Employee Recruitment, Training and Retention

2025 Employer Survey Results

SEPTEMBER 2025

AWIC ALGOMA WORKFORCE INVESTMENT CORPORATION

The Labour Market Group
Guiding partners to workforce solutions.

Sudbury & Manitoulin
Workforce Planning
Planification en main-d'oeuvre

FAR NORTHEAST TRAINING BOARD (FNETB)
your local labour market planning network
COMMISSION DE FORMATION DU NORD-EST (CFNE)
votre réseau local de planification du marché du travail

Canada
EMPLOYMENT ONTARIO EMPLOI ONTARIO
Ontario

EMPLOYEE RECRUITMENT, TRAINING AND RETENTION

2025 Northeastern Ontario Employer Survey Results

The views expressed in this document do not necessarily reflect those of the Government of Ontario.

The information presented in this report is current at the time of its release.

LABOUR MARKET GROUP (PARRY SOUND AND NIPISSING)
WORKFORCE PLANNING FOR SUDBURY & MANITOULIN
FAR NORTHEAST TRAINING BOARD (TIMISKAMING AND COCHRANE)
ALGOMA WORKFORCE INVESTMENT CORPORATION

LIMITATIONS:

While the survey results are a snapshot of employers who responded across various industry sectors, it is important to note that it is not generally applicable to all employers in the Northeast region of Ontario

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Northeastern Ontario Workforce Planning Boards would like to thank the 602 employers who took the time to answer the 2025 survey. Employer outreach is greatly enriched by the collaboration and support of the local organizations that assist and support this project, by distributing the survey to their members.

INTRODUCTION

There are twenty-five (25) workforce planning board across Ontario funded by the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development. The workforce planning boards across northeastern Ontario include Algoma Workforce Investment Corporation (AWIC), the Labour Market Group (LMG), Workforce Planning for Sudbury & Manitoulin (WPSM), and the Far Northeast Training Board (FNETB).

A key mandate of workforce planning boards is to conduct research and analyze what is happening in the local labour market. In addition to using various data sources such as business data from Statistics Canada and the Census, workforce planning boards also conduct industry-specific research, consult key stakeholders throughout the year and lead partnership projects. All of this is used to support and inform local workforce development strategies and local actions.

That is why the four workforce planning boards in the northeast conducted a survey of employers in their area. The goal is to gain some insight at the local level as well as the broader Northeastern Ontario region on employee recruitment, training and retention.

METHODOLOGY

The four workforce planning boards across the northeast developed a common assessment tool and timeline for implementation of the survey. Employers were asked to answer key questions related to industry demographics, workforce changes in 2024 and anticipated changes in 2025, hard-to-fill positions, recruitment practices, skills and training requirements, impact of technological and environmental changes and challenges/opportunities moving forward.

The survey was administered and open for 4 weeks – from April 30th to May 30th, 2025. Survey monkey was used as the platform to administer the survey. Various strategies were used to get the word out, including direct emails and the use of media. Each workforce planning board across the northeast conducted the survey in their respective regions and each produced a local report. This report is an analysis of the combined results for the entire Northeastern Ontario region.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

We are pleased to present you with the findings from a recent survey we conducted of employers across northeastern Ontario. As workforce planning boards, we use information from various sources to help us understand what is happening in the local labour market and one of the many important sources is the voice of employers.

The findings in this report represent just over six-hundred employers who responded to our survey which was conducted in late spring 2025. While some employers did not answer all questions, most did. Many provided us with insights into workforce challenges they are experiencing, occupations that are hard to fill, how they recruit and much, much more. Employers who responded represent all industry sectors and most who completed the survey were company owners, managers, human resources, and in other upper management positions in both the private-for-profit and non-profit sectors. Additionally, more than sixty percent had been in business for twenty-five years or more.

Interestingly, the findings did not reveal a lot of real surprises, but confirmation of what we had already been hearing and seeing from other research we have conducted, data that is available and from the many stakeholders we consult with each year. As well, responses from employers across the northeast were quite similar regardless of whether they were from Timmins, North Bay, Sault Ste. Marie, Sudbury or in between.

Some of the more significant findings open the door for further exploration or opportunities to provide greater support. For example, it is concerning when close to forty percent of employers who responded do not have a succession plan. This is something we need to pay closer attention to as we certainly do not want to lose any local business or have them close if they cannot fill key roles.

While many employers report separations from employees quitting or retiring, the good news is that many employers continue to hire to fill those vacancies or make adjustments to their business. Additionally, many report business growth and expansion as a reason that they hire.

Employers, however, continue to express challenges when it comes to finding qualified, skilled and experienced candidates which is not a new concern. Employers continue to stick to more traditional methods to hire through *word of mouth*, using *employee contacts* and *posting vacancies on their website*. We recognize that it is costly to post a job although it may be good to remind employers of free job posting services through the Job Bank and perhaps making greater use of free employment services and HR supports through Employment Ontario and local job boards that exist.

When asked specifically about hard-to-fill positions, employers were given the opportunity to list occupations they find most difficult to fill, which elicited just under two-hundred and fifty responses. A detailed breakdown of the most commonly cited jobs can be found in the section entitled *hard-to-fill* positions.

Employers were also asked about the most important skills they look for when hiring. Again, it is not a surprise that some of the "softer" skills continue to command attention. Just over three quarters of employers surveyed said that *work ethic, dedication and dependability* is one of the most important skills they look for, followed by *teamwork and interpersonal skills* and then *willingness to learn*. These are not new concerns being expressed regarding skills.

Employers who responded also provide various training and education opportunities for their own employees but sometimes *cost of training* and *distance to travel for training* are barriers. The good news is that many also provide opportunities for students through summer and part-time jobs (at 57% and 40% respectively), but those opportunities drop off significantly when it comes to apprenticeships, internships and Coop placements. Again, this is not new. It is important, however, for the education system to expand their outreach efforts to engage employers to understand their needs and help train our future workforce. The big question is – how do we do a better job of balancing supply and demand?

While technological and environmental changes are happening all around the world, employers were asked about the current and future impact on their business. This includes new developments in digitization, cyber-security, artificial intelligence, cloud-based technologies and other changes. While only a third reported that some of these changes are having and are expected to have an impact on their business, about a quarter felt there would be no impact in the future.

To tease this out a bit further, a question was also asked about the current and expected impact of tariffs and more than one third indicated that their supply chain will be impacted and that they will have to raise their prices.

To round out the survey, respondents were given the opportunity to indicate what they see as the biggest challenges and opportunities over the next three years. The most prominent challenges are related to the workforce and include the shortage of skilled and qualified workers and the ability to retain and replace employees, including those who are retiring. This makes succession planning and greater engagement with those involved in workforce development even more important.

On the other hand, opportunities were focused on business growth and expansion and in some cases, on the positive impact of increased investments in industry specific sectors such as mining and major

infrastructure projects. Overall, however, while employers are concerned about their workforce, they also expressed optimism about the future which we also share.
In closing, we again want to express our sincere appreciation to all employers who took the time to complete the *Employee Recruitment, Training and Retention Survey*. Your feedback is invaluable and when combined with other data and labour market sources and research, it provides us with a compelling picture of how some things have changed, how some things have not changed and areas that need to be addressed.

We hope you take the time to read this report. In particular, we hope you pay attention to some of the detailed responses of local employers who are not only the voice of business leaders across northeastern Ontario, but our guide to understanding labour market demand and what is needed to improve the development of our future workforce.

Sincerely

Julie Joncas
Executive Director
Far Northeast Training Board

Reggie Caverson
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Workforce Planning for Sudbury & Manitoulin

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PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS AND THEIR BUSINESS

INDUSTRIES REPRESENTED (602 responses)

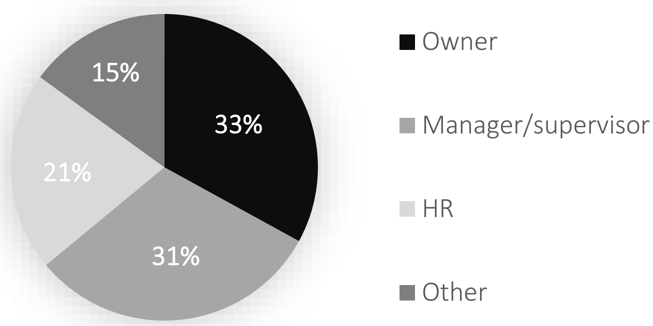
Respondents reflect a wide range of industries. Table 1 provides the breakdown of survey respondents by industry for all four workforce planning board areas combined. The percentage distribution is compared with the actual distribution of businesses in the Northeast Ontario area. The color coding for the survey results highlights where the survey percentage share is significantly greater (green) or significantly lower (red) than the actual distribution based on the Canadian Business Counts data as of December 2024.

TABLE 1: NUMBER AND PERCENT OF RESPONDENTS BY INDUSTRY

INDUSTRY	SURVEY		ACTUAL
	NUMBER	PERCENT	PERCENT
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	21	**4.5%**	2.5%
Mining, Quarrying and Oil and Gas Extraction	35	**5.8%**	0.9%
Utilities	3	0.5%	0.3%
Construction	71	**11.8%**	14.7%
Manufacturing	37	**6.1%**	3.8%
Wholesale Trade	5	**0.8%**	15.1%
Retail Trade	73	**12.1%**	3.6%
Transportation and Warehousing	12	2.0%	3.4%
Information and Cultural Industries	8	1.3%	1.4%
Finance and Insurance	20	3.3%	3.4%
Real Estate, Rental and Leasing	5	**0.8%**	4.7%
Professional, Scientific and Technical Services	24	**4.0%**	7.2%
Management of Companies and Enterprises	2	0.3%	0.3%
Administration and Support, Waste Mgmt	5	**0.8%**	4.1%
Educational Services	53	**8.8%**	1.1%
Healthcare and Social Assistance	81	13.5%	12.6%
Arts, Entertainment and Recreation	17	2.8%	1.9%
Accommodation and Food Services	44	7.3%	8.3%
Other Services (Except Public Administration)	50	8.3%	9.2%
Public Administration	36	**6.0%**	1.5%
TOTAL	**602**	**100.0%**	**100.0%**

Actual figures are from Statistics Canada's Canadian Business Counts, December 2024

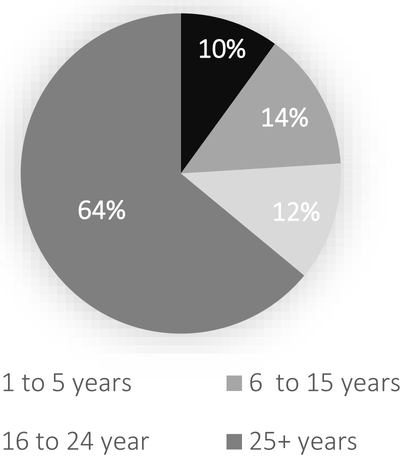
PERSON COMPLETING THE SURVEY (602 responses)



Other (15%) included those in an Executive Director's role, or those in an administrative position or front-line role.

YEARS IN OPERATION (602 responses)

64%
of the respondents have been in business for 25 years or more



NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES (602 responses)

The distribution of respondents by number of employees shows a far greater proportion of respondents with a larger number of employees compared to the actual figures, starting with firms with 5-99 employees, and much more among those firms with 100 or more employees. Even though they make up two-thirds of all firms, it is not surprising that only a very small proportion of firms with zero employees responded to a survey about employer workforce issues.

TABLE 2: PERCENT OF RESPONDENTS BY NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES COMPARED TO ACTUAL PERCENTAGE

	Zero employees	1-4 employees	5-99 employees	100-499 employees	500+ employees
ALL SURVEYS	3%	19%	56%	16%	8%
ALL ACTUAL	67%	15%	17%	1%	0.1%

Actual figures are from Statistics Canada's Canadian Business Counts, December 2024

Note: For the following questions in this section, the respondent was allowed to pick more than one selection.

TYPE OF BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION *(602 responses)*

- 62% private for-profit sector
- 15% not for profit/registered charity employer
- 9% Francophone business
- 5% Indigenous business
- 5% non-government funded not for profit employer
- 4% government-funded for-profit employer
- 5% franchise

62%
of the 602 respondents were private sector for profit businesses

CURRENT WORKFORCE BY AGE COHORTS (602 Responses)

40%
of the respondents have employees who are 65 or older

CURRENT WORKFORCE BY AGE COHORT

- 63% employ someone under 25 years of age
- 94% employ someone between 25 and 54 years of age
- 69% employ someone 55 or older
- 40% employ someone 65 or older

DEMOGRAPHICS OF CURRENT WORKFORCE (602 responses)

Respondents were asked about the demographic composition of their workforce. Table 3 shows that almost all respondents hire males and females, six out of ten employ Francophones (60%), and half employ immigrants/other cultural groups (54%) and Indigenous persons (51%). A smaller proportion (38%) employ domestic students, around one out of four employ persons with a known physical disability (24%), and one in five employ a person with a known developmental disability (19%). Three out of ten (30%) employ international students.

When comparing the responses of private sector for profit firms to all other categories, the biggest difference is that those organizations that are not private sector for profit firms are twice as likely to employ persons with a known physical disability and one and a half times as likely to employ a person with a known developmental disability. Those that are not private sector firms also seem more likely to employ an Indigenous person.

TABLE 3: DEMOGRAPHICS OF CURRENT WORKFORCE			
	Percent		
DEMOGRAPHIC CATEGORY	ALL	PRIVATE SECTOR FOR PROFIT	OTHERS
Male	89%	92%	83%
Female	94%	93%	97%
Immigrants/Other cultural groups	54%	51%	57%
Indigenous	51%	46%	59%
Francophones	60%	56%	66%
Persons with a known physical disability	24%	17%	36%
Persons with a known developmental disability	19%	16%	25%
Domestic students	38%	35%	44%
International students	24%	20%	30%

SUCCESSION PLAN (602 responses)

When asked about succession planning, less than four in ten respondents have a succession plan in place either for key roles or for some key roles:

- 39% acknowledge that they do not have a formal succession plan
- 20% say that they have a succession plan in place for key roles
- 19% say that they have a succession plan in place for some key roles
- 12% say they are currently developing a succession plan
- 10% of respondents say they do not know if their business had a succession plan.

39%
of the 290 respondents do not have a formal succession plan

SURVEY FINDINGS

WORKFORCE HIRINGS AND SEPARATIONS IN 2024

SEPARATIONS IN 2024 *(601 responses)*
A separation is defined as a retirement, a dismissal/being fired, an employee who left or quit, a permanent layoff, a temporary layoff, or any other termination of employment.

Respondents were asked whether their business or organization experienced any separations in 2024. Of all the respondents, 76% said yes; 23% said no; and 2% were uncertain. Among those who did experience a separation, a further question explored why and how many employees this impacted. Table 4 illustrates the responses provided. A category called 'Other' was included and respondents provided a wide range of reasons such as contract ending, returning to school, maternity leave, medical leave, seasonal employment, and so on.

By far, the single largest reason for a separation was that the employee quit (71% of respondents experienced this reason), followed by termination (51%) and retirement (41%). In most instances, the separation involved 1-9 employees.

TABLE 4: TYPE OF SEPARATION AND NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES INVOLVED BY PERCENTAGE OF EMPLOYERS – NORTHEAST ONTARIO

	Any number of employees	1-9 employees	10-24 employees	25-49 employees	50+ employees
Employee quit	71%	56%	9%	4%	3%
Employee retired	41%	37%	2%	1%	1%
Temporary layoff	16%	12%	2%	2%	0%
Permanent layoff	12%	9%	2%	1%	0%
Employee was terminated/fired	51%	45%	4%	2%	0%
Left for more flexible work (i.e., remote work)	17%	14%	3%	0%	0%
Other	17%	14%	0%	1%	2%

HIRING IN 2024 *(581 responses)*

Similarly, respondents were asked whether they hired any employees in 2024. Eighty-two percent (82%) of respondents indicated that their business hired in 2024 and 17% did not. The total number of respondents who indicated that they had hired was 477, while the total number that indicated they had experienced a separation was 456, almost an identical number.

REASONS FOR HIRING IN 2024 *(450 responses)*

The next question probed the reasons for new hires, including the number of hires that each reason represented (Table 5). “Other” responses consisted of seasonal hires including summer students, filling a medical leave or contract hiring for a funded short-term project.

As in the case of separations, the large majority of these hirings involved 1-9 employees, and the majority needed to fill a vacancy.

TABLE 5: REASONS FOR NEW HIRES IN 2024 – NORTHEAST ONTARIO

	Any number of employees	1-9 employees	10-24 employees	25-49 employees	50+ employees
Retirements	34%	29%	3%	1%	1%
Fill existing vacancies	80%	60%	10%	4%	5%
Growth/expansion	46%	35%	7%	2%	3%
Restructuring	14%	13%	1%	0%	0%
Technological changes	7%	6%	0%	0%	0%
Other	8%	6%	1%	0%	1%

OCCUPATIONS FOR WHICH RESPONDENTS HIRED IN 2024 *(191 responses)*

Respondents were next asked to list up to five occupations for which they hired the greatest number of new employees in 2024. The total number of entries amounted to over 1,100. Based on those entries, the following are the occupations for which respondents hired the most employees in 2024:

- Administrative staff, clerical
- Sales associate
- Labourer
- Early childhood educator
- Educator assistant
- Personal support worker
- Manager/supervisor
- Server
- Kitchen helper
- Cook
- Mechanic
- Receptionist
- Truck driver
- IT personnel
- Housekeeping
- Engineer.

ANTICIPATED WORKFORCE CHANGES IN 2025

HIRING IN 2025 *(562 responses)*
Respondents were asked about hiring in 2025 whether they had hired or were planning to hire. Table 6 shows the results for the 411 respondents who answered that they had hired or planned to hire in 2025.

TABLE 6: ALREADY HIRED OR PLAN TO HIRE IN 2025 – NORTHEAST ONTARIO					
	Any number of employees	**1-9 employees**	**10-24 employees**	**25-49 employees**	**50+ employees**
Already hired in 2025	65%	12%	4%	2%	82%
Plan to hire in 2025	57%	11%	3%	5%	75%

REASONS FOR HIRING IN 2025 *(410 responses)*
As in the case of the 2024 hires, respondents were asked to provide the reason for the new hires. The proportions are provided in Table 7 and the distribution by reason is very similar to the reasons provide for the hires in 2024 (Table 5). Again, the majority of hirings were to fill a vacancy.

TABLE 7: REASONS FOR NEW HIRES IN 2025 – NORTHEAST ONTARIO					
	Any number of employees	**1-9 employees**	**10-24 employees**	**25-49 employees**	**50+ employees**
Retirements	33%	30%	2%	1%	1%
Fill existing vacancies	77%	60%	11%	3%	3%
Growth/expansion	49%	39%	4%	2%	4%
Restructuring	12%	10%	1%	0%	0%
Technological changes	5%	5%	0%	0%	1%
Other	11%	7%	1%	0%	1%

OCCUPATIONS FOR WHICH RESPONDENTS HIRED OR PLAN TO HIRE IN 2025*:*
The occupations which respondents had hired or expected to hire in 2025 were generally like those which they had hired in 2024, notably among the larger categories: administrative staff, sales associate, labourer, and early childhood educator/assistant educator. Other occupations also receiving multiple mentions were carpenter, engineer, housekeeping, server and technician.

HIRING CHALLENGES

BIGGEST HIRING CHALLENGES *(517 responses)*

Table 8 illustrates the biggest challenges employers faced when recruiting new employees, as a percentage of those who answered this question (respondents were allowed to select as many challenges as applied).

The biggest challenge was that applicants lacked the skills required, cited by 60% of respondents. Three other challenges were each noted by around half of the respondents: applicants lacked the work experience required (51%), the low number of applicants (50%), and applicants lacked the qualifications required (48%). Lower on the list were such issues as competition from other employers (38%), applicants lacked the right soft skills (36%), compensation expectations (33%) and location challenges (32%).

TABLE 8: BIGGEST CHALLENGES WHEN RECRUITING NEW EMPLOYEES

Challenge	ALL
Applicants lack the skills required	60%
Applicants lack work experience required	51%
Low number of applicants	50%
Applicants lack the qualifications required	48%
Competition from other employers	38%
Applicants lack soft skills (communication, work ethics, etc.)	36%
Compensation expectations	33%
Location challenges	32%
Other	13%

The "Other" category (13%) was inflated because many respondents simply said the question did not apply to them; among other substantive reasons were housing, the job candidate was not bilingual and lack of a vehicle or transportation challenges.

40%
Identify the lack of houses/apartments to rent as a challenge

OTHER FACTORS IMPACTING EMPLOYEE RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION: *(510 responses)*

Respondents were further asked about other factors which affected their ability to recruit and retain employees. Responses were as follows:

- Lack of houses or apartments to rent (40%)
- Lack of daycare (23%)
- Lack of public transportation (22%)
- Lack of houses to purchase (17%)
- Lack of reliable and affordable high-speed internet (5%)

HARD TO FILL POSITIONS *(243 responses)*

Respondents were next asked to list the occupations that are the hardest to fill for their business or organization. The most commonly cited occupations were:

- Early childhood educator
- Educator assistant
- Administrative staff
- Manager
- Sales associate
- Mechanic
- Registered nurse
- Truck driver
- Millwright
- Labourer
- Welder/fitter
- Cook
- Heavy duty equipment mechanic
- Carpenter
- Housekeeping
- Employment counsellor
- Finance/accounting
- Personal support worker
- Engineer
- Technician

ADAPTING WHEN VACANCIES CANNOT BE FILLED *(243 responses)*

Respondents were asked how they adapt or will adapt where they cannot fill all their vacancies, for each of 2024 and 2025. Table 9 shows the combined responses as a percentage of all those who replied to this question.

By far, having current staff work more overtime is the most likely way of coping with unfilled vacancies in 2024 and 2025. It is noteworthy that the proportion choosing this option declined slightly for 2025 – might this suggest that relying on overtime has its limits? In 2025, close second and third options were redistributing work and cross-training for current employees. In both instances, these options increased from 2024, suggesting that employers were putting their minds to other options. A somewhat more distant fourth option was subcontracting or outsourcing.

TABLE 9: ADAPTATIONS WHERE VACANCIES CANNOT BE FILLED NORTHEAST ONTARIO		
	2024	**2025**
More overtime for current staff	51%	48%
Redistribution of work	40%	45%
Cross training for current employees	38%	44%
Subcontract/Outsourcing	25%	30%
Access staffing agencies	13%	12%
Offer job placements and internships	12%	15%
Diversify our workforce	11%	14%
Offering remote work options	9%	9%
Implementation of technology/automation	8%	12%
Reduction of our workforce	8%	8%
Other	10%	9%

RECRUITMENT AND TRAINING PRACTICES

METHODS USED TO RECRUIT CANDIDATES: *(511 responses)*

Table 10 shows the selections of respondents, chosen from a list which was provided in the survey, expressed as a percentage of all those who answered this question, for each of 2024 and 2025, for all areas.

More than half of the employers are using on-line platforms, such as free-online job boards, social media and their own website, to recruit job candidates. But it is striking that the old "low-tech" strategies of word-of-mouth and employee referrals still top the list of responses, with word-of-mouth being relied upon by eight out of ten respondents, and employee referrals accounting for six out of ten respondents.

Comparing 2024 and 2025 responses, both the "low tech" and online strategies show increases. In fact, almost every strategy shows an increase, suggesting that employers are constantly broadening their options when it comes to finding suitable job candidates.

TABLE 10: RECRUITMENT METHODS USED TO FIND CANDIDATES FOR JOB VACANCIES NORTHEAST ONTARIO		
	2024	**2025**
Word of mouth, personal contacts, referrals, and informal networks	79%	82%
Employee referrals	61%	62%
Social media (Facebook, LinkedIn)	57%	62%
Free online job boards/online postings	59%	59%
Our business/organization's own website	55%	59%
Local employment service agencies	42%	43%
Paid online job boards/online postings	37%	38%
Job fairs	31%	32%
On-site job signs or posters	28%	32%
Onsite recruitment at schools, colleges and universities	26%	28%
Print and online news media	20%	21%
Trade or professional publications or websites	18%	20%
Executive search companies/Headhunters	10%	8%
Radio ads	8%	7%
Other	4%	4%

AREA WHERE RESPONDENTS RECRUIT CANDIDATES: *(512 responses)*

Respondents were asked in which areas they searched for new employees, choosing as many options as applied from a list of five: within their community/district; in other Northern Ontario communities/districts; in Southern Ontario; in other provinces; or internationally. Not surprisingly, almost all respondents indicated that they recruit locally:

- 97% recruit within their community/district
- 59% recruit from other Northern Ontario regions
- 36% recruit from Southern Ontario
- 22% from other provinces
- 14% said they also recruited internationally.

USE OF LOCAL EMPLOYMENT SERVICES (505 responses)

Just over 200 respondents (just over 40%), as shown in Table 10, said they had used local employment services.

When asked to name the service they had made use of, a number cited Indeed, a private recruitment agency or a local radio station. Once these were eliminated, there were 63 responses (respondents were allowed to name up to five, although most named only one and sometimes two).

Others only mentioned a specific program, such as Canada-Ontario Jobs Grant, Canada Summer Jobs, apprenticeships, or Canada Job Bank.

43%
of the respondents said that they had used local employment services

SKILLS REQUIREMENTS AND TRAINING *(499 responses)*

Respondents were asked to select the five most important skills (from a list of thirteen) that they look for when hiring. The percentage responses of all respondents to this question who selected a particular skill are listed in Table 11.

Table 11: Most important skills when hiring

Skill	Percent
Work Ethic, Dedication and Dependability	76%
Teamwork and Interpersonal Skills	66%
Willingness to Learn	47%
Customer Service	44%
Self-Motivation and Independence	44%
Oral and Written Communication	42%
Time Management and Organization Skills	35%
Ability to Follow Instructions	35%
Technical	32%
Professionalism	32%
Problem Solving and Creativity	29%
Computer Literacy	16%
Analytical/Research Skills	8%

There are two skills which lead the pack, with three-quarters (76%) choosing "Work ethic, dedication and dependability" and two-thirds (66%) choosing "teamwork and interpersonal skills". This is consistent with other employer surveys that have been conducted.

SUPPORT FOR EMPLOYEE TRAINING *(499 responses)*

Employers were asked if they provide or support training and education for their employees. Respondents were once again given a list of options and could choose as many that apply. In response to this question:

- 77% of respondents said they fund employee training or education (either fully or in part)
- 50% offer flexible work schedules
- 48% supply information on opportunities available
- 25% use government hiring and training incentives
- 9% replied 'other' (which consisted of onsite training that they undertook).

SOURCES OF TRAINING *(498 responses)*

Respondents were asked to choose as many responses as relevant to their business regarding sources of training for their employees. Options and responses include:

- On-the-job training (82%)
- Online webinars/workshops (52%)
- Peer-to-peer training (47%)
- College (46%)
- Distance/online education (31%)
- Industry professional association (27%)
- University (25%)
- Private trainer (20%)
- Adult learning centre (6%)
- Local union (6%)
- School board (3%)
- Other (5%).

82%
of the respondents identify on-the-job training as the most common source of training for employees

The "Other" category responses often reiterated one of the table choices; two mentioned apprenticeship programs and one referenced training provided by a supplier.

OBSTACLES TO TRAINING *(490 responses)*

A list of obstacles to training was provided, and respondents were asked to choose all obstacles that were relevant to their business:

- Cost of training (55%)
- Distance to travel for training (39%)
- Relevant programs not offered in the region (32%)
- Loss of trained employees to other employers (31%)
- Loss of productivity during training periods (29%)
- Lack of awareness of training programs available (25%)
- Lack of awareness of support for employee training (17%)
- Lack of awareness of legislated training requirements (4%)
- Other (13%)

In the "Other" category, obstacles included not having enough staff to cover for employees being engaged in training, time or the unwillingness of employees to participate in training.

EMPLOYMENT EXPERIENCE OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENTS *(498 responses)*

Respondents were asked whether they provided employment experience opportunities to students and youth. The survey provided 12 categories of experience, including paid and unpaid coop placements for high school, college or university students, paid and unpaid internships, high school and college apprenticeships, summer jobs and part-time jobs.

Table 12: EMPLOYMENT EXPERIENCE FOR STUDENTS	
Employment experience opportunity	**Percent**
Summer jobs for students	57%
Part-time jobs for students	40%
Unpaid high school Coop placements	39%
College apprenticeships	28%
Unpaid college Coop placements	22%
Paid college Coop placements	20%
Unpaid university Coop placements	19%
High school apprenticeships	16%
Paid internship	14%
Paid high school Coop placements	13%
Paid university Coop placements	13%
Unpaid internship	10%

Of all respondents who answered this question, 85% provided at least one of these opportunities and over four in ten (45%) provided at least three such opportunities.

TECHNOLOGICAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGES

IMPACT OF TECHNOLOGICAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGES *(477 responses)*

Respondents were asked about the impact of technological and environmental changes and their business and workforce, both currently and in the future (Table 13).

There were five items where a quarter or more of respondents felt there was a current impact, namely: digitalization, cyber-security, artificial intelligence, cloud-based technology, and real time data collection, management and analysis

The future impact was expected to be greater than the current impact among the following changes:

- artificial intelligence
- automation and robotics
- climate change
- autonomous equipment
- electrification

TABLE 13: IMPACT OF TECHNOLOGICAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGES NORTHEAST ONTARIO		
Changes	**Current**	**Future**
Digitalization	33%	30%
Cyber-security	30%	27%
Artificial intelligence	25%	32%
Cloud-based technology	29%	25%
No impact on our business/organization	27%	24%
Real time data collection, management and analysis	28%	23%
Automation and robotics	16%	22%
Environmental regulations	18%	18%
Climate change	12%	15%
Autonomous equipment	9%	15%
Electrification	6%	9%
Other	4%	5%

Around one-quarter (27%) said that none of these changes had a current impact on their workforce, and a comparable share (24%) thought there would be no impact in the future.

IMPACT OF TECHNOLOGICAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGES ON THE WORKFORCE
(478 responses)

When asked about what impact these technological and environmental changes will have specifically on their workforce, a number of potential impacts were provided. By far, the biggest impact predicted by respondents was on the need for upskilling and reskilling at 50% followed by other impacts such as:

- Our workforce will need continuous upskilling or reskilling (50%)
- Our workforce will need advanced computer skills (31%)
- Workforce productivity will improve (27%)
- Our workforce will need data management skills (22%)
- Health and safety requirements will change (22%)
- Our workforce will decrease – some jobs will be lost (15%)
- Our workforce will increase – new jobs will be created (14%)
- It will facilitate remote work arrangements (11%)
- Other (14%) respondents who chose this said they did not know or that it was not applicable to them.

OCCUPATIONS EXPECTED TO BE MOST IMPACTED BY TECHNOLOGICAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGES (*478 responses)*

Respondents were invited to name up to five occupations which they thought would be most impacted by technological and environmental change. After eliminating those responses that said, "not applicable," "not sure," or "no impact," the respondents provided 854 entries. Below are the occupations which received the greatest number of mentions:

- Administrative staff, clerical
- Management
- Mechanics, auto technicians
- Salesclerk, salesperson
- Finance positions
- Pharmacy staff
- Human resources
- Labourer
- Supervisors
- Accountant
- IT positions
- Receptionist
- Cashiers
- Technician
- Welder/fitter

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES MOVING FORWARD

CURRENT AND FUTURE IMPACT OF US TARIFFS *(216 responses)*

Given the current news regarding the US tariffs, respondents were asked about the impact that US tariffs have or could have on their business or organization. Table 14 shows the percentage of respondents selecting each impact, both currently and in the future.

Four out of ten say their supply chains are and will be impacted. Two other effects are mentioned by at least three out of ten: that prices will have to be raised and that spending will have to be restricted.

Slightly more than one quarter (27%) say there is no current impact, but a smaller percentage (22%) say there will be no impact in the future. Indeed, in all instances (except those saying there will be no impact), respondents expect the future impact to be greater than the current impact, with the biggest jumps relating to the pressure to raise prices and the likely need to delay growth or expansion plans.

TABLE 14: IMPACT OF US TARIFFS, CURRENTLY AND IN THE FUTURE NORTHEAST ONTARIO		
Nature of impact	**Current**	**Future**
Our supply chain will be impacted	38%	43%
We will have to raise our prices	28%	38%
We will have to restrict spending because of uncertainty	28%	32%
No impact on our business/organization	27%	22%
We will delay growth/expansion plans	15%	24%
We will have difficulty honoring existing contracts	11%	13%
We will reduce our hours, staff and operations	8%	15%
Other	8%	7%

Among those that selected “Other,” the most common comment was a concern about fewer US visitors or seasonal residents, and the impact on the tourism sector and the local economy. A number of respondents said it was hard to know what the impact would be, and several felt it would require the development of new business strategies.

BIGGEST CHALLENGES IN THE NEXT 3 YEARS *(377 responses)*

When asked what they anticipate the biggest challenge will be for their business or organization in the next three years, 377 respondents provided 433 answers (some responses suggested two challenges).

By far, the most frequently mentioned challenge was a workforce issue (cited by 46%, almost half), the vast majority of whom felt challenged by the shortage of skilled or qualified job candidates; most of the others were concerned about the ability to retain staff or about replacing workers who were retiring.

After these workforce issues, it is important to point out that there were three further items, noted by a small number of employers:

- Increasing costs (12%): A considerable proportion pointed to increasing costs as their biggest challenge, for everything from supplies to operational costs to wages, as well as shrinkflation creating cost burdens.
- Coping within funding constraints (7%): Several organizations relied on their survival on external funding, which created uncertainty and made it difficult to plan for the long-term; funding constraints jeopardized the quality of services and made it difficult to offer competitive wages.
- Responding to growth, expansion and general business challenges (6%): this included keeping up with growth in the economy, managing growth across dispersed locations and scaling one's operations while maintaining quality and efficiency standards.
- Tariffs (6%): Several respondents again mentioned tariffs and how they contributed to uncertainty and were already resulting in supply chain difficulties.

Otherwise, several respondents mentioned trying to plan and carry on business amidst the uncertainties created by the economic and geopolitical turbulence of these times.

BIGGEST OPPORTUNITIES IN THE NEXT 3 YEARS *(337 responses)*

Respondents were also asked what they felt was the biggest opportunity for their business or organization in the next three years. In total, 337 comments were made (a handful mentioned more than one item). Most of the responses fell into the following clusters:

Growth and/or expansion (111 mentions, 33% of all respondents)

- Many cited growth, either growth in the local economy or their operations expanding, usually in response to growth; several mentioned expanding into new markets, including internationally, as well as opportunities arising from the increased emphasis on mining, major infrastructure projects, Canada's desire to diversify its trading partners and to broaden its manufacturing sector.

Technology (42 mentions, 13%)

- Various technological advancements were seen as ways to increase productivity and expand businesses, in particular, AI, digitization and automation.

Business improvements (30 mentions, 9%)

- Quite apart from the economic context, several respondents mentioned their own plans to make changes in their business processes to make their organization more effective.

Workforce development (23 mentions, 7%)

- Several respondents felt that investments in training and better recruitment processes would benefit their companies; some mentioned that the current circumstances provided an incentive to upskill their workforce, especially the continuing technological changes taking place.

The opportunities created by the expansion of the mining sector were mentioned a number of times, most prominently in the Far Northeast Training Board area, as well as in the Sudbury/Manitoulin and Parry Sound/Nipissing areas.

CONCLUSION

As is mentioned in the introduction, this survey was conducted by four workforce planning boards across northeastern Ontario: Algoma Workforce Investment Corporation, the Labour Market Group, Workforce Planning for Sudbury & Manitoulin, and the Far Northeast Training Board.

There was a very high degree of similarity across the responses from all four areas for every question in the survey. This suggests two conclusions: firstly, how employers experience these various workforce issues is generally the same across Northeast Ontario. Secondly, it provides affirmation that the results for each individual survey are sound, as it is far less unlikely that any one survey is unrepresentative when each survey provides much the same response.

While this report reflects the insight of the 602 employers from across the Northeastern Ontario region who responded to the survey, it nevertheless confirms a number of workforce issues related to recruitment, training and retention that have been fairly consistent across the region over the past years.

More specifically, it is not surprising that almost half view workforce issues as the biggest challenge for their business or organization in the next three years, either the challenge of recruiting or retaining employees, concerns regarding the large number of retirements, and worry that there are not enough qualified job candidates to fill labour needs.

That being said, many felt there were opportunities for their business or organization, because of growth in the local economy, business expansion possibilities, productivity advancements brought on by technological change, or the increased incentive to invest in workforce development because of technological change.

In closing, while the insights gained from this survey highlight what we might already understand about local workforce needs and issues, they also show that employers appear to be resilient and optimistic about the local economy and new paths moving forward. They see growth opportunities, are seeking new markets and are looking at ways to improve their business.

All of the topics discussed here are important as we move into the future to ensure a prosperous and growing economy with a robust workforce that is ready, trained and balanced to meet the needs of employers.

This section of the report includes tables that highlight the percentage responses to some of the survey questions for the entire Northeast region and for each of the four Northeastern Ontario Workforce Planning Boards:

Algoma Workforce Investment Corporation (AWIC)
Labour Market Group (LMG)
Workforce Planning for Sudbury and Manitoulin (WPSM)
Far Northeast Training Board (FNETB)

TABLE A: PERCENT OF RESPONDENTS BY INDUSTRY

INDUSTRY	SURVEY				NE ACTUAL
	LMG	WPSM	FNETB	AWIC	
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	4.1%	1.9%	4.8%	0.9%	2.5%
Mining, Quarrying and Oil and Gas Extraction	0.0%	10.7%	6.9%	3.6%	0.9%
Utilities	0.0%	1.0%	0.7%	0.0%	0.3%
Construction	10.3%	19.4%	10.7%	8.9%	14.7%
Manufacturing	12.4%	4.9%	4.8%	5.4%	3.8%
Wholesale Trade	0.0%	1.0%	1.0%	0.9%	15.1%
Retail Trade	12.4%	6.8%	14.1%	11.6%	3.6%
Transportation and Warehousing	3.1%	1.0%	2.1%	1.8%	3.4%
Information and Cultural Industries	2.1%	0.0%	1.4%	1.8%	1.4%
Finance and Insurance	4.1%	1.0%	3.8%	3.6%	3.4%
Real Estate, Rental and Leasing	0.0%	0.0%	1.7%	0.0%	4.7%
Professional, Scientific and Technical Services	1.0%	6.8%	4.5%	2.7%	7.2%
Management of Companies and Enterprises	0.0%	0.0%	0.3%	0.9%	0.3%
Administration and Support, Waste Mgmt	0.0%	1.0%	1.4%	0.0%	4.1%
Educational Services	17.5%	9.7%	6.2%	7.1%	1.1%
Healthcare and Social Assistance	12.4%	10.7%	13.5%	17.0%	12.6%
Arts, Entertainment and Recreation	1.0%	2.9%	2.8%	4.5%	1.9%
Accommodation and Food Services	9.3%	3.9%	4.8%	15.2%	8.3%
Other Services (Except Public Administration)	4.1%	9.7%	9.0%	8.9%	9.2%
Public Administration	6.2%	7.8%	5.5%	5.4%	1.5%

Actual figures are from Statistics Canada's Canadian Business Counts for NE Ontario, December 2024

TABLE B: PRESENCE OF SUCCESSION PLAN					
STATUS	Percent				
	LMG	WPSM	FNETB	AWIC	NE
Yes, for key roles	20%	16%	21%	21%	20%
Yes, for some key roles	25%	24%	16%	19%	19%
No, we don't have a formal succession plan	31%	38%	41%	43%	39%
We are currently developing a succession plan	17%	16%	10%	8%	12%
I do not know	8%	7%	11%	9%	10%

TABLE C: BIGGEST CHALLENGES WHEN RECRUITING NEW EMPLOYEES					
Challenge	LMG	WPSM	FNETB	AWIC	NE
Applicants lack the skills required	58%	59%	60%	60%	60%
Applicants lack work experience required	56%	52%	47%	54%	51%
Low number of applicants	55%	38%	52%	54%	50%
Applicants lack the qualifications required	42%	48%	48%	55%	48%
Competition from other employers	43%	36%	37%	38%	38%
Applicants lack soft skills	30%	33%	36%	41%	36%
Compensation expectations	24%	44%	30%	37%	33%
Location challenges	40%	31%	28%	36%	32%
Other	13%	16%	10%	20%	13%

TABLE D: OTHER CHALLENGES TO EMPLOYEE RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION					
Challenge	LMG	WPSM	FNETB	AWIC	NE
Lack of houses/apartments to rent	42%	33%	43%	37%	40%
Lack of daycare	20%	22%	24%	20%	23%
Lack of public transportation	18%	31%	21%	19%	22%
Lack of houses to purchase	14%	21%	15%	18%	17%
Lack of reliable and affordable internet access	8%	9%	2%	5%	5%
Other	44%	46%	45%	52%	47%

TABLE E: MOST IMPORTANT SKILLS WHEN HIRING					
Skill	**LMG**	**WPSM**	**FNETB**	**AWIC**	**NE**
Work Ethic, Dedication and Dependability	81%	70%	77%	75%	76%
Teamwork and Interpersonal Skills	79%	66%	59%	73%	66%
Willingness to Learn	44%	54%	47%	45%	47%
Customer Service	49%	33%	46%	46%	44%
Self-Motivation and Independence	49%	37%	45%	41%	44%
Oral and Written Communication	32%	44%	44%	46%	42%
Technical	45%	37%	31%	31%	35%
Time Management and Organization Skills	33%	36%	37%	33%	35%
Ability to Follow Instructions	26%	34%	33%	35%	32%
Professionalism	38%	34%	30%	30%	32%
Problem Solving and Creativity	31%	37%	26%	25%	29%
Computer Literacy	19%	12%	19%	12%	16%
Analytical/Research Skills	10%	6%	8%	9%	8%

TABLE F: OCCUPATIONS THAT ARE HARDEST TO FILL			
LMG	**WPSM**	**FNETB**	**AWIC**
• Early childhood educator/assistant educator • Engineer • Manager • Millwright • Sales associate • Cook • Housekeeping • IT roles • Welder	• Engineer • Tradesperson • Sales associate • Manager • Early childhood educators/assistant educators • Administrative staff • Employment counsellor/job developer • Heavy duty equipment mechanic • Technician	• Sales associate • Mechanic • Registered nurse • Driver, truck driver • Millwright • Administrative staff • Labourer • Welder/fitter	• Cook • Manager • Carpenter • Labourer • Cashier • Early childhood educator/assistant educator • Finance/accounting • Sales associate • Administrative staff

TABLE G: SUPPORT FOR EMPLOYEE TRAINING AND EDUCATION					
Type of support	LMG	WPSM	FNETB	AWIC	NE
We fund training or education, either fully or in part	76%	81%	76%	66%	77%
We offer flexible work schedules	48%	50%	43%	43%	50%
We supply information on opportunities available	43%	42%	48%	44%	48%
We use government hiring and training incentives	29%	31%	29%	21%	25%
Other	10%	8%	10%	13%	9%

TABLE H: COMMON SOURCES OF TRAINING AND EDUCATION					
Source of training or education	LMG	WPSM	FNETB	AWIC	NE
On the job training	82%	82%	81%	81%	82%
Online webinars/workshop	42%	62%	51%	52%	52%
Peer-to-Peer training	48%	48%	46%	46%	47%
College	57%	42%	42%	52%	46%
Distance/Online Education	24%	27%	32%	41%	31%
Industry Professional Association	22%	28%	27%	31%	27%
University	34%	27%	19%	29%	25%
Private trainers	17%	27%	18%	22%	20%
Adult Learning Centre	2%	8%	9%	2%	6%
Local union	8%	12%	4%	4%	6%
School Board	5%	2%	3%	2%	3%
Other	4%	4%	7%	2%	5%

TABLE I: OBSTACLES TO THE PROVISION OF OR SUPPORT FOR TRAINING					
Obstacles to training	LMG	WPSM	FNETB	AWIC	NE
Cost of training	52%	60%	54%	57%	55%
Distance to travel for training	39%	29%	42%	41%	39%
Relevant programs not offered in the region	31%	29%	33%	33%	32%
Loss of trained employees to other employers	15%	34%	33%	35%	31%
Loss of productivity during training periods	23%	36%	31%	22%	29%
Lack of awareness of training programs available	23%	28%	23%	28%	25%
Lack of awareness of support for employee training	11%	18%	19%	17%	17%
Lack of awareness of legislated training requirements	3%	1%	4%	6%	4%
Other	21%	13%	13%	13%	15%

TABLE G: EMPLOYMENT EXPERIENCE OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENTS AND YOUTH					
Employment experience opportunity	LMG	WPSM	FNETB	AWIC	NE
Summer jobs for students	54%	57%	60%	52%	57%
Unpaid high school Coop placements	54%	31%	39%	40%	40%
Part-time jobs for students	37%	33%	40%	44%	39%
Unpaid college Coop placements	36%	39%	22%	28%	28%
College apprenticeships	30%	16%	22%	19%	22%
Unpaid university Coop placements	17%	29%	17%	24%	20%
Paid college Coop placements	11%	30%	17%	18%	19%
Paid internship	22%	16%	15%	15%	16%
Paid high school Coop placements	11%	17%	14%	13%	14%
Paid university Coop placements	8%	24%	11%	12%	13%
High school apprenticeships	16%	8%	15%	9%	13%
Unpaid internship	11%	11%	10%	9%	10%

TABLE K: IMPACTS OF TECHNOLOGICAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGES ON THE WORKFORCE					
Impact	LMG	WPSM	FNETB	AWIC	NE
Our workforce will need continuous upskilling/reskilling	62%	57%	44%	48%	50%
Our workforce will need advanced computer skills	45%	34%	29%	21%	31%
Workforce productivity will improve	31%	28%	26%	28%	27%
Our workforce will need data management skills	22%	31%	21%	14%	22%
Health and safety requirements will change	33%	21%	19%	23%	22%
Our workforce will need project management skills	22%	35%	15%	14%	20%
Our workforce will decrease - some jobs will be lost	11%	12%	20%	11%	15%
Our workforce will increase - new jobs will be created	21%	13%	13%	14%	14%
It will facilitate remote work arrangements	5%	14%	12%	13%	11%
Other	11%	10%	16%	14%	14%

TABLE L: OCCUPATIONS TO BE IMPACTED THE MOST BY TECHNOLOGICAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE			
LMG	**WPSM**	**FNETB**	**AWIC**
• Administrative staff, clerical • Management, manager • All occupations • Human resources • Labourer • Project manager	• Administrative staff, clerical • Labourer • Management, manager • Engineer • IT positions • Heavy equipment operator • Human resources • Sales associate	• Administrative staff, clerical • Management, manager • Mechanic, auto technician • Sales associate • Finance positions • Pharmacy staff • Human resources • Labourer	• Administrative staff, clerical • Management, manager • Sales associate • Server • Carpenter • Cashier • Housekeeper