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# Adult Upskilling Exploratory Research Study

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## Executive Summary

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**Corporate Research Associates Inc.**

Prepared for:  
**Employment and Social Development Canada**

*Ce rapport est aussi disponible en français.*

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## Executive Summary

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### Background and Objectives

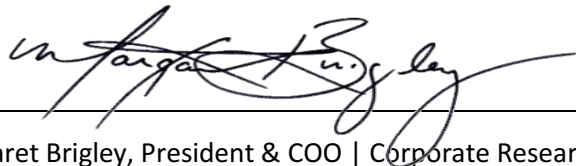
In order to better understand the motivations and barriers to employment and retraining, as well as build an overall evidence base for future communications efforts and advertising campaigns targeting this audience, ESDC commissioned a series of 18 Netfocus groups (simultaneous online and telephone discussions in real-time) with Canadian adults 25 to 60 years old (including both employed and non-employed, and Indigenous and non-Indigenous audiences). Of those, twelve groups were conducted in English with participants from various locations across Canada, while six groups were conducted in French with Quebec residents. Group discussions were conducted from March 13 to 19, 2018. Each focus group lasted approximately two hours and a \$75 token of appreciation was provided each participant, as per standard market research practice. A total of 120 participants took part across groups.

The research assessed public opinion regarding continuing education and skills development. Caution must be exercised when interpreting the results from this study, as qualitative research is directional only. Results cannot be attributed to the overall population under study, with any degree of statistical confidence. The total cost of the research was \$62,723.21 (taxes included).

### Political Neutrality Certification

I hereby certify as a Representative of Corporate Research Associates Inc. that the deliverables fully comply with the Government of Canada political neutrality requirements outlined in the ***Directive on the Management of Communications***. Specifically, the deliverables do not include information on electoral voting intentions, political party preferences, standings with the electorate or ratings of the performance of a political party or its leaders.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_



Margaret Brigley, President & COO | Corporate Research Associates  
Date: March 28, 2018



## Key Findings

Findings from the ESDC **Adult Upskilling Exploratory Research Study** suggest that efforts are needed to heighten awareness of the need for ongoing continued education and skills development as a means to stay relevant in a changing economy. Further, action is needed to increase public awareness, understanding and usage of federal government programs and services related to continued education and skills development.

When considering four specific terms (*lifelong learning, continuing learning, skills development and continuing education*) to describe the formal or informal training people take after leaving the formal education system to advance their professional skills or knowledge, findings clearly show the best alignment with **continuing education** and **skills development**. Indeed, both **lifelong learning** and **continuing learning** were considered more broadly and all-encompassing, suggesting day-to-day learning that may or may not be related to employment. By contrast, **skills development** and **continuing education** were closely aligned with work or job-related training, in a more structured format.

Continuing education and skills development are perceived to offer clear value to all those involved, including both employees and employers. For employees, training increases their knowledge and abilities, which in turn potentially increases their employability, efficiency and the value they provide to an employer.

That said, participants concurred that not all employers place importance on their employees' skill development. Most employers were deemed to recognize the value skills development and continuing education offers both in keeping employees up to date, and in increasing their company's capability and continued relevance. That said, across locations, it was felt that some employers consider skills development a risk in that it can negatively influence employee retention, resulting in little return on their investment.

When considering why someone might choose to pursue continued education or skills development, results were consistent across audiences and locations. In fact, a desire for increased financial stability is the primary motivator to pursuing continued education or skills development, followed by personal fulfillment or development.

Several barriers were identified in pursuing continuing education and skills development. The challenges primarily relate to three issues, including time, costs and a lack of motivation. Fear of the unknown was also noted, particularly when the path forward is not clear and the results are far from certain. Availability and accessibility are also barriers and these apply more strongly to those in rural areas and Indigenous people living on reserve.

Personal experiences with continuing education and skills development point to some risk aversion and lack of awareness of such opportunities. Those who are in environments where employer-sponsored



options are available and employees are expected to take them, seem more willing and able to take advantage. Often, the employer is prepared to pay and accordingly, workers often have a better picture of where such education can lead. Others are more likely to pursue such training or education only when they are required to and this is often triggered by a negative experience or event.

There is a mix of preferences for either informal or formal training options. Those preferring the latter, often want an “official” program and some form of accreditation.

The internet is the most commonly mentioned source for continuing education information and resources. Key word searches using Google or another search engine was the starting point for most. Many also turn to friends / family or peers for advice and another important source of information for Indigenous people includes Friendship Centres, mentors or role models in their communities.

There is greatest interest in two types of information relating to continuing education and skills development; information on the training/education available and employment potential following the training.

Government websites were not well known and tend not to rank highly when search engines are used. In fact, there was limited awareness that the federal government has much information on continuing education and skills development. Those who were more familiar with federal government information included immigrants and those with disabilities and they tended to deal with other federal departments.

No matter what level of current knowledge of services offered, there is a general belief that the Government of Canada should be involved in providing information and assistance related to skills development. There is also a general belief that information provided will be credible.

The lack of strong awareness that the Government of Canada does in fact have information and services related to skills development was seen as justification of the need for an awareness campaign. While online is one vehicle, many also see value in an awareness campaign that includes traditional media and some reliance on other government websites. In relation to online, social media platforms were generally suggested as the most productive way to reach people.

Finally, when considering proposed messaging there is a clear consensus that positively phrased messaging is most effective in terms of encouraging someone to pursue lifelong or continued learning. Positive messages are seen as motivating, reassuring and better prompt the audience to take action. On the other hand, messages that induce fear are considered to be negative, discouraging and generally disliked.

