

JAN
FEB
MAR
APR
MAY
JUN
JUL
AUG
SEP
OCT
NOV
DEC

Work Plans

2021

Natural Resources Centre

2021 WORK PLAN

Remaining competitive in times of change

The events of 2020, including the global spread of COVID-19, the associated lockdowns and the election of a new government in the United States, have accelerated a number of trends that have been building for a while. These include a growing volatility in demand for oil and gas, an increase in climate legislation, a stampede of investment to those companies that can demonstrate responsible performance and the steady growth of cleaner energy sources. These forces continue to shape the demand for Canada's vast resources, expertise and ingenuity.

They also continue to shape the landscape of opportunity that exists for Western Canada, as well as the challenges we face.

In 2021, we will continue to work on the issues that need to be resolved for Canada to make its way to the front of the line as a preferred, responsible supplier. And we will continue to make our voice heard – through balanced and evidence-based analysis, influential speaking engagements and media events.

POLICY GOAL

Carbon and climate policies that benefit the West

As home to many energy-intensive, high-emissions industries, Western Canada is particularly sensitive to the effects of carbon and climate policies. This creates both opportunities and risks. When policies complement each other, opportunities to achieve emission reduction goals are enhanced. But when they overlap or contradict each other, it can create confusion, increase costs, reduce competitiveness and undermine climate outcomes. In 2021, we will continue to focus on what works and what doesn't, and how the West can prosper in this rapidly changing environment.

In 2021, our major areas of focus will include:

- **U.S. energy and climate policy.** The decisions made under the new Biden administration will have enormous implications for Canada. We will keep a close eye on the implications of evolving U.S. policy on energy and climate, and what can be done to ensure Western Canada's interests are aligned with our giant neighbour to the south.
- **Offset opportunities.** As governments and companies across the country and around the world pledge to achieve net-zero emissions, demand for carbon offset credits to balance remaining GHG emissions is rapidly increasing. This project will look at requirements to support the development and scaling of offset opportunities that promote investment in Alberta and the West generally; we will convene government, industry, academic and other organizations at a James A. Richardson Discovery Roundtable to elicit feedback as we continue this work.

POLICY GOAL

Responsible energy for the future

In Western Canada and around the world, the energy sector is rapidly transforming to one that promises to be cleaner, greener and more efficient. In 2021, we will continue to help Canadians understand what responsible energy development should look like – and we will continue to advocate for the choices that make sense both locally and globally.

- The *Energy Innovation Brief* was launched in 2020 and has proven to be popular with a broad audience who want to be informed about technical and business innovations in the energy sector. We will continue to publish the *Brief* throughout 2021.
- Environmental, social and governance (ESG) factors are increasingly driving investment decisions, corporate actions and public opinion. Our work in 2021 will focus on helping Western Canada's energy companies, governments and other stakeholders understand the value of not only adopting ESG practices but going beyond current approaches to build trust, reduce risk and attract investment.
- We will continue to assess policy implications and produce recommendations for how Canada can best capitalize on emerging opportunities with nuclear energy, hydrogen, a more integrated electricity grid and other evolving technologies.

POLICY GOAL

Profiting from cleantech innovation

Western Canada is rife with innovators – and cleantech innovation can lead to both economically and environmentally positive outcomes. Our work in 2021 will focus on areas where policy decisions will play a central role in either bolstering success or creating challenges for cleantech innovators. Our projects in this area have us working with a broad range of partners, including energy innovators, technology adopters, accelerators, regulators, government agencies, law firms and others to create an ecosystem in which cleantech innovation can thrive.

- The L.E.A.D. project (Leveraging Energy Assets for Diversification) was started in 2020 in collaboration with the Energy Futures Lab. In 2021, the project will provide recommendations to amend legislation and regulations in Alberta that hinder the repurposing of inactive oil wells and facilities for new energy uses, such as solar, geothermal or lithium extraction.
- Our analysis of the Alberta clean energy ecosystem, undertaken with the Alberta Clean Technology Industry Alliance (ACTIA) and the Foresight Cleantech Accelerator, will help identify where Alberta has specific strengths in cleantech and how government and other actors can best support cleantech businesses and build Western Canada as an energy cleantech powerhouse.
- We will produce a report on the different types of policy levers that governments – federal, provincial or municipal – can use to attract investment for Western Canada's energy transition.

Trade & Investment Centre

2021 WORK PLAN

Trade, Investment, Trade Infrastructure: 2021 and beyond

Western Canadian exporters have endured unprecedented change over the past year and face an uncertain future due to the pandemic as well as other factors. The markets of focus in this work plan accounted for 84 per cent of Western Canada's total exports in 2019 and 56 per cent of foreign investment stock in Canada. The ongoing challenges include slow economic growth and political gridlock in the U.S. market; political tensions with China that prevent Canada from addressing trade issues; and the rise of a new trade bloc among Asia's most promising markets that includes Canada's competitors but not Canada. None of these challenges will get easier in the years ahead as Canada attempts to rebuild from the economic and social impacts of the COVID pandemic. Agriculture and other commodity exports from the West can lead the recovery on strong global demand. But issues that negate these advantages like falling global confidence in Canada's trade infrastructure must be addressed first. The West is well-positioned to lead Canada's recovery but only if it is supported, not hindered, in doing so. Our work in 2021 will focus on research, convening and communication activities that test new models, provide new information and pursue specific opportunities to drive crucial policy development. We will also carry out third-party advocacy to both defend and advance the interests of Western Canada at home and abroad.

POLICY GOAL

The West's relations with its largest trade partners

The United States: A Biden administration will remove some irritants, most notably the unpredictable use of unilateral tariff authority such as the threat of a 2 a.m. tweet that upends markets. But a weaker Democratic majority in the house and control of the Senate only narrowly in Democratic hands coupled with partisanship worse than the Obama years is likely to lead to gridlock. Efforts to resolve western issues will have to be done in the West, not in Washington, D.C. or Ottawa. In 2021, we will:

- Finish work begun in 2020 to develop and test a rationale and agenda for Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba to solve common problems directly with states in the U.S. mountain west. While heads of government of other regions along the border – Cascadia to the west and Great Lakes and Atlantic provinces to the east, and U.S. and Mexican states to the south – regularly meet, the Prairie provinces do not. This leaves potential resources and allies unused and the Prairies behind. We will convene a workshop of regional and private sector leaders including representatives from other border regions. The workshop will be used to produce a final report of recommendations for the Prairie premiers to take to their U.S. counterparts including a Canadian Prairie agenda for approaching U.S. governors and mechanisms for engagement.
- Increase general advocacy for the Cascadia Innovation Corridor between British Columbia, Washington and Oregon, to include Calgary in the initiative.

China: China is the second-largest trade partner for each of the western provinces and largest importer of key agricultural commodities – trade that is increasing every year. Relevant information for businesses and policymakers on China as a trade destination is critical for the West. Over the past five years, the Trade & Investment Centre has made a concerted effort to build knowledge, competence and capacity to work on China-Canada issues. In 2021, we will apply that capacity to:

- Build on the work behind the 2020 report *When Interests Converge: Agriculture as a basis of re-engagement with China* to spend time and resources on public speaking on the report to directly improve understanding of agricultural producer associations and other stakeholder organizations in Western Canada on relations with China. In addition, we will publish a series of short policy briefs based on the research targeted at specific audiences.
- Organize, and, with our partners, host a James A. Richardson Discovery Roundtable, to elicit feedback and further our work on the impact of the fifth plenary session (plenum) of the 19th Chinese Communist Party Central Committee and the 14th five-year plan for Canada and the West. China's fifth plenum is the chief planning mechanism and indicator of where the country is headed. The 14th Five-Year Plan is the resulting document based on the directions set forth by the plenum. Policy briefs from the workshop will inform policymakers.
- Continue publication of the *China Brief* news summary of major issues in Western Canada's relations with China. The brief is an important tool for increasing knowledge on China in Western Canada and highlighting western issues in the relationship in Ottawa and abroad.

POLICY GOAL

Rediscovering other markets

For Canada, the most efficient way to lessen overdependence on its two largest markets is to get more out of its underused existing trade relationships and trade agreements. Instead of replicating underperformance in new markets, Canada needs to improve performance in markets where it already has privileged access. In 2021, the Trade & Investment Centre will:

- Proactively respond to changes and challenges by updating 2017 modelling of the CPTPP agreement's impact on Canada to include the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and take into consideration the potential addition of the U.K. to the agreement and a U.S. return.
- Continue to provide ongoing analysis on the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) and other global trade developments for western stakeholders and national media.

POLICY GOAL

Getting to market: Improving Canada's trade infrastructure

In 2019, despite significant investments by the private sector, global perception of the quality and reliability of Canada's trade infrastructure declined significantly, dropping to 31st from perceived 15th best in the World Economic Forum's rankings. This confirms complaints from key markets and reveals that Canadian steps to mitigate this are not registering abroad. New action at home and more vigorous communication abroad are needed. In 2021, the Trade & Investment Centre will conclude work begun in 2020:

- Model the impact of the CPTPP trade agreement on Canada's trade infrastructure to enable western provinces and stakeholders to more effectively engage the federal government and demonstrate to foreign markets work that is being done in Canada. The modelling will include pre- and post-COVID analysis.
- Finish a strategic framework to guide trade infrastructure planning and prioritization in Canada including translating elements of Infrastructure Australia and other global best practices. These efforts include an aggressive public education campaign to raise awareness around the importance of improving trade infrastructure and turn policy recommendations from the research into action. A summit of New West Partnership premiers is planned for Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Other work

A principal strength and benefit to Western Canada of the Trade & Investment Centre is its ability to respond, often proactively, to challenges and opportunities that emerge unexpectedly. In addition to new challenges, the Centre will continue small-scale initiatives begun in 2020.

- Research to create greenhouse opportunities by incorporating CO₂ sequestration .
- Continue support and advocacy for copyright reform to protect small agricultural equipment manufacturing in Saskatchewan and Manitoba.
- Pan-Prairie trade advisory talks, *Trade Ahead*. A series of armchair conversations with trade experts from key markets for Western Canada to prepare businesses for upcoming trade issues in the year ahead. This series is being presented by the Canada West Foundation with the support of Export Development Canada and in partnership with Calgary Economic Development, Saskatchewan Trade and Export Partnership, World Trade Centre Winnipeg and Edmonton Global.

Human Capital Centre

2021 WORK PLAN

Skills, competencies and workforce development

The acceleration of workplace digitization combined with the disruptions caused by COVID-19 have added a powerful urgency to the work of the Human Capital Centre for 2021. Skills, competencies and new methodologies designed to rapidly reskill and upskill the workforce are more important than ever.

This year we will add to our body of work on competencies and workforce development and, if funding permits, enter into some new areas of study. The Human Capital Centre is on top of many of the latest solutions to workplace transition, especially for mid-career workers displaced by the massive changes experienced in recent years.

POLICY GOAL

Building the skills and competencies Canada needs

Canada has moved from an economy defined by jobs to one defined by skills. Employers hire bundles of competencies – the skills and related knowledge and aptitudes – required to accomplish the tasks in their workplaces. Some people are hired for short-term contract (gig) work, others for work in longer-lasting, but ever-changing jobs. We examine some of the ways to define and organize skills and competencies to make the process of matching people with jobs and jobs with people more efficient.

→ In 2017, we published *Matchup: A case for pan-Canadian competency frameworks*. Since then, we have learned a lot about the desired

architecture for these frameworks, and in 2021 we will publish a follow-up to *Matchup*. This new work will outline the structure and function required for useful frameworks and offer ideas on how to engage employers to ensure they are accurate, relevant and useful tools to better match people with jobs.

→ A critical aspect of investment attraction is a workforce with the right combination of skills. What would it take to make a skilled workforce guarantee part of a strategy to attract the investment of a large employer? An adaptive pathway to connect labour market information, investment attraction and available training is the answer. It has worked in Kentucky. We will provide examples from other jurisdictions and show how competency frameworks help government, post-secondary institutions and employers match today's workforce to tomorrow's jobs. We will convene government, post-secondary institutions and economic development organizations at a James A. Richardson Discovery Roundtable to elicit feedback as we undertake this work.

Other work

→ The federal government has developed a new framework of the most in-demand skills that drive workplace success. Some of the so-called soft skills are now included. To be most useful to employers and individuals, further research on measurement of these *Skills for Success* is required. We are part of a team involved in this ongoing research.

If funding permits

Canada has more than 170,000 charitable and nonprofit organizations which account for about 10 per cent of GDP and employ more than two million workers. With an emphasis on Alberta, we will build competency frameworks and look at capacity issues related to competencies for a variety of sub-sectors of this vital pillar of the economy.

POLICY GOAL

Effective and efficient workforce development

The days when a person prepared once for a career that lasted a lifetime are long over. Now, it is important to upgrade skills and competencies throughout a lifetime. While education goes well beyond workforce development, the Human Capital Centre is focused on how educational institutions can make sure that they prepare people for the workforce. In 2021, we will look at various facets of post-secondary education including how new approaches to work-integrated learning (WIL) and apprenticeship prepare jobseekers for early career opportunities as well as those in mid-career and beyond.

- Our 2015 report on apprenticeship, *Building Blocks: Modular credentials for Canada's trades* discussed the need to recognize the modular, stackable competencies of apprentices as they progress towards journey person status. In 2021, we will update this report as a lot has happened in the intervening years. One exciting development is the growing interest in expanding apprenticeship beyond the trades. We see this as not just an early career pathway but as one way to help mid-career displaced workers to rapidly reskill for jobs in new fields.
- Provincial and federal governments have recognized the desirability of having WIL experiences for every student in post-secondary education. The federal government has invested almost a billion dollars in this approach. Some provinces have mandated, or recommended strongly, that every new program incorporate WIL into its programming. We will examine ways to assist faculty, students and employers to work together to ensure that WIL becomes universal. There are ways to do this that go beyond co-ops and internships.
- Micro credentials are touted as one way to ensure that new hires have the exact skills that employers need. We will discuss the work that must go into the development of micro credentials and ways to ensure that employers

can recognize the specific micro credentials that meet their needs. We will use examples from our work in an ongoing Future Skills Centre project, led by Bow Valley College (BVC).

- While the workforce issues of the West can feel personal, much of the world experiences similar problems and have developed solutions that are useful here. Talent Pipeline Management (TPM), a brainchild of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation, is one solution that assists employers to define their exact needs and then develops the learning pathways to build a talent pipeline. The BVC project uses TPM as the first step in every pilot. We will discuss how TPM, and other technology-based innovations can help ensure that post-secondary institutions in Canada better meet labour market needs.
- Our investigation into employment outcomes of STEM graduates will continue in 2021. While STEM enrolment has drastically increased over the last decade, the evidence suggests that there is a mismatch between graduates and the requirements of available STEM jobs. We will examine the numbers and look at potential solutions.
- Modular, stackable chunks of learning that can be rapidly developed and micro credentialed would be useful to both workers and employers in the gig economy. Our short paper will discuss this concept as it applies to some technology-based careers.

Other work

Young people have been leaving Calgary. Students at Mount Royal University have examined this phenomenon and have thought of some innovative solutions to keep youth here. We are part of a group that advises on this work.

If funding permits

The exodus of young people may not just be a Calgary problem. If funding permits, we will take a closer look at the numbers across the West to determine if the problem is real, what this might mean for the western economy in the future and how stakeholders can work together to make staying in the province more attractive for young people.

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