

B.C. helps employers with staff training

\$3-million pilot program targets low-skilled employees

British Columbia has launched a pilot program meant to help local businesses and non-profit organizations train staff to better meet the demands of a changing labour market.

The \$3-million Targeted Skills Shortage Pilot Program is designed to help low-skilled employees who lack post-secondary training toward a degree or other credentials, gain new skills to improve productivity, take on new responsibilities and advance their careers, said the government. Up to \$1,500 per employee or \$7,500 per employer is available to pay for tuition fees and purchase training services, books, manuals and other study materials.

The pilot program targets four high-growth sectors where the demand for skilled workers over the next decade will be strong: transportation and warehousing; manufacturing; health care and social assistance; and professional, scientific and technical services.

"This pilot program provides a way for employers within B.C.'s high-growth sectors to identify and fill key skills and knowledge gaps in their operations," said Pat Bell, minister of jobs, tourism and innovation. "As part of our Skills for Growth strategy, this is one more way we are helping workers and employers succeed in a B.C. economy that is becoming increasingly dependent on a more skilled and highly trained workforce."

The program will be administered by the non-profit Association of Service Providers for Employability and Career Training (ASPECT) and local service providers will help businesses and non-profit organizations identify eligible employees, develop training plans and access funding for training.

For example, an employee in a production line could receive the training required to use new equipment and implement new processes that will both improve the individual's skills and the productivity of the manufacturer. The program could also assist a data entry worker to gain the technical training they need to advance within their company and become a software tester. "ASPECT has always believed in the importance of workplace-related training and this program represents an ideal blend of government innovation, administrative capacity and community delivery," said Norma Strachan, CEO of ASPECT.

The Targeted Skills Shortage Pilot Program is one of several programs funded through the Canada-B.C. Labour Market Agreement that are designed to help meet the current and future labour demands of the province's economy. Under the Labour Market Agreement, the federal government is providing the province about \$66 million annually until 2013-14. Through a variety of programs, these funds increase access to training for unemployed individuals who are not currently employment insurance clients, including those who are underrepresented in the labour market.

Funding also supports training for employed individuals who are low skilled, in particular, employed individuals who do not have a high school diploma or recognized certification to reach their full potential in the current marketplace, said the government.

More information on the Targeted Skills Shortage Pilot Program can be found at <http://www.aspect.bc.ca/tssp>.

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