



Skills for Change

STRATEGIC PLAN
2023 – 2028

 Skills for Change
Building Welcoming and Equitable Communities



MESSAGE FROM CEO

I am excited to introduce Skills for Change's new strategic plan for 2023-2028, which outlines an updated mission, vision, and values as well as sets new strategic directives for the next five years. The strategic planning process was an inclusive and collaborative effort, involving input and feedback from staff, board members, clients, and stakeholders. Our strategic plan reflects a deep understanding of our organization's strengths, challenges, and opportunities. It also reflects the accomplishments of our 2018-2023 strategic plan. We have identified key priorities and initiatives that will guide our approach and our work as we strive to achieve our mission and create positive impact in the communities we serve.

The strategic planning process involved several key steps, including:

Environmental Scan: We conducted a comprehensive analysis of our internal and external environment to identify trends, challenges, and opportunities.

Vision and Mission: We revisited and refined our vision and mission statements to ensure they accurately reflect our purpose and values.

Stakeholder Engagement: We engaged with staff, board members, clients, and other stakeholders through surveys, focus groups, and different feedback mechanisms to ensure that their perspectives were captured in the strategic plan.

Goal Setting: We set specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART) goals and objectives to guide our work over the next several years, including:

- Skills for Change will develop a decision-making framework to support the prioritization of resources in strategic growth
- Skills for Change will build out the data-informed "Skills for Change Story" for each internal and external audiences to inspire action
- Skills for Change will create an effective revenue generation strategy to support diverse revenue stream exploration
- Skills for Change will develop (design) an HR Strategy for being a Great Place to Work

Action Planning: We developed action plans to implement our goals and objectives, assigning responsibilities, timelines, and resources to ensure successful execution.

We believe that our new strategic plan will help us to build on our past successes and position us for continued growth and impact in the years to come. We look forward to working together to make our vision a reality.

Sincerely,

Surranna Sandy
CEO, Skills for Change

Who We Are

As Skills for Change launches our new Strategic plan, we do so with a refreshed Mission, Vision, Values, and Foundations.

Our Vision is the statement of the good we want to achieve in the community.

Our Mission is about why we exist and who we work for.

Our Values guide how we behave.

Our Foundations are the way we animate our values through our work.

This Strategic Plan reinforces the commitment we have to the people we work with and for and articulates our aspiration to meet the opportunities and overcome the challenges that we see across the sector.

OUR VISION

Our Vision is for a Canada where everyone has equal opportunities to succeed.

We are committed to striving for a Canada where newcomers and other underserved individuals have access to opportunities that empower them to succeed personally and professionally. Our approach to achieving this is supporting clients through strong partnerships, employment and sector relevant programs, and amplifying our voice in sector dialogue on immigration.

OUR MISSION

We work with newcomers and underserved groups providing holistic solutions that bridge the gap between potential and opportunity for success in Canada.

Our mission is to enhance skill sets, opportunities, and access to good work for newcomers and underserved groups across Canada.

OUR VALUES

Skills for Change's work is guided by a set of values that reflect our strong commitment to providing holistic support to a growing community of newcomers and underserved clients. These values inform our work and ensure that our methods that are empathetic, inclusive, and respectful. We lean on the interconnectedness of the communities in which we work and value the strength that comes from meaningful collaboration. Skills for Change's work is intrinsically informed by the following set of behavioural values:

Excellence: We deliver quality and excellence in all that we do. Through a commitment to delivering measurable results and accountability to our work, clients, employees, employers, and funders, we create positive, powerful, and sustainable impact.

Transparency: We hold ourselves accountable to transparently communicating and demonstrating our progress and outcomes. Transparency is essential to us in holding and maintaining the trust we have earned with our clients, employees, employers, and funders.

Empathy: We treat all individuals with empathy, compassion, and understanding to ensure that clients are supported holistically and feel respected through their journey.

Inclusivity and Diversity: We recognize the value of inclusivity and diversity as essential for creating an effective and supportive environment where everyone can feel comfortable to express their whole selves. As an organization dedicated to supporting newcomers and underserved communities, Skills for Change is especially concerned with being representative of the communities it serves.

Introduction

FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES

Skills for Change's Foundational Principles underpin our intended outcomes. Our values inform how we work, and our Foundational Principles inform why we do what we do. These are the Principles we embed in our programs and our motivations. At Skills for Change, our foundational principles are:

Client-Centered

Our primary focus is on our clients, the newcomers and underserved groups who have come to our communities to create a life for themselves and their families. We strive to serve the underserved and engage the unengaged.

Engagement

We believe that meaningful engagement must be both internal to our own organization as well as focused externally on our clients. Skills for Change emphasizes engaging those we serve and work alongside to produce meaningful results. Our staff reflects the clients we serve and all staff play a critical role in serving as catalysts for the success of our clients.

Optimism

We approach our work with the belief that we can work through the complexities of the sector and our clients' realities to meet their needs and facilitate positive experiences within our programs as well as society at large. Our optimism stems from our organization's collective belief that our work will have positive outcomes and impacts at the micro and macro levels.

Since our first training program deployed in 1982, Skills for Change has been pioneering programs that simultaneously respond and react to shifting immigration and workplace trends. We engage more than 16,000 clients annually with growing demand and recognition reaching beyond the Greater Toronto Area and the province of Ontario. The demand for more programs and support in the sector is ever growing and will be critical in the next five years as immigration policies and trends continue to shift. This strategic plan responds to this growing demand and opportunity by centring data-driven and proactive approaches to growth, identifying emerging trends, a sector-specific needs analysis, and most importantly — the lived experiences of newcomers and underserved communities in Canada. Complex problems are messy, ambiguous, and frustrating in nature. They defy traditional or expert approaches and are more likely to react in unpredictable and non-linear ways. We get stuck in complex problems, and this contributes to growing feelings that certain issues can't be solved. As a result, we tend to prefer the status quo and simple solutions because we can't see a way out of the systems we have built that don't serve us anymore.

The answer to solving complex problems starts with the people who are at the centre of the issues. The 'users' of a service, experience, system, or product possess the knowledge and creative power to help us redesign everything. Real insight comes from interacting with people at the edges of a system. It's about acknowledging the complexity of problems and working together. Honest insight comes from meaningfully and genuinely engaging those with lived experience and real change comes from ensuring that all proposed solutions are informed by these lived experiences and will work for and with those who need it the most!

At Skills for Change, this Strategic Planning process has provided us the opportunity to better understand the needs of the people we serve. Today, we share an optimism about our ability to bridge a gap in our wider system to impact our society in a meaningful way. This sense of optimism will drive us as an organization throughout our day-to-day operations, while collectively driving toward the priorities that have been set out in this plan.



The Process of Engagement and Strategic Planning

As part of our strategic planning process, we sought out the voices of many interested and critical voices: external partners, Skills for Change's Board of Directors, staff, management, and clients. Through three stakeholder labs and a distributed survey we were able to hear from a diverse set of participants to surface key insights. We asked questions to understand how people see the current state and future direction of Skills for Change, the challenges facing the sector, the opportunities, and the role we can play both now and in the future.

Equipped with insights from those we serve and work with, in addition to a trend analysis that helped offer future

considerations, our Leadership team and Board members began a collaborative and consensus-building process of co-creating the strategic plan. The strategic plan is constructed into the design to be flexible and responsive to changing contexts and environments.

Our strategic plan is important and will help us connect the work that we do now to the bigger picture of the organization's goals, purpose, and vision for our future. The strategic planning process drew out the pathways of where we want to go in the future so that we can create and operationalize a plan for how we will get there.

EMERGING TRENDS AFFECTING OUR SECTOR

As an organization dedicated to holistically and sustainably supporting newcomers and underserved individuals to settle and work in Canada, understanding emerging trends and their influence on our work, the economy, and the broader landscape is an important consideration in creating a durable strategic plan. The following trends were identified through this process as important considerations for facilitating discussion and generating ideas that led to the finalization of our strategic priorities.

Rates of technological progress

Access to basic pieces of technology plays a crucial role in the journey of many newcomers — for example, mobile phones, can help newcomers stay connected with their families, their previous host nations, and receive vital information concerning their settlement. Technology can be used as a tool to spark a first touchpoint with newcomers and allows for a diversification of targeted outreach to specific groups.¹ There is an opportunity to create links with newcomers that have not yet landed in Canada, leveraging social media and other channels that have a high potential of reaching target clientele at an appropriate point in their commitment to immigrate. A larger tech presence and utilization can also help to combat many common issues faced by newcomers such as online misinformation, digital literacy, and – of particular importance in our increasingly virtual world – bridging the digital divide.²

Immigration levels rising to combat future social and economic challenges

Coming out of the pandemic, Canada is facing critical labour market shortages that are causing uncertainty for workers. Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) released the 2023-2025 *Immigration Levels Plan* which embraces immigration as a strategy to manage the social and economic challenges Canada will face in the next few decades. The plan outlines a long-term focus on immigration with increases in regional programs to address targeted local labour market needs, and an emphasis on welcoming newcomers with specific skills and qualifications in sectors such as healthcare, manufacturing, skilled trades (i.e., construction), and

Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM). Skills for Change is dedicated to investing resources in government relations to track these policies and advocate for necessary government focus. Skills for Change's ability to track and influence government priorities on immigration will inform program development and ensure we can effectively support our clients in searching for work in their chosen fields. This will simultaneously support Canada's commitment to and prioritization of addressing labour market shortages in specific industries.³

Political instability and increase in immigration levels contribute to uncertainty on capacity for support

The *Immigration Levels Plan* targets several projections for growth in immigration over the next two years, with a significant increase in targeted numbers for programs and policies such as the Provincial Nomination Program, and Humanitarian & Compassionate public policy admissions. What remains unclear from the *Immigration Levels Plan* are programs and processes for Ukrainians that have attained three-year open work permits through the Canadian-Ukraine Authorization for Emergency Travel. With sensitivities around Russia-Ukraine remaining uncertain, it is unclear how this will continue to impact Immigration planning in the future and the capacity for organizations like Skills for Change to supply the support needed to meet demands.⁴ These kinds of considerations also inform how Skills for Change will need to continually monitor global immigration and migration trends. Skills for Change can subsequently create programming that is both reactionary to crises as well as proactively supportive of targeted immigration priorities.

¹ <https://cdn.odi.org/media/documents/12395.pdf>

² <https://theconversation.com/settlement-services-need-to-improve-their-online-offerings-for-tech-savvy-newcomers-181368>

³ <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/news/2022/11/an-immigration-plan-to-grow-the-economy.html>

Strategic Directions

Strategic Directions At-a-Glance

Emerging from the strategic planning process are four distinct strategic directions. These directions articulate Skills for Change's priorities for its work over the next five years. They provide a flexible platform to achieve our organizational goals and adjust to ever-changing community needs and emerging contexts.

The four Strategic Directions are:

- Intentional Growth to Amplify Impact
- Preferred Partner and Service Agency in the Sector
- Revenue Growth for Impact
- Be a Great Place to Work



Intentional Growth to Amplify Impact

Have a broad enough reach to readily support newcomers across Canada.

Historically, Skills for Change has pioneered programs across Ontario, and especially the Greater Toronto Area. As immigration patterns change, Skills for Change works to identify the trends in expanding immigration and the subsequent impacts on the sector. This informs our need to expand our programs to meet the changing needs, whilst considering how to scale organizational growth sustainably. We will work collaboratively with partners to identify and bridge current gaps that enable our ability to expand services and will prioritize data to inform and guide strategic growth. Through leveraging partnerships to ideate and apply an innovative approach to growth, the organization will expand programmatic and geographic reach to amplify efforts that support all stages of clients' journey prior to, during, and after their time with Skills for Change. Ultimately, nimble and strategic growth will increase the impact Skills for Change has on the newcomer experience in Canada and will enable us to continue centring clients' needs.



Preferred Partner and Service Agency in the Sector

Become the preferred organization in the sector for expertise, choice of work, and partnership in Canada.

Becoming the preferred partner and service agency in the sector is a priority that fully embodies our values and foundational principles to benefit our clients, employees, employers, and partners. To be the preferred partner requires us to further strive for excellence, transparency and ground ourselves in centring our clients. We want our brand, reputation, and most importantly our work, to be top of mind as a dependable resource and destination. To achieve this, we will establish a strong and trusted presence through a refreshed and competitive value proposition for each of our audiences and work towards propelling the recognition of our brand within the settlement sector and amongst external interest-holders. Strengthening our brand will increase the visibility of our organization and establish seamless points of access for future clients, partners, and employees.



Revenue Growth for Impact

Increase and diversify our funding sources to amplify our work and impact for newcomers in Canada.

As the anticipated demands for an increase in services and programs for new clients continues, so does the need to respond to these demands effectively and sustainably. Our desire to drive real impact for newcomers implores that we have dependable resources to sustain us. This presents Skills for Change with a unique opportunity to build resiliency and sustainability into our future revenue streams. We will explore strategic partnerships, sponsorships, grants, and diverse funding sources to generate revenue. This may manifest as an exploration of innovative ideas such as implementing a consulting vertical, investing in aligned corporate partnerships, or the creation of innovative social enterprise programs that increase revenue. Simultaneously, we will utilize our vast alumni network to activate effective fundraising efforts that will also drive further revenue. By growing and diversifying funding sources, Skills for Change will be able to generate more sustainable revenue for the organization and scale our impact across Canada.



Be a Great Place to Work

Invest in and support our employees as the enablers of strategy.

Our employees are not only the enablers of strategy but the backbone of the organization and the drivers of our work. Providing our employees with a supportive environment and opportunities for growth is crucial to becoming a great place to work. We will invest in our employees, by developing strategies to encourage internal growth and offer incentives to compete with industry standards. Additionally, we will work to maintain and protect a positive and supportive physical and emotional work environment that attracts and retains top talent. Through this investment we will cultivate a strong work culture and consistent inclusive employee experience. By focusing on this priority, we are not only supporting our people and teams, but also positioning ourselves to elevate the excellent work we deliver to newcomers and underserved individuals in Canada.

**This Strategic Plan has been developed collaboratively
with Skills for Change and Overlap Associates.**

OVERLAP ASSOCIATES INC.

22 Water St S Suite 201,
Kitchener, ON N2G 4K4

**Better is
absolutely
possible.**

**Overlap
Associates_**