

OUR WORK:

EDGE UP 2.0 - Upskilling Energy Workforce to Digital Economy

EDGE UP 2.0 (Energy to Digital Growth Education and Upskilling Project)

Context: Funded by the Government of Canada's Future Skills Centre, this initiative helped displaced oil and gas professionals with the opportunity to upskill and obtain ICT/digital careers while assisting Calgary employers in securing in-demand digital economy talent. Under the leadership of Calgary Economic Development (CED), the Information and Communication Technology Council (ICTC), local post-secondary education institutions, and Riipen were CED's delivery partners.

Challenge

In 2015, Alberta lost 20,000 oil and gas jobs while the tech sector struggled with skill shortages. Displaced mid-career oil and gas professionals had limited opportunities, whereas the demand for skilled tech experts grew. Reskilling displaced energy industry workers became a pressing issue, given that nearly 30% of Alberta's population relied on the oil and gas sector jobs.

Solution

The **EDGE UP 2.0** program provided short-duration training for some of the province's displaced mid-career oil and gas professionals and helped them find work in technology roles across all industries in Calgary.

Results & Impacts

EDGE UP 2.0's remarkable success has not only earned it recognition by the [OECD](#) but has also yielded profound positive impacts in the digital workforce, benefiting job seekers, employers, and the province:

- **255 participants completed the program, acquiring new skills and expertise**
- **181 participants secured gainful employment or advanced their education, contributing to the province's economic growth**
- **An investment of \$5.4M from the Future Skills Centre solidified the program's mission and impact**
- **The program received the Excellence in [Economic Development Award](#) from the International Economic Development Council (IEDC), affirming its transformative influence through partnerships with educational institutions**

EDGE UP 2.0 orchestrated a powerful trifecta: job seekers found employment, employers secured skilled professionals, and the province benefitted economically. It was a resounding success, fostering a stronger workforce within the province and aligning with Alberta and Canada's digital ambitions.



“Data crawls across every field, so the fact that I can now, with my new skills, apply to any of the industries I’m interested in, makes it all make sense. I have more opportunities, and it’s all thanks to EDGE UP 2.0.”

– Ani Memuduaghan, Program Participant

EDGE UP 2.0 - Reskilling Calgary's Workforce for In-Demand Tech Jobs

In 2015, Statistics Canada reported a significant loss of nearly 20,000 jobs in Alberta's oil and gas sector, impacting the economy of Calgary, which constitutes about 30% of Alberta's population. Simultaneously, Alberta's growing technology sector struggled to fill job vacancies.

Calgary's economic landscape faced a dual challenge due to the restructuring of the energy sector and rapid advancements in digital technologies. The shortage of digitally skilled workers, particularly in the technology sector, and the displacement of mid-career professionals from the energy sector became prominent issues. Reskilling and repositioning these professionals within the technology sector was imperative to secure Calgary's economic prosperity.

To address this talent gap and leverage the expertise of displaced energy sector professionals, CED initiated a collaborative pilot program. Partnering with ICTC, CED's efforts aimed to tackle these challenges.

Addressing Calgary's Workforce Transition Through EDGE UP 2.0

In response to the economic shifts and skills disparities, EDGE UP 2.0 emerged as a strategic initiative. A pivotal step in this journey was the 2018 release of the report [“Mapping Calgary's Digital Future: Tech Employment Opportunities for Displaced Workers”](#) by ICTC and CED. This analysis sought to bridge the gap between job seekers looking to transition to in-demand digital roles and tech employers grappling with a shortage of essential skilled talent.

In 2019, the EDGE UP pilot launched as a multi-stakeholder program aimed at upskilling professionals displaced from the energy sector and preparing them for careers in Calgary's digital tech landscape. The program collaborated with employers to identify upskilling pathways, trained participants in tech and soft skills and placed them in in-demand positions, including data analysts, full-stack developers, IT project managers, cybersecurity analysts, UI/UX designers, and digital marketing professionals.

Understanding these sought-after skills and where aspiring job seekers could acquire them was pivotal for navigating the tech sector. ICTC and CED unveiled a [skills mapping tool](#), a comprehensive resource for job seekers and employers. This platform imparted detailed insights into essential skills for high-demand roles and offered educational resources for upskilling. Moreover, it empowered tech employers by providing insights into the existing proficiencies of displaced job seekers. This synergy of information was the cornerstone for unlocking meaningful employment opportunities and bolstering business growth within the city.

More than 71.15% of the inaugural cohort are now employed in tech jobs.

Empowering Reskilled Professionals to Drive Calgary's Tech Economy

Over 255 participants from diverse energy sector backgrounds underwent training through EDGE UP 2.0. This reskilling journey facilitated their successful transition into high-demand tech roles, bolstering the growth of Calgary's digital economy. A testament to the program's efficacy, these graduates now contribute to a sector they once had limited access to.

The impact is quantifiable: more than 71.15% of the inaugural cohort are now employed in tech jobs or are pursuing further education, this is despite the challenging economic times during this period. This statistic reflects the success of EDGE UP 2.0 in bridging the gap between the energy and technology sectors. By aligning training pathways with the tech industry's needs, the program effectively addressed Calgary's persistent tech talent shortage.

Namir Anani, President and CEO of ICTC, affirms the profound importance of creating alternative employment avenues for displaced workers. He says that nurturing and equipping their potential with growth-inducing skills in high-demand sectors fortifies Calgary's workforce resilience and propels its economic vitality.

Brad Parry, President and CEO of Calgary Economic Development, emphasizes the adaptive learning landscape in Calgary, where post-secondary institutions and training programs fuel life-long skills development. This strategic approach directly addresses the escalating demand for tech talent across diverse industries, including the energy sector.

Insights and Lessons: Transformative Strategies for Reskilling

The program's success underscores the power of collaboration between diverse stakeholders. By uniting government bodies, industry associations, educational institutions, and workforce development organizations, EDGE UP 2.0 showcased the potential of concerted efforts to drive impactful reskilling initiatives.

The “flipped classroom” approach for the Transition to Tech course was particularly effective. Providing participants with online access to content, followed by interactive in-person sessions, enabled a deeper understanding of essential concepts. The emphasis on soft skills like self-awareness and adaptability underlined the holistic approach toward career transition.

EDGE UP 2.0 is a testament to the agility, innovation, and collaboration required to address dynamic workforce challenges. As it propelled individuals from the energy sector into technology roles, the program's far-reaching impacts encompassed job placement, economic resilience, and the fortification of Calgary's digital transformation journey. In unison with the city's ascent as a thriving tech hub, EDGE UP 2.0 affirms the potential of tailored reskilling initiatives in shaping a resilient and diverse workforce for the digital age.

To explore these impactful strategies, delve into our report [The Digital Talent Imperative: Calgary's Economic Edge](#).

For more success stories on reskilling and upskilling, read our [article](#) on building the future of Canada's workforce.