

Accountability and Continuous Improvement in the Canadian Career Development Sector

Career Development Maturity Matrix

Research Brief #1

The Career Development Maturity Matrix is a benchmarking tool designed to map and spark strategic conversation about the foundational elements that the career development sector requires for its structural integrity and advancement in the years to come. Created by the Canadian Career Development Foundation (CCDF) and Challenge Factory, the Matrix identifies and measures the maturity of four sector benchmarks: quality, capacity, cohesion, and access. This brief explores the foundation of quality within the sector and, specifically, its commitment to accountability and continuous improvement.

The Pilot Study

We asked experts in Canada's career development sector to rank 1) how important each Matrix benchmark is to the sector's structural integrity, and 2) how Canada measures up against each benchmark.

"[M]any in policy positions do not understand the impact of career development services on individuals and community."

The findings for the quality benchmark clearly indicate that Canadian career development thought leaders recognize the critical importance of this benchmark and are concerned that the Canadian sector currently falls short across all four associated indicators.

- A 2020 survey of career development professionals across Canada suggested that they see the value of evaluation and want to demonstrate the positive impact of their services but may not have the tools and resources needed to do so in a consistent and coordinated way.
- Canada has been a leader internationally in defining evidence-based "common indicators" of client change that apply across diverse clients and diverse delivery settings.
- Canadian governments have invested in evidence-based research to build robust evaluation tools and collect meaningful data using these common indicators.
- Yet, Canada has been slow to adopt these tools or integrate the findings of the data into policy.

The Sector Benchmark QUALITY

Service Delivery Standards

Services are delivered in accordance with clearly articulated standards that reflect rigor and accountability, respect for and responsiveness to the client, and a deep commitment to equity and inclusion.

Client-centered Services

Services/referrals are tailored to clients' initial and evolving needs, as assessed using rigorous employability assessment tools/methods for clients.

Demand-responsive Services

Services/referrals reflect the current and evolving needs of employers and industry sectors.

Accountability & Continuous Improvement

Meaningful indicators of client change are used to assess the impact of services. Results are shared publicly and used to inform evolving policy and practice.

- Instead, Canada largely continues to rely on reporting limited to blunt indicators of employment and/or training, missing the critical trajectory of impacts leading to sustainable outcomes.
- A growing body of evidence exists in Canada and internationally that points to the positive impact of quality career development on educational, labour market, and health outcomes. Canada is out of step with other OECD countries in its failure to use this evidence to inform policy and to equip the sector to gather consistent, rigorous data and share the findings widely in order to support transparency and continuous improvement for the sector.

Where do we go from here?

Guidance for the Sector

The evidence base demonstrating the positive impacts of quality career development services is extremely robust, but largely comes from time-limited research studies. Funders tend to limit their data requirements to whether a client is employed or in training. This is woefully limited relative to the full scope of impact, and the likelihood of success against these markers is highly variable depending on client and labour market conditions. The sector is primed to collect much more meaningful data that tells the full impact story, tracking the critical changes that occur across the full spectrum of employability dimensions and, over time, demonstrating the linkages between incremental progress and the ultimate outcomes of intentional learning and quality employment.

It is time for the sector to take ownership of what gets measured and how the data story is told. Otherwise, it will remain perennially fragile and vulnerable to funding cuts. What can professionals in the sector do now to get started? Consider the following:

- **ASK:** Ask clients how your work together is impacting them. Collect and report this data.
- **REFLECT:** Find time (even a tiny bit) to reflect on your impact.
- **SHARE:** Talk about impact (positive and negative) regularly with colleagues.
- **ADJUST:** Adjust your practice based on what you learn.
- **EDUCATE:** Educate funders about your impact (whether they ask or not!).
- **COLLABORATE:** Collaborate on consistent tracking with colleagues or even across agencies to pool data.
- **ADVOCATE:** Advocate in funding requests to include budget for meaningful evaluation and reporting.

The benefits of doing so are considerable:

- *Policymakers & funders* will see career services as a strategic investment rather than a dispensable budget line.
- *Career/employment services* will meet real client needs and agencies will be able to justify funding proposals.
- *Career development professionals* will be able to see and measure their impact, resulting in increased professionalism, confidence, motivation, job satisfaction, respect, and pride.
- *Clients* will see how they are progressing toward their preferred future, resulting in increased motivation and perseverance.

Conversation Activator

Connect with your colleagues within your agency or across the community to discuss what common impacts you see resulting from your services. How are clients different when they leave your services from when they entered? How might you integrate some simple ways to track these changes consistently and pool your results?

“Making the impact of our work visible is key to getting further support for career development for the common good.”

Guidance for Policymakers

Canada is recognized as a leader internationally in its evidence-based research and development of rigorous, meaningful evaluation approaches that integrate seamlessly into service delivery. This research has been funded by various levels of Canadian governments and heralded internationally, yet these same governments have been slow to adopt the outputs and use the findings to inform policy.

The evidence base demonstrating the positive impacts of quality career development services is extremely robust. The OECD and other leading transnational leadership bodies are increasingly pointing to the critical importance of career development for socioeconomic recovery post-COVID and for sustained, positive educational, labour market, and health outcomes. Use the existing research and draw on the deep expertise within the Canadian career development sector to reimagine how data is collected and reported. The sector is primed to collect more meaningful data, but needs the support of funders to ensure they have the capacity and appropriate resources to do so.

Guidance for Canadians

Demand excellence. Career services can help you across a wide range of issues, helping you to:

- Address personal/life issues that are currently preventing you from moving forward with your career goals
- Make informed decisions about learning and/or work
- Build the skills/credentials you need to pursue your career goals
- Get a job or start a business
- Keep your job
- Proactively build your career and create the life you want to live

If you don't know where to find a quality career service, contact the local association of career development professionals in your region or ask your local politician what services are available in your region.

[Sign up](#) on our project page to receive updates from CCDF and Challenge Factory about the Career Development Maturity Matrix.

Why now?

COVID-19 upended labour and employment across Canada in 2020, making career development more important and urgent than ever. As Canadians face unprecedented struggles in the world of work, the career development sector must not only step in to help, but also intentionally ensure its own structural

integrity. Just as a sector like healthcare cannot effectively execute its duties to Canadians without being properly prepared in the areas of quality, capacity, cohesion, and access, so too must the career development sector actively prepare itself to face the challenges ahead. [Career development professionals have adapted](#) with innovation and commitment to the challenges and new needs of their clients. Now is the time to build on that momentum and use it to strategically push forward the Canadian sector's maturity.