



Frequently Asked Questions

What is a sector?

A sector is an area of economic activity that produces well-defined products or services and that can be distinguished by the occupations, activities and issues present. Examples of sectors include tourism, mining and textiles. A sector's stakeholders include employers, workers, professional associations, the learning system (for example, colleges and universities) and governments.

What is a sector council?

A sector council is an organization that brings together business, labour and learning stakeholders to share ideas, concerns and perspectives about human resources and skills issues, and to find solutions that benefit the sector. Specifically, a council is

- Not-for-profit, permanent and governed by its own board of directors;
- Representative of a partnership between employers, workers, the learning system, professional associations and government;
- National (pan-Canadian) in scope;
- Operating to address skills issues in a collaborative and sustained manner; and
- Eligible to receive Government of Canada funding for infrastructure and projects that address human resources issues.

How many sector councils are there?

There are currently 29 national sector councils representing traditional industries such as mining and textiles and emerging industries such as biotechnology and the environment. The current sector council network covers approximately 40 per cent of the Canadian labour market.

Why does a sector create a sector council?

If a sector is experiencing skills and labour shortages or faces human resources challenges arising from rapid demographic and technological change, its stakeholders may wish to address these issues collectively.

Councils are usually established after key industry stakeholders (employers, workers, associations, learning systems and government) agree to work together to identify and address the industry's skills issues. By forming a sector council, stakeholders gain the following benefits:

- A better understanding of skills requirements;
- A way to anticipate future skills issues (due, for instance, to the introduction of new technology);
- A mechanism to influence the learning system so that it is more responsive to the industry's needs; and
- Access to tools and products that improve employee skills and thus increase a firm's productivity.



Sector councils are a proven method of meeting emerging skills requirements, addressing skills and labour shortages, and building essential skills in the workplace.

What do sector councils do?

Sector councils create the following products:

- Sector studies, to help define and understand skills requirements;
- Labour market forecasting and analysis, to help anticipate changes in skills requirements;
- Essential skills profiles, to identify the incidence and complexity of the skills necessary for a given occupation;
- National occupational standards, to describe the skills and knowledge needed to perform competently in an occupation;
- Core curricula tailored to industry requirements, to promote skills standardization;
- Skills development tools, to develop skills workers require for the workplace;
- Human resources management tools, to help employers; and
- Career information and youth work experience programs, to help young people move from school to work and to help workers who want to engage in continuous learning and further their careers make mid-career transitions.

How long has the Sector Council Program existed, and what is the history of the program?

The following points provide a chronology of the Government of Canada's Sector Council program:

- *1993*
The Sector Council Program (formerly the Sectoral Partnerships Initiative) was launched to foster the development of a training culture and to increase private sector investment in training by matching employers' training investments.
- *1995*
Prompted by labour market development agreements (LMDAs), sector councils evolved from purchasers of training and learning opportunities for workers to influencers of the learning system. In addition to influencing the learning system, sector councils continue to focus employers' attention on the importance of training as well as to promote issues such as recruitment, retention and, most recently, the integration of foreign-trained professionals.
- *2001*
The 2001 federal budget doubled the funding for the Sector Council Program from \$30 million to \$60 million over five years. This new funding prompted a program redesign to reflect two objectives: increasing sector council coverage from 25 percent to 50 percent of the labour market, and to strengthen sector councils.
- *2004*
The 2004 federal budget announced the development of the Workplace Skills Strategy (WSS). The Sector Council Program is placed under this exciting new initiative. New funding was also announced for sector councils to undertake foreign credentials recognition (FCR) projects.

How are sector councils formed?

There are three phases in sector council development.

Phase 1: Consensus-building activities

- Get feedback from industry to ensure interest in the sector council approach.
- Gain support and commitment from key stakeholders.
- Gain consensus on common human resources issues facing the industry.
- Establish a committee of stakeholders to map out the mandate and scope of a potential council.

Phase 2: Developmental activities

- Establish a board of directors and staff the executive director and administrative assistant positions.
- Develop a mission and mandate statement.
- Develop a five-year plan.
- Gain industry support for the organizational structure and business plan.
- Incorporate the council as a legal, non-profit entity.

Phase 3: Operational activities

- Implement business plan activities.
- Develop and implement a communications plan to promote awareness of the council.
- Revise the business and strategic plans annually.
- Update the board and administrative structure as required.

How are unions involved in sector councils?

The Sector Council Program considers workers' involvement, whether represented by a union or not, to be fundamental to the representation of all interested parties involved in the strategic agenda of a sector. Also, the sector council must be directed by a team of employers and employees that represent the major stakeholders and sub-sectors, and include other major partners. Outside of these broad guidelines, the industry partners work together to determine the actual composition of the sector council governing structure.

What is a sector study?

It is an overview of a particular industry that includes information on the following:

- Skills gaps (both current and emerging);
- Career progression and mobility;
- Workforce profile and characteristics;
- Training and professional development;
- Technological innovation;
- Worker recruitment and retention; and
- Human resources planning.

How are sector councils governed?

Sector councils are self-governed by a board of directors. This board is established, along with the executive director and administrative assistant positions, during the developmental stage (phase 2) of sector council development. Although sector councils are autonomous of the Government of Canada, they may qualify for performance-based infrastructure funding.

What eligibility criteria must new sector councils meet?

Sector councils must:

- Have a national scope;
- Be industry-driven;
- Feature a strong industry (employer-worker) partnership; and
- Focus on addressing identified labour market issues.

How does a sector council benefit workers?

By influencing the learning system, sector councils help ensure workers have the skills they need to get a job. Sector councils also help promote learning opportunities in the workplace, so that workers can continually upgrade their skills.

How does a sector council affect businesses?

Sector councils provide many benefits to employers, such as helping them anticipate labour market trends, recruit new workers and recognize the value of workplace learning.

What is the nature of government financial support?

The Government of Canada's Sector Council Program (through Human Resources and Skills Development Canada) is a system-wide initiative that addresses skills issues on an industry level.

It supports skills development activities and helps industry stakeholders build partnerships to foster collaborative action. The program respects LMDAs and provincial jurisdictional responsibility for training and education.