

ODEN's CANADIAN YOUTH SUCCESS STRATEGY
**EMPLOYMENT DISCOVERY
PROGRAM FOR RURAL
COMMUNITIES**

FACILITATOR GUIDE

**Youth
Success
Strategy**



**Stratégie
de réussite
des jeunes**



Acknowledgement

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ODEN's Canadian Youth Success Strategy Employment Discovery Program For Rural Communities

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Introduction

The Canadian Youth Success Strategy – Employment Discovery Program for Rural Communities is intended to be run as a two-week program and delivered daily over a 5-to-6-hour period. The program consists of 3 sections and is designed with flexibility in mind.

Purposely, activities have not been assigned to a specific day. This is done so that the facilitators may organize the activities to suit the needs of their group or with respect to the availability of external factors such as guest speakers.

Facilitators should review the program content together to determine the length and structure of each day and each week. You may decide that this is a program that should run for more than 2 weeks. **This is up to you!**

Based on the needs of the participants and the resources available, the facilitators may decide that some of the activities do not fit well with a group or may not be feasible for their organization or community. Flexibility is at the core of these resources. We also provide links to external resources you may want to incorporate to customize the activities to your community's needs.

The resources in the program have been created to respond to gaps identified in typical Employment Discovery programs that do not address the realities of rural communities. It is created to be used as an add-on to the curriculum that you may already be using with your pre-employment programs.

However, there is flexibility to use the resources in this program as a **stand-alone**. If you are using the resources in this manner, the facilitator may want to host an introduction session to explain the topics and goals for the activities. It is also important to clearly express any expectations that you will have of the program participants and their support systems (families, caregivers, educators), alongside what expectations participants can have of you, the facilitators.

A note on preparation

Before implementing this program, or any other activity you are facilitating, it is good practice that you review and prepare well beforehand; it goes without saying that some activities may require external resources, printing and copying, or creating handouts. Additionally, you will need to adapt the activities to bring further contextualization and relevance from your local communities, which is very important.

You should feel empowered to add, amend, and reword the content to match the local communities where your participants/job seekers/students are from.

A note on supportive facilitation

A reminder that as facilitators, you need to cultivate an environment of open and honest communication, both within 1-1 facilitator discussions, and as a group. Refer to the **Facilitator Guide – Intersectionality and Disability** for some tips.

Your aim is to provide clear direction and support as participants progress through the activities and create supportive processes not only for their learning but also to maintain their motivation and inspiration.

Consider that this material, and its areas of knowledge and potential, may be new to your participants and their families or caregivers; it may be breaking new ground in terms of their mindsets. Consequently, throughout the resource, we encourage you to foster a supportive and inclusive environment, where all participants feel valued and empowered to participate, to be creative, and to contribute their own thoughts and ideas. Remember to be patient, offer encouragement, and celebrate each person’s contribution and progress, no matter how small.

Together, let’s help our participants believe in and discover their potential and unlock opportunities in the wider world of employment!

Tips for improving access to this curriculum for all youth

The following strategies have been adapted from the resource [Mastering Soft Skills for Workplace Success: Skills to Pay the Bills](#). This is a free 139-page resource that provides activities to build soft skills around communication, attitude, teamwork, networking, problem-solving and critical thinking, and professionalism. Their intention is to reach youth facing significant barriers to employment, including youth who have a disability. While the resource is USA based, “the core pieces of the activities are transferable to any location and any environment. The following tips are built with knowledge/references from this resource.

Global strategies for engagement

Facilitators do well in considering the following strategies:

- ✓ Appreciate **individuality**. Having young people recognize that you appreciate their individuality is important.
- ✓ Demonstrate that you are committed to meeting the needs of all participants and that you are open to conversation and discussion about how to help them learn and succeed.
- ✓ Recognize that we all have our own learning styles and cultural assumptions. These styles and assumptions influence how we teach and what we expect from our students. Oftentimes our preferred method of teaching is not a student’s preferred (or required) method of learning. Refer to ODEN’s **Facilitator Guide – Intersectionality and Disability**.
- ✓ Prepare multiple examples to illustrate your points and help students move between abstract, theoretical, and concrete knowledge, experiences to expand everyone’s learning. Use pair and group work to help participants learn from each other (Day Al-Mohamed et al., n.d.).

Strategies for instructions and facilitation

You know best the audience that you are working with, but as noted in the “Skills to Pay Bills” resource that we are referencing here, facilitators do well in considering that:

- ✓ **Young people do well by doing rather than just listening.** Introduce ways for activities to have role-play, journaling, or drawing components (if literacy is a concern). Use technology where possible to support some record keeping or journaling; everyone should be able to engage with the curriculum if you get a little creative!
- ✓ **Repetition. Repetition. Repetition.** Particularly with youth who have developmental disabilities, consistent and frequent exposure is often needed for concepts and information to be fully understood and retained.
- ✓ **Excitement is contagious.** Demonstrating honesty, authenticity, and excitement for working with youth can often inspire the same qualities within the youth themselves as they engage with this curriculum. Your passion is infectious. As a youth service professional, it is important that you find ways to maintain your passion and excitement and recharge when necessary.
- ✓ **Presume competence and instill confidence.** Providing young people with confidence and an opportunity to succeed is one of the best gifts you can give. Have high expectations for all youth and help them to realize their potential as you support them to become independent decision-makers for their future (Day Al-Mohamed et al., n.d.).

Strategies for accommodations

Consider the following tips for providing accommodations:

1. **ASK THE PERSON** — what do your participants need to succeed in this program? You may want to include their families, caregivers, educators (if they are still in school) in conversations about examples of successful strategies for engagement and participation.
2. Consider accommodations that support or compensate for lower literacy levels—provide handouts of concepts that may be too abstract and highlight key concepts; and when conducting group discussions, ask for volunteers instead of requiring participants to read aloud.
3. Visuals help everyone! Visual representations help whether the person has lower literacy levels, a cognitive disability, or for people for whom English is their second language. Implement visuals as much as possible.
4. At the end of each day, summarize activities and concepts you wanted the participants to learn. Consider sending information about upcoming activities home for review.
5. Consider accommodations that support or compensate for lower numeracy levels or math difficulties — using calculators, phones, or iPads for solving math problems is a way to support a participant who has had difficulty with math concepts in the past.

We wish you a successful implementation of this resource content! If you happen to come across an activity or resource that should be included in this program, please connect with us by emailing info@odentwork.com.

Facilitator's role

As facilitators, before you start the program, ensure that you have read all the introductory documentation and review the activities & exercises in the *Participant Activities Workbook* – you will be required to prepare and ensure you have materials available for your participants.

You also want to know how well the activities will match the needs of your participants.

This program is specifically designed to provide you with a resource and a structure, along with the built-in flexibility that is essential to support the participants' futures in the rural communities which they come from.

And remember-the primary goals of this employment discovery programs are to enhance employability and promote economic self-sufficiency among participants.

Participant demographics and considerations for facilitators

Understanding the needs of a diverse audience

The success of your program, focused on rural employment opportunities and support for job seekers with intellectual disabilities, developmental disabilities and neurodiversity, hinges on everyone's ability to understand and support the unique needs of the participants.

As facilitators, you must be acutely aware of the demographic composition of your group and create an inclusive, supportive, and effective learning environment. The next points may help you appreciate the diverse backgrounds, abilities, and learning needs of your participants, ensuring that every workshop, exercise, and activity is accessible and effective.

The importance of inclusivity

Participants in your group may come from varied backgrounds and possess a wide range of intellectual/developmental disabilities or neurodiversity. These differences impact how they process information, communicate, and engage with new concepts.

Facilitators need to recognize that inclusivity goes beyond physical accessibility – it involves tailoring communication styles, learning materials, and instructional methods to meet the varied needs of all participants. This approach not only fosters a sense of belonging but also maximizes the educational impact of the program.

Adapting communication styles

Effective communication is crucial in delivering the program content, particularly when introducing new concepts and subjects such as self-employment, entrepreneurial skills, volunteering, etc. Facilitators must use clear, plain language, avoiding jargon and technical terms that may be unfamiliar to participants. When specialized terms are necessary, they should be explained first and in straightforward terms, using examples and analogies that relate to everyday experiences. Visual aids, demonstrations, and interactive activities can also enhance understanding and retention of new concepts.

Don't make any literacy assumptions! As you go into each activity always check for understanding of key words and terms among all participants. Allow for one-on-one check-ins for any participant who needs more support.

Understanding learning in participants with intellectual, developmental disabilities and neurodiversity

Students/participants who have intellectual and/or developmental disabilities may find it harder to learn, which may mean they need extra time and help to learn new skills. While intellectual and/or developmental disability can look different from one participant to another, participants with intellectual and/or developmental disability may experience differences in their:

- Thinking and organization: participants with intellectual disability often prefer concrete learning tasks. These students may need support with organization and staying on task.
- Practical Skills: these participants can benefit from many opportunities to practice practical skills such as handling money.
- Communication and Social Skills: level of social maturity may differ from participant to participant. They may also have varied levels of expressive communication.
- Emotions and Behaviours: some participants may find it difficult to manage their emotions or recognize and respond to the emotions of others. Some participants may find it frustrating if tasks are too complex at the start – but this does not mean you should not have high expectations!

As with anyone, participants who have intellectual and/or developmental disabilities have strengths! They may be visual learners who remember best written content, numbers or pictures.

At ODEN, we advocate for [Ask The Person](#) – communicate with the participant, their families and friends to find out what would help them participate fully.

Neurodiversity participants could include job seekers who have autism, ADHD, dyslexia, and others. The learning differences associated with neurodiversity can affect cognitive processes. Each participant will have unique strengths and challenges; for instance, some may excel in visual-spatial tasks but struggle with verbal instructions, while others may have excellent memory skills but need extra time to process information.

Facilitators should adopt a flexible, patient approach, allowing participants to learn at their own pace and in ways that suit their individual needs, whilst trying to maintain the timings and structure of the activities.

Creating an inclusive learning environment

An inclusive learning environment is one where all participants feel valued and supported. This involves setting a tone of respect and encouragement from the outset, establishing ground rules that promote positive interactions.

Group activities have been designed to encourage collaboration and peer support, helping participants build social skills and confidence in a safe, welcoming setting. This is supported by the way you facilitate them as well.

Tailoring workshop exercises and activities

The exercises and activities have been tailored to accommodate different learning styles and abilities, but obviously the mix of participants and their preferred styles will change with every group; you also have an important role in supporting an adaptive approach.

For instance, some participants may benefit or respond more positively to the hands-on activities that involve making or building something, while others might prefer written exercises or group discussions.

You should be prepared to consider alternative formats for exercises and be flexible in their delivery methods. Providing clear supporting instructions and checking in regularly with participants to ensure they are following along can help prevent frustration and disengagement.

Ensuring accessibility in language and terms

Accessibility in the language and terms used during the program is paramount. It's important for you, the facilitator, to remain aware of the words and phrases you use, ensuring that your communication is inclusive and respectful.

Again, when introducing new terms, facilitators should provide definitions and context, and encourage questions to clarify any confusion. Do not assume!

Continuous feedback and adaptation

A key aspect of meeting the diverse needs of participants is continuous feedback and adaptation. Facilitators should regularly solicit feedback from participants to understand what is working well and where adjustments are needed. This can be done through informal check-ins, structured feedback forms, or group discussions. Being responsive to this feedback demonstrates a commitment to participant success and helps to fine-tune the program to better serve everyone involved.

So...

Understanding the demographics and specific needs of participants with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities and neurodiversity is essential for facilitators of the **Canadian Youth Success Strategy - Employment Discovery Program for Rural Communities**. By adopting inclusive practices, using accessible language, and tailoring activities to diverse learning styles, facilitators can create a supportive and effective learning environment.

This will not only enhance the educational experience for participants but will also empower the participants to explore new working opportunities and develop valuable new mindsets and approaches to their futures.

Through patience, flexibility, and a commitment to inclusivity, you can make a meaningful difference to the program and further help it to expand the horizons and opportunities for your participants .

The educational context – using the *Canadian Youth Success Strategy – Employment Discovery Program for Rural Communities* in schools

The **Canadian Youth Success Strategy – Employment Discovery Program for Rural Communities** as a core structured initiative is designed as a 2-week program for youth and job seekers with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities.

However, its flexible structure and design allow for adaptation for use in schools, not only with the particular student demographics but potentially for a broader audience of Grade 11 and 12 students without a disability.

The notes here cover how educators may select and modify elements and activities from the program to create tailored learning experiences for their students. By focusing on key topics such as self-employment, entrepreneurial skills, and social enterprises, educators can provide valuable insights and practical skills that are relevant to all students and will add value to the existing school curriculum activities that cover general working and employment topics.

Adapting – the flexible use and selection of activities and exercises

The program has been designed with flexibility in mind, making it easy to adapt for various learning needs and classroom settings. Educators can select specific activities that align with their curriculum goals and the interests of their students. Alternatively, activities can be used to fill in any gaps in the curriculum or to support employment skill development for students in specific communities where employment opportunities are limited.

For students with developmental disabilities, it is essential to make instructions practical, use clear and accessible language, and provide additional support as needed. Additional resources, along with the hands-on activities, and interactive discussions may enhance understanding and engagement for all students.

Educators can choose from a range of workshops and activities within the program, focusing on those that best suit their students' needs and learning objectives. Some of the key topics in slightly more detail include:

Self-employment and entrepreneurial skills

Introducing students to the basics of self-employment and entrepreneurship can spark their interest in pursuing their own business ideas. Activities can be adapted to include simplified business concepts, step-by-step guides to creating a business plan, and interactive brainstorming sessions where students can develop their own business ideas.

Rural employment opportunities

Exploring the unique employment opportunities available in rural areas can open students' eyes to potential career paths they may not have considered. Educators can incorporate discussions on the benefits and challenges of working in rural settings, as well as activities that simulate job search, applications, and interviews for any rural positions that are out there.

In short, the *Canadian Youth Success Strategy – Employment Discovery Program for Rural Communities* can have a place in education, helping to further prepare students for work in many ways, and potentially adding real value to the existing resources and lessons for Grades 11 and 12 students.

Icebreakers and support resources for participants

The **Canadian Youth Success Strategy – Employment Discovery Program for Rural Communities** does not have any icebreaker activities for use by facilitators as first-step group exercises for new cohorts and groups on the Program.

As facilitators, you will have your own favored and regionally specific activities that you are comfortable using or that work well for you and with the groups of participants you are engaging.

However, if you don't have any icebreakers or if you want to consider options, then the following few links may provide an additional useful source of resources and activities to help get your group to know each other, prepare the way, and get every cohort in the right frame of mind to move forward effectively.

If you are familiar or are trained in using the [jobPath® curriculum](#), there are many Week 1 activities that can be selected and used as ice-breakers. Other sources include:

- [Group Ice Breakers & Energizers – Career Internship Network](#)
- [5 Icebreaker Activities for Teens That Aren't Boring](#)
- [13 fail-safe icebreakers to use in class today](#)

In addition, you can find more resources under the Real Xchange Knowledge Translation and Transfer hub [eVantage learning module](#). There are dozens of support tools and apps that participants may find useful to use, not just on the program but to learn more and to support themselves more on the path ahead.

Sample email and reach-outs to potential contributing organizations and participants

A key component of the **Canadian Youth Success Strategy – Employment Discovery Program for Rural Communities** is the involvement of third parties at various stages of the program to be guest speakers, to discuss, tell stories, advise and mentor, as described within several of the activities in the 2 modules.

Approaching these organizations in the right manner is key.

Many will of course be only too pleased to contribute and be there in person or virtually or send their team members.

As facilitators, you may have personal contacts in your sector, community or regional contacts who you can call on to help and add value to these activities, but often approaching new organizations and individuals who are NOT the traditional employer contacts will be necessary, simply due to the nature of the program and its non-traditional focus.

The following short sample email template can be used for approaching any organizations and individuals that you would like to approach to be involved in one or more of these activities. These organizations might suggest other activities such as site visits, or work shadowing or field trips.

Use this template as you see fit. We have attempted to include some of the key strong reasons for the program in the communication and how supporting employment skill development in this youth population has a number of benefits.

Where the template shows a blank [.....] you can insert the nature of their organizational type or profession or trade, or the nature of the potential involvement you would like from them.

Always try and find the leader or manager or principal if possible, and always assume that someone might be a “gatekeeper” for them, so the importance of the “Read Line” or Subject Line is critical on the note/email.

Try and avoid giving the perception that you’re asking for money, so stress it’s about time and expertise and advice. People like talking about their business, themselves and they often fundamentally like to help others.

Also try and keep it short with the first approach – it’s not always easy!

Sample email

Subject line:

Can you help young people find their career or working futures....?

Your advice and stories might help inspire young entrepreneurs...?

.....

Email body text:

Could you or one of your team be involved for a couple of hours....?

Dear [...]

We/my organization [...] are currently planning the delivery of an employment skill discovery program entitled **Canadian Youth Success Strategy – Employment Discovery Program for Rural Communities** here in [...] during [.....].

The Canadian Youth Success Strategy – Employment Discovery Program for Rural Communities is specifically designed to be delivered to young people who have developmental and or intellectual disabilities and who are looking for work in communities and rural areas where traditional employment opportunities aren't always as readily available.

The program supports their career discovery and helps them think in different ways about what work might mean for them. The program has activities to help participants identify work with rural employers or that they may be able to create for themselves. Employability skills might be developed through volunteering, working with charities or social enterprises, working alongside trade or craftspeople, working for themselves or starting up their own entrepreneurial activity.

We are looking local entrepreneurs, businesses people, social enterprise operators, tradespeople and other professionals in our community to get involved. You will participate in pre-designed activities to share your stories, talking about your work, talking about your business and generally helping to open participants eyes to what is possible and inspire them.

There are a number of activities you or one of your team members could be involved with for an hour or two; we are sure that you will find the experience of sharing your experience and supporting the career development of these young people inspiring as well.

If you'd like to have a chat about this then please drop me a line at [...]

There's no cost and there's no catch, we're just looking for a little help, support, and inspiration!

Best regards,



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