

OCWI Employment Project

Growing into Retail & Customer Service

CESBA East Meeting, Ottawa, April 25th, 2019

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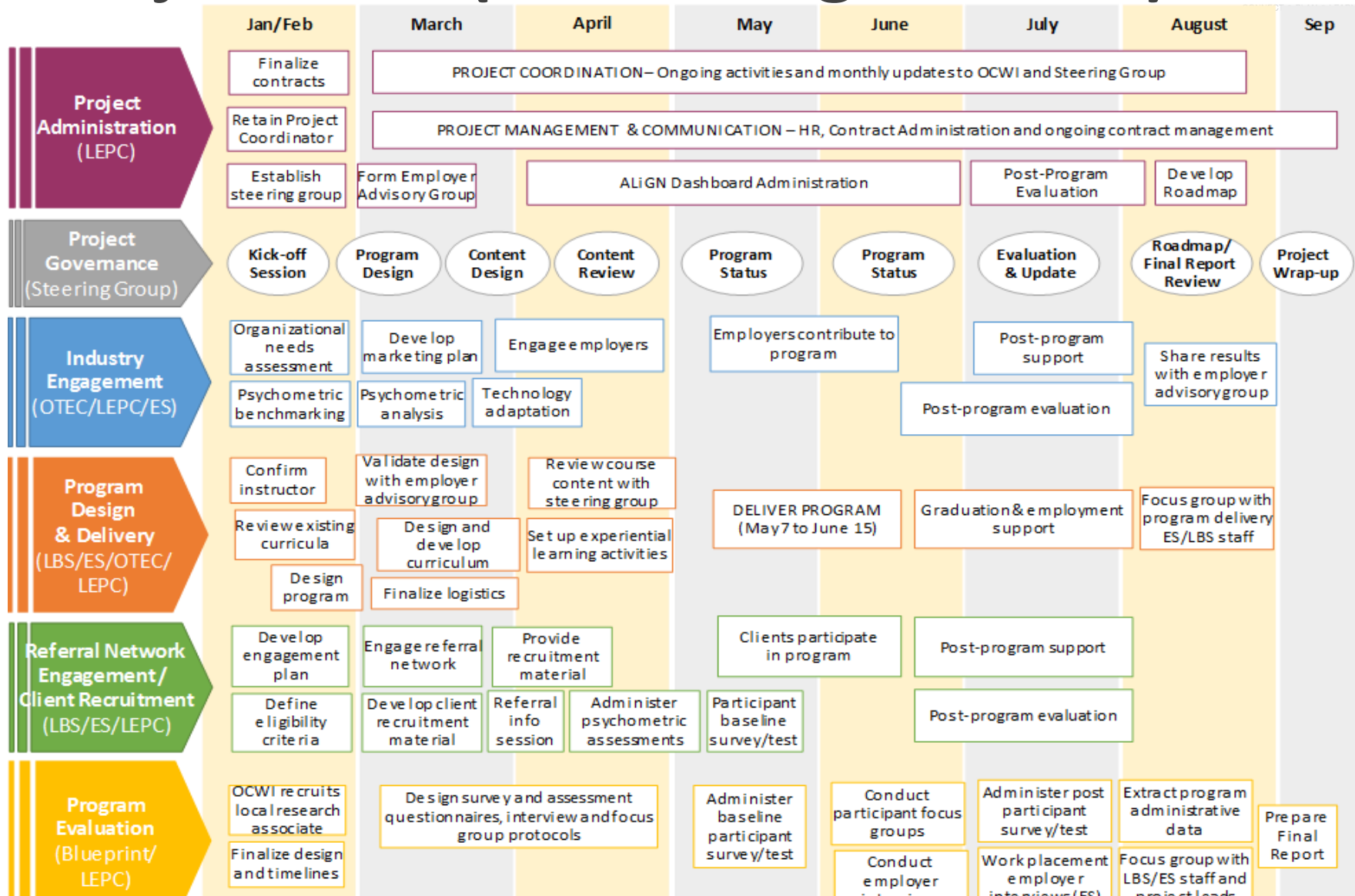
An industry, training and employment partnership to open employment opportunities in retail and customer service to a broader talent pool.



Elevator Pitch – Original Plan

This collaborative project, led by Ottawa Employment Hub (LEPC), will bring together industry, adult education, and employment expertise to develop and deliver a Retail and Customer Service contextualized essential skills curriculum for barriered job seekers. As the nation's capital, Ottawa continues to see high, and growing, demand for retail jobs and the customer service skills required are readily transferable to the broader service sector. A psychometric talent-to-role assessment, based on industry needs, will be used to both identify, recruit and identify specific training needs of program participants and to increase employer confidence in program employment referrals. By combining an objective assessment, skills training and employment support, the project will create a pool of the right talent with the right skills for retail jobs in Ottawa.

Project Plan (Feb to August 2018)



Key Outcomes

Program ran from May 14-June 22, 2018

- Included site visits to **Petsmart** and **Algonquin College Campus Store**
- Class visits from **Reitmans**, **Princess Auto**, **Plato's Closet**
- Two rounds of job tastings:
 - **Reitmans** **Best Buy**
 - **Plato's Closet** **Moores**
 - **Petsmart** **Algonquin College Campus Store**
 - **Giant Tiger** **Pier 1 Imports**
 - **Canadian Tire** **Staples**
 - **Edible Arrangements**
- 22 of 23 participants completed program and received certifications
- 8 attended alumni session in July; coordinator support by email and phone
- Coordinator follow-up in mid-August – 10 reported being employed
- *OCWI research posed challenges with multiple staff changes at OCWI – evaluation was completed in June although full program ran until August*

OCWI Findings - Benefits

Obtaining relevant certifications for employment.

- A number of learners found the benefits of the course to be in the training they received by way of certifications and soft skills training.
- This was especially appealing to the learners who were newcomers to Canada as many felt that their qualifications from abroad were not well recognized so having any Canadian certifications was a big asset, this is seen in the following quotation:
“Even with the simplest certificates that we got, like as simple as they might seem to some people, those ones I think they are going to move me forward. I've been able to actually argue and say that I do have something.”
- Likewise, many individuals who were re-entering the workforce felt the same benefits regarding certifications, one individual stated *“I thought it would be a good way for me to re-enter the workforce, because a lot of a lot of things have changed since I've been out of the workforce. And the new certifications have to be learned, like CPR is required in most workplaces. So I thought it would be really good for me.”*

OCWI Findings - Benefits

Developing soft skills.

- Many job seekers spoke about the soft skills that they learned in the program. One individual said ***“Now we have even skills. It was, like, substantial. That was really helpful, and especially these skills. What you have is soft but then you’re certified, I appreciate this. It’s great.”***
- Someone else echoes these sentiments and states that the broad scope of skills taught in this program is very beneficial for any number of jobs: ***“This program is really wide and I was looking for something related to the learning how we do [many things]. It’s really this program contains a lot of things that look like all in one program and it was really helpful. It was really open[ing] the doors to other [work opportunities].”***
- Other learners said that they are happy to walk away from the program knowing that they have a toolbox of skills, so they are armed with a toolbox to apply from any number of jobs that require soft skills.

OCWI Findings - Benefits

Boosting confidence in clients' ability to secure employment.

- A number of learners felt that taking the course improved their confidence in their ability to secure employment and finding the right job for them. Some cite this new found confidence coupled with the soft skills learned in the program as reasons for getting interviews.
- ***“I have transferable skills that were really different from what I was doing and I feel like dealing with customers after this program. I feel now [...] this has given me more confidence to deal with people's communication skills. This will help because I sent my resume to Citibank and I wasn't given a [reply] email last week. So I just sent my resume again. I got a call and the next moment. They are allowing me to do exams or simulations and everything. You know, that there was an improvement from the first time I sent [my email], and now that, so for me an encouragement, that means that my time is now.”***

OCWI – Areas for Improvement

Lack of clarity about the function and scope of job placements.

- Clients expressed a lack of clarity about what the placements were and whether or not they would be permanent on completion of the program. Learners argued that “a placement built-in to the program or a co-op placement built in [would improve the program].”

Room for improvement in the integration and coordination of placements with the rest of the curriculum.

- The instructor felt the placements were not sufficiently integrated into the class time or overall program, stating that site visits were not practical and did not line up well with placements or other parts of the curriculum.

Insufficient variety of job site visits and job trial opportunities in the retail sector.

- Learners and the instructor saw need for increased variation in site visits and “job trial” opportunities to give a more holistic account of Ottawa’s retail scene. Instructor felt this variation would be more interactive and engaging when interspersed with class time.

Key Learnings & Recommendations

#1 - Develop a strong, professional brand geared toward employers to engage industry and establish an advisory group to inform outreach, program design and curriculum, as well as share their knowledge in the classroom.

- Local retail employers were engaged early in the process in informational interviews and a dialogue session to provide input on local industry needs and the approach to outreach to the sector more widely. These employers formed a pool of sector champions who were invited into the classroom on a weekly basis to present content and engage with students in a variety of ways. This likely contributed to positive learner feedback around certifications, soft skills development, and self-esteem.

Key Learnings & Recommendations

#2 - Ensure that there is enough time upfront to properly engage employers and tailor the program to meet their needs, while providing quality work experiences to the clients.

- Employers were less committed to “job tastings” than we had anticipated; more time to build these relationships and incorporate the site visits (versus more formal job placements) would be key to future success. A delay in funding meant that we were designing the program “on the fly” as employer preferences were uncovered after we had begun communicating with learners and the instructor. These shifts caused some confusion.

Key Learnings & Recommendations

#3 - Test the ALiGN assessment as a recruitment tool in a future project.

- Funding delays meant that the ALiGN assessment could not be used in recruitment as originally planned. An in-class component focused on the assessment results, led by the LEPC coordinator, facilitated career exploration discussions that we believe were of benefit to participants. Employers were also on board with the concept of an industry-proven assessment in lieu of work experience as an indication of job seeker suitability.

Key Learnings & Recommendations

#4 - Identify the LBS instructor and bring them on board early in the process to ensure that they are fully engaged in the nature of a “pilot” which sought to bring new approaches to the traditional LBS classroom.

- Having the project coordinator in the classroom for employer-focused and employment related programming and adapting schedules to meet employer expectations presented understandable challenges for the instructor.

Key Learnings & Recommendations

#5 - Dedicate one person (e.g., LEPC or ES) to engage employers and focus on employment-related components of the training while the LBS instructor focuses on the learners and building essential skills; ensure roles are clear and everyone is on the same page.

- Ensure that everyone is clear and on board with what is happening in the classroom and on site visits/job tastings. While guest speakers can be included, have one person clearly responsible for bringing employers and industry components into the classroom while the LBS instructor focuses on teaching. This would facilitate a more comfortable sharing of the classroom and ensure that learners have the right information (although some confusion will likely be eliminated when this is no longer a monitored “research project” embedded within a program).

Key Learnings & Recommendations

#6 - Consider a similar approach of embedding employer-facing and employment-focused components more thoughtfully into and after the LBS classroom component, but “beef up” the work experience components.

- This program had a high retention and graduation rate (22 out of 23 learners with 10 informally reporting that they had found employment six weeks post-program). We believe that class visits by, and referrals to, Employment Services and follow-up by the LEPC coordinator regarding the job search were beneficial (this took place after the formal evaluation outlined in the results). Based on participant feedback, we should explore how to improve not only the site visits and the job “tastings” but also potentially provide a more traditional job placement opportunity.

Career gear

Gearing up for YOUR FUTURE!



BUILD & CONNECT
Build skills & market yourself
for your next destination

EXPLORE & CONNECT
Understand yourself and the
“world of work” to make
informed decisions

