

## **Building & Supporting Surrey Employer Capacity to Respond to COVID-19 Workforce Needs**

July 27, 2020 – July 23, 2021

“The key barriers to getting employees back to the office or workplace are social distancing requirements (38%), employees’ reluctance to return to the workplace due to safety concerns at the workplace (35%) and, to a slightly lesser extent, getting to and from work (22%). Over 50% of large businesses report these challenges. The complexity and cost of safety measures are other issues.”<sup>1</sup>

### **Project Goals:**

1. Support and build capacity among Surrey employers to plan, prepare for and take action on the re-opening of the BC economy, to mitigate risks and seize on workforce-related opportunities in the new normal during and after the coronavirus pandemic.
2. Work with workforce groups and employment and training service providers in Surrey to help support, build and coordinate their capacity to serve Surrey employers and workers. Employers will need help to develop a capacity for being nimble, agile and responding to changes in workforce supply and demand driven by lockdowns, public health guidelines, re-openings and economic recovery. This project responds to this need.

### **Highlights:**

- A **Back-to-Work Strategies Playbook** (regularly updated) which includes several tools, templates, checklists, and hyperlinks to specialized information and resources.
- A **Rapid Response Service** for outreach and to respond to individual employer needs for planning, preparing and executing recovery and back-to-work strategies.
- **Real-time Labour Market Intelligence** function through pulse surveying and other intelligence-gathering methods and regular LMI reports to Surrey employers.

### **Description:**

The coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) has precipitated the most widespread and deepest job loss and disruption to Canada and BC’s economy in our history. The Surrey economy and labour market have not escaped the huge impacts of the pandemic.

Since March through to July 2020, there has been a large volume of of labour force adjustment in Surrey with youth unemployment at 29% and 235,000 less jobs in BC. More upheaval is expected in the coming weeks and months during re-opening phases and beyond:

- Closures and layoffs
- Redeployment to other jobs and sectors
- Return to previous jobs
- Further employment interruptions
- Reskilling for new employment

---

<sup>1</sup> BC Chamber of Commerce. *MindReader™ Survey Results: Slow and Fragile Recovery Requires a Bold Plan*. July 16, 2020. Retrieved at <https://bcchamber.org/news/slow-and-fragile-recovery-requires-a-bold-plan/>.

- Continued changes in work models (i.e. remote work, different scheduling, work redesign to mitigate health and safety risks, more virtual learning, etc.)
- Longer term adjustments such as greater automation and more virtual work

### Key Activities:

1. Retain a **project manager, labour market consultant, and Playbook developer.**
2. Create a **Project Steering Committee** that will provide project oversight, give advice, and receive and advise on regular monthly reports.
3. Finalize a project **work plan** and create and implement project monitoring and reporting procedures and forms, which will include specific procedures and forms that project staff will follow to track, monitor and report on all project activities, outputs and outcomes. An Accountability Framework will be developed with a logic model including metrics for key inputs (i.e. including financial), outputs and short- and medium-term outcomes.
4. Create an **Employer Action Committee** to advise on project activities and coordinate employer and industry participation and actions, with a particular focus on informing and testing the Playbook (see below).
5. Create a **Service Provider Action Committee** to advise on project activities, coordinate service provider participation and actions and strengthen linkages with employers.
6. Develop and distribute an online (downloadable PDF) 'living' **Back-to-Work Strategies Playbook** (regularly updated with real-time information) which includes several tools, templates, checklists, and hyperlinks to specialized information and resources with the following content:
  - Information on COVID-19 workforce impacts
  - Surrey-specific and regional labour market and workforce needs and strategies
  - Navigate employers to health, safety and wellness information and tactics – available information on preparing the workplace for safety of workers and customers by navigating employers to essential online WorkSafeBC, industry safety associations, Small Business BC, and other information
  - Navigate employers to information on government programs and navigating employers to key online sites such as SBOT, sector-specific support information, Small Business BC, etc.
  - Building employer capacity for workforce planning and preparing for recovery and re-opening but also looking ahead into medium and longer terms
  - Supporting employer HR capacity including attraction, recruitment, onboarding, reskilling, retention, etc. in the new normal
  - Opportunities for doing work in new ways including virtually
  - Profiling best practices and examples in different sectors

The Playbook will be informed by two other key elements of the Project, the Rapid Response Service and Labour Market Intelligence Reports.

*\*\*\*NOTE – The Playbook focus is on employer and workforce resilience and on the re-employment, re-skilling, engagement, and mobilization of workers. Safety is being addressed by others. \*\*\**

7. A **Rapid Response Service** will be established to respond to individual employer needs for planning, preparing and executing recovery and back-to-work strategies. This service will provide outreach to Surrey employers on a continual basis throughout the project and builds on the HR Consultancy from last year's Surrey Workforce Strategy.

8. **Real-time labour market information and intelligence** will be collected through pulse surveying and other intelligence-gathering methods. Regular reports will identify those employers, sectors and workers most impacted and most in need of services.

9. The Project will produce **early learnings** (what works, what's helping employers, what doesn't work, best practices, etc.) that could be scaled for use in other communities and regions of the province.

10. A **project review** to consider whether above activities are needed beyond end of one year. It may be critical to continue these activities beyond May 2021 depending on COVID-19 patterns and impacts, public health direction, government actions, possible further lockdowns and re-openings.

11. Complete a **project evaluation and final report** and communicate the project findings, lessons learned and recommendations for future action.

#### **Anticipated Outcomes/Results:**

- More Surrey employers will be prepared and able to respond to the workforce-related impacts and opportunities resulting from the pandemic.
- More Surrey workers impacted by COVID-19 will find pathways to re-employment, re-deployment, re-skilling and sustained employment. More unemployed members of equity-seeking groups in Surrey will become employed.
- A real-time Back-to-Work Strategies Playbook that can be adapted and used after the pandemic, adapted for use in other communities, and tailored to specific industry sectors.
- Ongoing real-time Labour Market Information.
- Better use of government supports.

#### **Community Benefits:**

More Surrey employers will have the capacity to manage and respond to workforce challenges (e.g. bringing back employees, recruiting new ones, engaging and retaining employees) and respond to other COVID-19 challenges. Surrey service providers, SBOT, employers and industry groups will be enabled to work together in a more coordinated and collaborative approach on workforce priorities in a real-time, rapid response sense during the pandemic and in the longer term. Workers and the broader community in Surrey will have more confidence, less fear and greater resiliency during reopening and beyond. This project will also provide a tested road map for other communities in the new normal.