

Strategic Plan

2023 – 2026





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Message From Our Chair



Michael G. Sherrard
Board Chair

We are pleased to share with you our inaugural Strategic Plan and vision for the future of Skilled Trades Ontario as approved by the Board of Directors on August 22, 2023.

Demand for a new generation of skilled trades workers continues to grow. With historic infrastructure investments, including Ontario's Housing Supply Action Plan which will see 1.5 million homes built over the next 10 years, and an aging workforce, the need is more pressing now than ever before.

To meet these challenges, we engaged our staff, clients and industry partners to develop an ambitious plan for the next three years. Our plan aims to create opportunities and prosperity for skilled trades professionals in over 140 skilled trades across Ontario. Our plan also aims to create opportunities for those who are considering, or have never considered, the rich and diverse career opportunities the skilled trades offer.

As we move forward, we remain committed to collaborating with you, our partners. Thank you for your ongoing support and collaboration.

Together, we will build a stronger Ontario for skilled trades professionals.

Michael Sherrard
Chair, Skilled Trades Ontario

Message From Our CEO/Registrar



Melissa Young
CEO

Skilled trades are vital to Ontario’s success and continued economic growth.

That is why our top priority is ensuring we have the skilled workers we need now and in the future.

I am proud to present Skilled Trades Ontario’s first Strategic Plan, which sets out a roadmap to meet this goal. This plan reflects the input and advice of skilled trades professionals, experts, training delivery agents, our staff, clients, the government and our Board of Directors.

By prioritizing skills development, technological advancements and workforce diversity, we will build a highly skilled and adaptable workforce that is equipped to meet the demands of the sector for years to come.

I want to express my sincere appreciation to everyone involved in this process for their invaluable contributions. With your continued support and guidance, the future looks bright for Ontario’s skilled trades.

Melissa Young
CEO/Registrar, Skilled Trades Ontario

The Big Picture of Skilled Trades Ontario

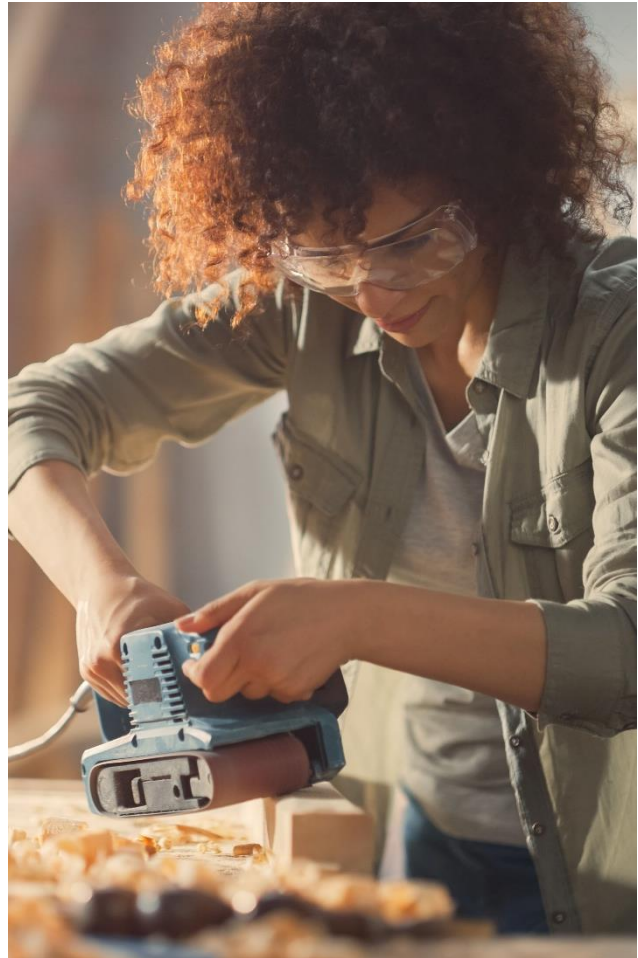


Introduction

Skilled Trades Ontario was launched during a period of unprecedented global, national, provincial and regional challenges. With soaring demand for skilled trades professionals and a surge in provincial and federal infrastructure investment, Skilled Trades Ontario has critical work to do.

These important challenges require an integrated approach: one founded on continuous collaboration, conversation and partnership.

That is why we relied heavily on the input of our many stakeholders to develop our first three-year strategy. Through interviews, focus groups and an industry event, we heard from employer associations, labour organizations, training delivery agents, apprentices, and government and industry partners. These diverse voices were the foundation of our first three-year strategy.



Today's Environment

To orient this strategy, it is important to consider the broader trends that Ontario's skilled trades professionals are navigating today, and in the years to come.

Political Context

Economic development and job growth continue to be top priorities for governments at all levels.

- Focused provincial economic priorities make developing a larger skilled trades workforce more critical than ever.
- Ever-increasing pressure for policymakers to take concrete action on workforce development and diversification.
- Provincial commitments to address by building the infrastructure our province needs, including at least 1.5 million homes by 2031.
- Implementation of provincial infrastructure policies and spending, requiring a robust skilled trades workforce. For example, in its 2023 Budget, the Province of Ontario announced an investment of more than \$184 billion over the next 10 years to support public infrastructure.

This is the most ambitious capital plan in Ontario's history, and it will significantly increase the demand for skilled tradespeople within the next decade.¹

Economic Context

The number of Canadians nearing the age of retirement outnumber young people entering the workforce, and the demand for a new generation of skilled trades workers is soaring across the country.²

- The Government of Canada (Employment and Social Development Canada) reports that approximately 700,000 skilled trades workers are expected to retire in Canada by 2028, creating an ever-growing need to recruit and train thousands more.³
- As it relates to the construction sector, retirements continue to outpace the recruitment of new entrants, which contributes to ongoing labour market challenges for Ontario's construction industry.⁴ Labour market challenges re-emerged in Ontario's skilled trades construction market in 2021 as a surge in new housing construction, along with a significant rise in non-residential investment, increased employment levels faster than the labour force.⁵
- According to Build Force Canada, the construction industry will need to add approximately 15,500 additional workers between 2022 and 2027 to meet construction demands.⁶ Further, the retirement of more than 56,300 workers (i.e., 13% of the current labour force) will increase the recruitment requirements for the construction industry to approximately 71,800 workers over the next six years.⁷
- These longer-term supply challenges for the construction industry have been exacerbated by a sharp decline in new apprenticeship registrations and interruptions and delays in training in 2020 and 2021 due to COVID-19.⁸
- Though numbers have rebounded since late 2021, making up the gap will take time.

¹ Government of Ontario (2023). 2023 Ontario Budget. [online: web] URL: <https://budget.ontario.ca/2023/chapter-1a.html#:~:text=To%20support%20the%20future%20of,capital%20plan%20in%20Ontario's%20history>.

² Statistics Canada (2022). People nearing retirement outnumber people old enough to enter the labour market, [online: web] URL: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/220427/g-a001-eng.htm>.

³ Government of Canada (2022). Government of Canada invests to help Canadians enter skilled trades. [online: web] URL: <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/news/2022/07/government-of-canada-invests-to-help-canadians-enter-skilled-trades.html>

⁴ BuildForce Canada (2022). Construction and Maintenance Looking Forward. [online: web] URL: https://www.buildforce.ca/system/files/forecast_summary_reports/2022%20ON%20Constr%20Maint%20Looking%20Forward.pdf

⁵ Ibid. p. 1.

⁶ Ibid. p. 1

⁷ Ibid. p. 1

⁸ Ibid. p. 3



Social Context

Appropriate representation, equity and access to skilled trades careers are more important than ever. Addressing these issues creates economic and social opportunities for a broader segment of society and broadens the pool of prospective skilled trades professionals.

- Admission of economic immigrant applicants intending to work in the skilled trades increased rapidly in Canada from around 2,500 annually in the first half of the 2000s to around 7,100 in 2015, then decreased to 6,800 in 2019.⁹
- Women made up 2.4% of working-age apprenticeship certificate holders in the fields of construction trades, mechanic and repair technologies, and precision production in 2021.¹⁰
- In Canada, women make up fewer than 10% of Red Seal certified journeypersons, and they are overwhelmingly concentrated in three trades: hairstylist, cook and baker.¹¹
- Further, female journeypersons with Red Seal certification earn persistently less than their male counterparts within all broad trade categories.¹²

⁹ StatsCan, (2021) The Labour Market Outcomes of Economic Immigrants in the Skilled Trades. [online: web] URL: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/36-28-0001/2021011/article/00003-eng.htm>

¹⁰ Statistic Canada (2022). Canada leads the G7 for the most educated workforce, thanks to immigrants, young adults, and a strong college sector, but is experiencing significant losses in apprenticeship certificate holders in key trades. [online: web] URL: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/221130/dq221130a-eng.htm>

¹¹ LMIC (2021). Women with low-earning trade certifications. [online: web] URL: <https://lmic-cimt.ca/publications-all/lmi-insight-report-no-41/#:~:text=Acknowledgements-,Key%20Findings,in%20all%20broad%20trade%20categories.>

¹² Ibid.

- Stigma around careers in the skilled trades continues to exist. Young people are often steered towards college and university by their parents due to misconceptions of skilled trades careers being low-skilled and low-paying with minimal job stability and a lack of long-term career prospects.¹³

Technological Context

The digital skills gap is widening rapidly amid increasing technological advances across the skilled trades in such areas as automation, electric vehicle design, construction and maintenance.

- Technological changes have transformed not only the tools available to tradespeople, but the skills needed to operate them (e.g., tools and skills required to build and maintain an electric vehicle).
- 25% of Canada’s four million skilled trades professionals will need to upgrade their skills within five years amid significant digital disruption.¹⁴
- Demand for digital and “soft” skills like creativity and problem-solving is expected to rise significantly across the skilled trades.¹⁵
- With mobile technology now ubiquitous, the skilled trades workforce is more distributed and mobile in nature. Training, registration, accreditation and service information need to be designed for mobile-first and digital environments.

¹³ Government of Ontario (2021). *Supporting an Accessible and Inclusive Skilled Trades and Apprenticeship System in Ontario*. [online: web] URL: <https://www.ontario.ca/document/supporting-accessible-and-inclusive-skilled-trades-and-apprenticeship-system-ontario>

¹⁴ Conference Board of Canada (2020). *Bridging Generational Divides; Advancing Digital Skills in Canada’s Apprenticeships and Skilled Trades Ecosystem*. [online: web] URL: <https://fsc-ccf.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Bridging-generational-divides-impact-paper.pdf>

¹⁵ Ibid

Skilled Trades Ontario's Mandate and What We Do

Skilled Trades Ontario is a Crown agency operating at arms-length from the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development and is dedicated to promoting rewarding careers in the skilled trades which support Ontario's economy. The agency works to raise awareness about the benefits of working in the skilled trades and helps to ensure apprentices and skilled trades professionals are trained to the highest quality standards.

One of Skilled Trades Ontario's key priorities is to promote and market the skilled trades in the province. As many skilled trades workers approach retirement age, there is a growing need for new workers to fill the gap. By encouraging more young people to pursue careers in the skilled trades, Skilled Trades Ontario is helping to ensure a strong future for the industry and for Ontario.

The Government of Ontario outlines Skilled Trades Ontario's role and responsibilities in Section 40 of the *Building Opportunities in the Skilled Trades Act, 2021*.¹⁶ They include:

- Establishing apprenticeship programs and other training programs for skilled trades, including training standards, curriculum standards and certifying examinations.
- Conducting research and evaluating whether a skilled trade should be prescribed as a skilled trade for the purposes of this Act and make recommendations on these matters to the Minister.
- Issuing certificates for the purposes of this Act.
- Assessing whether the experience and qualifications obtained by applicants for a Certificate of Qualification who do not complete an apprenticeship are equivalent to those received through completing an apprenticeship.
- Maintaining a public register of every apprentice in a compulsory skilled trade and every holder of a Certificate of Qualification or Provisional Certificate of Qualification in a compulsory skilled trade.
- Promoting skilled trades and apprenticeship.
- Promoting inclusivity and diversity in relation to skilled trades and apprenticeship.
- Conducting research in relation to skilled trades and apprenticeship.
- Collaborating with other governments in Canada with respect to the Interprovincial Standards Red Seal Program for apprenticeship and with respect to standards, qualifications and other requirements in relation to skilled trades.

¹⁶Ibid



Our Strategic Approach

The 2023-2026 Strategic Plan is centered on the vision, mission and values of Skilled Trades Ontario that were launched in 2022.

Vision

Our vision for the future of skilled trades in Ontario is:

To make Ontario the place where skilled trades professionals thrive.

Our vision is grounded in the needs of our partners, stakeholders and our province. It is a statement about the future we will help build, along with our partners and stakeholders.

Mission

The mission of Skilled Trades Ontario is:

To support Ontario's economic success as the central authority responsible for establishing leading-edge standards in the skilled trades to meet the opportunities of today and the challenges of tomorrow.

This is our purpose, and it is why Skilled Trades Ontario exists. It is why we are excited to come to work every day. It is both the starting point for our initiatives, policies and programs, and our decision-making guide.

Values

Our values as an organization are:

- **Professional:** Setting high standards for a trusted and valued skilled trades workforce.
- **Accessible:** Making the pathways into the skilled trades clear and straightforward for all.
- **Agile:** Providing leading-edge education and certification standards.
- **Collaborative:** Building strong partnerships with skilled trades professionals, employers and training providers.
- **Engaged:** Being there for skilled trades professionals, where and when they need us.

Our values exemplify how we conduct ourselves, manage our organization and engage with our partners and stakeholders. They are at the heart of everything we do and every decision that we make.

Three-Year Strategic Priorities

Based on the input gathered from our partners, stakeholders, Board of Directors and staff, we developed four strategic priorities to guide our work over the next three years.

Each strategic priority is aligned with our mandate and the *Building Opportunities in the Skilled Trades Act, 2021*,¹⁷ and represents our roadmap to delivering on our vision and mission as an organization.

Our three-year strategic priorities are to:

1. Support an innovative apprenticeship and certification model
2. Promote and advance the skilled trades
3. Facilitate research in the skilled trades, and
4. Build a diverse, equitable and inclusive skilled trades sector.

The following pages provide details on how we define these strategic priorities, our plans to achieve them and what we will deliver.



¹⁷ Legislature of Ontario Bill 288 Building Opportunities in the Skilled Trades Act, 2021, S.O. 2021, c. 28 – Bill 288. [online: web] URL: <https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/s21028>



Success Factor #1: Support an Innovative Apprenticeship and Certification Model

During our stakeholder engagements, there was a growing recognition that a streamlined and simplified pathway to apprenticeship is critical for advancing the skilled trades. Skilled Trades Ontario is dedicated to supporting an apprenticeship experience that prioritizes the needs of our clients and supports employers in building the skills and capabilities of their apprentices.

Skilled Trades Ontario is responsible for ensuring that training and curriculum standards as well as assessments/examinations reflect the need of the skilled trades sector today and in the future. We will collaborate with our partners to ensure Ontario's skilled trades training and curriculum standards lead the way in Canada, and that the process of entering the skilled trades and completing qualifications is seamless and frictionless.¹⁸

For Skilled Trades Ontario, this means:

- We will clearly communicate Ontario's apprenticeship model.
- We will simplify and streamline the apprenticeship pathway to support entry and success for employers and prospective apprentices.¹⁹
- We will update training and curriculum standards.
- We will enhance certification and examination processes.

What we aim to deliver:

- Increased stakeholder awareness and understanding of the process to become an apprentice.
- Updated training and curriculum standards aligned with the current and future needs of the skilled trades workforce.
- Enhanced examination and certification processes from the point of preparation to completion.

We will achieve this by:

- Collaborating with the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development (MLITSD) and partners to simplify and streamline the apprenticeship pathway(s).
- Developing tools and supports for apprentices and employers throughout the apprenticeship pathway.
- Revising training and curriculum standards to keep pace with evolving trends in the skilled trades sector (e.g., economic trends, technological advancements, newly prescribed skilled trades, etc.).
- Reviewing and enhancing certification processes to ensure they are future proofed.
- Exploring alternative assessment models.

¹⁸ Harmonization of the skilled trades in Ontario with other Canadian provinces and territories is an ongoing process, and STO will continue to collaborate with MLITSD.

¹⁹ STO will collaborate with MLITSD to streamline the apprenticeship pathway.

Success Factor #2: Promote and Advance the Skilled Trades

Skilled trades play a vital role in Ontario's economy by providing essential services, building and maintaining infrastructure, and creating the specialized equipment and tools we need to power Ontario's economy. A strong skilled trades workforce will ensure the maintenance and growth of infrastructure, manufacturing and innovation.

Skilled Trades Ontario is mandated to promote and advance the skilled trades. This ensures our workforce is robust and trained to the highest standard, and that skilled trades professionals can take pride in their career choice and the services they provide.

For Skilled Trades Ontario, this means:

- We will work to promote the skilled trades as a career of choice.
- We will champion a variety of career paths in the skilled trades professions.
- We will demonstrate the value of certification and apprenticeship.
- We will communicate a clear and unified identity to our stakeholders and industry partners.

What we aim to deliver:

- Increased stakeholder knowledge and awareness of Skilled Trades Ontario's role and scope of work.
- Increased growth in the skilled trades workforce.
- Perceptions of the skilled trades professions as a valuable career option among students, parents, educators and key stakeholders.

We will achieve this by:

- Promoting the values and benefits of skilled trades professions to all Ontarians.
- Identifying and demonstrating the diversity and flexibility of skilled trades in an individual's career path.
- Raising awareness of Skilled Trades Ontario's role and scope of work.



Success Factor #3: Facilitate Research in the Skilled Trades

Skilled Trades Ontario will take an informed, data-driven approach to decision-making. This approach will aim to improve operational efficiency, customer satisfaction and the overall performance of the skilled trades sector. It will also enable our stakeholders to identify trends, make accurate predictions and mitigate risks, leading to better strategic planning and competitive advantage for the province.

Collaborating with our partners and stakeholders, we will work to ensure that the strategies, initiatives and decisions made around Ontario's more than 140 recognized skilled trades are grounded in published and reliable data and analysis.

For Skilled Trades Ontario, this means:

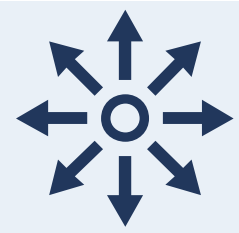
- We will be a centre of excellence for respected and trusted research and insights to support policies related to apprentices, employers and government.
- We will use data to support evidence-based decision-making on policies related to the skilled trades sector.
- We will build a user-centric culture that is focused on making processes and services work better for apprentices and skilled trades professionals.

What we aim to deliver:

- Improved use of data for evidence-based decision-making, information sharing and reporting.
- Increased transparency and accountability in information reporting.
- Transparency in decision-making to inspire trust among Skilled Trades Ontario's stakeholders.
- Increased knowledge and use of emerging technologies in the skilled trades sector.

We will achieve this by:

- Establishing a hub for research and insights on skilled trades.
- Reporting on skilled trades priorities to support government decision-making.



Success Factor #4: Build a Diverse, Equitable and Inclusive Skilled Trades Sector

Diversity, equity and inclusion in the skilled trades are essential for creating a more representative workforce and ensuring equitable opportunities for all. Embracing diversity in the industry will help to overcome labour shortages, encourage innovation and increase client satisfaction. By promoting equity and inclusion in the skilled trades, we aim to create a welcoming environment that fosters creativity, encourages teamwork and empowers individuals from all backgrounds.

This focus area will promote the skilled trades as a welcoming career choice for all and ensure all stakeholders have the knowledge and tools they need to support diversity, equity and inclusion.

For Skilled Trades Ontario, this means:

- We will strive to ensure the skilled trades reflect Ontario's diverse population and geography.
- We will build partnerships to encourage the representation of equity-deserving communities, youth and Indigenous peoples in the skilled trades.
- We will evolve our practices, policies, tools and technologies to create an equitable and inclusive culture.

What we aim to deliver:

- Partnerships established with organizations focused on employment and/or skilled trades that represent equity-deserving groups, youth and Indigenous peoples.
- Increased representation of equity-deserving populations, youth and Indigenous peoples in the skilled trades workforce.
- Increased awareness of cultural-safety needs among stakeholders to ensure all skilled trades professionals are supported and respected.

We will achieve this by:

- Working with the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development to increase the exposure of the skilled trades in schools.
- Working with existing organizations that represent equity-deserving communities to increase engagement and representation in the skilled trades workforce.
- Cultivating a diverse, equitable and inclusive workplace at Skilled Trades Ontario.



Measuring Success

As outlined at the beginning of the Strategic Plan, the skilled trades sector is facing diverse challenges, requiring an approach founded on continuous collaboration, conversation and partnership.

That is why the development of this first three-year strategy relied heavily on the input of our many stakeholders. That is also why our measures of success will be determined in ongoing conversations with skilled trades professionals, experts, employer associations, labour organizations, training delivery agents, apprentices, and government and industry partners.

To meet the needs and expectations of our stakeholders, we will identify their key priorities and use that information to create valuable services and initiatives that align with their needs. Additionally, we will be responsive to stakeholder feedback and continually strive to improve our services and initiatives to ensure their ongoing satisfaction.

We are confident that this approach will create a competitive advantage for Ontario's skilled trades professionals and achieve long-term success.

Appendix

Approach to Strategic Planning

Skilled Trades Ontario's Board of Directors and Senior Management Team developed this Strategic Plan to guide the agency over the next three years. Throughout the planning period, we considered our internal and external operating environment, examined our organization's strengths and opportunities for improvement, identified trends in the skilled trades sector we support and leveraged best practices from peer jurisdictions. This plan was developed with the input of Skilled Trades Ontario's staff, employer associations, labour organizations, training delivery agents, apprentices, and government and industry partners through interviews, focus group discussions and an industry event. As we begin to implement this plan, we will continue this engagement to ensure that we are progressing towards shared goals and achieving our collective vision for the future of Ontario's skilled trades.

Specifically, the process included:

1. **STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT:** Both internal and external stakeholders were engaged to support the planning process and determine where we were succeeding, where there was room for improvement and what should be most important to us going forward. Interviews were conducted with a variety of leaders, industry partners and staff.
2. **ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN:** Industry trends, best practices in Ontario and other jurisdictions, and the Ontario landscape were closely considered to inform the development of the Strategic Plan.
3. **STRATEGIC PLANNING MEETINGS:** Our Board and Senior Management Team came together through a series of strategic planning sessions to reaffirm our Mission, Vision and Values and to define our new strategic goals.