Employee Recruitment, Training and Retention

2025 Employer Survey Results

FAR NORTHEAST TRAINING BOARD (FNETB)
your local labour market planning network

COMMISSION DE FORMATION DU NORD-EST (CFNE)
votre réseau local de planification du marché du travail

Canada

EMPLOYMENT ONTARIO EMPLOI ONTARIO

Ontario

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The information presented in this report is current at the time of its release.

LIMITATIONS:
While the survey results are a snapshot based on the input of employers who responded across various industry sectors, it is important to note that it is not representative of all employers in the FNETB.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The FNETB would like to thank the 290 employers who took the time to answer the 2025 survey. Employer outreach is greatly enriched by the collaboration and support of the local organizations that assist and support this project by distributing the survey to their members. The participating business organizations in 2025 were:

- Cochrane Board of Trade
- Northern Corridor Chamber of Commerce
- Kirkland Lake District Chamber of Commerce
- Temiskaming Shores & Area Chamber of Commerce
- Timmins Chamber of Commerce

EMPLOYEE RECRUITMENT, TRAINING AND RETENTION

2025 Employer Survey Results

INTRODUCTION

There are twenty-five workforce planning board across Ontario funded by the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development. The Far Northeast Training Board (FNETB) is one of four workforce planning boards across northeastern Ontario. Other workforce planning boards in the northeast include Algoma Workforce Investment Corporation), the Labour Market Group and Workforce Planning for Sudbury and Manitoulin.

A key mandate of workforce planning boards is to conduct research and analyze what is happening in the local labour market. In addition to using various data sources such as business data from Statistics Canada and the Census, workforce planning boards also conduct industry-specific research, consult key stakeholders throughout the year and lead partnership projects. All of this is used to support and inform local workforce development strategies and local actions.

An important part of the community outreach is to collect input from employers about the challenges they are facing with their workforce in terms of recruitment, training and retention. As a result, the four workforce planning boards in the northeast conducted a survey of employers in their respective areas.

METHODOLOGY

All four workforce planning boards across the northeast developed a common assessment tool and timeline for implementation of the survey. Employers were asked to answer key questions related to: industry demographics, workforce changes in 2024 and anticipated changes in 2025, hard-to-fill positions, recruitment practices, skills and training requirements, impact of technological and environmental changes and challenges/opportunities moving forward.

The survey was administered between April 30th to May 30th, 2025. Survey Monkey was used as the platform to administer the survey. Various strategies were used to get the word out, including direct emails and the use of social media. Each workforce planning board across the northeast conducted their own survey and this report is an analysis of the results for the FNETB area (the Highway 11 Corridor from Hearst to Latchford, Kirkland Lake, Timmins, Elk Lake, Chapleau, Hornepayne and the James Bay Coast).

PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS AND THEIR BUSINESS

For the Far Northeast Training Board area, a total of 290 employers started the survey and while there was some drop-off in respondents as the survey progressed, around three-quarters completed the survey.

INDUSTRIES REPRESENTED *(290 responses)*

Respondents reflect a range of industries. Table 1 provides the breakdown of respondents by industry and compares the percentage distribution with the actual percentage distribution of businesses in the FNETB region (districts of Timiskaming and Cochrane). The color-coding in Table 1 highlights where the survey percentage share is significantly greater (green) or significantly lower (red) than the actual distribution based on the Canadian Business Counts data as of December 2024.

TABLE 1: NUMBER AND PERCENT OF RESPONDENTS BY INDUSTRY

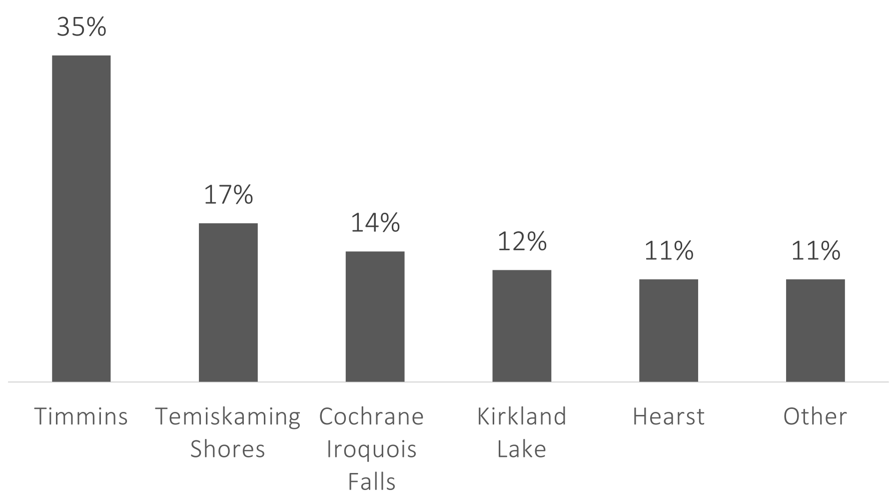
INDUSTRY	SURVEY		ACTUAL
	NUMBER	PERCENT	PERCENT
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	14	4.8%	5.1%
Mining, Quarrying and Oil and Gas Extraction	20	**6.9%**	1.4%
Utilities	2	0.7%	0.6%
Construction	31	10.7%	12.9%
Manufacturing	14	4.8%	3.6%
Wholesale Trade	3	**1.0%**	3.3%
Retail Trade	41	14.1%	16.8%
Transportation and Warehousing	6	**2.1%**	5.2%
Information and Cultural Industries	4	1.4%	1.4%
Finance and Insurance	11	3.8%	3.4%
Real Estate, Rental and Leasing	5	**1.7%**	3.3%
Professional, Scientific and Technical Services	13	4.5%	5.6%
Management of Companies and Enterprises	1	0.3%	0.3%
Administration and Support, Waste Mgmt	4	**1.4%**	3.4%
Educational Services	18	**6.2%**	1.3%
Healthcare and Social Assistance	39	13.5%	12.5%
Arts, Entertainment and Recreation	8	2.8%	1.6%
Accommodation and Food Services	14	4.8%	6.6%
Other Services (Except Public Administration)	26	9.0%	9.6%
Public Administration	16	**5.5%**	2.1%
TOTAL	**290**	**100.0%**	**100.0%**

Actual figures are from Statistics Canada's Canadian Business Counts, December 2024, Timiskaming and Cochrane

As shown in Table 1, there are a few imbalances with the distribution of respondents by industry, but there are certainly more instances where the survey responses/distribution is close to the actual distribution of firms by industry in the survey area.

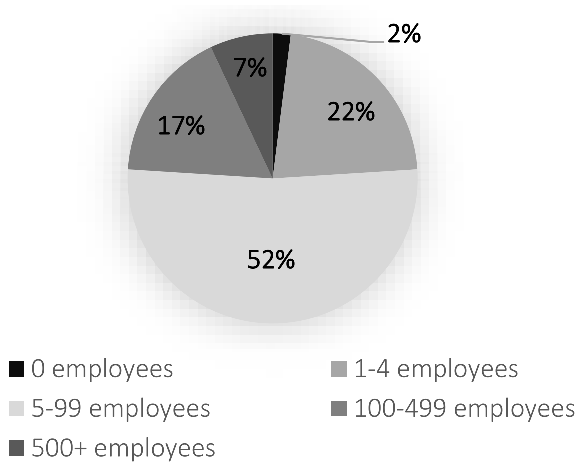
PERSON COMPLETING THE SURVEY *(290 responses)*
Eighty-two percent of the surveys were completed by a senior person in the organization as follows: owner (32%); human resources (19%); and supervisor/manager (31%). Others (18%) included in that category are those in an Executive Director's role, in an administrative position or front-line role.

BUSINESS LOCATION (290 responses)

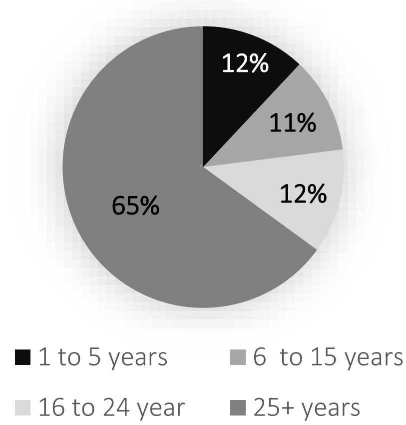


The "Other category represented 11% of the total responses some of the smaller communities, those with multiple locations, as well as a handful from outside the workforce planning board area, such as North Bay, Sault Ste. Marie and Val d'Or.

NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES *(290 responses)*



YEARS OF OPERATION *(290 responses)*



Note: For the following questions in this section, the respondent was allowed to pick more than one selection.

TYPE OF BUSINESS *(290 responses)*

- 62% private for-profit sector
- 15% not for profit/registered charity employer
- 9% Francophone business
- 5% Indigenous business
- 5% non-government funded not for profit employer
- 4% government-funded for-profit employer
- 5% franchise

62%
of the 290 respondents were private sector for profit businesses.

40%
of the respondents have employees who are 65 or over

CURRENT WORKFORCE BY AGE COHORT: *(290 responses)*

- 63% employ someone under 25 years old
- 95% employ someone between 25 and 55
- 68% employ someone 55 or over
- 40% employ someone 65 or older

DEMOGRAPHICS OF CURRENT WORKFORCE *(290 responses)*

Respondents were asked about the demographic composition of their workforce. Almost all respondents hire both males and females, and around two-thirds (69%) employ Francophones. Around half employ either Indigenous persons (48%), or immigrants or other cultural groups (48%). A slightly smaller proportion (37%) employ domestic students, while 19% indicate that they hire international students. Around one out of five (23%) employ people with a known physical disability while 17% indicate that they hire people with a known developmental disability (17%).

- Males (88%) and females (94%)
- Francophones (69%)
- Indigenous (48%)
- Immigrants/other cultural groups (48%)
- Students: Domestic students (37%), International students (19%)
- People with a known disability: physical disability (23%), developmental disability (17%)

SUCCESSION PLAN *(290 responses)*

When asked about succession planning, less than four in ten respondents have a succession plan in place either for key roles or for some key roles:

- 41% acknowledge that they do not have a formal succession plan
- 21% say that they have a succession plan in place for key roles
- 16% say that they have a succession plan in place for some key roles
- 10% say they are currently developing a succession plan
- 11% of respondents say they do not know if their business had a succession plan.

41%
of the 290 respondents do not have a formal succession plan

SURVEY FINDINGS

Limitations: While the survey results are a snapshot in time and based on the input of employers who responded across various industry sectors, it is important to note that it is not representative of all employers in the FNETB region but rather a reflection of the experience and current situation of those who responded to the survey.

WORKFORCE HIRINGS AND SEPARATIONS IN 2024

SEPARATIONS IN 2024 *(290 responses)*
A separation is defined as a retirement, a dismissal/being fired, an employee who left or quit, a permanent layoff, a temporary layoff, or any other termination of employment.

Respondents were asked if their business or organization experienced any separations in 2024. Of all respondents, 77% said yes; 22% said no; and 2% were uncertain. Among those who did experience a separation, a further question explored why and approximately how many employees this impacted. Table 2 illustrates the responses provided. A category called 'other' was included and respondents provided a wide range of reasons including returned to school, parental leave, closure of business, seasonal employment, changing residence.

By far, the single largest reason for separation was that the employee quit (79%), followed by termination (56%) and retirement (42%). In most instances, the separation involved 1-9 employees.

REASONS FOR SEPARATIONS IN 2024 *(205 responses)*

Table 2: Type of separation and number of employees involved by percentage of employers

	Any number of employees	1-9 employees	10-24 employees	25-49 employees	50+ employees
Employee quit	79%	61%	11%	5%	2%
Employee retired	42%	39%	2%	1%	0%
Temporary layoff	16%	12%	3%	2%	0%
Permanent layoff	14%	13%	1%	1%	0%
Employee terminated/fired	56%	48%	5%	2%	1%
Left for more flexible work (i.e., remote work)	20%	16%	2%	1%	0%
Other	19%	17%	0%	1%	1%

HIRING IN 2024 SEPARATIONS IN 2024 *(279 responses)*

Similarly, respondents were asked whether they hired any employees in 2024. Eighty-one percent (81%) of respondents indicated that their business had hired in 2024 and 19% did not. The total number of respondents who indicated that they had hired was 226, while the total number who indicated they had experienced a separation was 222, virtually an identical number.

By far, the primary reason for hiring was to fill an existing vacancy (81%), followed by a hiring in response to growth or expansion (46%) or to replace a person who retired (33%). "Other" responses included seasonal hires, summer students, contract workers, internships, or backfilling a parental leave. As in the case of separations, the large majority of these hirings involve 1-9 employees.

REASONS FOR SEPARATIONS IN 2024 *(210 responses)*

Table 3: Reasons for new hires in 2024

	Any number of employees	1-9 employees	10-24 employees	25-49 employees	50+ employees
Retirements	33%	28%	4%	1%	0%
Filling existing vacancies	81%	57%	13%	5%	5%
Growth/expansion	46%	33%	8%	2%	2%
Restructuring	15%	13%	1%	1%	0%
Technological changes	8%	8%	0%	1%	0%
Other	8%	6%	1%	1%	0%

OCCUPATIONS FOR WHICH RESPONDENTS HIRED IN 2024 *(191 responses)*

Respondents were then asked to list up to 5 occupations where they hired the greatest number of employees.

- Labourer
- Sales associate, customer service
- Administrative staff, clerical
- Truck driver
- Personal support worker
- Early childhood educators/assistant
- Registered practical nurse
- Receptionist
- Server
- Millwright
- Technician
- Cashier
- Miner
- Welder/fitter
- Equipment operator
- Human resources
- Mechanic
- Registered nurse
- Teacher's assistant
- Social work

ANTICIPATED WORKFORCE CHANGES IN 2025

HIRING IN 2025 *(266 responses)*

Respondents were further probed about whether they had already hired in 2025 (January to May 2025) as well as whether they planned to hire between June and December 2025. A larger number of respondents had already hired (84%) since the beginning of 2025 compared to the proportion of those saying they planned to hire by the end of 2025.

The main difference between the responses in 2024 and 2025 is the larger proportion of respondents who were uncertain (in 2024: 0.4%; in 2025: 9%), in part because one is asking them to forecast half-way through 2025, compared to reporting on what actually happened in 2024.

Table 4: Already hired or plan to hire in 2025

	Any number of employees	1-9 employees	10-24 employees	25-49 employees	50+ employees
Already hired in 2025	84%	65%	15%	3%	1%
Plan to hire in 2025	74%	54%	13%	2%	5%

REASONS FOR HIRING IN 2025 *(191 responses)*
The proportion by reason is very similar to the reasons provide for the hires in 2024. The only noticeable difference is that in 2025 in the “Other” category, a much larger proportion of respondents indicated that the hiring was for a seasonal or summer student position which is likely due to the timing of the survey.

Table 5: Reasons for new hires in 2025

	Any number of employees	1-9 employees	10-24 employees	25-49 employees	50+ employees
Retirements	29%	27%	2%	1%	0%
Filling existing vacancies	75%	57%	12%	4%	2%
Growth/expansion	50%	39%	6%	1%	3%
Restructuring	12%	11%	1%	0%	1%
Technological changes	6%	6%	0%	0%	1%
Other	12%	11%	1%	1%	1%

OCCUPATIONS FOR WHICH RESPONDENTS HIRED OR PLAN TO HIRE IN 2025 *(166 responses)*

The occupations for which respondents had hired or expected to hire in 2025 were generally similar to those for which they had hired in 2024, notably among the larger categories: labourers, administrative staff, welders, miners, and sales associates, with somewhat fewer drivers, receptionists and servers.

HIRING CHALLENGES

BIGGEST HIRING CHALLENGES *(243 responses)*

Respondents were asked about the challenges they face when hiring. Table 6 illustrates the biggest challenges employers face when recruiting new employees, as a percentage of those who answered this question (respondents were allowed to select as many challenges as applied).

The biggest challenge was that applicants lacked the skills required, cited by 60% of the respondents. Three other challenges were each noted by around half of the respondents: low number of applicants (52%), applicants lacked the qualifications required (48%) or applicants lacked the work experience required. Lower on the list were such issues as compensation expectations (30%) or location challenges (28%).

Table 6: Biggest challenges when recruiting new employees

Challenge	Percent
Applicants lack the skills required	60%
Low number of applicants	52%
Applicants lack the qualifications required	48%
Applicants lack work experience required	47%
Competition from other employers	37%
Applicants lack soft skills (communication, work ethics, etc.)	36%
Compensation expectations	30%
Location challenges	28%
Other	8%

The “Other” category (8%) had only two items which were mentioned more than once: poor work ethic or not being bilingual, in each case representing slightly less than 1% of those who responded to this question.

43%
Identify the lack of houses/apartments to rent as a challenge

OTHER CHALLENGES TO EMPLOYEE RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION: *(243 responses)*

Respondents were further asked about other factors which affected their ability to recruit and retain employees. Responses were as follows:

- Lack of houses or apartments to rent (43%)
- Lack of daycare (24%)
- Lack of public transportation (21%)
- Lack of houses to purchase (15%)
- Lack of reliable and affordable high-speed internet (2%)

HARD TO FILL POSITIONS *(243 responses)*

Respondents were next asked to list the occupations that are the hardest to fill for their business or organization. The most commonly cited occupations were:

- Sales associate, customer service
- Mechanic
- Registered nurse
- Driver, delivery driver, truck driver
- Millwright
- Administrative staff, clerical
- Labourer
- Welder/fitter
- Cook
- Heavy duty equipment mechanic.
- Pharmacist
- Receptionist
- Driller
- Instructor
- Management
- Personal support worker
- Production worker
- Technician.

ADAPTING WHEN VACANCIES CANNOT BE FILLED *(243 responses)*

Respondents were asked how they adapt or will adapt where they cannot fill all their vacancies, for each of 2024 and 2025. Table 7 shows their responses as a percentage of all those who replied to this question.

Having current staff work more overtime is the most common way of coping with unfilled vacancies. It is noteworthy that the proportion choosing this option declined for 2025 – might this suggest that relying on overtime has its limits?

Table 7: Strategies to adapt when vacancies cannot be filled		
	2024	**2025**
More overtime for current staff	52%	46%
Redistribution of work	39%	44%
Cross training for current employees	34%	39%
Subcontract/Outsourcing	27%	31%
Offer job placements and internships	13%	14%
Access staffing agencies	14%	12%
Diversify our workforce	10%	12%
Offering remote work options	11%	10%
Implementation of technology/automation	6%	12%
Reduction of our workforce	8%	7%
Other	12%	9%

The ”Other” option often had a response that said this question did not apply to them. Among those who did have a response, the two most common strategies they cited were the following:

- They had to limit the work they committed to, including turning away work, having a backlog or having a waiting list.
- The owner had to work extra hours to make up for the shortfall.

RECRUITMENT AND TRAINING PRACTICES

METHODS USED TO RECRUIT CANDIDATES: *(241 responses)*

Table 8 shows the selections of respondents from a list which was provided expressed as a percentage of all those who answered this question, for each of 2024 and 2025.

More than half of the employers are using on-line platforms, such as free-online job boards, social media and their own website, to recruit job candidates. It is striking that the old “low-tech” strategies of word-of-mouth and employee referrals top the list of responses, with word-of-mouth being relied upon by 80% or more, and employee referrals accounting for almost two-thirds.

Table 8: Recruitment methods used to find candidates for job vacancies

	2024	2025
Word of mouth, personal contacts, referrals, and informal networks	80%	84%
Employee referrals	63%	65%
Free online job boards/online postings	63%	64%
Social media (Facebook, Linkedin)	61%	65%
Our business/organization's own website	52%	57%
Local employment service agencies	41%	44%
Job fairs	33%	31%
On-site job signs or posters	30%	33%
Paid online job boards/online postings	29%	29%
Onsite recruitment at schools, colleges and universities	24%	25%
Print and online news media	21%	21%
Trade or professional publications or websites	18%	18%
Radio ads	12%	10%
Executive search companies/Headhunters	8%	7%
Other	5%	4%

The “Other” category often involved employers reiterating one of the options already listed, such as Indeed, Job Bank or their own website. Options that had not been listed included recruiting through their customer networks, distributing job postings at the entrances of other businesses, or digital ads at the airport.

AREAS WHERE RESPONDENTS RECRUIT *(241 responses)*

Respondents were asked where they search for new employees by choosing as many options as applied from a list of five: within their community/district, in other Northern Ontario communities/districts, in Southern Ontario, in other provinces, or internationally.

- 96% recruit within their community/district
- 59% recruit from other Northern Ontario regions
- 33% recruit in Southern Ontario
- 23% from other provinces
- 14% said they also recruited internationally.

USE OF LOCAL EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

Around one hundred respondents, representing slightly over 40% in the answers in Table 8, said they had used local employment services.

When asked in a subsequent question about their reliance on an employment program or service to assist in recruitment, only 52 (22%) said that they had, 67% said they had not and 11% were uncertain.

67%
of the respondents said that they had not used local employment services

When asked to name the service they had made use of, a number cited Indeed, a private recruitment agency or a local radio station. Once these were eliminated, there were 63 responses (respondents were allowed to name up to five, although most named only one and sometimes two. The most frequently named services were the following: Employment Options, Northern College Community Employment Services, Centre Partenaires pour l'emploi

Some respondents named Employment Ontario, either on its own or by referencing a specific agency. Three named Jobs Options Emploi. Others only mentioned a specific program, such as Canada-Ontario Jobs Grant, Canada Summer Jobs, apprenticeships, or Canada Job Bank. Others that received at least two mentions were: Collège Boréal, Far Northeast Training Board and Jobs Ontario grants.

SKILLS REQUIREMENTS AND TRAINING *(234 responses)*

Respondents were asked to select the five most important skills (from a list of thirteen) that they look for when hiring. The percentage responses of all respondents to this question who selected a particular skill are listed in Table 9.

Table 9: Most important skills when hiring

Skill	Percent
Work ethics, dedication and dependability	77%
Teamwork and interpersonal skills	59%
Willingness to learn	47%
Customer service	46%
Self-motivation and independence	45%
Oral and written communication	44%
Time management and organization skills	37%
Ability to follow instructions	33%
Technical	31%
Professionalism	30%
Problem solving and creativity	26%
Computer literacy	19%
Analytical/Research skills	8%

There are six skills which can be considered in the 'TOP 5", with the first being head-and-shoulders above the rest:

1. Work ethic, dedication and dependability
2. Teamwork and interpersonal skills
3. Willingness to learn
4. Customer service
5. Self-motivation and independence
6. Oral and written communication

SUPPORT FOR EMPLOYEE TRAINING *(234 responses)*

Employers were asked if they provide or support training for their employees. Respondents were once again given a list of options and could choose as many that apply. In response to this question:

- 66% of respondents said they fund employee training or education (either fully or in part)
- 44% use government hiring and training incentives
- 43% offer flexible work schedules
- 21% supply information on opportunities available
- 13% replied 'other' (which consisted of onsite training that they undertook).

SOURCES OF TRAINING AND EDUCATION *(234 responses)*

Respondents were asked to choose as many responses as relevant to their business regarding common sources of training and education for their employees. Options and responses include:

- On-the-job training (81%)
- Online webinars/workshops (51%)
- Peer-to-peer training (46%)
- College (42%)
- Distance/online education (32%)
- Industry professional association (27%)
- University (19%)
- Private trainer (18%)
- Adult learning centre (9%)
- Local union (4%)
- School board (3%)
- Other (7%)

81%

of the respondents identify on-the-job training as the most common source of training for employees

The "Other" category responses often reiterated one of the table choices; two mentioned apprenticeship programs and one referenced training provided by a supplier.

OBSTACLES TO TRAINING *(234 responses)*

A list of obstacles was provided, and respondents were asked to choose all obstacles that were relevant to their business:

- Cost of training (54%)
- Distance to travel for training (42%)
- Relevant programs not offered in the region (33%)
- Loss of trained employees to other employers (33%)
- Loss of productivity during training periods (31%)
- Lack of awareness of training programs available (23%)
- Lack of awareness of support for employee training (19%)
- Lack of awareness of legislated training requirements (4%)
- Other (13%)

In the "Other" category, easily half of the comments mentioned lack of time or inability to release workers for training.

EMPLOYMENT EXPERIENCE OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENTS *(234 responses)*

Respondents were asked whether they provide employment experience opportunities to students and youth. The survey provided 12 categories of experiences, including paid and unpaid coop placements for high school, college or university students, paid and unpaid internships, high school and college apprenticeships, summer jobs and part-time jobs.

Table 10: EMPLOYMENT EXPERIENCE FOR STUDENTS

Employment experience opportunity	Percent
Summer jobs for students	60%
Part-time jobs for students	40%
Unpaid high school Coop placements	39%
College apprenticeships	22%
Unpaid college Coop placements	22%
Paid college Coop placements	17%
Unpaid university Coop placements	17%
High school apprenticeships	15%
Paid internship	15%
Paid high school Coop placements	14%
Paid university Coop placements	11%
Unpaid internship	10%

Of all respondents who answered this question, 84% provided at least one of these opportunities and almost half (44%) provided at least three such opportunities.

TECHNOLOGICAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGES

IMPACT OF TECHNOLOGICAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGES *(222 responses)*

Respondents were asked about the impact of technological and environmental changes on their industry, both currently and in the future. Almost a third (32%) said that none of these changes had a current impact on their business or organization, although that proportion dropped slightly when asked about the future. There were five technological/environmental changes identified by 24% to 30% of the respondents as having a current impact, namely: digitalization, cyber-security, cloud-based technology, artificial intelligence, real time data collection, management and analysis

And for future impact, the following were identified: artificial intelligence, digitalization, cyber-security, cloud-based technology, real time data collection, management and analysis, automation and robotics

Three issues showed larger increases in concern for their future impact:

1. Artificial intelligence
2. Automation and robotics
3. Autonomous equipment.

Table 11: Impact of Technological and environmental changes on the workforce		
Changes	**Current**	**Future**
No impact on our business/organization	32%	28%
Digitalization	30%	26%
Cyber-security	29%	24%
Cloud-based technology	27%	21%
Artificial intelligence	24%	28%
Real time data collection, management and analysis	24%	19%
Environmental regulations	16%	14%
Automation and robotics	13%	19%
Climate change	11%	12%
Autonomous equipment	8%	14%
Electrification	5%	8%
Other	5%	5%

IMPACT OF TECHNOLOGICAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGES ON THE WORKFORCE
(222 responses)

When asked about what impact these technological and environmental changes will have specifically on their workforce. By far, the biggest impact predicted by respondents was on the need for upskilling and reskilling:

- Our workforce will need continuous upskilling or reskilling (44%)
- Our workforce will need advanced computer skills (29%)
- Workforce productivity will improve (26%)
- Our workforce will need data management skills (21%)
- Our workforce will decrease – some jobs will be lost (20%)
- Health and safety requirements will change (19%)
- Our workforce will need project management skills (15%)
- Our workforce will increase – new jobs will be created (13%)
- It will facilitate remote work arrangements (12%)
- Other (16%) respondents who chose this said they did not know or that it was not applicable to them.

Respondents were invited to name up to five occupations which they thought would be most impacted by technological and environmental change. The most common responses (five or more) were the following:

- Administrative staff, clerical
- Management, manager, project manager, program manager, office manager
- Mechanics, auto technicians
- Salesclerk, salesperson
- Finance, finance administration, financial advisor, financial controller
- Pharmacist, pharmacy technician, pharmacy assistant.
- Human resources
- Labourer
- Supervisors
- Accountant
- IT positions
- Receptionist
- Registered nurse
- Technician
- Welder/fitter

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES MOVING FORWARD

CURRENT AND FUTURE IMPACT OF US TARIFFS *(216 responses)*

Given the current news, regarding the US tariffs, respondents were asked about the impact that US tariffs have or could have on their business or organization. Table 12 shows the percentage of respondents selecting each impact, both currently and in the future.

In most instances, a higher percentage of respondents are expecting a future impact than they currently experience, which is understandable since clarity on what those tariffs was still unpredictable at the time of the survey (May 2025).

Supply chain disruptions and the need to raise prices are the two most common impacts selected, both currently and for the future, with restricted spending due to uncertainty coming in third. While fewer are currently delaying growth or expansion plans, a quarter (25%) expect that will be the case in the future.

Table 12: Current and future impact of US tariffs on business or organization

Nature of impact	Current	Future
Our supply chain will be impacted	35%	43%
We will have to raise our prices	30%	41%
We will have to restrict spending because of uncertainty	29%	32%
No impact on our business/organization	26%	20%
We will delay growth/expansion plans	12%	25%
We will have difficulty honoring existing contracts	13%	16%
We will reduce our hours, staff and operations	6%	13%
Other	7%	7%

Among those who chose “Other,” several mentioned it is hard to predict the impact, while others were concerned about price increases or expressed hesitancy to hire because of the uncertainty.

BIGGEST CHALLENGES IN THE NEXT 3 YEARS *(178 responses)*

Respondents were asked what they anticipate being the biggest challenge for their business or organization in the next three years, 178 respondents provided 191 answers. The challenges can be summarized as follows:

- Almost half (49%) identified a workforce issue, either the challenge of recruiting or retaining employees, concerns regarding the large number of retirements, and worries that there are not enough qualified job candidates to fill labour needs, particularly having the necessary skill set.

- A very distant second was inflation and rising costs (14%), especially related to inputs for business.

- Third was lack of funding or restricted finances (8%), with several indicating that they could not pay adequate or competitive wages.

- Around 3% were concerned with tariffs or with competition from other businesses.

- A further 2% were concerned with managing a turbulent economic landscape, or were worried about growth prospects, or were apprehensive about the impact of tariffs.

BIGGEST OPPORTUNITIES IN THE NEXT 3 YEARS *(158 responses)*

Respondents were also asked what they felt was the biggest opportunity for their business or organization in the next three years. In total, 161 comments were made Most of the responses fell into the following clusters:

- Growth (38 mentions, 24% of all respondents) - Many cited growth, either growth in the local economy or their operations expanding, usually in response to growth; there is a genuine optimism in these responses – as one respondent expressed it "Growth and opportunity with the buzz around Northern Ontario".

- Mining expansion (18 mentions, 11%) - In addition, a further 11% specifically mention mining sector expansion and the Ring of Fire development ("mining boom in Northern Ontario"; "Mining Sector may help isolate us from the overall economic situation")

- Technology (20 mentions, 13%) - Various technological advancements were seen as ways to increase productivity and expand businesses ("Leveraging technology to enhance our outreach, service delivery, and data collection and fostering greater collaboration by strengthening partnerships"; "Offer better and more tailored digitized services"; "Adoption of advanced manufacturing technologies"; "self-checkout")

- Marketing, networking, partnerships (10 mentions, 6%) - A number of respondents looked forward to increasing their marketing and networking efforts to get their services better known ("Putting ourselves out there more and networking"), or else seeking out partnerships to expand their impact ("Partnering with another francophone organization"; "Working with Indigenous communities")

- Expand goods/services (9 mentions, 6%) - Quite apart from the economic context, several respondents mentioned their own plans to expand the premises, outlets or the range of services they provide

- Possible limitations due to labour shortages (5 mentions) - Some respondents acknowledged growth opportunities but tempered their optimism with concern that there may be labour constraints ("If we can find staff, we can increase our workload")

- Addressing constraints - A number of respondents felt that there were opportunities to overcome constraints or to turn threats to their benefit, including:
    - Tariffs may result in more demand for local goods and services.
    - The "shop local" trend should help local businesses.
    - More immigration can help address labour shortages.
    - Hiring inexperienced workers and training them.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Finally, respondents were asked if they had any other comment to make regarding employee recruitment, training and retention for their business or organization. Apart from two who said they had no comment, one who said the survey was hard to complete because they are largely a volunteer organization, and one who said the survey was too long, there were 21 final comments, as follows:

"It cost me close to $15,000 per employee to train – minimal government incentive would help".

"To support employee recruitment, training, and retention in our industry, it would be highly beneficial for local employment offices to offer unemployed clients access to a local training center focused on developing skills in the trades".

"Many people are applying for jobs that they are not remotely qualified to do".

"The applicants coming in aren't what is expected".

"Everything would be easier if people were educated and trained to choose and pursue jobs they love out of passion and according to their natural talents and gifts, rather than for the sole purpose of monetary gain. Everything would be easier if people went to work to satisfy their passion and not to make the most money with the least possible investment in their job."

Other comments included:

- The lack of experienced skilled trades/ technical employees.
- Difficulty in recruiting and retaining French speaking and/or bilingual staff.
- The lack of housing and high taxes for small businesses.
- The difficulty of recruiting workers to live in a remote community.
- The lack of work for a spouse when someone relocates.
- One respondent cited success in hiring temporary workers from overseas.
- Another said they would focus on hiring newcomers to Canada because of their work ethic.

CONCLUSION

The Northeast Ontario Employee Recruitment, Training and Retention Survey was administered to employers in the Far Northeast Training Board area during the month of May 2025. In total, 290 employers started the survey and while there was some drop-off in respondents as the survey progressed, around three-quarters completed the survey.

While this report reflects the insight of those who responded to the survey, it nevertheless confirms a number of workforce issues related to recruitment, training and retention that have been fairly consistent across the region over the past years.

More specifically, it is not surprising that almost half view workforce issues as the biggest challenge for their business or organization in the next three years, either the challenge of recruiting or retaining employees, concerns regarding the large number of retirements, and worry that there are not enough qualified job candidates to fill labour needs.

That being said, many felt genuine optimism for the local economy because of growth opportunities, including high expectations arising from expansion of the mining sector. And while new technologies pose new challenges, these advancements are also viewed as tools to increase productivity and expand their businesses.

In closing, while the insights gained from this survey highlight what we might already understand about local workforce needs and issues, they also show that employers appear to be resilient and optimistic about the local economy and new paths moving forward. They see growth opportunities, are seeking new markets and are looking at ways to improve their business.

All of the topics discussed here are important as we move into the future to ensure a prosperous and growing economy with a robust workforce that is ready, trained and balanced to meet the needs of employers.