



**Higher
Education**
STRATEGY ASSOCIATES

Observations and Recommendations Re: the CED's Work Integrated Learning Initiative

**Prepared for the Calgary Economic Development
Secretariate**

July 2023





**Higher
Education**
STRATEGY ASSOCIATES

Higher Education Strategy Associates (HESA) is a Toronto-based firm providing strategic insight and guidance to governments, postsecondary institutions, and agencies through excellence and expertise in policy analysis, monitoring and evaluation, and strategic consulting services. Through these activities, HESA strives to improve the quality, efficacy, and fairness of higher education systems in Canada and worldwide.

Authors: Janelle Curry, Nancy Johnston, Hiro Hiratsuka, and Barry Burciul

Work completed on behalf of: the Calgary Economic Development WIL Pilot Project Secretariate

Contact:

Higher Education Strategy Associates
Suite 207, 20 Maud Street, Toronto ON, M5V 2M5, Canada
+1 (416) 848-0215
info@higheredstrategy.com
www.higheredstrategy.com

© Higher Education Strategy Associates, 2023

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Methodology	1
Themes	2
1. Goals and Metrics	2
2. The Portal	4
3. Sustainability and Stakeholder Relations	7
4. Value Adds	9
Collective Impact	11
References	13

Introduction

This report presents a checkpoint in the CED Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) Pilot Project to mark how the project has been going so far, based on data and observations gathered by Higher Education Strategy Associates (HESA) and the CED Secretariate. The report is structured around four themes: Goals and Metrics, the Portal, Sustainability and Stakeholder Relations, and Value Adds. These themes are not presented in any rank order. Under each theme is a summary of the main data sources, a reflection on what is currently working well at the Secretariate, and a recommendation based on all data sources. The report concludes with an overarching recommendation for the project moving forward.

These themes and recommendations are provided as this project moves forward to refine and develop its partnership model. These recommendations are based on three sources of data. One, early observations drawn from HESA researchers through their attendance at related meetings. Two, interviews that HESA researchers conducted with key members of the Secretariate to gather their lessons learned to date. Three, the findings of a pulse survey sent by the Secretariate to the Community of Practice (CoP), a group composed of representatives from the participating post-secondary institutions (PSIs) and select funders of the project. This report is also informed by current WIL literature and practice. These recommendations do not represent all possibilities but have been selected in this report given the timing of the project, early observations of the context, and lessons learned from comparator experiences that were in the first report.

Methodology

The main methodology for this analysis is qualitative. The HESA content expert led the analysis and other team members provided support by conducting interviews and analyzing data sources to shape this report. The qualitative design of this analysis required a data management structure that allowed HESA researchers to collect and examine information in an organized and systematic approach. HESA collected data through virtual observations, informal interviews and email exchanges throughout the duration of the project, and semi-structured interviews. This data is supplemented by the pulse survey the Secretariate sent to the CoP. This analysis also applied evidence reliability methods to ensure the quality of the data.

Data Collection: HESA researchers kept virtual field notes during their attendance at periodical meetings, including the bi-weekly meetings with the CED Secretariate, monthly meetings of the Executive Decision Making Group (EDMG), platform launch meetings with participating PSIs, and monthly COP meetings. The researchers also reviewed the existing meeting minutes and other documents related to the project, and they kept notes and messages through informal interactions with CED staff members via virtual calls and email exchanges. Virtual interviews of 30-45 minutes each were conducted with five key members of the Secretariate. These were recorded with consent for transcription purposes only. The recordings were deleted following transcription. Additional data from a survey administered to PSIs was provided by the Secretariate, which had nine respondents.

Data Analysis and Quality Assurance: This analysis led by the HESA content expert organized the texts from the existing reports, notes, and messages to generate evidence. The validation methods of member and data triangulation were used for quality assurance of the data and analysis. The analysis was reviewed by HESA members and the textual data were triangulated by best practices and comparator analyses from the literature in the first report. Through the process, the HESA researchers kept each other's bias in check to ensure the quality of their analyses.

Themes

1. Goals and Metrics

The CED WIL Pilot Project has many goals, several of which are tied to specific funder expectations, but generally revolve around supporting the implementation, growth, and capacity of WIL opportunities in Calgary. Each funder has different expectations and metrics through which to evaluate the success and impact of the project. Direct beneficiaries of this project are:

1. The students who have greater access to more—and more diverse—WIL opportunities;
2. PSIs which can connect with more employers to facilitate these opportunities through a shared online portal;
3. Employers who can grow or build their capacity for offering and benefiting from WIL placements;
4. The Calgary regional economy which benefits from a future labour pool with more relevant hands-on training and skill sets;
5. Any future jurisdiction or region which can learn from this project and potentially implement a similar initiative.

Interviews with the Secretariate revealed that there are two key limitations to the data collection needed for assessing these goals. One, the PSI partners have not yet signed MoUs regarding data collection and sharing. Until they do so, data points relating to PSIs and students cannot be tracked. MoUs are expected to be signed by all seven institutions by September, and the parameters of the data collection and sharing agreement will determine what information can be gathered from that point onward. Two, the technology platform developed and supported by Magnet and Orbis does not collect nor track much of the information that is needed for this project, and requested customizations may not be readily doable. This point will be further addressed in the next theme.

The CoP survey respondents highlighted the Secretariate's role in process mapping their WIL procedures as a useful exercise to improve their ability to offer students these opportunities. Process mapping can aid in identifying bottlenecks or areas of improvement. One respondent shared that they hope the project facilitates data collection that can show them how process enhancements benefited them through the metric of

how many of their students secured WIL opportunities who would not have otherwise, something the current data collection cannot do. The survey also suggests that the goals of the project may not be clear or fully align with the PSIs' understandings, and that the timelines of the project and its milestones seem largely at odds with their work flow, style, and capacity.

What is going well: The Secretariate has been actively working to smooth out data collection limitations and proactively learn about useful metrics from other WIL initiatives in Canada.

The SUNY Works Review¹ showed how critical tracking and evaluation is to the success of the program. Based on interviews, the Secretariate clearly share this understanding and is continuously refining project goals and defining the relevant metrics which will prove very useful in future reporting. Tied to this is a key lesson learned from VIWIL,² which is the importance of getting written agreements between and amongst institutions early in the process, particularly as it relates to data collection and sharing. These early shared understandings by participating PSIs are critical and the Secretariate has appropriately been focussing significant attention to this given that those agreements are taking some time to finalize. The Secretariate also arranged a meeting with a leader of Future NB³ to discuss the metrics and goals that they used which overlap with the CED WIL Project, and to explore how they resolved data sharing issues with stakeholders. This proactive outreach to learn about Future NB/Future Wabanaki's challenges, solutions, and opportunities will hopefully be ongoing given that this project shares similar goals to the CED WIL Project and they are further along in its implementation.

Recommendation: Gain greater clarity regarding goals and align appropriate metrics to track goal attainment

In our introductory meetings, six KPIs were identified for the ongoing measurement and assessment of this project. These were:

1. Growing the number of (new) opportunities created through the project;
2. Growing the number of (new) employers supporting WIL opportunities;
3. Enhancing satisfaction (of employers, students, PSIs) with recruitment and onboarding processes;
4. Ensuring quality WIL (from employer, PSI, and Student perspectives);
5. Greater access and use of CED WIL opportunities by equity groups (students, employers, etc.);
6. Growing the number of WIL types served by the CED project and portal.

Additional discussions noted the following aims in addition to the above KPIs:

- “filling skills gaps”

¹ See deliverable one, “Scan of WIL Types and Comparator System- Level WIL Initiatives.”

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

- “fostering greater collaboration (between who and for what)”
- “sharing of resources” (what kind and with whom)
- “building capacity in small businesses” (need to define capacity and small)
- “scaling up” or “becoming a prototype for or expanding into other regions of the province” etc.

We have already discussed the need to put a finer level of detail to many of these goals (some examples of refinement needed are noted in the bracketed comments above) and to identify measures or proxies for measures we might be able to use to monitor the project’s progress.

Along the way, and at various milestones, we need to be able to make data-informed statements regarding progress toward the project’s key goals. The project needs to define a set of clearly articulated objectives for each goal that aligns with performance indicators or metrics. The project must also provide the data to monitor and assess goal attainment. We have already discussed how we could make use of regular Dashboards and other monitoring tools, yet the data we would need to include in these still requires greater definition and source identification. Once these metrics are determined, the project needs to gather baseline data as soon as possible to ensure all metrics identified can be readily accessed on an ongoing basis.

At this juncture, the CED WIL Secretariate may find value in undertaking a **strategic planning exercise** to refine the CED WIL Project’s stated high-level goals with **more specific objectives and action plans**. This strategic planning exercise will help operationalize those goals and ensure the support and monitoring of the key stakeholder needs. With the rapid start-up phase of this project reaching more of a steady state, this exercise could also be valuable in ensuring all new staff have a shared and fairly clear understanding of the key goals driving this initiative and their specific contributions to its success.

Strategic planning exercises provide an opportunity to clarify the key stakeholder groups (Employers, Students, PSIs, Project Secretariate, and Funders) and their particular goals. The exercise may also be useful to contemplate (or re-affirm as a group if this has been articulated already) the overall project mission, vision and values prior to determining individual stakeholder goals. Overarching shared clarity can assist all stakeholder groups when stakeholder needs do not align or require prioritization. Once the stakeholder goals are determined, and specific related objectives defined, HESA is able to develop sets of metrics or indicators for each goal, and begin to gather the baseline data. The data will likely include a mix of both qualitative and quantitative, given the nature of the goals.

2. The Portal

The portal developed and supported by Magnet and Orbis has been branded as the TalentEDyyc portal. Its initial purpose and promise were to provide a clean link between employers and PSIs to facilitate WIL opportunities for students, all the while enabling extensive data collection by the Secretariate. The Secretariate, along with HESA, would

then analyze, consolidate, and prepare the data for dissemination, which the Secretariate would then share with its various partners and funders. Several issues have prevented some of these expectations from being met. Issues related to the portal were also prevalent in the VIWIL initiative but were only brought to light through HESA's content expert's discussion with a leader of the initiative, which took place after the portal's implementation for the CED WIL Pilot project.

Interviews with the Secretariate revealed that the portal developed by Magnet and Orbis has only been utilized by a few employers and is generally not meeting the needs of the PSIs nor the Secretariate. However, those using the portal are helping to increase its functionality by flagging issues, which are in turn being resolved where possible at a steady pace, though often through "work arounds." So, though there isn't uptake of the portal across the board, those using it are investing time to provide feedback and benefiting from an incrementally better platform.

Interviewees observed that large enterprise employers are typically finding the portal more useful than small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Two reasons for this were suggested. One, large enterprises have staff dedicated to hiring activities, perhaps even to hiring WIL students. Since the portal may reduce their workload overall, the time spent learning it is a worthwhile investment. Comparatively, at an SME, the employee responsible for hiring WIL students is more likely to have diverse responsibilities with which the portal does not help, so the technology is not necessarily worth the time it takes to learn. Two, large enterprises have more WIL positions available—sometimes hundreds per term or year—and so they would typically be posting the positions to several PSIs, thus making the portal a useful shortcut to individual communications with PSIs. Comparatively, SMEs may not have many positions to post, and receiving applications from several PSIs may overwhelm their hiring process rather than ease it.

Regarding the PSIs, the Secretariate staff shared that impressions of the portal differ depending on a few factors. Similar to employers, the size of the institution and its capacity for WIL are strong indicators of difference, however for PSIs it is the larger institutions with more capacity that have *less* need for the portal. These PSIs tend to already have internal digital infrastructure for WIL postings, or they have set procedures by which they operate and collect data. However, those PSIs without any online portal of their own may appreciate their ability to tap into the CED WIL portal. Still, without clear value adds from the portal, uptake will be difficult to increase amongst these PSIs.

Regarding the Secretariate, the portal has not provided the data collection functionalities that were expected by the team based on their onboarding to the project. The portal was presented as the main functionality and value add of the Secretariate, not only for ease of connecting employers with multiple PSIs, but also for providing the Secretariate with extensive data. These data are required to meet funders' targets and milestones and to enable the Secretariate to provide benchmarking to PSIs as well as to catch and address any gaps in their outreach. The Secretariate team has had to find other methods of obtaining the data required, made all the more difficult because so much time was spent trying to make the technology work before it was ultimately deemed unfit for the tasks. Further, ongoing issues with the portal have required some Secretariate staff to make surreptitious fixes so that PSIs and employers aren't burdened with the errors, again taking up staff time.

The CoP survey respondents identified more issues than benefits to the portal as it currently operates. One respondent did share that job postings now directly show up on their job board, presumably with fewer steps involved than without the portal. Another respondent, however, shared that the portal has invalid links, postings can show the wrong work terms, and PSI staff aren't able to edit the posting details to rectify these mistakes, all of which contribute to confusion for students. Another respondent noted that the feature of the portal which approves postings campus-wide instead of per job board is limiting their use of the portal, as job boards differ in what postings they are meant to contain. Dissatisfaction with the lack of consultation with WIL experts about the portal prior to its launch was also stated and seems to have fed into a mistrust of the Secretariate's knowledge about WIL.

What is going well: There have been ongoing efforts to maximize the utility of the portal and shift expectations of what the portal can do.

Two key learnings from VIWIL—which also used the Magnet/Orbis portal—is that institutional cultures may need to change with respect to truly sharing such a portal with other PSIs, and that the portal would need to do more than what their existing digital infrastructure does. The Secretariate's CoP group has brought together PSIs participating in the pilot as well as a few key funders for monthly meetings, thus setting a foundation for inter-institutional communication and collaboration. The CED WIL platform has already offered added value, especially to the non-Orbis schools, by providing a functioning mechanism to receive WIL placement postings related to the Calgary project but also more broadly from the Orbis/Magnet general feed. This should significantly assist those PSIs that are in more of a "start-up" mode or trying to scale up from a smaller base. There have also been ongoing efforts to determine the capabilities of the portal platform and make enhancements that best serve the project needs, including adding value for PSIs. The Secretariate has also reached out to a leader at Future NB to discuss their experiences with the portal. This work is important to develop the CED WIL Pilot platform into a portal that adds important value to the system beyond what any single institutional platform can do.

Recommendation: Determine what is needed from the portal and vigorously pursue any required changes

It is essential that the WIL Portal platform is purposefully built to meet the challenges for which it has been deemed a solution. In the case of the CED project, where the goals are still being refined as new information and understandings emerge, there is a need for timely responsiveness to customization and configuration requests.

The Orbis platform was already designed and then adopted as a solution for the high-level goals of enhancing WIL delivery in the Calgary region. However, when a form precedes a function (that is, a solution precedes well-defined problems or goals), it is often the case that the "solution" needs to be refined/revised to better align with the increasingly better understood and ever-evolving goals and related issues. For example, based on conversations with the principal investigator, a 2022 BC study into WIL systems and WIL data collection yielded findings that have implications for the proposed expansion of the BC co-op database to include all forms of WIL. These findings reflect input from 25 WIL institutions in BC and likely resonate with themes related to WIL in Alberta.

It was determined that while many institutions are beginning to get a grasp on what WIL is happening at their institution (through mapping exercises and implementing new data tracking software), there remain many “gaps in understanding, especially when it comes to defining WIL for an institution and getting buy-in from programs, instructors, and community partners” (BC Council, 2022). This appears to be similar to what has been heard from the Calgary PSIs as well. As seen with respect to the CED Project, the BC Study (2022) also found “that WIL at the course-level is the most varied as it is responsive to the needs of the instructors, students and community partners.” It concludes that much of the data desirable for tracking various impacts/outcomes of WIL is currently very challenging to access, and expectations regarding monitoring and reporting may need to be adjusted. This may be the case for the CED WIL Project at this juncture as well.

3. Sustainability and Stakeholder Relations

As a pilot, part of the CED WIL project’s activities is figuring out by trial and error how to best meet the goals and metrics outlined for the project. There are few comparable initiatives in Canada, and provincial differences—whether political, cultural, infrastructural, etc.—limit the applicability of lessons learned in initiatives in other provinces (e.g., VIWIL in British-Columbia, FutureNB in New Brunswick). The most useful lessons for future WIL projects in Alberta may thus be gained from this pilot project, and perhaps the most important lesson is how to ensure sustainability of the project. Specifically, this means how to ensure that:

1. The Secretariate provides added value to the stakeholders and maintains healthy and collaborative relationships with them;
2. The PSIs remain open and collaborative (to the extent possible) with their data sharing and reflections on process enhancement;
3. That WIL opportunities are equitably available to students, particularly those historically marginalized due to race, ability, socio-economic status, or gender;
4. That all kinds of businesses, especially SMEs and those historically without the capacity or knowledge to offer WIL positions, benefit from this collective practice of skilling new and re-entrants to the labour force of Calgary and beyond.
5. The Secretariate becomes financially sustainable through its business model and/or longer-term funding sources.

Interviews with the Secretariate and other observations and communications have shown that the Secretariate has made great strides to compensate for the later start to the project and has widely adopted an ethos of flexibility, pivoting when needed, and keeping their eyes on the core goals like the sustainability of the project. The issue of the viability of the CED WIL Project after the current funding expires is an important one. Presently, various funding sources have been pursued to secure sustainability of the project through to March 2025. In interviews, members of the Secretariate generally expressed an ambivalence toward securing new funding sources. Their commitment to the project’s central goal—to expand WIL opportunities to students in Calgary PSIs, which has various interlocking benefits to students, employers, and the Albertan economy—made them at

once eager to respond to current and future stakeholder needs and desires, but wary of these needs incrementally expanding the scope of the project past sustainability.

Insights from the Secretariate suggest that there are some risks associated with the pursuit of a variety of funding sources. While it's a success to have secured multiple funding sources, each source does have its own expectations and benchmarks tied to the money. These expectations generally work in concert with each other, so conflicting expectations are not necessarily the issue; rather, the risk is scope creep. For example, the latest funder, BHER, has communicated expectations for growing "innovative WIL." While under the WIL umbrella, this was not a type originally included in the project and so literature reviews and planning did not address it. Adding this funder presents an exciting opportunity to expand WIL opportunities and be on the forefront of the sector; however, the Secretariate must now work to backfill its collective WIL knowledge, have new discussions with PSIs and employers regarding this WIL type, and find ways to integrate it into its current models. This constricts the Secretariate's capacity its original core activities, and potentially disrupts the planning that has taken place up to this point.

The late start to the pilot project, combined with the relatively aggressive milestones and the under-usage of the portal, have all been challenges to the sustainability and success of the project.

The CoP survey respondents largely cited the Secretariate's ongoing and fulsome communication with the stakeholders as something that is working well. One respondent even characterized the communication with CED and the CoP partners as "refreshing." Another respondent characterized the leadership of the Secretariate as "humanistic," and with a team of driven and dedicated staff who strive for inclusivity in the project. This is great news for the project and demonstrates a successful commitment by the Secretariate to developing strong relationships with PSIs and funders.

Respondents did however also express a concern about the sustainability of the project, pointing explicitly to the timelines and milestones as challenges. PSIs have unique workflows throughout the year, with bursts of business at the start of terms or semesters (roughly September and January), periods of closure or disruption of schedules during exam seasons (December and April), and a piecemeal staff contingent over the summer months (July and August). There are also multiple levels of institutional vetting and approval to go through, considerable staff turnover, and under-resourcing and under-staffing, due to the waves of provincial cuts to PSI funding. CoP survey respondents shared that the CED WIL Pilot project's anticipated milestones, especially with its later-than-expected kick off, has tested the limits of the PSI partners' capacities. Several respondents also stated that meetings and expectations for the time given to the project were difficult for them to meet given competing priorities and under-staffing.

At risk with this misalignment of timing and priorities are the relationships between the Secretariate and the PSIs, which are necessary for the success and sustainability of the project.

What is going well: The Secretariate continues to solicit feedback from stakeholders to learn how best to sustain relationships and the project itself.

The issue of sustainability is at the forefront of the Secretariate staff's thinking. A key learning from the WACE Global Challenge⁴ was the importance of choosing good partners that are responsible and willing to take risks, and to be clear about everyone's roles and expectations. It was also proven how important it is to maintain good communication with all stakeholders and to be quick to resolve issues that arise, especially at the start. The Secretariate has continuously solicited feedback from stakeholders to get a better sense of what role they can take that provides the most benefit for each one. One change they implemented following feedback from the CoP was to reduce the CoP meeting schedule and to send general updates in a monthly newsletter so that the meetings could be more fruitfully utilized for collaboration. This commitment to an iterative and collaborative relationship can build a foundation of trust and ease of communication over time, something integral to the sustainability of the project.

Recommendation: Define sustainability beyond the current funding envelope

Many WIL researchers note the significant costs of supporting quality WIL programs (Billett, 2009). As seen in the Future NB Strategic Plan, it may be helpful to articulate whether financial sustainability is a Secretariate goal even at this early juncture. The articulation of the financial sustainability could align the relevant strategies, including more clearly defining the nature of the business for this project's intention:

- a "Solution Shop" with user fee for service fees
- a "Value Add Provider" where users pay based upon the level of utility they get from the products or services of the CED WIL Project, or
- a "Facilitated User Network" that operates on a membership or subscription fee basis.

It may well be a combination of two or all three, but such thinking could help determine business models and where the Secretariate should focus its attention with respect to financial sustainability.

It seems clear from meetings and related conversations that the CoP could play an important role in supporting participating PSIs, especially if the "Facilitated User Network" approach is seen to be an important feature. It may be timely to identify activities that this group can undertake and create real value-adds for each member in addition to the value the Orbis Platform may bring. Several areas of broader interest to the Calgary WIL community are noted in the section.

4. Value Adds

Part of the impetus for the CED WIL Pilot project was the observation that PSIs, employers, and governments were all in alignment that WIL is a growing part of the post-secondary educational experience with benefits that reach beyond those directly involved.

⁴ Ibid.

Still, there was a reluctance for any one entity to take ownership of facilitating and expanding WIL, with each stakeholder doing their part but lacking space and the capacity to collaborate. The Secretariate was established to provide that space and connection between the stakeholders. The initial project implementation saw the portal as a key and tangible part of that space. Since the portal has not met expectations, the Secretariate has needed to re-strategize and re-conceptualize its place in supporting the development WIL in the Calgary region.

Interviews with the Secretariate show that they are in the process of re-conceptualizing what their role is and can be with the various stakeholders, as well as how to communicate those expectations and market themselves. The branding of the portal as TalentEDyyc was part of this effort. It was deemed important to avoid the jargon of “work-integrated learning,” as it is not fully understood by many employers and is not a universal term within PSIs either.⁵ This branding focuses instead on the relationship between education and skill-building to foster talent in the labour force. While the limitations of the portal are better understood, there are still updates that can and are being made to increase its usability and functionality, thus continuing to add value to stakeholders.

The CoP survey respondents largely found the process mapping exercises helpful, and provided these as an example of things that are working well for the CED WIL Pilot Project. A few respondents lamented that the CED team was not embedded in the post-secondary education sector, that WIL was essentially being “outsourced,” and that the project had not increased any funding at the PSIs. They stated that their WIL teams were already lean or at the top of their capacity, supporting WIL initiatives off the sides of their desks or as part of a large dynamic portfolio of responsibilities.

What is going well: The Secretariate is continuously re-defining the value adds of the project to stakeholders.

The CED Secretariate continues to seek and articulate the value adds their project brings to both Employers and PSIs (and by extension students) which will be important as they continue to promote the project regionally and beyond. Part of this work is distributed through the other themes, as it involves offering data for benchmarking (Goals and Metrics), improving the functionality and reach of the portal (the Portal), maintaining relationships and collaboration between stakeholders (Sustainability and Stakeholder Relations), and participating in a collective impact in Calgary, Alberta, and Canada (Collective Impact).

Recommendation: Explore what value adds the CED WIL Secretariate can uniquely provide to the WIL community

As noted previously, the existing WIL CoP could be leveraged to identify value-adds for each member and the regional “system”.⁶ A 2018 report from the University of Calgary Scan of WIL states: “On a meta-level, given the fast-changing EL landscape across Canadian postsecondary institutions, it’s reasonable to anticipate intense (and ongoing) discussions on the mission, purpose, and pedagogy of higher education across multiple

⁵ During a discussion between the Secretariate and a leader from FutureNB, the term “experiential learning” was suggested as a more friendly term for those in PSIs, especially professors, who may not see their mission as driven by preparing students for “work.”

⁶ See an example of a WIL online CoP here: <https://olc.sfu.ca/>.

contexts. For the City of Calgary and the Province of Alberta, the findings repeatedly and specifically voice a need to consider how to manage community and industry placement saturation” (Braun, Kaipainen & Usman, 2018). These may be two topics of interest for the Secretariate to explore as a collective going forward.

Clearly, there is also interest in the Calgary WIL community in participating in networking activities. Given the CED’s connections with large employment organizations such as the Calgary Chamber of Commerce and the Chamber of Voluntary Organizations, it would be well positioned to host events that promote connections and information sharing between the PSIs, the CED Project and the Business and Industry representatives. The key for the CED WIL Secretariate is to provide a service and/or product that no single PSI can do alone. Chief among these is system-level data (big data) for key stakeholders, funders, and governments. Another opportunity may be taking on the role that a professional WIL Association might do in Alberta⁷ in terms of providing quality resources for students, employers, and practitioners as well as serving as a data collection site and research hub. It may also be interesting to investigate the state of WIL in the secondary school and explore whether there is an appetite to connect to that system to meet their student’s needs for WIL in partnership with the PSI’s student placements.

The Secretariate may also want to identify a business or industry sector (or two) on which they could initially focus (perhaps to complement the three industry Associations the Government of Alberta has already identified in their Alberta 2030 Paper: 1. BIO Alberta, 2. Technology Alberta and 3. the Alberta Construction Association). “Lower hanging fruit” sectors for WIL could be explored by the CoP with consideration for the priority areas for WIL development that have been identified by each PSI in the start-up conversations.

Collective Impact

The overarching recommendation for the CED WIL Pilot project is to leverage the power of “systemness.” It may be timely to consider the CED WIL project’s unique broader regional impacts and situate the WIL outcomes within that broader context. Systems can have “collective impacts, and the ability to leverage innovation at scale in order to add value to students and [regions], greater than the sum of their parts” (Martin 2022). They have the potential to monitor the progress of innovations and “use continuous improvement to inform the scaling up of proven solutions” (Martin 2022). It has been envisioned that the CED WIL project could serve as a test case for building a WIL system within other regions. Seen in this way, the CED project would want to deeply explore and formalize how it might demonstrate the impact of its collective outcomes (E.g. retention of new grads within the Calgary region after graduation, amount of tax dollars contributed to the Calgary region through students’ paid work, recruitment and retention of top students to Calgary region PSIs and employers, development of articulation agreements between institutions that honour students’ WIL experiences within the region, enhanced post-graduation employment rates for participating Calgary PSIs, increased numbers of small and medium businesses participating in WIL, etc.).

⁷ See what BC is doing here: <https://acewilbc.ca/>. Or what Ontario is doing here: <https://ewo.ca/>.

By clearly articulating regional goals and strategies and providing the tools and resources needed to achieve them, this project could be seen to have impacts that go well beyond the creation of more WIL opportunities and an online portal that hosts them. A useful resource with respect to systems thinking is The National Association of System Heads (NASH) in the US. Among many other goals, this organization is committed to re-envisioning the “Education-and-Work” cycle that students revisit throughout their careers, and NASH’s work in this area might usefully inform any efforts that the Secretariate might take in this direction (NASH 2023).

References

- Arney, N.D. & Krygsman, H.P. (2022). Work-integrated learning policy in Alberta: A post-structural analysis. *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy*, 198, 97-110
- BC Council on Admissions and Transfer. (March 2017). *Experiential education in BC post-secondary institutions: Challenges and opportunities*.
- Billett, S. (2009). Realising the educational worth of integrating work experiences in higher education. *Studies in Higher Education*, 34(7), 827-843
- Cunningham, A. & Steele, P. (2021). SUNY works and the applied learning on campus: Creating experiential opportunities for students at the State University of New York. *Higher Ed Insight*.
- Itin, C. M. (1999). Reasserting the philosophy of experiential education as a vehicle for change in the 21st century. *The Journal of Experiential Education*, 22(2), 91–98.
- Johnston, N., Drysdale, M, and Chiupka, C. (2013). An experiential pedagogical model for developing better global citizens, in *The World is My Classroom: International Learning and Canadian Higher Education*. The University of Toronto Press.
- Johnston, N. and Sator, A. (2022). Bringing experience-based education together at our institutions: A focus on distinct outcomes, shared attributes and a coherent narrative, in *The practice and research of cooperative education and work-integrated learning in the Canadian context*. Pretti, J. and Stirling, A. (Eds). 21-33, CEWIL and WACE joint publication.
- Johnston, N. (2021). Global calls to action for work integrated education: The WACE charter and applications for Gen X and Y, in *Applications of work integrated learning among Gen Z and Gen Y students*. IGI Global Publishing.
- McRae, N., & Johnston, N. (2016). The development of a proposed global work-integrated learning framework. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education*, 17(4), 337–348. https://www.ijwil.org/files/APJCE_17_4_337_348.pdf
- Martin, R., Zimpher, N., Lane, J. & Johnsen, J. (2022). Leveraging the power of systemness to improve the success of students and society, change. *The Magazine of Higher Learning*, 54:4, 38-44, DOI: [10.1080/00091383.2022.2078154](https://doi.org/10.1080/00091383.2022.2078154)
- National Association of System Heads (NASH). (2023). The Talent Imperative. <https://nash.edu/talent/>.
- Sattler, P., Wiggers, R.D., & Arnold, C. (2011). Combining workplace training with postsecondary education: The spectrum of work integrated learning (WIL) opportunities from apprenticeship to experiential learning. *Canadian Apprenticeship Journal*.
- Stokes, Peter J. (2015). *Higher education and employability: New models for integrating study and work*. Harvard Education Press.



**Higher
Education**
STRATEGY ASSOCIATES

20 Maud Street, Suite 207
Toronto ON, M5V 2M5, Canada
+1 (416) 848-0215
info@higheredstrategy.com

higheredstrategy.com