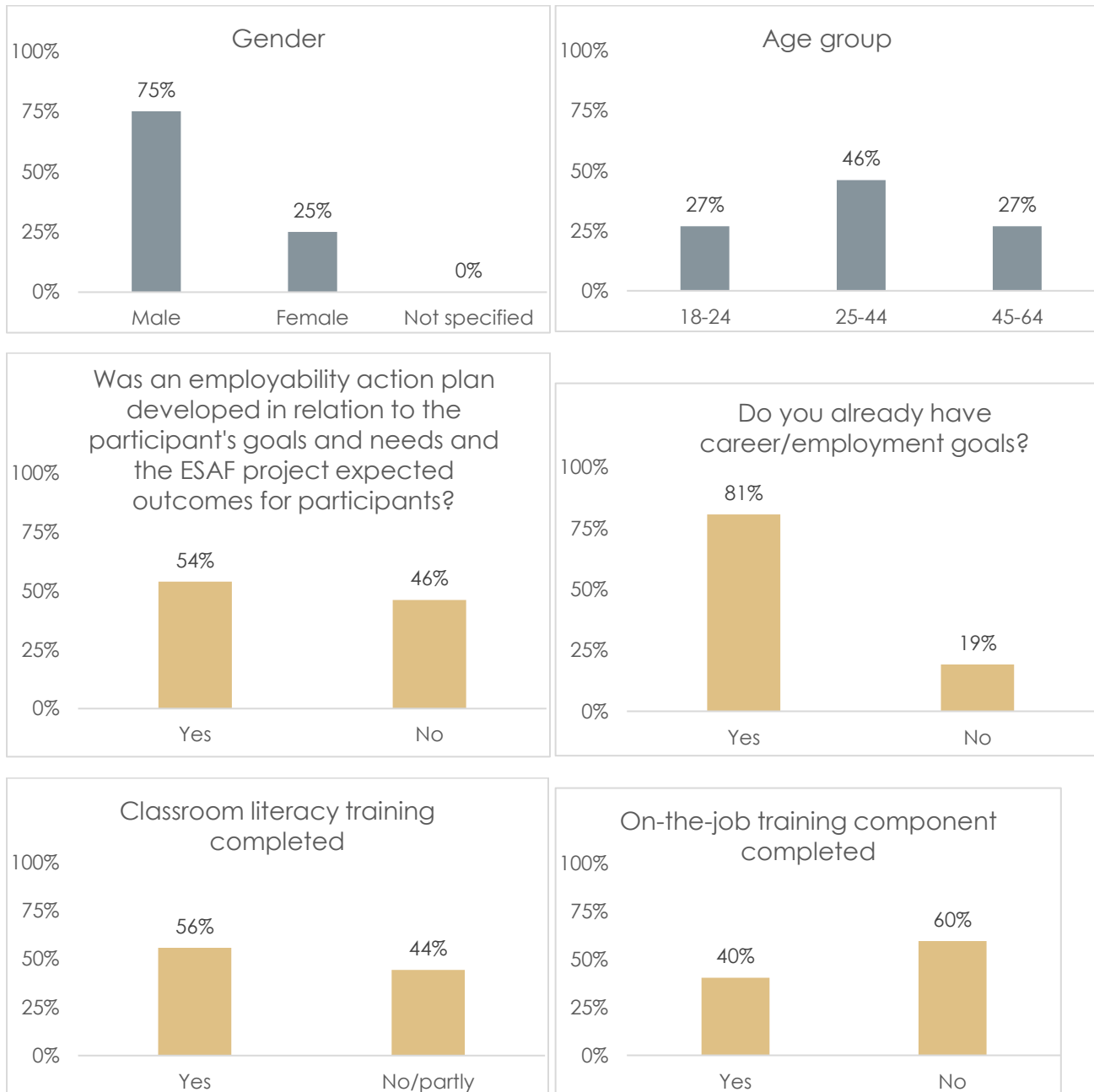y Cohort 1 findings are English language only as French language employers, mentors, and participants were only added as a portion of Cohort 2.

EMPLOYER NEEDS

Labour shortages

Many employer representatives (managers and mentors) interviewed felt the industry is facing present and future labour shortages in their local area. There is an urgent need for labour market solutions to meet growing skill shortages and demand. Employers commented: [2]

> *"With our industry labour market supply shortage, there is a need for a pool of potential hires"*

> *"There is always a need for new employees and its difficult to find people locally."*

> *"I needed people that I could train specifically for our operations and this program provided me with that opportunity."*

Some employer interviewees indicated that labour shortages are driven by older employee retirement, youth outmigration, and rapid turnover of entry level employees due to the physical demands, shift work, etc. or employment barriers faced by potential employees such as work ethic, attendance, transportation, dealing with workplace conflict, not knowing typical employer and job expectations, etc.

PARTICIPANT NEEDS

Employment barriers

The project manager, coordinators, facilitators, and partners interviewed (combined for analysis purposes) noted that many participants face employment barriers such as low literacy, low motivation, lack of confidence (related in part to low literacy), lack of problem solving ability, poor attendance, lack of adaptability, length of time out of the workforce, personal circumstances, lack of transportation, and/or lack of child care. There may also be issues with employers in the industry in general, such as working conditions.

Participant employment needs

Several participants interviewed saw ESAF as a pathway to a job or a way back into the labour force or noted that they needed work or were having trouble finding work. Several noted they were dealing with physical or mental health issues or limitations, which caused employment challenges.

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[2] *Interviews were not recorded. Quotes are from interviewer notes and are as close to verbatim as possible.*

Participant essential skills needs

Several participants interviewed in both cohorts saw the need to improve their education or literacy generally or to gain workplace skills generally or specific to this industry.

WHAT WORKED WELL

Employer representatives (managers and mentors), project manager, coordinators, facilitators, and partners interviewed (combined for analysis purposes), and participants interviewed described what worked well.

Positive feedback on project staff

The project was generally seen by interviewees to be supported by experienced, relatable, and adaptable coordinators, facilitators, and/or project team members who developed excellent relationships with the employers and participants; encouraged and supported the participants to build their confidence; provided positive feedback; and were flexible to adapt the delivery and enhancement of training content, where needed. Participants provided these comments:

> *"Made me feel like I belong"*

> *"The support was encouraging"*

> *"Made me believe in myself"*

Positive feedback on training content and delivery

The mentor training was seen to include relevant topics and resources such as conflict resolution; suitable topics and objectives; and a good balance of presentation and discussion in Cohort 1. Cohort 1 interviewees noted using 'hands on' activities was an effective learning approach for participants who had been out of school and or the workforce. Cohort 2 interviewees noted that training material was standardized, very well organized with good content, had a good outline, and had an easy to follow presentation. As training material was very well organized, it could be easily converted to virtual delivery with some enhancements. Several project manager, coordinators, facilitators, and partners interviewed noted the improvements in the Cohort 2 curriculum. The revised Cohort 2 participant curriculum was seen to be more participant friendly, more related to the jobs they would be matched to, and was seen to be more practical.

Mentors support to participants

Many participants noted the positive contributions of mentors to their experiences in Cohort 2. Mentors were seen to be patient; helped by giving them step-by-step instructions, answering their questions, and understanding their limitations.

Move to virtual training

The move to virtual training after Covid-19 public health restrictions was seen to work well by most interviewees though they noted a few participants did not continue. Some participants noted that they gained additional skills in virtual tools such as Zoom. Participants liked the learning technology, getting the Chromebook, the flexibility to review lessons when convenient, and to ability to work at their own pace.

Project delivery flexibility

Many project manager, coordinators, facilitators, and partners interviewed (combined for analysis purposes) note the flexibility in project delivery as an asset in both cohorts. This included the flexibility to adjust to meet participant unique learning needs and circumstances and to adjust to the evolving situation in terms of community needs and resources, the Covid-19 public health restrictions, new essential skills assessment tools in Cohort 2, etc.

CHALLENGES

This section captures the key implementation challenges most frequently noted by the employers (managers and mentors); project manager, coordinators, facilitators, and partners (combined for analysis purposes); and participants who completed evaluation interviews. Understanding challenges can explain the context of project implementation and can contribute to identifying suggestions for improvement in future projects.

Competing work demands for mentors

The challenge most frequently noted by employers and mentors was mentors juggling the completion of ESAF training with work demands, which was noted in Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 (English). Although this was true for both cohorts, for Cohort 2 it was compounded by the outbreak of the pandemic. To quote a comment from one mentor in Cohort 2:

> *"Work demands come first 'anytime', but we were also in Covid and uncertain times for work."*

Training curriculum materials (Cohort 1 only)

Project facilitators, coordinators, and stakeholders as well as participants noted a variety of challenges with training materials during Cohort 1, particularly how engaging or understandable the material was (not adapted for participant literacy levels). As well, some noted a perceived lack of relevance and lack of examples for this industry. [Notes added after data collection: The late delivery of Cohort 1 curriculum materials meant there was little time to provide feedback and revise the curriculum for Cohort 1. While the "taught curriculum' aligned with the written curriculum topics, it was not limited to it. The seasoned project training facilitators drew upon their extensive teaching experience and responded to the specific learning needs of the participants and the requirements of the job.]

Document review revealed project personnel and partner feedback on the Cohort 1 curriculum, including:

- The materials were not seen to be innovative, engaging, or interactive.
- The material had a "one size fits all" methodology and was not customized for the fisheries industry or for the participants.
- The facilitator manual did have some good content in it.
- Timing was an issue: the material was delivered very late, and the project facilitators felt overwhelmed with the amount of information provided.
- The curriculum contractor was seen not to incorporate project feedback provided.

The curriculum was revamped for Cohort 2, successfully addressing the above issues.

Covid-19 (Cohort 2 only)

Project manager, coordinators, facilitators, and partners (combined for analysis purposes) as well as participants described the challenges presented by Covid-19, which necessitated a switch to virtual training for most of Cohort 2. The switch to virtual training delayed project implementation slightly but the project moved rapidly to virtual delivery. Some participants found the switch to virtual learning challenging at first or faced Internet access issues but most were able to adjust to virtual delivery after one or two weeks. Some participants felt that learning computer skills and how to participate in virtual learning and/or avoiding the need for transportation to the training site were positives. A comment from one participant in Cohort 2 explained:

> "The pandemic situation was unusual. ... But the program people did a good job of adjusting and continuing the training."

Participant learning barriers and behaviour issues

Project manager, coordinators, facilitators, and partners (combined for analysis purposes) noted learning barriers and/or behaviour issues among a <u>few</u> participants in both cohorts such as anger management issues, abusive or harassing behaviour towards project staff, length of time out of school, etc. (English language finding only).

Practical challenges for participants

Project manager, coordinators, facilitators, and partners (combined for analysis purposes) as well as participants described practical challenges encountered by participants such as participant transportation, lack of childcare, and internet availability or speed (with virtual training in Cohort 2) though the project provided assistance and some participants went to public Internet locations (some of which remained open in PEI due to low Covid-19 numbers - English language participants only).

Selected participant dropout

Project manager, coordinators, facilitators, and partners (combined for analysis purposes) noted the challenge of losing a <u>few</u> participants to other job opportunities, other government financial assistance such as Covid-19 benefits(Cohort 2), or because they did not want to complete virtual training (Cohort 2).

LESSONS LEARNED

Project manager, coordinators, facilitators, and partners (combined for analysis purposes) identified some lessons learned during interviews such as these themes noted in both cohorts:

- The importance of ensuring sufficient time for reviewing and revising draft curriculum materials before having to use them for delivery of the training.
- The key importance of considerations such as participants' job readiness, commitment, and employment barriers in the recruitment and participant selection process.
- The value of involving employers early in the process.
- The value of having adaptability and flexibility in project design and delivery to be responsive to varying participant, mentor, and employer needs and unanticipated events and factors such as Covid-19.

SUSTAINABILITY

What is the 'potential sustainability' of the project model for future implementation across the four Atlantic provinces? Is there a sustainability strategy/plan? Communications plan?

- Stakeholder key informants raised the following points. The need for this project is evident. *"Both employers and participants needed this project/training program in this province's rural and remote communities where the fishing sector is key."* "The Model works!" "The Model proved itself." "We have a good track record with this pilot project." Many noted that the ESAF Model was novel and flexible, and that the approach worked for entry level training especially where materials were tailored to the industry and specific jobs. It was also raised that employers identified lead hand/supervisor/manager to receive tailored mentor training to support participants in the workplace transition and experience. "Training was linked to a job."

- With respect to sustainability, all indicated that this Model was generally transferrable and has potential for sustainability in both in the fisheries sector and in other sectors. With some work, *"The training packages (both participant and mentor) can be tailored to a different sector with entry level job vacancies/demand to suit particular job profiles, and employer workplace needs."* "Communication has started in the sector and communities about re-offering the training in the fisheries."* Some mentioned how much was learned from the pilot project for future use.

- Identified by most as a major driver for sustainability was Funding! Funding! Funding! *"It would be a waste not to implement this further! Sustainability needs funding also. "*

- *"Having the right people involved"* was raised in terms of project leaders/managers, partners, funders and in-kind contributors, employers, local project teams, community agencies and committees. Continuity, proposal writing support, flexibility, and adaptability, and on-going communication were also raised by some as important for sustainability.

- "We want to find funding to continue offering this project/training beyond the pilot project. It is a great project – Great Model, overall. If I didn't believe in it, I wouldn't be looking for more funding."

Building on cumulative knowledge and on-going considerations, the Literacy Coalition of New Brunswick led a systematically assessment of the capacity for sustainability across a range of specific organizational and contextual factors. This assessment resulted in the sustainability strategy documented *Leaving A Legacy Essential Skills for Atlantic Fisheries* (October 2020). This document is included with ESAF project resources. This sustainability strategy document also includes a detailed Communication Plan and Dissemination Strategy.

From the external evaluator perspective, this overall strategy and the learning gained in the development of it has and will continue to contribute significantly to the sustainability of the ESAF model in whole or in part for the fisheries sector (and in other sectors), and inclusive of interested and eligible participants/job seekers. A rolling review and update of the Strategy are suggested.

In brief, the Sustainability Strategy addresses:

- **A summary and outcomes of the ESAF project:** tables with the expected and actual outcomes (of Cohort 1 and 2), a list of ESAF program tools and resources (referred to as 'Legacy'), and the utilization of continuous evaluation are described. This introduction provides a clear snapshot of the ESAF project.

- **The continued need of the ESAF project** and its training "Model". This section describes the Atlantic Canada's fishing and fish processing sector's labour challenges involving workforce shortages to fill entry level jobs. Factors included an aging workforce, imminent retirements, physical demand of jobs, stagnant population growth - particularly in coastal communities, fast-changing business environment (markets, technology), the global pandemic, and production and remaining competitive in the global market.

- **The opportunity and uptake to sustain the ESAF project** (a) in the *fisheries sector* in the four participating Atlantic Canada provinces in order to train interested unemployed, low-income job seekers including those from underrepresented populations, and (b) in other sectors (e.g., *health sector* – seniors care), as well as the potential use of parts of the training program to meet other particular needs. As presented in the Plan, there remain many opportunities to sustain ESAF in the fisheries sector in Atlantic Canada. As part of its sustainability strategy, the PEI Literacy Alliance will continue discussions with the aquaculture sector regarding the ESAF mentor and/or participant training. Literacy Nova Scotia is confident the ESAF project is sustainable beyond the pilot project. They have many organizations interested in the ESAF project from other parts of that province. Recently, they received funding from the Community Recovery Fund to continue to offer the ESAF training until March 2021. At the time of this evaluation report, the adapting and testing of the transferability of the existing Essential Skills for Atlantic Fisheries (ESAF) training model in the health care sector had already begun. This is specifically for entry level positions in the senior health care sector (nursing homes, special care home and assisted living facilities). *The Essential Employability Skills for the Health Sector (EES-HS)* project began on October 1, 2020 in New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland and Labrador

- **Moving forward** describes capacity-building and sustainability for the post-pilot project era. The APPROACH sub-section of Moving Forward addresses key strengths, challenges, and opportunities for sustainability. Factors for successful sustainability are described in considerable detail under the headings of *Management and Staff, Partnerships, Communications, Financial Resources, and Funding Strategies*.

- **Incorporating lessons learned.** As stated in the sustainability strategy document, each partner organization will incorporate lessons learned and apply best practices as they move forward in sustaining the project in whole or in part in each province. To do this successfully, each province will focus on some key learnings from the ESAF project as noted in the document (e.g., recruitment, development of industry specific training modules using a blended learning approach, incorporate hands-on learning, focus on results).

- **Communications plan and dissemination strategy.** As part of the overall sustainability strategy a detailed plan was developed to generate awareness and effectively promote the project.

  o The Communications Plan includes the development of tools, communication channels and tactics to promote the ESAF project to community agencies, employers, and job seekers. The Plan will be used by the partner organizations to create awareness and promote the benefits of literacy and essential skills development for the workplace. As noted in the Plan, this will also generate awareness for the literacy organizations and recognition of their role in improving literacy and essential skills in each province. Communications will be continued through: The implementation of the communication plan, and the dissemination strategy activities (to create awareness of the value and benefits of the ESAF project).

o The Dissemination Strategy (described in the Communications Plan) will focus on three main messages: (1) It worked and here are the learnings; (2) The cost benefits it can generate; and (3) The flexibility and potential for replicability of the program.

o The Plan also includes the sharing of knowledge and lessons learned (e.g., via videos, a project overview, testimonials, case studies, documents, a one-page information sheet, a project overview (6-8 pages), press releases, a shared website – ESAF project information, materials and tools will be available and shared with general public, stakeholders and those who may wish to replicate the project, and project evaluation report(s), and a project final report.

THREE WORDS TO DESCRIBE THE PROJECT

The eight most common words that 'Come to Mind' when stakeholders were asked to describe ESAF were (comments are ranked in descending order):

① *Successful/It Works!* ② *Needed/Valuable*

③ *Exciting* ④ *Flexible* ⑤ *Adaptable*

⑥ *Inspiring* ⑦ *Grassroots* ⑧ *Challenging*

OUTCOMES

PARTICIPANT OUTCOMES

Essential Skills outcomes

Participants in Cohort 1 described the skills they gained in the training including learning about employer expectations as well as learning about time management, math skills, communication, and working with others. This helped build their confidence. Participants in Cohort 2 noted their skill gains in working with others; digital technology such as Chromebooks and virtual learning; oral communications; specific literacy and numeracy skills; and stress and anger management. Participants provided the following comments on their skill development:

> "I lost jobs not because i wasn't a good worker but because i would get pissed off and tell the supervisor off, or walk out. The training and facilitator helped us learn ways to de-stress and react less quickly, and to think of a situation from a supervisor's point of view, to make suggestions, and be less negative in responding if told to do something or do something a different way at work."

> "It was all a good refresher - math, computer use, digital."

> "I learned new ways to use the computer in the online part of the training. ... I will use Chromebook to research all kinds of things, like health and safety - free training."

> "... learned about the more workplace type of skills and awareness of the employers and what they are looking for when they hire."

"Hoping this will help me get a job, locally. I don't want to move away again to city."

"I learned teamwork, communications, learned from videos on work-related skills."

"I improved my ability to work in a team. It also helped me to better understand and solve problems. I also learned better time management and to be less stressed."

"It was more interpersonal skills and basic work functioning."

Employers and mentors noted improved participant essential skills and the usefulness of training in WHMIS (hazardous materials) and first aid in Cohort 1. One Cohort 2 employer noted:

"This program taught us all the importance of learning new skills. It made us think how we can better ourselves. New skills will continue to help the participants down the road in all their future employment."

Project manager, coordinators, facilitators, and partners (combined for analysis purposes) noted the Cohort 1 and 2 training led to gains in skills, assessment scores, self-esteem, confidence, etc. Furthermore, they explained that Cohort 2 training provided participants with computer and virtual learning literacy skills.

Participant preparation for the workplace

Participants in Cohort 2 felt the project provided practical job skills and gave them confidence and motivation to return to work. They felt that they knew what to expect for the on-the-job project component and that it gave them more awareness of what information is available online and where to search. It also gave them confidence to complete future virtual learning. Participants commented:

"... first experience with a Chromebook, more comfortable now."

"... more awareness of what information is available to search and where."

"I have a better idea of where to find information about skills, jobs, resume, and the package."

"It helps with job skills."

"I received a job offer from the employer based on my punctuality and the good comments from the facilitators!"

"Time management was the biggest thing for me, since I find it hard keeping to a schedule."

"Training provided goal setting and the work portfolio prepared me for a job."

Employers and mentors in both cohorts felt that participants were better prepared for what to expect in the workplace by knowing the jobs available to them; learning about the main workplace skills; having site tours and talks with employers; and being better prepared for main job duties, the workplace, and employer expectations. Employers and mentors in both cohorts also noted that ESAF provided participants with the skills to advance in the workplace. Project manager, coordinators, facilitators, and partners (combined for analysis purposes) also felt the training will help with future advancement within the workplace. Employers and mentors commented:

"They were 'primed' or 'prepared' to go to work; knew about the job; whether they would like it or not; what employers expect of a worker."

"Classroom training gave the participants an opportunity to understand what to expect when they came to the work phase of the program ... included site visits so everyone knew what they were getting into."

"... this provided an opportunity as an employer to get to know the participants in advance of them coming to work. It also provided an opportunity to match participants to employers based on the preferences of both. Ultimately, this project phase created a bridge between the employer and participants and helped cement relationships."

"I think the classroom training was helpful in preparing the participants on what to expect when they got to the jobsite."

"We have strict health and safety policies. I think the classroom portion of the program helped the participants understand why some rules exist and to question any policy that is not clear. This meant that on the job site, some participants had the confidence to question and to clarify rules that they did not immediately understand."

Employment outcomes

Project manager, coordinators, facilitators, and partners (combined for analysis purposes) interviewed felt the project led to successful employment for many participants. Participants interviewed in Cohort 1 noted the project provided a doorway to employment and the labour force.

"This was a bridge to an employer [I was] not able to cross on my own."

"If going back to school was the way to a job, I was going to do it."

"Wanted to get in the [employer's] door."

"Just wanted to be given a chance."

Participant employment outcomes with the ESAF employer they were placed with were assessed for those who completed all three program components only. Participant employment outcomes was available for 38 participants in Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 combined at 3 and/or 6 months after program completion (all but one Cohort 1 employer and all but two Cohort 2 employers responded to the survey). Some of the seasonal employers were not operating at one or both of the 3 or 6 month follow-up times. The employment outcomes for Cohorts 1 and 2 combined were:

- 76% of participants (22 of 29 participants) were employed with a project employer which was operating at 3 months after program completion

- 77% of participants (24 of 31 participants) were employed with a project employer which was operating at 6 months after program completion

- 76% of participants (29 of 38 participants) were employed with a project employer which was operating at 3 and/or 6 months after program completion in **Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 combined**.

The following chart illustrates the percentage who were employed with their project employer (for those participants whose employer was operating at the specified follow-up time).

Employment of Cohort 1 and 2 participants with the same project employer at 3 and 6 months after program completion (all three components)

Category	Percentage
3 months post program completion	76%
6 months post program completion	77%
Employed at one or both of the follow up times at 3 and 6 months post program completion	76%
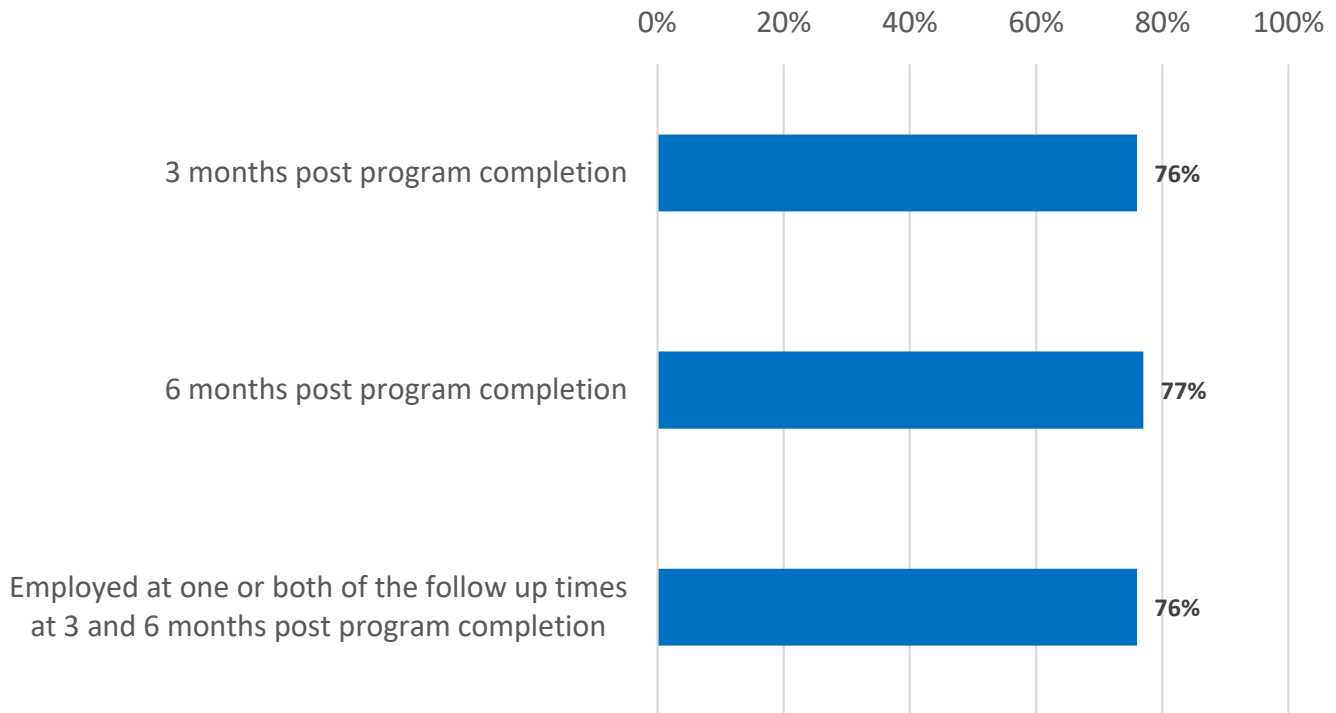
Other participant outcomes

Some participants in Cohort 1 noted that ESAF motivated them to work in the fishing industry, stay in the community, and continue to learn or go back to school. One participant commented:

> *"Without classroom training I wouldn't have ... goals of going to school. ... Everyone started thinking about their goals and it kind of made me think it was possible."*

Project manager, coordinators, facilitators, and partners (combined for analysis purposes) in Cohort 2 felt that the move from classroom to virtual learning resulted in participants demonstrating their determination and perseverance to succeed and made them feel good about themselves. One commented that they will "carry that outlook to their everyday lives and their future work." Another commented that it, "opened people's minds to their own potential and possibilities."

EMPLOYER AND MENTORS/SUPERVISOR OUTCOMES

Mentor skill gains

Mentors in Cohort 1 noted they gained skills that they applied working with the ESAF participants and with other employees in their company such as listening, confidence building, and problem solving any issues or situations that arose in the workplace. Mentors in Cohort 2 provided feedback on their outcomes including people management skills, problem solving, and communication:

> *"Mentor training helped me to further improve my people management skills. It gave me perspective on how to effectively communicate with people with different skills and capabilities to help instruct them on how to productively do their jobs."*

> *"Training helps understand participants, have skills in our toolkit to help, like problem solving."*

> *"It was great. It taught me valuable skills in how to help people. I learned ways to navigate the waters to use the best tools to understand and help find mutual solutions for those experiencing work issues."*

> *"Review of some basic skills I already knew from previous training, like importance of clear communication, listening, identifying problem and solutions."*

> *"For me, learning new ways to understand unfamiliar issues [such as] mental illness and to clearly communicate with people to help them succeed. Sometimes people had the capacity to do the work required but needed it explained in a way that worked with their personality and capabilities."*

Providing skilled employees

Project manager, coordinators, facilitators, and partners (combined for analysis purposes) in Cohort 2 felt the project provided employers with skilled employees in their community. Employers and mentors in both cohorts noted ESAF provided a pool of new employees for the employer. Employers in Cohort 2 commented:

> *"Yes, we held onto several participants with some as permanent and others as seasonal."*

> *"We held onto all ... participants and plan to hire all of them back again next season."*

> *"Without this program, I would not have these employees and I would be short staffed. This program also meant I did not need to use time and money to conduct a recruitment drive."*

Improved approach to working with employees

Employers in Cohort 2 noted that mentors were better prepared to effectively communicate with employees with different skills and capabilities to help instruct them on how to productively do their jobs. They felt it gave mentors the tools to deal with employee challenges and issues in a professional manner and/or helped them with a long-term approach to their employees. It also supported a more tailored approach to engaging employees. Employers commented:

> *"The mentor training was great. It provided in-depth information that allowed us to think about our approach to HR differently. It gave us the tools to deal with any challenges/issues in a professional manner."*

"It prepared us to effectively deal with and ultimately help people that had different needs. It opened our eyes."

"The mentor training was very beneficial since it taught us how to interact with people with various needs. It showed us that in order to get the most out of an employee, we should not approach and treat everyone in the exact same way. People learn and interact in different ways. The training helped us understand the need for individual approaches in order to bring out the best in the participants."

"The most useful mentor skills focused on our need to understand and provide encouragement to those that had special needs. This included providing additional encouragement, one-on-one interactions to help build confidence. This created a productive and happy employee."

"This program helped us understand the need to create team environments. How the setting of work goals put everyone on the same page to get things done. We learned to clearly communicate a lot better to get the outcomes we wanted."

"... we had experienced supervisors chosen as mentors but they did increase awareness or were reminded/refreshed about what new people need when starting this type of work and how to help them learn and behave as needed to do the job and be responsible."

"We learned some things about the participant groups' employment history and challenges and the ... learning they had which could be carried into their workplace training component - like the type of jobs in the program, preparation to go to work, reliability, being on time, not missing shifts, work behaviours."

Employer feedback on whether their cost and time invested was worth it

Employers were asked whether, for the contribution your company made to the project, was the cost and time invested worth it? All employers interviewed in Cohort 2 agreed that it was. Several commented:

"Absolutely! The additional employees created a more reasonable workload, and we were able to complete the fishing season regardless of COVID."

"Yes. We had a shortage of workers and a pilot project worth a try. ... The benefit was having participants identified and prepared in knowing about the jobs available to them, and knowing about the main workplace skills before starting at a workplace, and one that is production orientated and with shift work."

"Yes, definitely worth it. At the end of the day, my business is only as good as the employees that work here. Investment in training and other supports pay off with increased and sustained productivity."

"Yes, definitely worth it."

PARTNER AND COMMUNITY OUTCOMES

Meeting intended project goals/objectives for ESAF Local Communities

This section captures the key view of project managers, coordinators, facilitators, and partners (combined for analysis purposes) regarding their perception of whether ESAF intended goals/objectives were met for 'ESAF Partners/Organizations', and if so, what was viewed as outcomes/results for the Partners/Organizations? Any differences between ESAF Cohort 1 and 2 are noted, if raised.

New and broadened relationships among ESAF partners with local communities and stakeholders

Project manager, coordinators, facilitators, and partners interviewed (combined for analysis purposes) indicated improved relationships. For example:

> "*For the Literacy organizations involved with ESAF, we have created new relationships, broadened previous relationship, and partnered with local communities and stakeholders. That is positive.*"

> "*More visibility for the organization. Second project for us in both French and English communities.*"

Offering English and French projects increased inclusion and organization visibility

Several project manager, coordinators, facilitators, and partners interviewed (combined for analysis purposes) indicated that communities are aware of the 'enhanced role' of Literacy organizations (as some expanded into adult literacy and workplace training).

Early stakeholder engagement and having Community Advisory Groups were key to project success

Several project manager, coordinators, facilitators, and partners interviewed (combined for analysis purposes) noted that the project had good collaboration, relationships, and 'pooling of resources' among organizations/stakeholders. This included contributions that enabled target population (learner) participation, retention, completion. For example:

> "*The involvement of committees including local Community Advisory Groups was beneficial for understanding the project and situation and leveraging resources/contributions from various parties - the project, employer contributions, social services, etc.*"

MEETING INTENDED GOALS/OBJECTIVES FOR ESAF PARTNERS/ORGANIZATIONS

This section captures the key view of project managers, coordinators, facilitators, and partners (combined for analysis purposes) regarding their perception of whether ESAF intended goals/objectives were met for 'ESAF Partners/Organizations', and if so, what was viewed as outcomes/results for the Partners/Organizations? Any differences between ESAF Cohort 1 and 2 are noted, if raised.

Partner and other stakeholders were key to all stages of the overall ESAF pilot project and Cohort 1 and 2

All project manager, coordinators, facilitators, and partners interviewed indicated that the ESAF was an opportunity and met the goals and the expanded mandates of the four literacy partner organizations, and other key stakeholders. One commented:

> *"Extremely well. All stakeholders saw a need and were committed to be at the table early in the planning. Agencies were involved and 80% of referrals came from government agencies, like social development. This is unique and tailored training pilot project well supported by [a] ... Steering Committee and Community Advisory Groups (stakeholders) in communities where employers were identified as having a need and interest in ESAF. Many stakeholders (including employers) also contributed (e.g., allowances, childcare, transportation, and other costs, and in-kind contributions). This was a unique and tailored project."*

Literacy organization – some expanded their mandate

Project manager, coordinators, facilitators, and partners interviewed noted that literacy organizations that had not been involved in adult literacy training or workplace related training prior to ESAF entered into a new role. Interviewees commented:

> *"We learned more about offering programs with job related training and employer matching, etc."*

> *"They (the partner organization) were so happy to have something optimistic for people to enroll in and do and, it was free and it gave them a workplace and a computer and something on their resume. It's a great program it really, really is."*

The ESAF project was also expanded to predominantly French speaking communities (in French), and as a parallel training program to the English, and with equal opportunity for tailoring to meet local needs.

Communication and collaborative relationships among partners and stakeholders were key for planning and implementation

As reflected in interviews from Cohort 1, an ESAF project 'kick-off forum' was held for all stakeholder representatives (including various committees) and others. That provided common messages and the opportunity for sharing, and building relationships that sustained and evolved over time. The forum increased their knowledge and understanding of the project, partners and other stakeholders, and their contributions going forward.

In Cohort 2 project manager, coordinators, facilitators, and partner interviews combined, one respondent reported that as time went on there was less reliance on the initially very important overarching Atlantic Advisory Group. Over time there was more reliance on the Steering Committee, local Community Advisory Groups, and others. This included collaborating on improvements (e.g., curriculum based on learnings and findings from Cohort 1), and proactively pivoting the early stage of the pandemic in Cohort 2). Several other respondents echoed the positive collaboration and contribution of such groups.

In both Cohorts, several of the combined project manager, coordinators, facilitators, and partners interviewed specifically mentioned the great support from the Departments of Community Services - the case managers doing referrals and hands-on support, child-care help, transportation, work boots, laptops. As one stated, *"The project took a stakeholder and community effort."*

SUMMARY OF ACHIEVEMENT OF INTENDED OUTCOMES

The intended project outcomes were as follows.

Category	Intended outcome	Summary of actual outcomes
Access to supports	Increased number of individuals accessing essential skills supports (e.g., find an example in an ESAF project doc)	73 participants completed classroom/virtual essential skills and employability training in both cohorts combined
Improved essential skills for participants	Improved essential skills for individuals participating in the project	Participants interviewed gained a variety of skills including specific literacy and numeracy skills, learning about employer expectations, time management, communication, working with others, digital technology such as Chromebooks and virtual learning; and stress and anger management.
Further training and education	Increased rate of individuals seeking further education and/or additional training	Some participants interviewed in both Cohorts noted the project motivated them to continue to learn by searching for information online or to go back to school.
Improved essential skills for mentors (managers / supervisors)	Improved essential skills for mentors (managers / supervisors) (e.g., working with others, oral communication, thinking skills, etc.) contributing to their ability to be effective in their roles as managers / supervisors and capacity to retain employees, as part of wrap-around supports for vulnerable individuals	Mentors interviewed noted they gained skills that they applied working with ESAF participants and with other employees such as listening, communication, confidence building, people management, and problem solving any issues or situations that arose in the workplace. Employers interviewed noted that mentors were better prepared to effectively communicate with employees, deal with employee challenges and issues in a professional manner, and helped them with a more tailored approach to engaging employees.
Integration of essential skills in workplaces	Improved integration of essential skills into employer workplaces practices (e.g., recruitment, onboarding, and people management)	Employers and mentors interviewed felt that participants were better prepared for what to expect in the workplace; learned workplace skills; were better prepared for their main job duties; and gained the skills to advance in the workplace.
Participant wellbeing	Improved participant wellness and wellbeing (e.g., health, psycho-social capital, self-efficacy, self-confidence, resilience)	Participants and other interviewees felt the project gave them confidence, motivation, helped them set goals and think of their own possibilities, supported a determination and perseverance to succeed, and made them feel good about themselves.

Category	Intended outcome	Summary of actual outcomes
Employer business outcomes	Improved employer business outcomes (e.g., satisfaction, return on investment, reduced error rates, reduced accidents, increased retention, and improved productivity and customer service)	Employers and mentors interviewed noted that ESAF provided a pool of new employees and helped address staff shortages. They also felt that participants were better prepared for the workplace, their job duties, and workplace rules and policies, and participants were better able to meet employer expectations. Employers and mentors interviewed noted that mentors gained skills that they applied working with the ESAF participants and with other employees such as listening, communication, people management, and problem solving which helped employees be more productive. They also noted that the project supported a tailored and longer term approach to engaging and developing employees.
Essential skills capacity	Increased number of organizations with capacity to offer essential skills supports	The partner literacy organizations expanded their essential skills and workplace training and resources, developed classroom and virtual training curricula and capacity, and developed community relationships and partnerships to address workplace essential skills.
Labour market attachment	At least 76 low-income job-seekers have a stronger attachment to the labour market through improved literacy and essential skills and job-related training (for both cohorts)	73 participants completed classroom/virtual essential skills and employability training (out of 103 enrolled) in both cohorts combined. A total of 48 of those participants completed both on-the-job training and work placements.
Skilled labour pool	A pool of skilled labour available in the fisheries sector (a minimum of 76 job-seekers for both cohorts)	A total of 76% of Cohort 1 and 2 participants who completed all three ESAF components were employed at 3 and/or 6 months after project completion with their project employer.

CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE SUGGESTIONS

CONCLUSIONS

The following conclusions were based on Cohort 1 and 2 data collection with employer representatives (managers and mentors), participants, and the project manager, coordinators, facilitators, and partners.

ESAF goal	Progress toward goal
To increase the pool of skilled labour available in the fisheries sector	The project successfully completed classroom/virtual training component in essential skills relevant to the fisheries sector and broader employability skills for the workplace with 71% of participants in both cohorts combined.
To connect unemployed individuals in rural communities to available jobs in the fisheries sector	The project successfully completed the on-the-job training component with a fisheries and aquaculture employer for 56% of participants (79% of those that finished classroom training) in both cohorts combined. The project successfully completed the work placement component with a fisheries and aquaculture employer for 47% of participants (83% of those that finished the on-the-job training) in both cohorts combined. [Note: The Covid-19 pandemic led to a decreased proportion of completion of all three components in Cohort 2.]
To strengthen the attachment of low-income individuals to the labour market by improving their literacy and essential skills and providing them with job-related training, thereby providing a better skill match with available jobs in their community	Through the provision of classroom and virtual training, on-the-job training, and workplace experience in the ESAF Model and through the support of project personnel and mentors, the project led to a variety of improved participant essential skills relevant to the fisheries sector; broader improvements in workplace preparedness; and stronger self esteem and confidence to apply those skills in the workplace. It led to successful employment in the industry after completion of project components for many participants. A total of 76% of Cohort 1 and 2 participants who completed all three ESAF components were employed at 3 and/or 6 months after project completion with their project employer.

ESAF goal	Progress toward goal
To increase the essential skills of supervisors and middle-managers and establish workplace essential skills mentors/coaches to support the application of literacy and essential skills in the workplace and improve employee performance and retention	The project supported 41 mentors to complete their training (98% completion rate). The training provided skills that they subsequently applied in their supervisory work with ESAF participants and with other employees in their company such as listening, confidence building, and problem-solving issues or situations that arose in the workplace. In some employers, it supported transformative change resulting in an improved approach to engaging and supporting employees moving forward.
To develop and test an innovative and highly contextualized blended learning approach to essential skills training for the fisheries sector using a community partnership approach that is focused on rural, coastal regions, targeted to low-income Canadians, and customized to needs of the fisheries sector	The project successfully developed and implemented the ESAF model in all four Atlantic provinces, working with employers and a variety of community partners. The project partners and the interim evaluation identified improvements in the ESAF Model and broader project implementation that was successfully applied in Cohort 2 and expanded to include a French language cohort.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: LOGIC MODEL

The project logic model on the following page is a pictorial overview of the intended inputs, activities, reach, and outcomes of the ESAF project. Not all outcomes in the logic model, particularly long-term/ultimate outcomes, were captured in the evaluation due to scope and timeframes. The evaluation questions determined the focus of data collection including all the intended outcomes listed in the project description section above.

Essential Skills for Atlantic Fisheries Project - Action Logic Model

GOAL: The primary project goal is to examine and test the effectiveness of workforce training models that integrate job-specific skills and literacy and essential skills. The project aims to address workforce challenges in the fishing industry in coastal rural areas through the development and testing of a contextualized blended learning approach to essential skills training to benefit low income workers, employers, local communities and communities of interest.

PRIMARY TARGET GROUP(S): *Workers* - Eligible low income job-seekers from underrepresented populations such as non-high school completes, youth-at-risk, underemployed and unemployed workers, women, newcomers and Indigenous peoples. *Employer* - Fishery sector employers such as in harvesting, processing and aquaculture.

INPUTS
(Partners/stakeholders - what we invest)

Project Manager
Project Coordinators (NL, NS, PEI & NB)
NLLLC, LNS, PEILA, LCNB
Literacy Trainers
Mentorship Trainers
Funders/ Contributors ($, in-kind)
Locations, Equipment, & Data System
Project Advisory Committee
Time/Resources
Provincial/Atlantic Partnerships Network
Employers' Contributions
Communications Stategy; Project Evaluation
Other (e.g., other programs, in-kind, volunteers)

ACTIVITIES/OUTPUT
(What we do/Produce)

- Set-up project & hire staff
- Develop communication strategy/products
- Liaise with stakeholders
- Promote the project and Recruit
- Conduct information sessions
- Liaise with referral agencies/case managers
- Develop tailored learning approaches
- Develop/tailor training materials, forms, tools, etc.
- Select communities/fishery sector employers/jobs
- Select Project Participants
- Conduct Intakes/orientations
- Conduct LES assessments
- Support Learning Plans developed
- Matching of workers with employers & jobs
- Deliver Classroom Training (6 wks.)/4 wks. on-site
- Coordinate 6-12 wks. Workplace Experience
- Deliver Mentoring Training for mangers/supervisors
- Coordinate orientations for workplace on-boarding
- Coordinate/manage program delivery & monitoring
- Complete operational reports
- Design, conduct & report on Project Evaluation

REACH
(Who we work with)

- Target population in selected communities
- Employers (owners, managers, supervisors, HR, Staff)
- Local Community Organizations of interest
- Referral Sources (for participants, employers, support)
- Other:

OUTCOMES/ Short-term

- Participants, employers and organizations received appropriate/-timely information re: pilot to determine their needs/benefits to engage
- Target # of employers/sites participate
- Target group # of unemployed workers participate
- Participants completed essential skills training
- Participants improved their essential skills/levels
- Communities/organizations engaged/support project
- Project contributes to meeting employers' job vacancies/worker shortage needs & with suitable level of literacy & essential skills
- Essential skills for managers /supervisors improved & contributed to their ability to be effective; capacity to retain employment.

OUTCOMES/ Intermediate

- Increased awareness of benefits of pilot to continuous learning by target group & employers;
- Participants increased their knowledge, skills & connections in the workplace/ community;
- Increased number of individuals accessing essential skills supports over time;
- Increased skills contribute to participant goal achievement, full potential, & taking advantage of jobs, etc.;
- Participating 'low-income job-seekers' - have a stronger attachment to the labour market;
- Increased rate of participants seeking further education and/or training;
- Managers/supervisors enhanced skills for effectiveness in roles, capacity to retain employment;
- Improved business outcomes (e.g. productivity);
- Improved integration of ES into workplace practices (e.g. on-boarding, people management);
- Improved outcomes for participant wellness/wellbeing (e.g., self-confidence);
- A pool of skilled labour available for fisheries sector; (min. 76);
- Employers retained/intend to call back;
- Client and employer overall satisfaction;
- More organizations have increased capacity to offer essential skills supports;
- Lessons Learned shared about the pilot to inform future design and delivery.

OUTCOMES/ Long-term/Ultimate

- Sustained worker attachment to work, employer, community;
- Sustained employer benefits to meeting workforce needs and production ;
- Contribution to communities in rural, coastal areas and the fisheries sector for supply/de-mand;
- Continued building-on ELS and workplace learning and sharing about what works;
- Continued funding and stakeholder support.

Assumptions:
Uptake by participant, employer, organizations; Model(s) will address needs and adaptation can be responsive to needs worker & employer needs; resources meet demand for Model testing.

External Factors:
By-in/support of local rural coastal fishing communities; Socio-economic, political, environmental, business ownership, unions and market conditions. The Evaluation will determine and report on extenuating factors impacting the project goals and outcomes.