

Towards Sustainability

**A Consideration of Strategic Choices
for Skills Canada BC**

August 29, 2016

**Prepared for the Skills Canada BC Advisory
Committee**



SIENA CONSULTING

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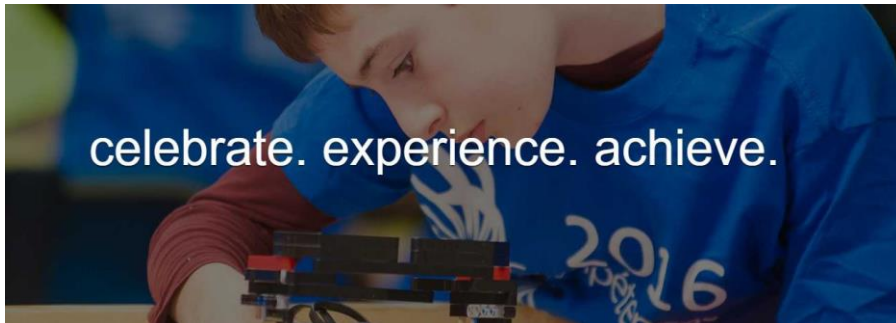
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1.0 FOREWORD

Over the course of its 22 years, with support from educators, industry and government, Skills Canada BC (Skills BC) has created high-profile, high-quality events that have had a profound and lasting impact on youth in BC. Its programs promoting careers in the skilled trades and technology industries have reached hundreds of thousands of students and their parents, engaged thousands of educator-volunteers, and ignited the participation of dozens of communities throughout the province.

The organization's core programs – the highly visible and well-regarded skills competitions – are rock solid but Skills BC is at risk. Its circumstances are similar to that of other organizations that have existed for over 20 years. Are we still relevant or are we seen as a little tired and out of step? Is the scope of our programming keeping up with rapidly evolving definitions and career options in the skilled trades and technology sectors? Are there opportunities for us to do things differently or to do different things? Are we at risk of falling behind because new players on the horizon may step into our space with bold, new ideas that create some type of disruptive innovation that make our programs less relevant?

This report has been informed by secondary research and through interviews with Skills BC staff, Board members, and stakeholders. Its purpose is to enable Skills BC to begin to address these types of questions by providing a thoughtful review of the organization, its stakeholders, and the environment in which it operates, and to make recommendations that will help position it for long-term success. At its heart lies the following question: what steps might Skills BC consider to enhance its relevance, maximize its value, and ensure its sustainability?



2.0 BACKGROUND

Founded in 1994, Skills BC is a ~~not-for-profit organization~~[charitable foundation](#) dedicated to promoting the skilled trades and technologies as first-choice career opportunities for young people across the province. It regards itself as an early influencer, offering youth in grades K-12 and in the post-secondary system safe and engaging environments in which to explore trades and technology careers. Its programming also creates opportunities for its partners – industry, educators, government, and labour – to network while promoting rewarding and in-demand skilled trade and technology careers to BC's youth.

The core undertaking of Skills BC involves the annual hosting of ~~133~~ regional [and 1 provincial](#) skills competitions, featuring some ~~4,400-2200~~ competitors going head-to-head in 50+ Olympics-style trades and technology events. Winners at the regional level then compete in a provincial showdown held every year in Abbotsford. The provincial competition also features the [Skills Trades & Technology Conference for Women's Trade & Technology Conference](#) and the Pathways to Careers Showcase. Skills BC delivers some ~~50050~~ InSPIRE presentations annually at schools around the province, stages Cardboard Boat races involving teams of Grade ~~7-8~~ students in select communities across BC, and partners with Trades Training BC (a consortium of trades/technology training post-secondary institutions) in the online resource called Discover Skills BC, used by youth, parents, and educators searching for information about in-demand careers in skilled trades and technologies in BC.

Over 30,000 students participate in Skills BC programs and activities every year. Their involvement is made possible by the organization's affiliation with more than 150 public and private K-12 schools around the province, and a network of 600+ volunteers whose contributions of time and expertise are essential to the success of the regional and provincial skills competitions.

Skills BC operates on a budget of approximately ~~\$2.4\$4~~ million per annum. Of that total, just over \$250,000 consists of federal funding received through an agreement negotiated by Skills Canada. Another \$300,000 comes by way of industry (i.e., business and labour) sponsorships tied largely to the skills competitions. The remainder of the organization's operating budget comes from provincial sources, including ~~\$3\$200,000~~ from the Industry Training Authority [and JTST](#). Provincial ministries contributing to the funding of Skills BC include Education, Advanced Education, and Jobs, Tourism and Skills Training. [Of the total budget,](#) ~~the~~ organization ~~also~~ receives in-kind funding valued at between \$1.5 and \$2 million annually (~~including a substantial contribution from Telus~~, donations of materials and supplies for the competitions from various sources, the work of educators/ volunteers, etc.).

Skills BC operates with a staffing complement of 23.0 FTEs, supplemented by a number of full time an part- time contractors who assist with the delivery of the organization's mandate. Governance is provided by a 15-member Board of Directors whose members are drawn largely from the education sector with some industry representation.

3.0 CURRENT STATUS

Skills BC finds itself in a situation not unknown to other mature not-for-profit organizations. Well established in an annual cycle of familiar activities, it has settled into a routinized operational model that varies little from one year to the next. It continues to do important work, but is hard-pressed to demonstrate its core value proposition to partners and funders, who are looking for tangible examples of outcomes and impact. As a result the organization lacks the medium- to long-term financing necessary to secure a sustainable future.

Recognizing this challenge, the provincial Ministry of Jobs, Tourism and Skills Training supported the Board to convene an Advisory Committee of respected, knowledgeable individuals representing key industry sectors in late 2015 to assist Skills BC in developing a long-term organizational structure and focus that is sustainable and maximizes the opportunity for the organization to grow and play an integral role in promoting skilled trades and technology careers in BC. The Advisory Committee engaged the services of Siena Consulting in early 2016 to assist with this process.

4.0 ASSESSMENT

Using a series of interviews with key informants (see Appendix A) combined with a review of background documentation, Siena analyzed Skills BC in the context of an eight-point sustainability framework that considers the key structures and processes that keep an organization going over time. These include:

- Purpose, Vision, and Planning
- Organizational Capacity
- Political Support
- Partnerships
- Program Development
- Measurement and Evaluation
- Communications
- Financial Situation

A summary of the assessment findings is provided below.



4.1 Purpose, Vision, and Planning

Purpose, vision, and planning are cornerstones of every not-for-profit organization. Together they inform the mission of an undertaking – the higher-order calling that brings the organization together, drives its day-to-day activities, and inspires clients, partners, stakeholders, and the public to support it.

Purpose (i.e., why an organization does what it does, rather than what it does) and vision (i.e., a clear and compelling “imagining” of where an organization sees itself in the future) do not figure prominently in the Skills BC agenda. Workload and a certain

comfort level with “business as usual” have so far precluded a revisiting of these fundamentals. Evidence of a comprehensive approach to planning, meanwhile, is scant. Organizational direction appears to be influenced more by available funding than by strategic intent. Priorities are difficult to discern. Operational plans relating to the regional and provincial skills competitions are sound, and execution of the events proceeds seamlessly. The last dedicated strategic planning effort was in 2013. The results of that exercise were incomplete, and have little impact on the day-to-day operations of the organization.



4.2 Organizational Capacity

Organizational capacity refers to the resources Skills BC has to effectively manage its operational and programming activities, including its physical and technological infrastructure, its organizational systems, its human resources, and its leadership. Key considerations are the staffing, the Board, and the volunteers.

Skills BC operates with a lean staffing model comprising 32.0 FTE positions, supplemented by a number of full time and part-time contractors. The staff team is led by an Executive Director who has been in the role

for four years. Originally hired as the Director of Development in 2011, she assumed the additional Executive Director responsibilities when her predecessor left the organization in 2012.

The Executive Director and Director of Development roles each require a different operational perspective. An organization that seeks to build a sustainable future requires a dedicated, full-time commitment to both positions. In the current situation the Executive Director is unable to dedicate sufficient time to fully succeed at either role.

As mentioned previously, governance for Skills BC is provided by a 15-member Board of Directors dominated by current and former educators. Board members service two-year terms, with half of the members coming up for re-election at the organization's Annual General Meeting. Membership is gradually diversifying, a process assisted by the creation of a skills/sector-based matrix for Board recruitment. Continued diversification will be essential to refreshing the organization, instilling a sense of vision and purpose, introducing new ideas, and creating strong (and potentially lucrative) relationships with industry and other key stakeholders (e.g., BC Schools Trustees Association, BC Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils, BC Principals and Vice Principals Association, etc.). The Board is also evolving from being

a hands-on, operating board to a policy/governance board – a model of higher-level oversight that is central to long-term sustainability.

The most robust aspect of Skills BC's organizational capacity consists of the 600+ volunteers who are the backbone of the 14 skills competitions. Without them Skills BC would be hard-pressed to maintain anywhere near the level of activity and quality it does with its current staffing complement. This is especially true of the regional competitions. The sole concern with the volunteer component goes to the organization's ability to sustain it over time. What happens when current volunteers step down? Are there plans in place to recruit replacements? What steps is Skills BC taking to nurture and renew this invaluable resource?



4.3 Political Support

Political support speaks to the presence of champions – key stakeholders who endorse the mandate and activities of an organization, and who can advocate and garner resources on its behalf. Skills BC has a handful of champions – mostly in the regions and especially in the education system – but their influence is limited in terms of ability to build political capital for the organization. Government relations is not an organizational strong suit. Nowhere is this more evident than in the organization's

relationship with the provincial government. In some government quarters there is lack of clarity about what the organization does and how it aligns with other initiatives working in this domain, leading to speculation that it may be redundant. In other areas there is frustration with Skills BC for its unrealized potential. While acknowledging that Skills BC is fulfilling its mandate, it is perceived as lacking a compelling organizational vision and as being without a plan for making a bigger impact in

Commented [Office1]: Less so in Regions – more so on a Provincial level

the future. At a time when skills training has been a top government priority, Skills BC is not regarded as a significant player. More than anything else this represents a lost opportunity to provide more in the way of solutions to secure additional support.

Relations with the federal government are filtered through Skills Competences Canada, the national umbrella under which Skills BC

operates. This too represents a lost opportunity for Skills BC, at a time of a new federal focus on apprenticeship and youth. Lack of capacity and knowledge in this domain also means political support is underdeveloped at the local level, with both regional and municipal governments as well as with school trustees (a potential source of political capital who shouldn't be ignored).

Commented [Office2]: Does not consider the Federated model of Skills Canada Competence and how this model limits individual province's relationship with the Federal Government.



4.4 Partnerships

Closely related to the issue of political support is that of partnerships – the connections that exist between Skills BC and the stakeholder groups with a vested interest in the success of the organization. Genuine partnerships are predicated on a commitment to doing something together benefiting all those involved, achieving results that are beyond a single partner acting alone. Skills BC has few partners as defined above – passionately committed to the advancement of the organization, its mandate and its goals, and meaningfully engaged in the development of its programming and organizational capacity. The ones it has are found largely in the education system.

Partnerships with government, industry, and labour, on the other hand, have proven more of a challenge. While pockets of endorsement exist within these sectors,

broad levels of awareness and support are not in evidence. In the absence of such it's not entirely surprising that the Skills BC value proposition – its benefits and relevance – isn't widely understood. Whether it can demonstrate sufficient value in its current incarnation as a series of skills competitions to attract and sustain interest and support from prospective partners remains to be seen. Until then it may be limited to interacting with its stakeholders more as funders rather than partners.

Partners are also understood to possess valuable and valued insight into matters of joint interest and are sought out accordingly. Viewed through this lens, Skills BC does not appear to be widely acknowledged by industry, labour and government as a known partner in the discussion about careers for youth in the skilled trades and technology sectors.



4.5 Program Development

How does Skills BC adapt and enhance its program activities to ensure ongoing organizational effectiveness and relevance? This question is an ongoing challenge for Skills BC. It is especially pertinent in the rapidly evolving field of technology, where the careers that Skills BC addresses are those that link to current competition areas rather than the broader portfolio of job opportunities represented by the province's robust technology industry. A rethinking of the definition and place of technology in the Skills BC mandate would open the door to new programming (and new program partnerships) in the technology sector.

From a broader perspective, limited resources and the lack of program evaluation results constrain the development and implementation of quality improvement processes. There's no evidence of a standardized program review cycle. The addition of new programs tends to be influenced more by copying what's been tried in other extra-provincial jurisdictions than by local considerations, or by vision and strategy. Opportunities for partner involvement in program development are also limited.

Program development at Skills BC is characterized by the ongoing tension between the general and the specific, between the organization's belief that its mandate involves exposing youth to trades and technologies careers in general (i.e., career development), versus the push from the province and some industry sectors to meet the needs of specific groups (i.e., labour market development). At present this is regarded as an either/or rather than a both/and proposition, limiting program development options as well as opportunities to pursue additional partnerships.

Skills BC has demonstrated a readiness to consider some programmatic enhancements/adjustments at the behest of its provincial funders, but only insofar as capacity allows and new sources of funding are made available. The organization would be well-served by exploring opportunities to work collaboratively with other organizations promoting careers in the skilled trades and technologies to BC youth (e.g., the Industry Training Authority) to streamline and leverage resources and to co-develop and co-design new programs.

Commented [Office3]: 1. SkillsBC has focused heavily on the technology side of its mandate for the past 5 years. Examples:

2. All junior level contests in Regionals and Provincials are STEM based (gearbots; sumo robotics; wind turbine; gravity car; potential energy vehicle; spaghetti bridge building)
3. Secondary/Post secondary contest areas: Robotics; Computer coding; Apps Development; Electronics; CNC Machining; Auto CAD; Website Design; IT systems; 3D Animation; 2D Animation; Graphic Art)
4. MOA/Partner with ASTTBC (Applied Science Technologists, Technicians of BC)
5. Partner with Babcock Canada – STEM Spotlight Awards
6. InSPIRE Presentations – offer students insight into opportunities in technology careers including a hands-on coding challenge which was introduced in 2014/15
7. DiscoverSkillsBC – changed the name of the website from DiscoverTradesBC in 2014 in order to include a focus on technology careers.



4.6 Measurement and Evaluation

More than the tracking and reporting of metrics and data, measurement and evaluation refer to Skills BC's ability to demonstrate to its stakeholders and the public that its programs are successful. While good at reporting outputs (e.g., number of students participating annually in Skills BC programs, number of competitors, number of InSPIRE presentations delivered etc.), the organization continues to struggle with outcomes and impact. Mechanisms to capture the value for students of participating in Skills BC competitions have proven elusive. The organization recently commissioned a body of

work by Banister Research to assess the efficacy of some of its programming but the findings are inconclusive. Economic impact assessments – be they of the regional and provincial skills competitions on their hosting communities, or demonstrating the value of hosting the national skills competitions in BC – have not been undertaken.

This inability to demonstrate value – perhaps more than any other shortcoming – hobbles Skills BC in building out and strengthening its relationships with funders, stakeholders, and the public.

Commented [Office4]: The findings in the Banister Report conclusively indicate that SkillsBC delivers on its mandate.



4.7 Communications

This category goes to levels of awareness of Skills BC's programs and benefits among policy makers, stakeholders, and the public. While a full communications audit was beyond the scope of this assessment, several observations emerge from the various conversations that inform these findings. The first is that awareness of Skills BC tends to be siloed and varies greatly between stakeholder groups and regions of the province. Highest levels of awareness are found among educators in the regions.

A number of industry sources interviewed professed no knowledge of Skills BC or its mandate. Several government stakeholders were unclear on the role of the organization and how it articulated with others involved in the promotion of careers in the skilled trades and technology sector. There was no evidence of media presence of any kind at the last provincial skills competition on April 2016. Limited resources/capacity appear to preclude a proactive communications strategy for Skills BC.



4.8 Financial Situation

Skills BC's funding environment might be best described as hardscrabble: i.e., great effort invested in securing just enough to keep the organization functioning at a level it is used to – no more and no less. While the effort is commendable, the outcome isn't likely to be sustainable in the long term.

In terms of federal funding the organization is secure at current levels for two more years. Whether it is able to significantly improve its position after the expiry of its existing contract with Service Canada remains to be seen, especially inasmuch as responsibility for negotiating federal contracts has been ceded to Skills Competences Canada. The latter's readiness/ability to negotiate in BC's best interests/specific needs, as opposed to relying on a pre-established equality-between-provinces formula, has yet to be determined.

Cash and in-kind funding from industry and labour are at an all-time high – a testament to the commitment and revenue development initiatives of staff and Board members. That said, these funding levels in and of themselves are insufficient to guarantee Skills BC's financial security. Many industry funding commitments are for a single year, meaning the effort required to hang on to them will need to be repeated, a daunting proposition in a situation where there's no single staff position dedicated to

revenue development and where evidence of programming outcomes and impact remains scarce (see 4.6 above). Some current sponsors are reviewing their existing commitments to Skills BC, unconvinced that they're receiving best value for their investment. The absence of a dedicated revenue development resource has also limited Skills BC's ability to pursue potential new funding sources, such as municipal and regional governments.

Skills BC's funding arrangement with the province is also fraught with uncertainty. While reliant on the latter for a significant portion of its annual operating budget (through the Ministry of Jobs, Tourism and Skills Training, by way of the Industry Training Authority), Skills BC has no guarantee from one year to the next what allocation it can expect and where it might come from. Instead, the organization is faced with making annual requests in hopes of securing the funding it needs for the following year. While Skills BC has managed to make do for a number of years in the existing situation, the latter makes it incredibly difficult to think beyond the status quo. Moreover, it reinforces the practice of decisions based more on financial considerations than strategic benefit. Case in point: locking down the location of the annual provincial skills competition in

Commented [Office5]: The Federal Government has mandated that it will ONLY work with the Skills Canada National office in negotiating funding contracts. This is not an option, but a mandate.

Abbotsford. While clearly cost-effective, the decision precludes realizing the significant benefits that could accrue to Skills BC if it were to rotate the competition through different regions of the province every year, or stage it in the GVRD, where it could have a higher profile and draw a greater number of attendees.

Skills BC's long-term sustainability will depend ultimately on its ability to secure funding commitments from multiple sources. Its success in this regard will flow from how the organization chooses to address the sustainability factors identified above.

5.0 SUMMARY ASSESSMENT

What Skills BC has:

- a) A noble mandate: promoting the skilled trades and technologies as first-choice career opportunities for young people across the province. Great support in principle for that mandate among stakeholder groups. The work is acknowledged as important.
- b) A unique program delivery vehicle: the regional and provincial skills competitions. Skills BC's core business is competition-based event production – a fairly exclusive niche. High-touch, and potentially high-profile.
- c) Access to a highly desirable target market: students in schools. Prospective sponsors and partners view the prospect of “getting into the schools” as an attractive proposition.
- d) An exceptionally lean but highly motivated and hard-working staff.
- e) A cohort of 600+ volunteers whose contributions of time and talent make the skills competitions possible.
- f) A well-meaning Board of Directors who want to do what's best for the organization.
- g) Pockets of support within business, labour, education, and government.
- h) Evidence of annual outputs: 13 regional skills competitions, one provincial competition, ~~50+~~500 InSPIRE presentations, a scattering of additional programs, some 30,000 “touches” every year. Approximately \$1 million spent annually to realize these outputs; another \$1.5–\$2 million in in-kind costs.

- i) Self-awareness. Skills BC knows there's more it could be doing to enhance its relevance, maximize its value, and ensure its sustainability. Its investment in impact research, sustainability assessment, and strategic planning suggests the organization is committed to being the best it can be.

What Skills BC doesn't have:

- a) Hard evidence that its activities and investments (both time and resources) are producing outcomes and results. To date, Skills BC has not been able to demonstrate definitively that it is making a difference.
- b) A high level of brand awareness. After 22 years Skills BC remains a cypher to a lot of people. There are many constituencies of prospective partners and stakeholders who don't know what the organization is or what it does.
- c) The organizational capacity to be much more than a competent event producer. Its current operating model limits its focus to the regional and provincial skills competitions. Skills BC hasn't had the opportunity to become a true programmer, always looking for new ways to connect with students (and others) about the benefits of thinking about a career in the skilled trades.
- d) A sustainable funding model.
- e) A large supply of political capital. Skills BC is not perceived as a "player," or a possible solution to anyone's problem(s). Skills BC is not seen to be of consequence and is treated accordingly.
- f) An unending supply of goodwill and patience. In our conversations with partners and stakeholders we encountered some frustration with the organization, wondering if it would ever "get it," and what it would take for Skills BC to fully realize its potential.

Commented [Office6]: This has been proven wrong by the findings in the Banister Report – based on the current mandates of the organization.

6.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

Skills BC knows that its long-term well-being depends on the organization having a sustainable funding model, which it understands to include some combination of increased private-sector funding (i.e., from business and labour), and secure, multi-year commitments from government partners. Landing such a model has so far proven elusive, leading Skills BC to conclude that it will need more than "business as usual" to secure its future.

Skills BC now faces a choice between retooling and rebuilding. Retooling would entail doubling down on the skills competitions to become an even better version of themselves – great event producers. It would involve a top-to-bottom diagnostic and tune-up of the regional and provincial competitions. Identify and build on and amplify what’s working. What Cirque du Soleil has become for circuses, Skills BC could become for competition-styled events for young people.

Rebuilding will mean going back to first principles – how to be an effective advocate for the skilled trades and technologies. It would involve rethinking the entire concept of Skills BC both in terms of what it does and how it does it, the organization’s relations with and outreach to young people, their parents, the educators, and governments, labour and industry. Retooled skills competitions will be part of the rebuilding plan.

The choice between retooling and rebuilding must be part of a broader conversation to crystallize Skills BC’s mission and mandate. It’s essential that the organization first articulate its purpose, values, goals, and vision, and then build out an action plan informed by that mission.

Our first recommendation to Skills BC is that it make a priority investment in re-imagining its mission and mandate. Use the first part of the Board strategic planning day on October 23/16 for the conversation described above. Clarify Skills BC’s value proposition: why it does what it does, why it matters, and why it’s critical to support it. Consider the following questions: “Who benefits from the work we do?” “How?” “What/whose problems are we a solution for?” “What is the question for which the answer is Skills BC?” Once the mission and mandate are confirmed, make the strategic choice to retool or rebuild. Agree on a statement of purpose and vision. Develop a rolling three-year strategic plan to realize the option selected and commit to the plan’s resourcing and implementation.

A number of directional recommendations pertaining to either the retooling option or the rebuilding option are presented below.

Option 1: Retooling

Essential to the success of the retooling option is ensuring the supporting structure is there to be successful. To that end we recommend the following:

- Conduct a full cost/benefit analysis of either relocating the annual provincial skills competition from its current semi-permanent home in Abbotsford to a location in the GVRD, or rotating its staging in different parts of the province.

- Conduct a full cost/benefit analysis of the proposal to host the Skills Competences Canada 2020 National Competition in BC. How will hosting this competition help advance the mandate of Skills BC? What value will partners in government, industry, labour, and education derive from their association with the event?
- Complete a diagnostic of the business component of the regional and provincial skills competitions. Explore what more could be part of these events to make them more meaningful for students, parents, educators, and employers. How will Skills BC ensure new program initiatives address local, industry- and partner-identified needs?
- Explore strategic partnerships with other organizations. For example, would a closer alignment with the Industry Training Authority help Skills BC better realize its mission by leveraging additional capacity? Are there any learnings from Skills BC's relationship with Telus that might inform how Skills BC approaches other strategic partnerships? How else might Skills BC benefit from these relationships?
- Develop and implement a more aggressive industry sponsorship strategy with the goal of doubling the dollar value of current cash and in-kind sponsorship commitments in the next two years, and a focus on staggered, multi-year commitments.
- Develop and implement a government relations strategy to strengthen ties with existing stakeholders (i.e., the province and the federal government) and develop connections with new ones (e.g., municipalities and regional districts). Re: the province, justify the case for a multi-year funding commitment at \$500,000 per annum based on the value of Skills BC's contribution to the province's Skills for Jobs blueprint.
- Develop and implement a comprehensive communications strategy to raise the profile of Skills BC and share and celebrate the stories of those who benefit from and contribute to its work. Focus on reaching out to new audiences, including students, educators, and prospective partners and stakeholders. Devise a strategy to deploy student videographers to capture digital images of the skills competitions. Perhaps a competition of videographers? Build up a repository of digital images of Skills BC competitions to use for promotion and other purposes. Try something similar with a social media strategy for the Skills BC competitions.
- Build out the staffing capacity of Skills BC, adding dedicated resources where needed and particularly in the areas of evaluation, communications, government relations, and partnership/sponsorship development.

- Fast-track the continuing evolution of the Skills BC Board of Directors. Review size and composition. Clearly spell out a governance model that delineates authority and responsibilities. Clarify and pursue a Board succession strategy to ensure the Board remains composed of champions representing key capacities and stakeholder groups.
- Invest in the identification and development of the next generation of Skills BC volunteers, thereby reinforcing a central element of the organization's infrastructure, especially in the regions.

Option 2: Rebuilding

Insofar as a retooled set of skills competitions will figure in the rebuilding option, the latter will incorporate variations of each recommendation above, tweaked to meet the mandate and mission underpinning this option. For example, the staffing model for the rebuilding option will look different from that of the retooling option. The exploration of strategic partnerships will differ, depending on which option is in play. The nuances specific to the rebuilding option will be detailed in the strategic plan.

The most significant differences between the two options lie in the areas of leadership and scope. Central to the success of the rebuilding option is new executive leadership for Skills BC. The organization needs a senior-level executive who is visionary, innovative, collaborative, and empathetic – a powerful voice for Skills BC, its mission, and its mandate. The CEO must be supported by a connected and committed Board, large enough to meet all the expectations there are of it but sufficiently nimble and decisive so as to be strategic.

The new CEO and the refreshed Board will have a major say in shaping the direction of a rebuilding of Skills BC. A useful starting point for re-imagining the scope of the organization is to reposition Skills BC. More than an excellent event producer, Skills BC is a node in the skilled trades and technology ecosystem – a constellation of processes and players (i.e., governments, public agencies, business, labour, educators, parents, and students) variously engaged in conversations about advancing trades and technologies as valued career opportunities. To be successful over the longer term, Skills BC must find a meaningful voice in those conversations. Through active listening and engagement the organization can develop a more profound understanding of the concerns and needs of other players in the ecosystem. This will be key to building out true strategic partnerships (i.e., relationships, not just sponsorship arrangements) throughout the system.

Special attention should be paid to evolving dialogues with parents and educators, early influencers whose sway is fundamental when it comes to career choices by young people. The parental conversations (through local parent advisory councils as well as the BC Council of Parent Advisory Councils) could involve parent-focused variations of the InSPIRE presentations aimed at overcoming the long-held bias against skills training because it is somehow “second rate.” With educators, a number of possible topics come to mind: overcoming teacher bias that favors university or college options for students; how best to tackle systemic barriers to skills training in schools such as 8x5 timetables and 63- or 75-minute instruction blocks; and: what other ways are there for schools to encourage careers in the skilled trades? What about something like advanced placement shop class? What other educational stakeholders might be engaged (e.g., BC School Trustees)?

Conversations also need to happen with employers. Business and labour can do more in terms of making entry points available for apprentices and others in need of early, on-the-job paid experience with their chosen trades. Together all parties can work to crystallize the journey maps that students can follow to pursue their careers in the skilled trades and technologies.

Beyond the one-on-one relationships, there may also be a role for Skills BC in convening broader, system-wide conversations involving all those either directly or tangentially engaged in the promotion of the skilled trades and technologies as first-choice career options, focused on sharing best practices as well as exploring how best to align their efforts and leverage their resources for optimal results.

To embark on the rebuilding of Skills BC sketched out above, we recommend the following:

- Initiate the search for a CEO. Strike a subcommittee of the Board to oversee the development of a job description, compensation package, hiring process, reference checks, and an employment contract. The goal is to onboard the new CEO by February 2017.
- Complete the restructuring of the Skills BC Board of Directors. The task as outlined in the retooling option becomes more pressing with the many requirements of rebuilding.
- Develop and implement a stakeholder relations strategy that does not focus on funding requests but seeks to build strategic alliances with business, labour, and the education sector, ensuring these connections benefit all parties. This type of relationship-based foundation will support Skills BC as it defines and executes its strategic vision.
- Pursue the recommendations regarding the retooling option, fine-tuning them to align with the agreed-upon strategic vision.

- Engage additional executive capacity to assist with the implementation of these recommendations. The rebuild has a lot of moving parts; moving them ahead successfully will require dedicated interim capacity not currently available in Skills BC. Directed by the Executive Committee of the Board, this resource would act as the “general contractor” for the rebuild for a period of eight months, until such time as the new CEO has been onboarded.

7.0 CONCLUSION

Skills BC finds itself at a crossroads. On the one hand it could stay the course with the goal of preserving the status quo and not losing ground. It might continue with “business as usual” and supplement with new programming as circumstances/budgets allow. Pursuing this course is predicated on the belief that Skills BC’s future will continue to unfold much as it has in the past, and that with more time it can not only continue to deliver results but improve on them. Moreover, if the provincial funding scenario can be shored up, current practices will be sufficient to meet new challenges.

More realistically, however, the shifting expectations of partners and stakeholders, increasing competition for attention and resources, and a push for demonstrable results constitute a new normal for Skills BC. The choices it makes going forward in this changing environment – to hold, to retool, or to rebuild – will determine how the organization fares in the future.

SKILLS CANADA BC SUSTAINABILITY PLAN INTERVIEW LIST

Category A: Internal Informants

Subject: background on organizational operations, including activities, capacity, governance, systems and infrastructure, stakeholder relations, culture, and challenges and opportunities.

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. Amber Papou
Executive Director
Skills Canada BC | 2. Kelly Betts
Board President
Skills Canada BC |
| 3. Rene Ragetli
Director of Operations
Skills Canada BC | 4. David Kalaski
Board Secretary
Skills Canada BC |

Category B: External Informants and Stakeholders

Subject: awareness and perception of Skills BC. What value do they see in the services it provides? To what extent and why are they involved? What would it take to get them to engage and partner with Skills BC?

Industry:

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. Mark von Schellwitz
CRFA Vice President for Western Canada
Restaurants Canada | 5. Dave Baspaly
Executive Director
Council of Construction Associations |
| 2. Blair Qualey
President & CEO
New Car Dealers Association | 6. Neal Moody
CEO
Canadian Homebuilders Association of BC |
| 3. Christie Morning-Smith
Event Manager
New Car Dealers Association | 7. Camila Louzada
Manager, Talent Programs
BC Technology Industry Association |
| 4. Dan Southern
Manager, Talent Management
Seaspan | |

Education:

8. Larry Espe

Superintendent of Careers & Student
Transitions
BC Ministry of Education

9. Dr. Lindsay Langill

Dean, School of Trades & Technology
Thompson Rivers University

Government:

10. Susan Brown

Executive Director, Strategic Policy &
Planning Branch
BC Ministry of Advanced Education

12. Vincent Portal

Director of Skills Training
Ministry of Advanced Education

11. Nicola Lemmer

Executive Director, Colleges & Skills
Training
Acting ADM – Institutions and Programs
Division
Ministry of Advanced Education

13. Scott MacDonald

Assistant Deputy Minister, LMI Division
BC Ministry of Jobs, Tourism and Skills
Training

Other:

14. Gary Herman

CEO
Industry Training Authority

15. Christine Mendonca

Associate
Banister Research

SKILLS CANADA BC ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

Dennis Green

Director
Industry Training
go2HR

Raseel Sehmi

Manager
Policy and Strategic Initiatives
BC Tech Association

David Kalaski

Board Secretary
Skills Canada BC

Rishi Sharma

Director
Corporate Initiatives and Stakeholder
Relations
Ministry of Jobs, Tourism and Skills Training
Government of British Columbia

Rob MacKay-Dunn

Director
Public Policy and Communications
Greater Vancouver Board of Trade

MJ Whitemarsh

Consultant
Whitemarsh Enterprises Inc.

Jaclyn Neumann

Vice President
Auto West Group