



Essential Skills
For Atlantic Fisheries

Final Report



Literacy Coalition
of New Brunswick ^{Ltd.}

Canada

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Essential Skills for Atlantic Fisheries (ESAF) Pilot Project was a collaborative Pan-Atlantic and team-based initiative. We are grateful to many people and organizations that have contributed to the success of this project.

The Literacy Coalition of New Brunswick (LCNB) extends its heartfelt gratitude to project partners, Literacy Nova Scotia (LNS), Newfoundland and Labrador Laubach Literacy Council (NLLLC), and PEI Literacy Alliance (PEILA). They and their staff played critical individual and collective roles in helping plan, develop, and deliver the ESAF project in Atlantic Canada.

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Executive Summary

High unemployment in rural areas has long been a challenge in Atlantic Canada and elsewhere. In addition to generations of young people leaving these communities, low literacy rates and a lack of essential skills hamper those left behind. This phenomenon not only affects people, but the businesses looking to employ these people. The fishing, seafood and aquaculture industry is one of the most important to our region, employing about 35,000 people and generating more than \$2.5 billion in annual exports – but it is now an industry facing a significant shortage in skilled labour.

The Essential Skills for Atlantic Fisheries Project was created to address the workforce challenges in the fishing industry by providing literacy and essential skills training opportunities to unemployed or underemployed low-income individuals in rural coastal communities and connect them to available jobs in the fisheries sector.

The multi-year community-based pilot project was led by the Literacy Coalition of New Brunswick in partnership with Literacy Nova Scotia (LNS), the Newfoundland and Labrador Laubach Literacy Council (NLLLC), and the PEI Literacy Alliance (PEILA) and funded by the Government of Canada's National Essential Skills Initiatives.

The training model was designed to test an innovative and highly contextualized blended learning approach to literacy and essential skills training for the fisheries sector. It included a 30-hour train-the-trainer module for supervisors/managers identified as Workplace Essential Skills Mentors and 6 weeks of classroom/online training for participants with up to 4 weeks of paid on-the-job-training and 6 to 12 weeks of paid work placement with a participating fisheries employer.

Project Results

- 17 fisheries sector employers participated in the ESAF project.
- 40 of 41 supervisors/managers completed the mentor training.
- 73 of 103 participants completed classroom/virtual training.
- 58 of 73 participants completed the on-the-job training.
- 48 of 58 participants completed the work placement and were offered a job with the pilot site employer.
- 77% of participants were still employed with their project employer 6 months after project completion.



These completion rates are notable as Cohort 2 experienced significant impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic, including altered work schedules, layoffs, and plant closures.

Mentors in both cohorts gained skills that they applied working with the ESAF participants and with other employees in their company such as listening, confidence building, problem solving, people management skills, and better communication skills. Employers 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.

Results from pre- and post-program assessments indicated that despite the relatively short classroom learning portion and the disruptions to Cohort 2's learning because of the pandemic, participants made gains in essential skills, especially reading. In each of the cohorts reporting results, participants reported feeling more ready and more positive about their learning. Participants gained confidence in their abilities and indicated an increased readiness to seek learning and employment supports.

Overall, successes are attributed to factors including, but not limited, to regular communication, skilled facilitation, sector-specific training using relevant curriculum, and realistic previews of the nature of working in the fisheries.

Given its success in Atlantic Canada, the ESAF project was extended by ESDC beyond October 2020 to adapt and test the transferability of the ESAF training model in the health care sector, specifically for entry level positions in the senior health care sector (nursing homes, special care homes, and assisted living facilities) in NB, NL, and PEI.

I. INTRODUCTION

This report presents the findings of the *Essential Skills for Atlantic Fisheries (ESAF) Project*, a pilot project that was designed to test an innovative and highly contextualized blended learning approach to essential skills training for the fisheries sector. The project was led by the Literacy Coalition of New Brunswick in partnership with Literacy Nova Scotia (LNS), the Newfoundland and Labrador Laubach Literacy Council (NLLLC), and the PEI Literacy Alliance (PEILA).

Using a community partnership approach, the project focused on rural coastal regions in Atlantic Canada, targeting low-income unemployed or underemployed Canadians and customizing the training to the needs of the fisheries sector. The ESAF Pilot Project was a multi-year, community-based initiative funded by the Government of Canada's National Essential Skills Initiatives.



A. Background

In Atlantic Canada, fishing, seafood, and aquaculture are essential components of our regional economy, employing about 35,000 people and generating more than \$2.5 billion in annual exports—but it is now an industry facing a significant shortage in skilled labour.

High unemployment in rural areas has long been a challenge in Atlantic Canada and elsewhere. In addition, generations of young people leaving these communities, an aging workforce, low literacy rates, and a lack of essential skills hamper those left behind. Businesses are also facing competition for labour from other sectors of the economy, and it is becoming more difficult to hold on to a workforce when employment is seasonal, physically challenging, and involves long hours.

These challenges are hindering the Atlantic seafood industry's ability to meet client demand and stay competitive in a global world.

The literacy and essential skills (LES) training model developed through the ESAF project was designed specifically to take a pro-active and innovative approach to address the labour market and workforce challenges faced by fisheries sector employers in New Brunswick (NB), Newfoundland and Labrador (NL), Nova Scotia (NS), and Prince Edward Island (PEI).

The project also sought to better understand the challenges encountered and key success factors in place in this industry to ensure that the training model developed would be transferable to other sectors and jurisdictions in Canada.

B. About the ESAF Project

The ESAF Project was an innovative, contextualized literacy and essential skills program implemented in Atlantic Canada. The project was created to address workforce challenges in the fishing industry by providing training opportunities to unemployed or underemployed low-income individuals in rural coastal communities and connect them to available jobs in the fisheries sector.

The ESAF project, intended to serve as a model for training in other sectors in the future, was designed to benefit two groups: low-income unemployed or underemployed individuals who are interested in working in the fisheries sector and supervisors and managers currently working in the fisheries industry.

A combination of classroom, online and on-the-job training was provided and customized to the available jobs in the fisheries sector. This blended learning approach proved to be very effective because the participants were better prepared for the workplace.

C. Pan-Atlantic Canadian Approach

Especially unique about this project was the pan-Atlantic Canadian approach carried out in both official languages. This allowed us to gather information and experiences from a variety of sources that were similar but, at the same time, had important differences. It provided important knowledge for future expansion into other industries.

We approached this project in a holistic fashion by training not only the participants, but also the pilot site supervisors and middle managers. With this two-pronged approach, we sought to develop skills which would maximize the chances of long-term success for the unemployed and underemployed individuals taking part in the training program while also providing valuable supervisory tools and strategies to assist in their success.

D. Project Duration

The ESAF Pilot Project was originally a three-year initiative that commenced February 1, 2018 and concluded October 31, 2020. Building on the success of Cohort 1, LCNB received additional funding in September 2019 to add a French cohort to the ESAF project in the province of New Brunswick.

In September 2020, the project was extended beyond October 2020 to test the adaptability of the ESAF model to the senior health sector in New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Prince Edward Island.

E. How We Went About It

An Atlantic Advisory Group was formed to provide advice on the planning and implementation of the project. Community Advisory Committees were established in each pilot site to bring together agencies and organizations that work with low-income individuals, identify appropriate pilot participants, and identify community resources to support participants in overcoming barriers to employment.

The curriculum materials integrated employability skills and essential skills into the training program designed specifically for available entry level jobs in the fisheries sector. It also included a

train-the-trainer package for supervisors/managers identified as Workplace Essential Skills Mentors.

Participating employers identified and allowed supervisors and middle managers to participate in a customized essentials skills training for workplace mentors tailored to the fisheries sector. The intent of the program was to support the application of literacy and essential skills in the workplace and the ESAF participants during the on-the-job training and workplace experience components of the project.

F. The ESAF Training Model

The ESAF training model included:

- A 30-hour train-the-trainer package for supervisors/managers identified as Workplace Essential Skills Mentors. The supervisors and managers gained skills such as listening, confidence-building, and problem-solving to apply in situations that arise in the workplace with ESAF participants and existing employees in their company.
- Six weeks of classroom/online training, up to 4 weeks of on-the job training, and 6 to 12 weeks of paid work placement for unemployed individuals with a participating fisheries employer.
- Through the provision of a blended learning approach, the project led to a variety of essential skills gains and broader improvements in workplace preparedness and stronger self esteem and confidence to apply those skills in the workplace.
- The project included a Cohort 1 (English language) and Cohort 2 (English and French language) that involved employers in the fisheries sector and unemployed individuals in a variety of rural coastal communities in Atlantic Canada. Cohort 1 project learnings and evaluation findings were used to update the approach used in Cohort 2.



G. Project Specific Objectives

The specific project objectives were to:

- increase the pool of skilled labour available in the fisheries sector;
- connect unemployed workers in rural communities to available jobs in the fisheries sector;
- 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 and a better skill match with available jobs in their community;
- 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
- 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.



H. Project Governance and Structure

Literacy Coalition of New Brunswick	The Literacy Coalition of New Brunswick (LCNB) was the project lead. 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. A Project Manager led the concerted efforts with the partners across all provinces.
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.
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.
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 jobseekers in overcoming employment barriers and provide logistic support.
Provincial project coordinators	Coordinated ESAF project planning, implementation, and reporting for each province.
Local classroom/virtual training facilitators	Facilitated classroom/virtual training for participants and mentor training for the supervisors and middle managers in each province.

In addition, the partner organizations worked closely with provincial government departments and other sources to secure additional strategic funding such as training allowances, childcare and transportation for the participants, and wage subsidies for employers.

The employers who took part in the ESAF project were responsible for:

- identifying entry-level job vacancies;
- participating in the workplace needs assessment;
- identifying supervisors/managers to be trained as workplace mentors;
- paying the supervisors/managers while in training; and
- providing paid on-the-job and work placements to the participants.



Project Governance Structure



1. Targeted Skills

This initiative targeted the following skills:

Essential skills



Employability skills



J. Key Features of the ESAF Training Model

DESIGN

- Sectoral approach with industry engagement at all phases
- Sector-specific curriculum materials specifically designed for the fisheries sector and aligned with entry level positions requirements and essential skills gaps
- Employability skills integrated seamlessly into the essential skills modules
- Common curriculum materials rolled out across all four provinces
- Innovative approach
- Focused on rural coastal areas
- Customized to needs of fisheries sector
- Community partnership approach
- Blended learning approach to LES training combining classroom-based and online learning
- Online learning platform with synchronous and asynchronous engagement options
- Train-the-trainer package for supervisors/managers
- Partnership with provincial governments to access existing employment programs and support services to complement the new LES service delivery model

TARGET GROUP

- Unemployed and underemployed low-income individuals
- Underrepresented populations such as non-high school completers, youth-at-risk, women, newcomers, and Indigenous Peoples.



DELIVERY

- One lead organization (LCNB) in partnership with literacy organizations in Newfoundland and Labrador (NLLLC), Nova Scotia (LNS), and Prince Edward Island (PEILA)
- A 30-hour train-the-trainer package for supervisors/managers
- Classroom and online training delivered over a six-week period, followed by up to four weeks of on-site job specific training and a 6 to 12-week work placement
- Training delivered by each organization across the four Atlantic provinces

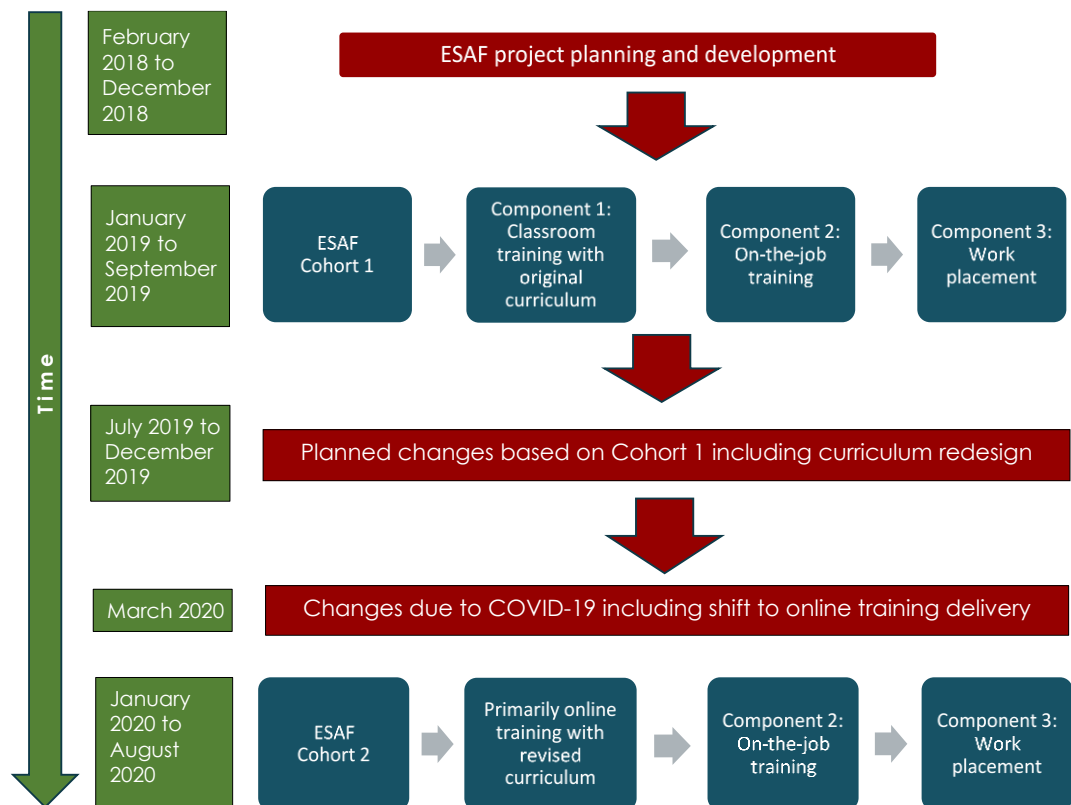
INCENTIVE STRUCTURE

- A flexible delivery with a modular design allowed training sessions to be broken down in a variety of ways.
- Participants received training allowances during the classroom/online portion of the project and paid wages by the employer during the on-the-job training and work placement.
- Participants who completed the program received a Chromebook.
- Employers received a wage subsidy (50% of the participant's wages) during the on-the-job training and work placement.



K. Project Implementation Overview

The following chart provides an overview of project implementation timelines and changes made from Cohort 1 to 2 (curriculum material redesign to add industry examples and better match participants' literacy levels and changes to virtual learning due to COVID-19).

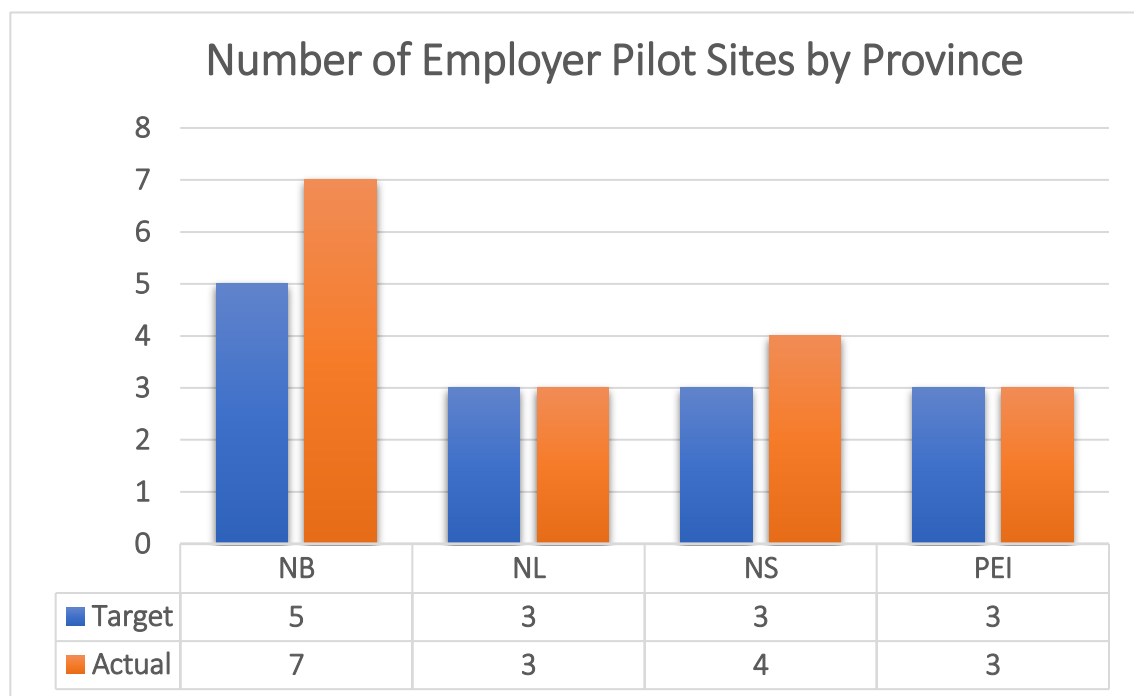


II. WHO DID WE REACH?

A. ESAF Pilot Sites

The goal was to recruit 14 fisheries sector employers, from across the four Atlantic provinces, but a total of 17 employers (7 in Cohort 1 and 10 in Cohort 2) participated in the ESAF project.

As indicated in the table below, both NB and NS exceeded the minimum number of employers required with seven (7) and four (4) employers respectively. NL and PEI met their target with three (3) employers each.



B. List of Employers and Pilot Sites

The following employers were selected as pilot sites based on their location and their readiness and interest in participating in the ESAF project.

List of Employers by Province

PROVINCE	COHORT 1	COHORT 2	FRENCH COHORT
NEW BRUNSWICK	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Marine Harvest, Letang▪ Cooke Aquaculture, Blacks Harbour▪ Bayshore Lobster, St. George	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Cooke Aquaculture, Blacks Harbour▪ Bayshore Lobster, St. George▪ Connors Brothers, Blacks Harbour	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Oyster Kings, Richibucto-Village
NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Allen's Fisheries, Benoit's Cove (Crab)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ North Atlantic Aquaponics, Black Duck Siding▪ North Atlantic Canada Eel	
NOVA SCOTIA	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Acadian Seaplants, Charlesville▪ Sea Star Seafood, Clark's Harbour	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Gidney's, Centreville▪ O'Neil Fisheries, Digby	
PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Atlantic Aqua Farms, Orwell Cove (Mussels)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Atlantic Aqua Farms, Orwell Cove (Oysters)▪ Raspberry Point Oysters, Raspberry Point	

C. Business Size

The business size of participating employers varied from smaller family-owned businesses to large companies. Of the 17 companies:

- 8 employed fewer than 100 employees (47%)
- 5 employed between 100 and 500 employees (29%)
- 4 employed over 500 employees (24%)

Different types of fish, seafood, and marine plants were processed by the fisheries employers. They included salmon, oysters, sardines, ground fish, seaweed, mussels, crab, and lobster.

D. Recruitment Challenges

Based on the Workplace Needs Assessments results, employers identified the following recruitment challenges when trying to fill vacant positions:

- Stigma associated with working in a fish processing facility
- Plant location (rural setting)
- Transportation issues (lack of reliable transportation for some employees)
- Small labour pool (lack of applicants)
- People do not consider the fishing industry as a career move
- EI mindset / seasonal mindset locally
- Aging workforce
- Seasonal work period
- Physical demands (candidates do not want to do labour-intensive jobs)
- Finding and retaining people willing to work full-time
- Public perception (a lot of pre-conceived notions of fishing industry)
- Finding and hiring the right skilled people
- Finding people who want to work

E. Skills Gaps

The employers also identified the following gaps in both employability and essential skills among new and existing employees:

- Do not understand the importance of reliability and the effect it has on co-workers and production
- Lacking effective communication skills
- Not showing up at all or on time, reliability, absenteeism, and tardiness from employees
- Not motivated or accountable
- Do not understand the expectations of the employer, relating to safety, attendance, respect for others, respect for authority, proper hygiene requirements when working in food processing environments
- Lacking a good work ethic
- Unacceptable workplace behaviour
- Lacking teamwork skills
- Don't understand the value of making good decisions
- Poor attitude towards others and self
- Difficulty following instructions



III. WORKPLACE ESSENTIAL SKILLS MENTOR TRAINING

A. Supervisor/Manager Characteristics

The mentor characteristics summarized below are based on intake forms compiled by provincial coordinators. As indicated in the table below, overall, 61% of the supervisors and managers were men, 32% had attained less than a Grade 12 education, and 25% had over 10 years of experience as supervisors and managers.

	Characteristics	Total Supervisors/Managers (with %)
Gender	Male	25 (61%)
	Female	16 (39%)
Highest Education Attainment	Community College	9 (22%)
	Grade 12	12 (29%)
	GED	4 (10%)
	Grade 11 or less	13 (32%)
	Other	3 (7%)
Years of Supervisory Experience	None	5 (12%)
	Less than 1 year	7 (17%)
	1-3 years	7 (17%)
	4-5 years	3 (7%)
	5-10 years	9 (22%)
	Over 10 years	10 (25%)

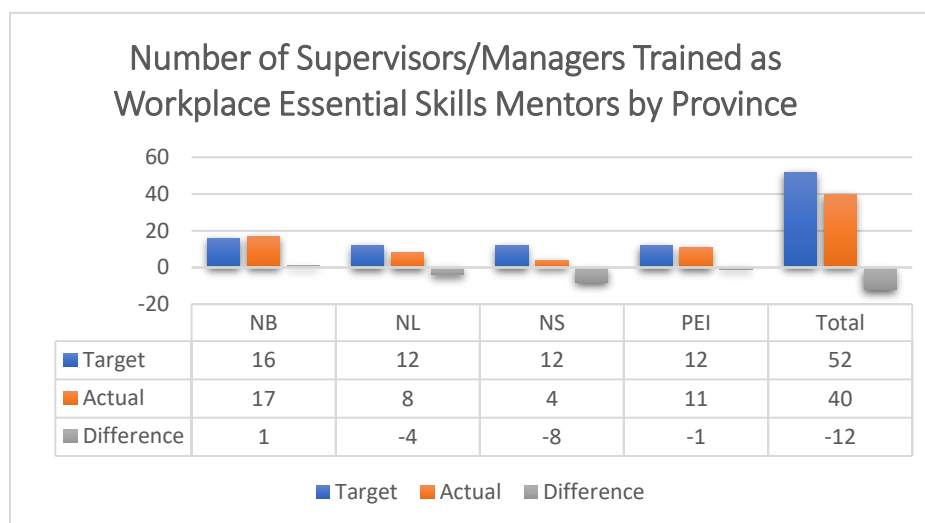
B. Training Results

The goal was to have 52 supervisors/managers participate as workplace essential skills mentors. Our model was designed to have the supervisors/managers complete the mentor training before the participants entered the workplace. This approach ensures participants are well supported during their work placements and therefore have the greatest chance for success. It also recognizes that increasing the capacity of supervisors/managers to coach their new and existing staff can lead to increased employee retention. Each province was to identify and train a minimum of 12 supervisors/managers. The addition in NB of a French cohort increased NB's total to a minimum of 16 supervisors/managers.

A total of twenty-six (26) supervisors/managers were identified for the cohort 1 mentor training. Only one (1) supervisor/manager (NS) did not complete the training. Cohort 2 had fifteen (15) supervisors/managers identified and all completed the training.

As indicated in the table below, NB surpassed its target while PEI with 11 supervisors/managers had a 92% participation rate. NL, with a total of eight supervisors/managers, fell a bit short of their target, resulting in a 67% participation rate. NS, with only 4 supervisors/managers trained in Cohort 1 and none in Cohort 2, fell remarkably short of their target. As a result, their participation rate is the lowest of all four provinces at 33%.

It's noteworthy to mention that 40 of the 41 supervisors/managers (98%) completed the mentor training.



C. Organizational Impact

Although the mentor training was very successful, at the beginning of the training some mentors were somewhat sceptical that this type of program was going to work. They felt it was needed in the workplace; however, they expressed concern that in such a fast-paced work environment with “old school” ways of doing things, mentoring new and exiting employees would be thrown to the wayside. Once the training started, the mentors became very involved and agreed that their mentorship role was important regardless of how busy they were during the peak periods.

When the participants finished their classroom training and began their workplace training, the mentors stepped in and began effectively mentoring their assigned participants. All parties involved, including the mentors, participants, and plant management, noticed a positive impact almost immediately. Participants felt confident going to work each day because they had a relationship with the supervisor and could talk to them if they had any questions or if any issues arose. Mentors felt the training was an effective way for them to develop leadership skills and very helpful when training new employees.

IV. PARTICIPANT TRAINING

A. Participant Characteristics

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

	Characteristics	Total Participants (with %)
Gender	Male	69 (67%)
	Female	33 (32%)
	Not specified	1 (1%)
Age Group	18-24	26 (25%)
	25-44	47 (46%)
	45-64	30 (29%)
Priority Groups	Person with Disability	17 (16.5%)
	Indigenous Person	16 (15.5%)
	Visible Minority	2 (2%)
Highest Education Attainment	Degree	1 (1%)
	Community College	16 (15%)
	Grade 12	37 (36%)
	GED	10 (10%)
	Grade 11 or less	36 (35%)
	Other	3 (3%)

B. Training Results

Our original goal was to have 96 participants enrolled in training; however, with the addition of a French cohort in NB, the total number of participants increased to 108.

Each province was to select and train a minimum of 24 participants. The addition in NB of a French cohort increased NB's total to 36 participants.

Although 109 participants were selected for the training program, only 103 participants were present on the first day of the classroom training (43 in Cohort 1 and 60 in Cohort 2). The reasons some participants were not present were:

- Two participants (Cohort 1) failed to show up for their pre-assessment and were removed from the program before it began.
- One participant (Cohort 1) found a job before the classroom training start date.
- 3 participants (Cohort 2) dropped out when we switched from classroom to virtual training due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

During Cohort 1, some minor external factors or events affected project implementation and results.

- There were challenges with the curriculum materials in Cohort 1, which were successfully addressed with revised curriculum materials in Cohort 2.
- Union input prevented one potential employer from participating.
- Due to weather conditions and large amounts of ice in the bay, one employer was unable to begin processing. As a result, the start date of the on-the-job (OTJ) training and work placement components of the project was delayed by 2 weeks.
- A variety of practical challenges for participants such as lack of transportation, childcare, and/or behavioral issues were noted.

During Cohort 2, a few major external factors or events affected project delivery and results.

- Our 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 unable to train any mentors. They also did not complete pre- and post-program assessments with their participants. 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.

- During Cohort 2, the COVID-19 pandemic led to the abrupt closure of in-person classroom training in all provinces except for Nova Scotia. This caused some delays as the project switched from classroom to virtual training. Some individuals with lower technical skills or inadequate access to the Internet dropped out. Also, some communities were without access to sufficient Internet speeds, making it challenging for some participants.
- When the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) was announced, some participants withdrew from the project to collect CERB payments.
- Due to the significant impact of the pandemic on the fisheries sector, 2 pilot site employers in New Brunswick and Nova Scotia had to alter their work schedules, lay off staff, or close their plants. Consequently, some participants were unable to begin or complete their on-the-job training and work placement.

Below are the overall results for each project component by province.

Actual Results	Participants enrolled in training	Completed classroom / virtual training	Completed OTJ training	Completed work placement	Employed by pilot site employer
NB	30	21	15	12	12
NL	24	20	17	15	15
NS	23	12	9	9	9
PEI	26	20	17	12	12
Total	103	73	58	48	48

Completion rates based on the number of participants who completed each project component:

- 71% of participants (73/103) completed the classroom/virtual training.
- 79% of participants (58/73) completed the OTJ training.
- 83% of participants (48/58) completed the work placement.
- 100% of participants (48/48) who completed the project (all 3 project components) were offered a job with the pilot site employer.

Completion rates based on the total number of participants enrolled in training:

- 71% of participants (73/103) completed the classroom/virtual training.
- 56% of participants (58/103) completed the OTJ training.
- 47% of participants (48/103) completed the work placement and were offered a job with the pilot site employer.

If we were to extract Nova Scotia's Cohort 2 results (14 participants, 5 complete classroom training, 2 OTJ training, and 2 work placement) because they did not follow the ESAF model, the completion rates based on the total number of participants enrolled in training would increase considerably to:

- 76% of participants (68/89) completed the classroom/virtual training.
- 82% of participants (56/68) completed the OTJ training.
- 82% of participants (46/56) completed the work placement and were offered employment with the pilot site employers.
- 100% of participants (46/46) who completed the project (all 3 project components) were offered a job with the pilot site employer

C. Participant Training Results by Province

1. NB Cohort 1 Results

A total of 12 participants were selected; however, two did not begin the classroom training because they failed to show up for their pre-assessment.

New Brunswick	Completed	Reasons for non completion
# of participants selected	12	
Classroom	10	2 did not show up for the pre-assessment
OTJ training	8	2 - transportation issues
Work placement	7	1 - terminated by the employer due to code of conduct violation
Employed/working with pilot site employers	6	

2. NB Cohort 2 Results

One week of classroom training was completed when COVID-19 public health restrictions caused the project to switch from classroom to virtual training delivery. As a result, only 4 of the 12 participants completed the classroom/virtual training.

New Brunswick	Completed	Reasons for non completion
# of participants selected	12	
Classroom/Virtual	4	7 - found a job (most of them as construction labourers) 1 - unable to adapt to the virtual environment
OTJ training	1	3 - unable to complete due to plant closures (COVID-19 pandemic)
Work placement	1	
Employed/working with pilot site employers	1	

3. NB Cohort 2 Results (French cohort)

The classroom training had not yet started when COVID-19 public health restrictions caused the project to switch from classroom to virtual training. Although 11 participants were selected, 3 dropped out when the training switched to virtual delivery. Of the 8 remaining participants, 7 completed the virtual training, 5 completed the on-the-job training, and 4 completed the work placement.

New Brunswick	Completed	Reasons for non completion
# of participants selected	8	
Virtual	7	1 - found a job
OTJ training	5	1 - injured (not work related) 1 - returned to his previous job
Work placement	4	1 – retired
Employed/working with pilot site employers	5	Once recovered, the injured participant was hired by the employer

4. NL Cohort 1 Results

Eleven participants were selected for the training, 9 completed the classroom training, 6 completed the on-the-job training, and 4 completed the work placement. The 4 participants were offered employment by the employer.

Newfoundland and Labrador	Completed	Reasons for non completion
# of participants selected	11	
Classroom	9	1 - transportation issues 1 - removed due to anger issues and poor attendance
OTJ training	6	2 - transportation issues 1 - fisheries was not the right fit
Work placement	4	1 - terminated by the employer due to behavioral issues 1 - medical reasons
Employed/working with pilot site employers	4	

5. NL Cohort 2 Results

One week of classroom training was completed when COVID-19 public health restrictions caused the project to switch from classroom to virtual training delivery. After the switch to virtual training, 11 of the 13 participants completed all three training components.

Newfoundland and Labrador	Completed	Reasons for non completion
# of participants selected	13	
Classroom/Virtual	11	2 - to collect CERB payments
OTJ training	11	2 - transportation issues
Work placement	11	
Employed/working with pilot site employers	11	

6. NS Cohort 1 Results

Nine participants were selected and 7 completed all three training components.

Nova Scotia	Completed	Reasons for non completion
# of participants selected	9	
Classroom	7	2 quit – unknown reasons
OTJ training	7	
Work placement	7	
Employed/working with pilot site employers	7	

7. NS Cohort 2 Results

The classroom training was completed when COVID-19 public health restrictions were implemented. Of the 14 participants selected for the training only 5 completed the classroom component, and 2 completed the on-the-job and work placement components.

Nova Scotia	Completed	Reasons for non completion
# of participants selected	14	
Classroom	5	5 - permitted to start their on-the-job and work placements before completing their classroom training 2 - found a job 1 - transportation issues 1 - medical reasons
OTJ training	2	3 - unable to complete due to plant closures (COVID-19 pandemic)
Work placement	2	
Employed/working with pilot site employers	2	

8. PEI Cohort 1 Results

Of the 13 participants selected, 11 completed the classroom training, 10 the on-the-job training, and 9 the work placement. The 9 participants were offered employment by the employer.

Prince Edward Island	Completed	Reasons for non completion
# of participants selected	13	
Classroom	11	1 - found a job 1 - removed due to poor attendance
OTJ training	10	1 - let go for not being fast enough processing mussels
Work placement	9	
Employed/working with pilot site employers		

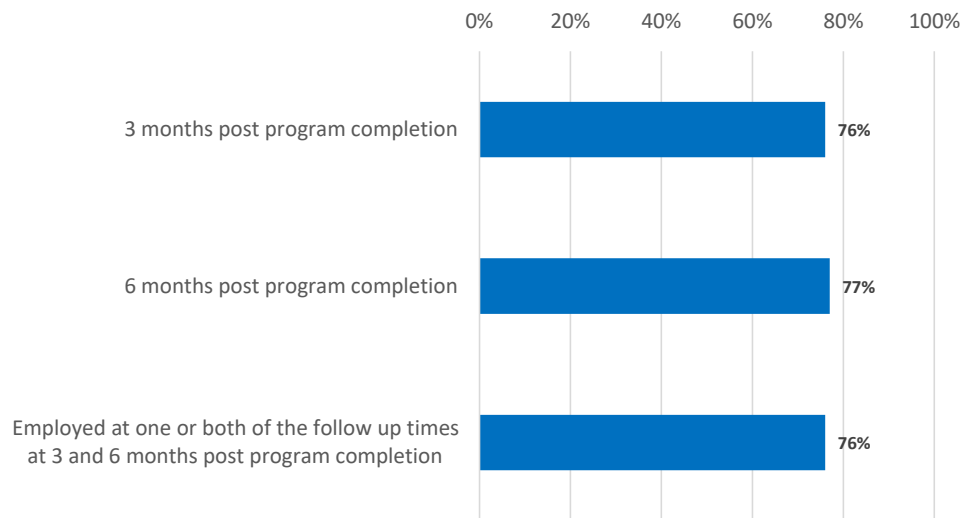
9. PEI Cohort 2 Results

The classroom training had not yet started when COVID-19 public health restrictions caused the project to switch from classroom to virtual training delivery. Of the 13 participants, 9 completed the virtual training, 7 completed the on-the-job training, and 3 completed the work placement.

Prince Edward Island	Completed	Reasons for non completion
# of participants selected	13	
Virtual	9	1 - personal problems 1 - found a job 2 didn't show up – no reason given
OTJ training	7	1 quit the first day of OTJ training – fisheries not a good fit 1 - injured before OTJ training started
Work placement	3	1 quit - got a job on a road crew 2 quit – fisheries not a good fit 1 - let go by the employer for missing multiple days
Employed/working with pilot site employers	3	

The following chart illustrates the percentage of participants who were employed with their project employer at the specified follow-up time (other employers had seasonal operations and were not operating at time of follow-up).

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



V. PROJECT OUTPUTS

The following are the key deliverables of the project:

A. Pan-Atlantic Partnerships

A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Literacy Coalition of New Brunswick (lead organization), Literacy Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Labrador Laubach Literacy Council, and PEI Literacy Alliance was signed by all parties. The MOU outlined the collaboration and established cooperative principles and responsibilities among the parties of the partnership for the successful planning, implementation, delivery, and evaluation of the ESAF project.

B. Steering Committee

As a first step, the project established a Steering Committee which included the Project Manager (chair) and the Executive Director of each partner organization (Literacy Coalition of New Brunswick, Literacy Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Labrador Laubach Literacy Council, and PEI Literacy Alliance) as well as their respective Project Coordinator. The Steering Committee provided a forum for sharing information and ideas between the partner organizations to inform the successful planning, development, delivery, and evaluation of the ESAF project.

The functions of the Steering Committee were to:

- provide guidance and advice to the project;
- receive and review project documents/reports and provide feedback to the Project Manager;
- ensure the project was delivered according to the objectives, activities, scope, time, quality, and cost in accordance with the ESDC Agreement;
- provide opinion and advice on specific areas of the project;
- act as a key forum to communicate appropriate project information back to key stakeholders within or relevant to their own organization;
- ensure that project activities occurred as planned for each phase of the project; and
- meet monthly or more often if needed.

C. Atlantic Advisory Group

The project also established an Atlantic Advisory Group (AAG). This pan-Atlantic multi-stakeholder group met occasionally to provide expertise, advice, information, and constructive feedback about the ESAF project from planning to completion. Each province selected two representatives to sit on the AAG. The group included representatives from the partner organizations, government agencies, Nova Scotia Fisheries Sector Council, workplace learning, and employers.

The responsibilities of the AGG included:

- providing advice to LCNB regarding the planning, implementation, delivery, and evaluation of the ESAF project as required;
- reviewing proposed project information or materials and providing feedback;
- identifying data and information gaps critical to the ESAF project and assist with addressing gaps as appropriate;
- identifying partnerships and other sources of funding when appropriate; and
- communicating within their organizations to share information about the project and to seek feedback when appropriate.

D. Community Advisory Groups

Community Advisory Groups (CAG) were established in each pilot site for both cohorts. The CAG was an advisory body that met and provided ongoing advice to the Project Team/Coordinator. The primary goal of the CAG was to bring together government agencies and community organizations that work with low-income target groups on a regular basis. Specifically, they helped to identify appropriate pilot participants, identify community resources that were available to support job seekers in overcoming barriers to employment (e.g., training allowance, transportation, childcare, and wage subsidies for work placements) and provide logistic support. Accessing these community resources increased the likelihood of jobseekers getting a job and strengthened their attachment to the workforce going forward.

The role of the CAG was to act as a working group where the Project Team/Coordinator could discuss ideas, identify community resources, and help with the recruitment of participants.

The responsibilities of the CAG included:

- providing an open and equitable forum for discussion;
- providing advice and assisting with the recruitment of pilot participants from low-income target groups (in particular, underrepresented populations such as non-high school completers, youth-at-risk, unemployed and underemployed workers, women, newcomers, and Indigenous Peoples);
- providing a direct channel of communication between government agencies, organizations, community groups, and the Project Team/Coordinator; and
- identifying and discussing potential issues, challenges and opportunities and assisting the Project Team/Coordinator in developing mechanisms to identify satisfactory outcomes for the pilot participants.

E. Essential Skills Profiles

The Project Coordinators identified the workplace essential skills tasks for the vacant positions the participants entered. The existing Essential Skills Profiles in the Employment and Skills Development (ESDC) database were examined, used, and validated by the employers. New profiles were not created because the profiles in the ESDC database accurately described the tasks and complexity levels of the vacant positions participants entered.

Many pilot site employers did not have a job description for the vacant positions identified. Using the essential skills profiles, the Project Coordinators helped the employers develop job descriptions for the vacant positions. Employers can now use existing profiles to create job descriptions for other positions within the business.

The participants in both cohorts entered a variety of entry level positions. Below is a list of the entry level positions with the National Occupation Classification (NOC) and job title:

Aquaculture and Marine Harvest (NOC 8613)

- Wet Production Room Hand - Aquatic Plants (seaweed)
- Cultivation Pond Cleaner Harvester - Aquatic Plants (seaweed)
- Mussel Farm Labourer - Mussel Socker
- Oyster Farm Labourer - Oyster Grader
- Oyster Farm Worker - Oyster Picker-Shucker

Labourers in Fish and Seafood Processing (NOC 9618)

- Fish Plant Labourers - Eel Processing
- Fish Plant Worker - Sardine Processing
- Fish Plant Worker - Salmon Processing
- Fish Plant Worker - Lobster Processing
- Fish Plant Worker - Crab Processing
- Shellfish Labourer - Oyster Processing

Fish and Seafood Plant Workers (NOC 9463)

- Fish Handler - Groundfish
- Seafood Packer - Groundfish and Lobster Processing
- Shipper/Receiver - Groundfish and Lobster Processing

F. Replicable LES Training Model

One of the project outputs is a replicable LES training model. We found it important to consider issues of replication when first developing, implementing, evaluating, and documenting the effectiveness of the training model. Focusing on the potential replication of the model from the outset made it easier to understand what worked best, under what conditions, and for what target population. It also makes it easier for other organizations to adopt the model later.

Given its success in Atlantic Canada, the ESAF project was extended by ESDC beyond October 2020 to adapt and test the transferability of the ESAF training model in the health care sector, specifically for entry level positions in the senior health care sector (nursing homes, special care homes, and assisted living facilities) in NB, NL, and PEI.

G. ESAF Curriculum

An initial task in implementing the ESAF project was to engage a curriculum writer to develop our curriculum materials. Our goal was to ensure the participants gained the essential skills and employability skills needed to be successful when placed in entry level positions in aquaculture, harvesting, or processing within the Atlantic provinces' fishing industry.

However, the timing of the projected versus actual start date of the project meant that timelines were very tight for moving the project along. It left very little opportunity to make revisions before we began training the first cohort. We recognized the shortcomings of the materials but were forced to use what we had. It is important to note that while the “taught curriculum” aligned with the written curriculum topics, it was not limited to it. Our seasoned facilitators drew upon their extensive teaching experience and responded to the specific learning needs of the participants and the specific requirements of the job.

The curriculum materials were revamped for the second cohort, addressing identified issues, including making the learning materials more suited to the lower literacy level of participants, adapting, and customizing the materials for entry level positions in the fisheries sector, and updating some of the computer modules. The redesign process included a review of existing participant learning materials and facilitator instructional materials, and interviews with each facilitator.

As part of the revision, the consultant developed customized pre- and post- program assessment tools tailored specifically for the fisheries sector. The design of these assessment tools was modeled from the Government of Canada's (2015) [*Essential Skills Indicator*](#) for Levels 1–3.

Questions on the ESAF assessments reflected knowledge and scenarios representing the various fisheries industries in Atlantic Canada that were partnered with the project.

1. Online Learning Platform

Based on the consultation with the ESAF Steering Committee, Cohort 1 facilitators, and Project Coordinators, it was clear that the project would benefit from having all learning content available via a more functional and easier-to-use online platform. Main reasons included the expectation to

embed essential skills learning outcomes into the participants' engagement with technology and use of Internet-based resources. As well, it was felt that providing an alternate means of accessing information would not only address effective practices for learning, but also reduce barriers to learning associated with childcare issues, transportation, and weather-related class cancellations.

Supported by the literature indicating a trend towards online learning and flexible access to resources and training, the entire mentor and classroom-based curriculum materials were modified for online, asynchronous delivery.

After exploring viable and sustainable software platform options, it was determined that the ZNanja platform by [Velsoft](#) (New Glasgow, NS) was an appropriate choice. Part of the work involved meeting with Velsoft's instructional designers and production team members to ensure their platform could handle recommended and required criteria in terms of ease of use, accessibility, interactivity, and French language. It also involved mapping out the curriculum materials into stand-alone modules and identifying interactive activities to supplement learning materials.

The features of the ESAF web-based learning platform are:

- Self-paced training modules: Participants log in on their own and move through the training at their own pace.
- Virtual Classroom: The virtual classroom has mic and webcam, whiteboard, screenshare, chat, etc.) to deliver a live classroom training session remotely. It's like a physical classroom except it's online.
- Audio function: Participants can choose to have the text read aloud. This is especially beneficial for participants with lower literacy levels and potential barriers related to disabilities.

The redesigned curriculum materials and online learning platform used for Cohort 2 was well received by both the facilitators and participants because of the improved content and relevance to the fisheries sector.

Having the classroom-based curriculum manuals modified for online, asynchronous delivery proved to be fortuitous when all in-person classroom activity was halted when the effects of the COVID-19 global pandemic began to impact the Maritime provinces. Once facilitators and participants were able to transition to the online space provided by the online learning platform, they continued their learning.

2. Training Modules

The 30-hour workplace essential skills mentor training focuses on developing the communication, team building, and mentoring skills of supervisors and/or managers, thus increasing their capacity to coach and retain staff.

The revised ESAF curriculum materials contain a series of training modules that integrates employability skills content within the essential skills training. Training modules are tailored specifically for entry level positions in the fisheries sector.

The facilitator, mentor, and participant training manuals are available in both official languages. The training modules are available online in both official languages.

The ESAF resources and tools created can be found on the ESAF website: www.essentialskillsatlantic.ca.

H. Essential Skills Gains – Cohort 1

As part of the ESAF curriculum and programming, Cohort 1 participants in NB, NL, and NS completed the TOWES pre- and post-program assessment. TOWES assessed the participant's reading, document use, and numeracy skills.

Although TOWES worked in terms of measuring skill gains, it was found to be too long a process and caused extreme anxiety and stress in some of the participants. As a result, some participants rushed through the assessment while others did not complete all sections just to finish quickly.

Because of issues encountered with TOWES, PEI was given approval by LCNB and ESDC to use a formative assessment created by Workplace Learning PEI. A Read Forward assessment was administered for the pre- and post-program assessment. Although an essential skills/employability self-assessment was also used as part of the assessment process, no pre- and post-data was provided by PEI.

A total of 40 pre-program assessments and 36 post-program assessments were administered.

- In NB, all 10 participants completed the pre- and post-program assessment.
- In NL, 11 participants completed the pre-program assessment and 9 remained in the program to complete the post-program assessment.
- In NS, 7 of 9 participants completed the pre- and post-program assessment. Two participants were unable to complete the pre-program assessment.
- In PEI, 12 participants completed the pre-program assessment and 10 remained in the program to complete the post-program assessment.

1. Assessment Results Using TOWES

Overall, the TOWES assessment tool captured much better results than was anticipated given the training was delivered over a relatively short 6-week (180 hours) training period. Of the 26 participants assessed using TOWES:

- 17 participants (65%) improved their reading skills
- 13 participants (50%) improved their document use skills
- 11 participants (42%) improved their numeracy skills
- 6 participants (23%) remained at the same reading level
- 1 participant's (4%) reading level decreased
- 11 participants (42%) remained at the same document use level
- 13 participants (50%) remained at the same numeracy level

PEI, using the Read Forward assessment tool, saw little or no gains in the reading level of their participants. In fact, only 1 participant saw a slight gain in their reading skills.

Below is an overview of the essential skills gains by province.

Province	Reading	Document Use	Numeracy
New Brunswick	70% of participants increased their reading skills	60% of participants increased their document use skills	50% of participants increased their numeracy skills
Newfoundland and Labrador	89% of participants increased their reading skills	56% of participants increased their document use skills	67% of participants increased their numeracy skills
Nova Scotia	40% of participants increased their reading skills	40% of participants increased their document use skills	No change
Prince Edward Island	PEI used a different assessment tool; based on data, only one participant's reading skills slightly increased, and the other 9 participants stayed at the same level.		

The NB and NL participants showed the greatest skill gains in reading, document use, and numeracy. NS showed some moderate gains in reading and document use but no gains in numeracy. From the data gathered from PEI, there were little to no skill gains among their participants.

J. Essential Skills Gains - Cohort 2

As part of the ESAF curriculum and programming, participants completed a self-assessed *Readiness to Learn* questionnaire before and after the program and pre- and post-program assessments of three essential skills (Numeracy, Document Use, and Reading). ESAF curriculum materials also included lessons related to the other six essential skills and embedded employability skills content. The following data was collected from 4 of 5 locations of Cohort 2 (New Brunswick [EN], Nouveau-Brunswick [FR], Newfoundland and Labrador, and Prince Edward Island). Pre- and post-program readiness and assessment data from the Nova Scotia Cohort 2 was not provided because they did not complete post-program assessments with their participants.

Readers are cautioned to not compare performance between provinces, as classroom sizes and response rates varied, as did the point in which each cohort shifted from classroom-based instruction to online delivery. Additionally, because of COVID-19 and the sudden shift to virtual learning and online assessment for some of the cohorts, final results may have been impacted by participants' comfort level of being assessed in an online environment.

1. Pre- and Post-Program Readiness to Learn Results

The pre- and post-program readiness assessments were designed for participants to self-assess how ready they were to participate in training and to learn. It was an opportunity for them to reflect on their attitude about learning and work before and after the ESAF program. The questions related to employability skills, which are the skills needed to get and keep a job and to continue to do well at a job. Participants ranked their responses on Likert scales of 1 (*not at all like me*) to 5 (*a lot like me*). The scores depicted in the table below represent a comparison of the change between 33 pre-program response totals with 23 post-program response totals.

Pre- and post-program readiness to learn data from the Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and Labrador cohorts is unavailable because they did not complete the post-program assessment with their participants.

Overall, in each of the three cohorts reporting results, cohort participants reported feeling more ready and more positive about their learning. Of note in the individual assessments is that participants gained confidence in their abilities and indicated an increased readiness to seek

learning and employment supports. In light of Cohort 2 having their program disrupted because of the COVID-19 pandemic, such positive gains are noteworthy.

	Gain/ Loss
New Brunswick (EN) (n=4, 3 of 4 did not complete a post-program assessment)	39
Nouveau-Brunswick (FR) (n=7, 1 of 7 did not complete a post-program assessment)	16
Newfoundland and Labrador (n=13, 13 of 13 did not complete a post-program assessment)	--
Prince Edward Island (n=9, 3 of 9 did not complete a post-program assessment)	8
Nova Scotia (n=14, no participants completed a pre- or post-program assessment)	--
Overall gains/ (loss) :	

2. Pre- and Post-Program Essential Skills Results

Each of the essential skills test categories contained questions written to reflect the Level 1 to Level 3 skills categories outlined by The Government of Canada's *Essential Skills Indicators*. Questions progressed in difficulty from Level 1 to Level 3. Individual participant scores were not assessed in terms of gains in levels, but rather in overall ability within each of the testing domains.

The following table breaks down by location the overall gains/(losses) in each cohort's total scores of essential skills measured. Note that the following pre- and post-program score totals have been adjusted to account for participants who did not complete the post-test (i.e., if no post-test was written, the individual's pre-test was removed from the data set). A cursory analysis of individual assessment scores reveals most participants either stayed at the same level or increased at least one level; however, the sudden shift to an online post-program assessment and missing data makes any kind of definitive conclusions about overall skills gain difficult to make.

Overall, despite the unfamiliarity of completing a skills assessment online, 24 participants who completed the post-program assessment achieved an overall increase in the essential skills measured, with the strongest gains appearing in reading.

Total Net Scores	Math			Document Use			Reading		
	Pre	Post	Gain/ (Loss)	Pre	Post	Gain/ (Loss)	Pre	Post	Gain/ (Loss)
New Brunswick (EN) (n=4)	35	43	8	28	42	14	19	29	10
Nouveau-Brunswick (FR) (n=7)	81	90	9	68	74	6	47	68	21
Newfoundland and Labrador (n=13)	96	109	13	95	95	0	75	88	13
Prince Edward Island (n=9)	99	97	(-2)	83	86	3	69	79	10
Nova Scotia (n=0)	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Overall gains/(Loss):			28			23			54

The following table indicates each cohort's average scores on each component of the essential skills assessment measures (class average). If no post-test was written, the individual's pre-program test was removed from the data set. The reported loss in Prince Edward Island's math results is attributed to one participant not answering Levels 1 and 2 Questions 1–10; they answered 4 of 6 Level 3 questions correctly.

Cohort Average Scores per Location	Math (17 questions)			Document Use (13 questions)			Reading (10 questions)		
	Pre %	Post %	Gain/ (Loss)	Pre %	Post %	Gain/ (Loss)	Pre %	Post %	Gain/ (Loss)
New Brunswick (EN) (n=4)	8.75 51.5%	10.75 63.2%	2.0	7.0 53.8%	10.5 80.8%	3.5	4.75 47.5%	7.25 72.5%	2.5
Nouveau-Brunswick (FR) (n=7)	11.6 68.2%	12.9 72.9%	1.3	9.7 74.6%	10.6 81.5%	0.9	6.7 67.0%	9.7 97.0%	3.0
Newfoundland and Labrador (n=13)	9.6 56.5%	10.9 61.1%	1.3	9.5 73.1%	9.5 73.1%	0	7.5 75.0%	8.8 88.0%	1.3
Prince Edward Island (n=9)	12.4 72.0%	12.1 71.2%	(-0.3)	10.4 61.2%	10.8 83.1%	0.4	8.6 86.0%	9.9 99.0%	1.3
Nova Scotia (n=0)	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Overall gains/(Loss):			4.3			4.8			8.1

3. Other Gains - Cohort 1 and 2

a) Mentors

Mentors in both cohorts gained skills that they applied working with the ESAF participants and with other employees in their company such as listening, confidence building, problem solving issues or situations that arose in the workplace, people management skills, and better communication skills.

Employers 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 the training 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.

b) Participants

Aside from the positive gains in reading, document use, and numeracy, there were also many gains in the other essential skills.

Although there was no formal assessment administered, it was obvious through observation and discussion that other essential skills improved over the 6-week training period. These skills include:

- computer use (results of the Chromebook training) – a greater skill gain was noticed in Cohort 2 because of the shift to virtual training due to the pandemic and more targeting learning activities
- working with others (working in teams to solve problems)
- oral communication (feeling confident enough to speak in front of the group and on topics surrounding employment)
- listening skills
- improved attitudes towards training and work
- increased self-esteem and confidence
- improved stress and anger management

- participants were better prepared for main job duties, the workplace, and employer expectations
- the training provided participants with the skills to advance in the workplace

Throughout the classroom training, it was observed that most of the participants in all the provinces lacked employability skills. By embedding the employability skills in the essential skills training, the participants' employability skills improved, which was one of the reasons all the participants who completed the program were offered employment by the pilot site employers.



VI. SUCCESSES, CHALLENGES AND TAKEAWAYS

A. What Worked Well?

Many aspects of the ESAF project worked well.

- **Regular Communication:** Initially, some partner organizations were apprehensive about the scope of the pilot project. Information sessions and monthly meetings of the Steering Committee helped lessen any uncertainties or apprehensions about the project. It also contributed to relationship building and sharing information among the partner organizations.
- **Staff:** Our experienced, dedicated, and adaptable staff developed effective relationships with the employers, mentors, participants, and stakeholders.
- **Job Combination:** NL hired a project coordinator who was an experienced facilitator. This worked very well because the participants felt more comfortable dealing with the same person during all three training components. This enhanced the relationship with the participants and provided a better understanding of their individual needs and circumstances.
- **Community Advisory Groups (CAG):** The establishment of a Community Advisory Group in each pilot region was well received by the community stakeholders. Members of the CAG were engaged and helpful in referring potential participants, identifying community resources, and contributed positively to the success of the project.
- **Sector-Specific Training:** Employers found the program's blend of essential skills and sector-specific training to be well-aligned with their business needs.
- **Cohort 2 Curriculum:** Facilitators reported that the curriculum materials were relevant, useful, and aligned with the needs and interests of employers in the fisheries sector. They were more appropriately suited to the participants, especially those with low literacy skills.
- **Plant Tours:** The plant tours gave the participants a realistic preview of what they would be doing in their job and allowed them to become familiar with their workplace surroundings.

Mentor Training

The project supported mentors to gain skills that they subsequently applied in their work with ESAF participants and with other workers in their company such as listening, confidence-building, and problem-solving issues or situations that arose in the workplace. In some cases, it supported transformative change for employers, resulting in an improved approach to engaging and supporting employees moving forward. The following are key successes:

- **Matching the mentors with the mentees:** Mentors and mentees (participants) were matched up before the start of the on-the-job training. This allowed both parties to spend time together, discuss expectations, and help facilitate the transition from classroom training to the workplace.
- **Flexibility and Adaptability:** Our ability to be flexible and to adapt the delivery and enhancement of training content supported effective project implementation (i.e., meeting participant learning needs, adapting to available community resources, moving to virtual training in Cohort 2 as a result of COVID-19, etc.).
- **Training On-site (Employer's Boardroom):** The ability to use the employer's boardroom as a classroom, when possible, gave the participants a greater understanding of the company's day-to-day operations. It also allowed the participants to get to know other employees and supervisors before the actual work placements started.
- **Blended Learning Approach:** The use of a blended learning model worked especially well for individuals with low literacy skills. We also found that embedding employability skills within the essential skills helped better prepare the participants for the workplace.
- **Guest Speakers:** Having guest speakers on topics such as budgeting, nutrition, resume building, job searching, etc. added value to the participant's training and learning experience.
- **Additional Training:** Providing additional training in areas of workplace health and safety, WHMIS, first aid, mental health fitness, and stress management helped better prepare the participants for the workplace.
- **Chromebooks:** Providing Chromebooks to participants with low incomes and/or low literacy skills not only gave them 24/7 access to the training modules and digital information, but it also increased their digital skills and served as an incentive to complete the training program.
- **Learning Management System:** During the COVID-19 pandemic, our online learning platform allowed us to move quickly and effectively from classroom to virtual training delivery. The addition of the mentor manuals as well as the pre- and post-program assessments to the platform added a new dimension to the project and our learning platform.

- **Portfolio:** The use of Learning Portfolios in PEI enabled participants to demonstrate their essential skills and show evidence of employability skills. It also ensured that participants had a tangible document (a portfolio) that could be used to represent their skills and learning to other employers should they not find work in the fishery.

B. What Challenges Were Encountered?

- The seasonal nature of the fisheries sector, which was a bit different in each province, created logistical challenges and made scheduling somewhat tricky as project coordinators had to find training dates that worked best for different fisheries sector employers.
- The late delivery of Cohort 1 curriculum materials meant there was little time to provide feedback to the writers and revise the curriculum materials before start up of training. The material had a “one size fits all” approach and was not customized for the fisheries industry or for the participants. Although the curriculum materials were inadequate, our seasoned facilitators were able to draw upon their extensive teaching experience and responded to the specific learning needs of the participants and the requirements of the job. The curriculum materials were revised for Cohort 2, successfully addressing the above issues.
- Some supervisors/managers found it difficult to juggle competing work demands with their completion of the mentor training.
- COVID-19 pandemic health protocols and restrictions necessitated a switch to virtual training for Cohort 2 participants. The switch delayed project implementation slightly, but the project moved rapidly to virtual delivery.
- A few participants (English cohorts) demonstrated learning barriers because of the length of time they were out of school (literacy slippage) and/or behaviour and mental health issues such as anger management issues, abusive or harassing behaviour towards project staff, etc. A policy was developed to help the coordinators/facilitators deal with inappropriate behaviour and to improve screening processes.
- Some participants encountered a variety of practical challenges such as lack of transportation, childcare, and/or Internet availability (with virtual training in Cohort 2). Many fishery organizations are in rural areas, which poses a problem for participants as there is little to no public transportation such as public bus system or taxi services in these areas.

- Retaining participants became a challenge due to the availability of other job opportunities within the community, financial assistance such as COVID-19 benefits (Cohort 2), or their inability to complete the training virtually (Cohort 2).
- Plant closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic prevented some participants from completing the on-the-job training and work placement.
- In Cohort 1, the facilitators were not involved in supporting the participants while in the workplace and this was identified as a gap. In Cohort 2, the facilitators were retained a few weeks longer to do periodic check-ins with the participants, which resulted in fewer issues escalating.

C. What Lessons Did We Learn?

This project generated a number of valuable learnings on factors that could support the successful implementation of essential skills training and enable the scaling of the ESAF project.

- Multi-partner collaborations can face inherent challenges and complexities. Communication, collaboration, trust, and transparency between partner organizations are critical to accomplish project objectives and are key success factors in achieving the planned project outputs and outcomes.
- The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the partner organizations involved should not only describe the project, define the scope, and outline each party's roles and responsibilities, it should also be detailed sufficiently to ensure the parties involved are clear about expectations and can be held accountable for their actions or inactions.
- Accountability starts with a common vision, a clear understanding of project goals, objectives, and expectations. "Unless accountability is embraced unequivocally by all, each unaccountable action that is not reported or is ignored will result in a cumulative consequence that can cause irreparable damage to the project. Peer to peer accountability is the only way that problems will be identified in time for corrective actions to be implemented."¹
- While communication and clarity of roles and expectations are at the heart of accountability, a participatory approach is also key. Team members own what they participate in creating, and when they own something, they are more apt to feel accountable for it.

¹ Baxter, D. Strategies to Build Successful PPP Project Management teams – Overcoming Team Dysfunctionality – February 10, 2020

- Managing a multi-partner project requires substantial time, skill, strategic planning, and team effort. The very nature and scope of a pan-Atlantic project already poses a challenge. Factors such as roles and responsibilities, efficient staff management, managing changes in project requirements, mitigating risks, and ensuring commitment to the training model must be carefully considered. Roles and guidelines must be clearly outlined, and ongoing communication is critical. Building a culture of active collaboration is also crucial to achieving the best results.
- Hiring service providers sooner rather than later in the process helps the whole program move forward in a timely way. In hindsight, the communication consultant should have been hired at least two months earlier to ensure the timely development and distribution of marketing and communication materials to potential Cohort 1 employers and participants.
- Using a variety of strategies to promote and recruit employers and participants is key to attracting suitable candidates. A “one-size-fits-all” approach does not work—especially across different provinces, different levels of community and government partners, and different industries within the fisheries sector.
- Sector-based essential skills projects must consider the impact that policy, seasonal, and regional factors could have on the overall success of the project, and particularly on the ability to recruit employers and participants.
- The quality of the employers and participants selected directly impacts the project’s outputs and outcomes. Establishing clear selection criteria to identify potential employers and participants for the project is important. This makes the selection of pilot site employers and referral of participants much easier to navigate. It also ensures selected employers and participants are the best fit for the project.
- Conducting interviews with potential participants prior to selection ensures only those who are job ready, committed, and engaged are selected for the project.
- Relying on a single employer for OJT and work placement is risky. Cohort 1 training in Prince Edward Island was delayed because of the focus on only one employer. When the employer withdrew from the project, PEILA had to regroup and restart the recruitment process.
- Informing participants during the recruitment and selection process about the realities of work in the industry (especially variable and seasonal employment), the impact of personal issues on job fit, employment requirements such as criminal records checks and drug policies, and employer expectations helps them make an informed decision on whether enrolling in the program is a good fit.
- Some participants will drop out either before or shortly after the training begins. To plan for such outcomes, it is advisable to recruit and screen more participants than is needed. Establishing a waitlist will make it easier to replace participants who drop out during the

first week of training and will improve outcomes. It also increased the pool of available workers for employers.

- Flexibility and adaptability were essential elements to the success of the ESAF training model. Below are a few examples of how we were able to adapt to a number of unexpected scenarios:
 - In Newfoundland and Labrador, the classroom training for Cohort 1 had to be extended due to the weather conditions and the large quantity of ice in the Bay of Islands. Because the crab fishery was unable to begin processing, the on-the-job training was delayed until production could begin. This meant the participants would have to wait a couple of weeks to start their on-the-job training. Concerned that a two-week break in the program would lead to participants dropping out, approval was obtained from our funders to extend the classroom training to 8 weeks. This allowed the participants to receive additional essential skills training while awaiting their on-the-job training.
 - Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent emergency health and safety protocols, the classroom training was put on hold for a period of three weeks. Nova Scotia had completed their classroom training just as the provincial shut down was implemented. NB and NL had completed only one week of classroom training. PEI and the French NB cohort had not yet started their classroom training. After consulting with our partners, it was decided that the training would be continued in NB, NL, and PEI using the virtual classroom feature of our learning platform. Although we knew some participants may not continue the training virtually or would drop out because of their limited digital skills, we saw this as an opportunity to further test the training model in a way we had not anticipated. Although a few participants did drop out, we were pleasantly surprised by how well the remaining participants adapted to the virtual setting and how fast their digital skills improved compared to the Cohort 1 participants.

D. ESAF – Participant Success Stories

Every ESAF participant has a unique success story. Some were homeless and are now employed; those who completed the training were offered employment and have continued working in the fisheries sector; some advanced to new roles and responsibilities with their pilot site employers; others found employment in other sectors; and some continued their learning path.

Because there are too many to mention, we will showcase only one inspiring success story.

1. Patrick Curtis, PEI Participant

In spring of 2020, Patrick Curtis had a newborn son, which inspired him to want to improve his literacy and essential skills. He applied for the Essential Skills for Atlantic Fisheries (ESAF) training program to gain new literacy and employability skills and because he was very interested in doing a work placement in a marine-based industry.

Patrick successfully completed and graduated from the ESAF training program and started his work placement at Atlantic Aqua Farms. After completing the work placement, Patrick decided to continue his education by upgrading his Math, Biology and English skills at Holland College.

Patrick is happy to report that his hard work and dedication to learning has paid off as he has been accepted to his dream college program, Wildlife Conservation Technology, which he will be starting in fall 2021 at Holland College.

Recently, Patrick received a \$1,500 entrance scholarship to his program at Holland College and was awarded the PGI Learner Award by the Prince Edward Island Literacy Alliance.

We are so happy for Patrick, and proud of his dedication to continuing his education and following his dreams! We wish him much success with his chosen career path in Wildlife Conservation.



Essential Skills For Atlantic Fisheries

"I really feel like I can muscle my way through anything now. I think after this course the world is my oyster. I have skills I will take with me throughout my career in conservation and in life." - Patrick Curtis, Program Participant 2020



VII. CONCLUSION

The Essential Skills for Atlantic Fisheries (ESAF) was an innovative training program aimed to develop and test an innovative and highly contextualized blended learning approach to essential skills training using a community partnership approach. Focused on rural coastal regions and customized to meet the needs of the fisheries sector, the ESAF has provided training opportunities to over 100 lower income and skilled unemployed individuals as well as increased the pool of skilled workers for employers in the fisheries sector.

This is the first workplace essential skills project that we are aware of to use this approach to design and deliver specific training for the fisheries sector and include wrap-around mentor training and OJT and work placement supports. Our results demonstrate that this project was highly successful on all counts:

1. **Industry Partnerships:** ESAF took a sectoral partnership approach by involving industry associations and employers from the fisheries sector in all aspects of the project.
2. **Sectoral Curriculum:** The project resulted in the design of high-quality curriculum materials customized specifically for entry level jobs in the fisheries sector.
3. **Integrated Employability Skills:** Employability skills were integrated seamlessly in the essential skills training to help maximize job-relevance and to foster other skills employers value such as teamwork, motivation, and engagement in work.
4. **Pan-Atlantic Partnership:** LCNB partnered with literacy organizations in Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island to roll out the project across all four Atlantic provinces.
5. **A Replicable Essential Skills Training Model:** Given its success in Atlantic Canada, the ESAF project has since been extended to adapt and test its transferability in the health care sector. More specifically, it is being tested for entry level positions in the senior health care sector (nursing homes, special care home and assisted living facilities) in NB, NL, and PEI.

The findings presented in this report showcase the potential for this type of essential skills training, particularly as a linkage between those sectors with a need to fill low-skilled jobs and job seekers. The success of the ESAF training model also highlights how industry-responsive, contextualized essential skills training can contribute to meeting labour market needs.

One day, an old man was walking along a beach that was littered with thousands of starfish that had been washed ashore by the high tide. As he walked, he came upon a young boy who was eagerly throwing the starfish back into the ocean, one by one.

Puzzled, the man looked at the boy and asked what he was doing. Without looking up from his task, the boy simply replied, “I’m saving these starfish, Sir”.

The old man chuckled aloud, “Son, there are thousands of starfish and only one of you. What difference can you make?”

The boy picked up a starfish, gently tossed it into the water and turning to the man, said, “I made a difference to that one!”