


● WHITE PAPER



A Strategic Framework for Enhancing Employment and Educational Outcomes for the English-speaking Community in Quebec's Eastern Townships

September 2025



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Authorship

This white paper was forged in partnership. It is built upon a foundation of dedicated research commissioned by Townshippers' Association and shaped by candid consultations with stakeholders across the Eastern Townships' health, education, employment, and economic sectors. The result is a strategy that is both ambitious and grounded in the community's lived reality.

Townshippers' Association's team first codified these rich insights and then guided the document through an iterative process of drafting, rewriting, and refinement. Modern tools, including artificial intelligence, were employed to sharpen our analysis and clarify our message, culminating in the framework you see today.

This document does not have a single author but is rather the shared voice of a community effort. We wish to formally recognize the following individuals and organizations, whose significant contributions were key to its development and review:

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- Office of St-Francois MNA Geneviève Hebert
- Eastern Townships School Board
- Champlain Regional Colleges
- Bishop's University





About Townshippers' Association

BACKGROUND

Townshippers' Association has been a voice for the English-speaking community in the Eastern Townships since 1979. People trust us when we talk about issues that matter to English speakers.

We support our local communities through a variety of programs:

- We help people find and access health care and services in English
- We support seniors, families, and youth
- We encourage job creation and strengthen the local economy
- And we celebrate our community's history and culture

We work in the Eastern Townships, and we are happy to lend a hand to partners across Quebec who ask for our help.

WHAT WE DO

At Townshippers' Association, we have three main goals:

- To support the interests of the English-speaking community in the Eastern Townships.
- To keep the culture and identity of this community strong.
- To encourage English speakers to take part in their local communities and Quebec society.

HOW WE DO IT

Here is how we accomplish our goals:

- We make sure the voices of English speakers are heard when big decisions are on the table.
- We use our time, money, and partnerships to help our communities grow, and we plan for the resources we will need in the future.
- We make our community strong by supporting people who want to stay here and by welcoming new English speakers.
- We get young people involved in the community and help them become leaders.
- We highlight the important role English speakers play in Quebec society.

WHAT GUIDES US

Here's how we make decisions and plan our work:

- Everything we do connects to our organizational goals and our mission.
- We carefully check each of our projects to make sure they fit with our plans and the promises we make to our partners and members.
- We make decisions by listening to the community, looking at facts and numbers, and using reliable research.

Executive Summary

This white paper presents a strategic framework designed to address the systemic educational and employment challenges confronting the English-speaking community in Quebec's Eastern Townships (Estrie). Despite their high levels of bilingualism and educational attainment, this community faces elevated unemployment rates, lower median incomes, and a significant graduation gap compared to their French-speaking counterparts. The Eastern Townships School Board (ETSB) reports a 7-year graduation and certification rate of 73.9%, notably below the Estrie region's 79.3% and the provincial public-school rate of 81.8%. This foundational educational vulnerability, stemming from a perceived lack of French-language skills and limited access to professional training, has created a self-reinforcing cycle of out-migration and economic precarity.

The proposed framework outlines a multi-faceted, integrated strategy built upon four core pillars:

A. Cultivating Confidence and Academic Resilience in Youth (Ages 14-17)

The framework recognizes that academic struggles often stem from deeper personal, social, or economic challenges. To address this, it advocates for a "whole youth" approach that integrates academic support with social-emotional learning, mentorship, and life skills development. Key initiatives include targeted dropout prevention strategies, such as those modeled by Pathways to Education Canada, which provide comprehensive support including tutoring, financial aid, and long-term relationships with caring adults. The strategy also recommends incorporating principles from programs like the King's Trust and Confident Kids Canada to build self-confidence, critical thinking, and adaptability. By fostering early career exploration through "Student for a Day" activities and by engaging youth in entrepreneurial workshops, the goal is to create a supportive ecosystem that encourages academic perseverance and guides youth toward promising future pathways.

B. Strengthening and Diversifying Post-Secondary Training Pathways

Addressing the low rates of post-secondary continuation requires a strategic approach to expand accessible options and create seamless transitions. The framework proposes leveraging the region's robust vocational training programs, particularly those offered by the Lennoxville Vocational Training Centre (LVTC) and Campus Brome-Missisquoi. It emphasizes the need to actively strengthen and formalize "DVS-DCS bridges" (which facilitate the transition between programs leading to a Diploma of Vocational Studies (DVS) and those leading to a Diploma of College Studies (DCS)), which allow students to

seamlessly progress from vocational studies to college-level technical training at institutions like Champlain College-Lennoxville.⁸⁶ By expanding English-language technical programs and advocating for policy changes that improve access to French language training, the strategy aims to mitigate geographical and linguistic barriers. It also highlights the critical role of Bishop's University in talent retention, emphasizing the threat posed by recent policy changes that has led to declining enrollment.

C. Fostering Employer-Led On-the-Job Training and Partnerships

To effectively bridge the gap between education and employment, the framework calls for a robust system of on-the-job training (OJT) driven by strategic partnerships. It identifies the Tables des MRCs (Regional County Municipalities) as ideal central conveners for these initiatives, given their eligibility for federal funding and their role in local governance. The strategy recommends empowering MRCs to act as hubs for workforce development by facilitating needs assessments and brokering direct partnerships between English-speaking community organizations, educational institutions, and local businesses. This model ensures that training is demand-driven and directly addresses regional labor market needs in key growth sectors such as manufacturing, healthcare, and emerging fields like ICT and clean technologies. It also outlines a plan to strategically leverage federal and provincial funding, including the Canada Job Grant (CJG) and the Workforce Training Measure (MFOR), to support more structured and comprehensive OJT programs.

D. Enhancing and Integrating Employment Services

The framework seeks to transform the existing Employment Services program from a transactional model to an integrated, case-management approach. It recommends adopting best practices for "high-touch" service delivery, which includes identifying and providing dedicated support to "high-need" job seekers, streamlining access to training scholarships, and offering comprehensive resources. A critical component of this pillar is directly addressing the unique barriers faced by English-speaking job seekers, particularly the perception of insufficient French language skills. The framework supports advocating for free, universal, and profession-specific French language training, as recommended by the Provincial Employment Roundtable (PERT). By embedding essential "Skills for Success" (e.g., adaptability, digital literacy, and collaboration) across all program components, the strategy ensures that individuals are not only technically proficient but also resilient and well-equipped for a dynamic labour market.



Implementation Strategy and Recommendations

Successful implementation requires a phased, collaborative, and data-driven approach. The framework proposes starting with targeted pilot programs to refine strategies, involving a multi-stakeholder model that includes the education sector, industry, government (federal and provincial), and community organizations. Key recommendations include:

- Policy Recommendation 1: Enhance Accessibility and Professional Relevance of French Language Training to overcome a significant systemic barrier.
- Policy Recommendation 2: Incentivize and Promote the Development of DVS-DCS Bridge Programs to create seamless post-secondary pathways.
- Policy Recommendation 3: Empower the Table des MRCs as Local Workforce Development Hubs to ensure localized and responsive solutions.
- Policy Recommendation 4: Integrate Foundational "Skills for Success" across all programs to build long-term employability and adaptability.

In conclusion, this strategic framework provides a comprehensive roadmap for reversing negative trends and empowering the English-speaking community to contribute fully to the Eastern Townships' economy, thereby securing a more prosperous and vibrant future for the region.



Introduction: The Eastern Townships' English-speaking Community - A Call to Action

The Eastern Townships, or Estrie, a region within Quebec, is home to a vibrant English-speaking community that, despite its inherent strengths, navigates a complex socio-economic landscape marked by significant disparities. Understanding the nuances of this environment is crucial for developing effective interventions aimed at fostering greater economic integration and opportunity.

The understanding of these nuances also requires an understanding of the Estrie as a whole. Where this document studies the English-speaking community specifically, the research encompasses the entire region. As an editorial, it is the opinion of the authors that the challenges facing the English-speaking community are the same as those faced by the general population of the Eastern Townships. Though our communities have followed different paths, we are now meeting at the same crossroads. This reality offers us a unique opportunity to establish partnerships through which to achieve our common goals. Fostering this opportunity is the Enabling Fund for Official Language Minority Communities (EF-OLMC), which Townshippers' Association was recently awarded.

Through collaboration and partnership, both key platforms of Townshippers' Association, the challenges we are facing are formidable, but nonetheless surmountable.

A. Demographic and Economic Context: Understanding the English-speaking Minority

The English-speaking community in Estrie faces notable disadvantages in the labour market. Data indicates that English speakers in the region experience higher unemployment rates, recorded at 7.7%, in contrast to 5.6% for French speakers. Furthermore, their median employment income stands at \$28,600, which is \$5,000 lower than the \$33,600 earned by their French-speaking counterparts. This income disparity persisted between 2016 and 2021, highlighting a deeply entrenched economic challenge.¹

A significant contributing factor to these disparities is the prevailing perception that English speakers lack sufficient French language skills, which consequently restricts their opportunities for career advancement, resulting in lower wages and impeding their overall economic mobility.¹ This challenge is exacerbated by practical barriers to accessing crucial training programs, such as long commutes and inadequate public transit links, even within a region that uniquely hosts an English-language university, a CEGEP, and a vocational training centre.¹



English speakers constitute a minority within Estrie's labour force, making up 8.3% of the total.² Across Quebec, the unemployment gap between English (10.9%) and French (6.9%) speakers has doubled since 2016, with English speakers earning \$5,200 less in median employment income provincially.³ Despite these economic hurdles, English speakers in Quebec generally demonstrate high levels of educational attainment, with approximately 86% having at least a secondary-level education, a figure higher than the 81.6% of French speakers who have completed a similar level of education.³

The economic and demographic realities reveal a situation where English speakers encounter systemic obstacles to full economic participation, even with a strong proficiency in both official languages and acceptable educational credentials. This suggests that the challenges extend beyond mere skill acquisition, pointing instead to issues of recognition, equitable access, and potential biases within the labour market. Addressing these underlying factors is as critical as providing targeted skill development. Adding to the complexity, the English-speaking population in the Eastern Townships is contending with a significant demographic shift, characterized by an aging population and a notable trend of out-migration. Between 1991 and 2001, the English-speaking population in the region decreased by 2.9%, with 7,945 English speakers choosing to relocate outside the area.⁴ The Estrie region, specifically, exhibits an aging population with a replacement rate of 87%, which is lower than Quebec's provincial rate of 96.6%. The region's employment rate of 57.1% and disposable income of \$24,400 also fall below provincial averages.⁵

This out-migration, particularly of youth, is directly linked to factors such as a perceived lack of post-secondary education institutions in rural areas, linguistic tensions, difficulties in securing employment within their fields of study, and lower wage prospects.⁷ This creates a self-reinforcing cycle: as younger, skilled individuals depart due to limited opportunities, the community's labour pool diminishes, the demographic skews older, and economic struggles intensify. A successful employment strategy must therefore encompass robust talent retention mechanisms, particularly for youth, by cultivating attractive educational and career pathways within the region itself, thereby fostering long-term community vitality.

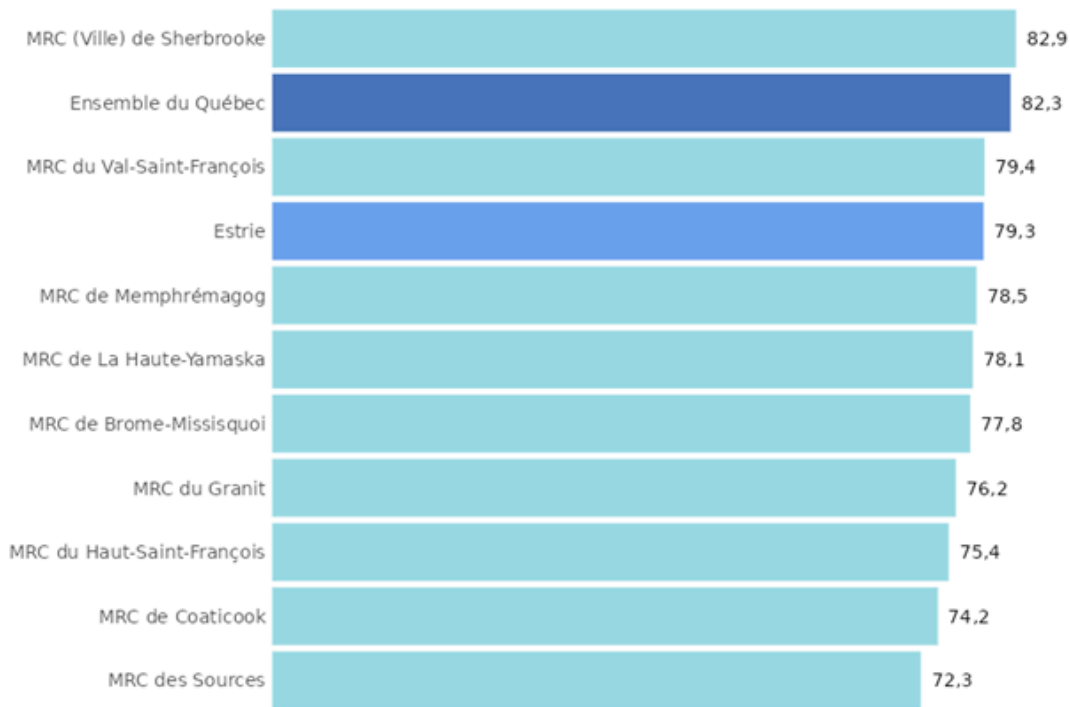
B. The Urgency of Intervention: Graduation Gaps and Foundational Challenges

The pipeline of future talent within the English-speaking community is facing critical challenges that demand urgent intervention. According to the most recent data from the Eastern Townships School Board (ETSB), the 7-year graduation and certification rate is 73.9%, which is significantly lower than that of the Estrie region as a whole, which is 79.3%, and the Quebec provincial public-school average of 81.8%. This graduation gap points to systemic issues affecting student success.



Taux de diplomation et de qualification après 7 ans au secondaire (%)

Sexes réunis - Tous réseaux confondus - 2023



Indicateur : Taux de diplomation et de qualification après 7 ans au secondaire (%)

Indique la proportion des élèves d'une cohorte du secondaire qui ont obtenu un diplôme, ou une qualification, au plus tard sept ans après leur première inscription en première secondaire.

Les diplômes pris en compte sont : diplôme d'études secondaires (DES), diplôme d'études professionnelles (DEP), attestation de spécialisation professionnelle (ASP) et attestation d'études professionnelles (AEP). Les qualifications prises en compte sont : certificat de formation à un métier semi-spécialisé (CFMS), certificat de formation préparatoire au travail (CFPT), insertion sociale et professionnelle des jeunes (ISPJ, ISPJT), certificat de formation en entreprise de récupération (CFER), attestation de formation professionnelle (AFP, AFPT), certificat d'équivalence d'études secondaires (CEES), certificat de formation en insertion socioprofessionnelle des adultes (CFISA) et attestation de compétence (ADC).

Dans le contexte du secondaire, une cohorte est l'ensemble des élèves inscrit(e)s pour la première fois en première secondaire pour une année scolaire donnée. De façon générale, les données scolaires sont présentées selon l'année de la cohorte. Toutefois, dans la plateforme Regard 360, elles sont majoritairement présentées selon l'année de leur compilation, ce qui correspond à l'année de la cohorte plus 7 ans. Par exemple, les données associées à l'année 2022 font référence aux élèves de la cohorte de 2015 suivi(e)s jusqu'en juin 2022.

Les données incluent les élèves fréquentant les écoles secondaires de tous les réseaux. 85

More fundamentally, data from the Enquête québécoise sur le développement des enfants de la maternelle (EQDEM) reveals that students entering the ETSB system exhibit greater vulnerabilities across all developmental domains when compared to peers in the broader Estrie region and other English school boards. This early disadvantage creates a persistent challenge throughout their educational journey, representing a critical loss of human capital and underscoring the necessity for comprehensive interventions that support academic perseverance. The immediate need for comprehensive interventions that address both academic perseverance and smooth transitions to post-secondary education or meaningful employment is undeniable.

C. Current Landscape of Educational and Employment Support

The Eastern Townships is not without foundational resources to address these challenges. The region benefits from established English vocational training centres, including the Lennoxville Vocational Training Centre (LVTC) and Campus Brome-Missisquoi, both operating under the Eastern Townships School Board.⁸ The Eastern Quebec Learning Centre further contributes to vocational studies offerings.¹² For college-level education, Champlain College-Lennoxville serves as the English CEGEP, providing both pre-university and technical programs.¹³ As the region's only English-language university, Bishop's University—a small liberal arts institution—plays a central role in higher education for English speakers in the Townships. The Université de Sherbrooke supplements this by offering a limited selection of English and bilingual undergraduate and graduate programs.

Complementing these educational resources, an Employment Services program is being implemented to equip individuals with essential job search competencies, such as CV development and interview skills.

Strategic Pillars for Enhanced Employment and Educational Pathways

Addressing the multifaceted challenges in the Eastern Townships requires a cohesive and integrated strategy built upon four interconnected pillars. These pillars aim to create a supportive ecosystem that nurtures talent from adolescence through to sustainable employment, while also adapting to the evolving demands of the labour market.

A. Cultivating Confidence and Academic Resilience in Youth (Ages 14-17)

The elevated rates of high school dropout and low post-secondary continuation among youth in the Eastern Townships necessitate a focused effort on building foundational confidence, providing robust academic support, and fostering early career awareness.

Targeted Dropout Prevention Strategies

The elevated regional high school dropout rate underscores the urgent need for direct and effective interventions. Programs such as Pathways to Education Canada offer an evidence-based model for dropout prevention and youth engagement, particularly in low-income communities. This program, with a presence in Sherbrooke, provides comprehensive support including tutoring, mentorship, financial aid, and advocacy, emphasizing the cultivation of strong, consistent, and long-term relationships with caring adults.³⁰ This holistic approach is crucial for addressing the diverse factors that contribute to students disengaging from school.

Similarly, Maison Jeunes-Est in Sherbrooke serves youth aged 12-17, offering aid, support, and guidance for personal, family, school, and social challenges.³⁴ Their "Accès 5" program specifically aims to increase the graduation rate of young people in disadvantaged communities, and notably, its services are available in both French and English.³⁴ Effective dropout prevention programs are characterized by early, personalized interventions and efficient screening of at-risk students, utilizing both self-reported information and administrative data.³⁸ The literature also stresses the importance of community-wide involvement and integrated approaches for youth development programs, recognizing that a student's success is deeply intertwined with their broader environment.³⁹

The high dropout rate suggests that academic struggles are often symptoms of deeper personal, social, or economic challenges. Programs like Pathways to Education and Maison Jeunes-Est, by offering comprehensive support that extends beyond academics to include mentorship, financial aid, and addressing personal issues, demonstrate that a narrow focus on curriculum or grades alone is insufficient. To effectively reverse dropout trends and encourage post-secondary continuation, programs must adopt a "whole youth" approach. This means integrating academic support with social-emotional learning, mental health resources, and family engagement, thereby creating a



supportive ecosystem that addresses the root causes of disengagement and builds overall resilience and confidence. This comprehensive approach is particularly vital for English-speaking youth, who may face additional barriers related to language and cultural integration within a predominantly French-speaking environment.⁴⁰

Confidence-Building and Life Skills Development Programs

The King's Trust program, primarily targets individuals aged 18-30 in Canada and 16-30 in the UK, and its core principles – boosting confidence, acquiring essential work skills (such as critical thinking, communication, time management, and adaptability), and offering mentorship – remain highly pertinent.⁴² Given the age range of 14-17 for this initiative, the strategy should focus on integrating these proven methodologies into existing local youth programs rather than direct implementation of King's Trust programs for this younger demographic. This could involve partnerships, curriculum development, and training for local youth workers, leveraging established community connections while infusing best practices in youth development.

Confident Kids Canada offers programs focused on self-awareness, emotional management, mental health, and confidence, utilizing unique methods like equine-assisted learning.⁴⁴ Although not explicitly based in the Eastern Townships, their methodology provides a valuable model for developing the social-emotional competencies and developmental assets crucial for youth success. CEDEC's Youth Start-Up Workshops are effective in engaging youth in discovering entrepreneurial qualities and developing essential soft skills such as problem-solving, planning, leadership, and communication.⁴⁰ Additionally, Tyndale St-Georges offers a "B-HIVE" teen program and a "Youth Cooperative" specifically for ages 14-17, providing academic support, organized group activities, and work-related experience within a cooperative business framework.⁴⁷ Quebec's "Young Volunteers" program, for individuals aged 16-29, further supports professional projects with expert guidance and ongoing mentorship to cultivate new skills essential for job market integration.⁴⁸

Mentorship and Academic Support Networks

Effective mentorship and academic support are cornerstones of youth development. Pathways to Education stands as a prime example, offering tutoring, financial aid, and advocacy, with its success rooted in strong, consistent, and long-term relationships with caring adults.³⁰ Big Brothers Big Sisters provides impactful one-to-one mentoring, which has demonstrated positive effects on school success and self-confidence in children facing adversity.⁴⁹



YES Montreal, an English-language service provider in Quebec, offers one-on-one employment counselling and business coaching, leveraging a network of partners and volunteers as mentors. They provide personalized support specifically tailored for English-speaking Quebecers.⁵⁰ The Carrefour jeunesse-emploi (CJE) Network offers services for youth aged 16-35, including workshops that help individuals discover their personal strengths and apply them professionally, leading to increased self-confidence.⁵² Lastly, Quebec 4-H is a community-based organization dedicated to developing life skills such as leadership, cooperation, and responsibility for English-speaking rural youth.⁴⁰

Early Career Exploration and Awareness

Introducing career exploration early is vital for guiding youth towards promising pathways. Programs like CareerONE, designed for 14-17 year olds, provide valuable career exploration in fields such as Healthcare, Construction, and Manufacturing, combined with hands-on experience, work readiness training, and financial literacy.⁵³ "Student for a Day" activities, offered by local vocational training centres, allow prospective students to experience a program firsthand, interact with instructors, and tour facilities, thereby helping them confirm their career choices.⁸ Champlain College-Lennoxville further supports this by providing career counselling services, assisting students in choosing careers and programs, and navigating the labour market. They also offer resources such as MonEmploi.com and the National Occupation Classification (NOC) for comprehensive career exploration.⁵⁵

B. Strengthening and Diversifying Post-Secondary Training Pathways

Addressing the low rates of post-secondary continuation and the identified gap in college-level technical training requires a strategic approach that builds upon existing educational strengths, expands accessible options, and creates seamless transitions between educational levels.

Leveraging Existing Vocational Training Strengths

The Eastern Townships currently possesses a robust vocational training offering with English, French, and bilingual options available to students across a variety of programs. The Lennoxville Vocational Training Centre (LVTC) offers Diploma of Vocational Studies (DVS) and Attestation of Vocational Specialization (AVS) programs in fields such as Accounting, Health Assistance & Nursing Care, Professional Sales, Sales Representation, Secretarial Studies, and Welding.⁸ Complementing this, the Eastern Townships School Board (ETSB) operates Campus Brome-Missisquoi, which provides bilingual programs in Computer Graphics, Food and Beverage Service, Industrial Construction and



Maintenance Mechanics, Machining Techniques, Professional Cooking, and Welding and Fitting.¹¹ Vocational training leading to a DVS is widely recognized as an effective pathway for individuals to quickly enter the job market.⁵⁶

Despite this strong presence of vocational training programs in the region, there remains a limited presence of college-level technical training opportunities in English. This situation presents a significant opportunity. Vocational training (DVS) can serve as a foundational step for further technical education, with existing "DVS-DCS bridges" designed to facilitate this progression.⁵⁴ Champlain College-Lennoxville, the English CEGEP in the region, already offers some technical programs.¹³ The strategy should therefore focus on actively strengthening and expanding these DVS-DCS bridges. This involves formalizing articulation agreements between vocational centres, such as LVTC, and Champlain College-Lennoxville, and potentially developing new English-language technical DCS programs that directly build upon existing DVS offerings in high-demand sectors. This approach leverages existing educational infrastructure and established student pathways, providing a clearer and more attractive progression for students who might otherwise conclude their studies after vocational training.

Expanding and Promoting College-Level Technical Training

Champlain College-Lennoxville, as the region's English-language CEGEP, is a pivotal institution, offering technical programs in Accounting and Management Technology, Computer Science Technology, Nursing, and Special Education Techniques.¹³ The college also provides essential career counselling services to guide students through their educational and professional choices.⁵⁵

A key recommendation from the Provincial Employment Roundtable (PERT) is to enhance the accessibility of postsecondary education, particularly through online and distance learning, to enable English speakers to acquire skills vital for the local workforce.¹ This approach directly addresses the geographical barriers posed by long commutes and inadequate public transit, which currently limit access to training programs.¹

Formal DVS-DCS bridges are established pathways that allow students who have obtained a Diploma of Vocational Studies (DVS) to continue their technical training in the same field at CEGEP, with the potential for some DVS courses to be recognized and reduce the length or workload of the college pathway.⁵⁴ These bridges are crucial for ensuring seamless progression through the educational system.

A significant and persistent challenge for English speakers is the difficulty in accessing French CEGEP technical programs due to French language proficiency issues.⁵⁹ PERT has proposed concrete recommendations to address this, including advocating for free French language training for all Quebecers, strengthening French language training programs tailored for specific professions, and developing remote French-language training programs.⁵⁹

While English-language CEGEP enrollment has seen growth, driven by a diverse student body, recent provincial policies, such as Bill 96 capping French-language student enrollment in English CEGEPs and increased tuition for out-of-province students, are reversing this positive trend. This has notably impacted institutions like Bishop's University and Concordia, posing a direct threat to talent retention and the overall vitality of the English-speaking community's educational ecosystem.⁷ A comprehensive solution must simultaneously tackle geographical and linguistic barriers. Expanding online and distance learning opportunities for both vocational and technical programs can mitigate the commute issue. Concurrently, advocating for and implementing accessible, free, and professionally relevant French language training for English speakers is crucial. This dual approach will significantly broaden educational and employment opportunities for the English-speaking community.

Role of Bishop's University in Regional Talent Retention and Development

Bishop's University holds a unique position as the "only English university" in the Eastern Townships, characterized as a "small liberal arts University".¹ Its presence, alongside an English CEGEP and vocational training centre, makes the region one of only two in Quebec with such a complete English-language educational continuum.¹ Higher education institutions are vital contributors to regional productivity by developing a skilled workforce, fostering innovation through research, and promoting industry collaboration.⁶¹ Nationally, Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) programs have been expanding in response to evolving labour market demands.⁶¹

However, recent policy changes, particularly increased tuition for out-of-province students, have led to significant drops in enrollment at English universities in Quebec, including Bishop's.⁷ This poses a direct threat to the retention of talent within the region and the broader vitality of the English-speaking community's educational ecosystem.

Eastern Townships Labour Market: Opportunities and Demands

A thorough understanding of the Eastern Townships' current and future labour market is essential to guiding strategic interventions. This section analyzes prevailing employment patterns, identifies sectors with high demand, and outlines the critical skills required for future workforce success.

Current Employment Landscape and Disparities

Beyond the overall unemployment and income disparities, English speakers in Estrie exhibit a higher degree of labour market precarity. A smaller proportion of English speakers are engaged in full-time employment (49.3%) compared to their French-speaking counterparts (51.5%).² This indicates a greater reliance on part-time or temporary positions, which often come with reduced benefits and job security. Moreover, vulnerable groups within the English-speaking labour force—including youth, women, visible minorities, immigrants, and First Nations and Inuit individuals—face even more pronounced labour market obstacles, manifesting in higher unemployment rates and even lower incomes.² This highlights the need for targeted support that addresses intersecting disadvantages.

A. Key Growth Sectors and In-Demand Occupations

Analysis of the regional labour market points to specific sectors and occupations that currently experience, or are projected to experience, significant demand. Manufacturing is identified as the industry with the highest number of vacancies in the Eastern Townships.² For English speakers in Estrie, the top four leading industries are manufacturing, educational services, retail trade, and health care and social assistance.² Broader Quebec-wide labour market trends, which offer valuable insights for regional needs, consistently show job gains in the wholesale and retail trade and health care and social assistance sectors.¹⁷

Future outlooks for Quebec highlight numerous in-demand occupations across diverse sectors¹⁹:

Healthcare and Social Assistance: This sector consistently demonstrates high demand. Occupations with "good" or "very good" outlooks include general practitioners and family physicians, dentists, optometrists, psychologists, audiologists and speech-language pathologists, dietitians and nutritionists, registered nurses, licensed practical nurses, nurse aides, medical laboratory technologists, medical radiation technologists, and social and community service workers. Managers in health care are also in demand.¹⁹ The expansion of private retirement home construction is a particular driver for nursing care demand.¹⁷



- Trades: In-demand trades include welders and related machine operators,⁸ electricians, plumbers, heating, refrigeration and air conditioning mechanics, heavy-duty equipment mechanics, industrial electricians, and ironworkers.²⁰
- Information Technology (IT) and Business Services: Key roles with strong outlooks include telecommunication carrier managers, financial advisors, human resources professionals, administrative officers, property administrators, payroll administrators, administrative assistants, medical administrative assistants, library assistants and clerks, business systems specialists, information systems specialists, database analysts and data administrators, computer systems developers and programmers, and software developers and programmers.¹⁹
- Other: Sales supervisors (retail), technical sales specialists (wholesale trade), insurance agents and brokers, and financial sales representatives also show promising demand.²¹

Crucially, the Eastern Townships' economic development strategy explicitly targets five key sectors for growth: life sciences, clean technologies, micro-nanotechnologies, information and communications technologies (ICT), and advanced manufacturing. Tourism is also recognized as a significant economic hub.⁵ These represent high-value, future-oriented opportunities that demand a forward-looking approach to workforce development.

B. Future Labour Market Projections and Skill Needs

The broader Canadian labour market has experienced a rise in the unemployment rate, reaching 7% in May 2025, up from 5.2% in 2023, accompanied by a decrease in the employment rate.²³ Quebec's unemployment rate also increased to 6.3% in June 2025.¹⁷ However, job creation in Quebec has shown positive trends for youth under 25 and for the 25–54 age group.¹⁷

Conversely, the forestry sector is experiencing declines, indicating a need for workforce transition and retraining in this area.¹⁷ There is a recognized imperative to boost productivity growth and mobilize untapped labour resources, which includes promoting the employment of older workers and fostering gender equality in the workforce.²³

The increasing prevalence of digitalization, automation, and AI adoption is fundamental for enhancing productivity across Canada.²⁵ This technological shift necessitates a growing demand for digital skills across all sectors, making digital literacy a foundational requirement for future employment.

A significant finding from employer feedback is the consistent emphasis on "soft skills," with 87.8% of respondents indicating that they assess these competencies during job interviews.²⁶ The "Skills for Success" model further underscores the importance of critical



thinking, communication, time management, adaptability, creativity, digital literacy, and collaboration as essential foundational and transferable skills for navigating the current and future labour market.²⁷

The data reveals a potential gap between the current employment concentrations of the English-speaking community and the region's strategic growth areas. While manufacturing, education, retail, and healthcare are currently prominent sectors for English speakers², the Eastern Townships' economic development strategy is explicitly focused on high-value, future-oriented sectors such as life sciences, clean technologies, micro-nanotechnologies, ICT, and advanced manufacturing.⁵ This highlights a need for proactive measures to bridge this gap. The process for increasing employment must strategically align training and educational offerings with these emerging high-value sectors. This requires a review and potential modernization of vocational and technical training programs to ensure that English-speaking youth and workers are prepared for the jobs of the future, not just the jobs of today. Such an alignment will be instrumental in retaining local talent and attracting new residents, thereby contributing to the region's economic dynamism.

Another critical observation is the consistent feedback from employers regarding the importance of "soft skills."²⁶ These are not merely supplementary but are increasingly foundational for employability and adaptability in a dynamic labour market. The "Skills for Success" model explicitly lists competencies such as adaptability, creativity, digital literacy, communication, and collaboration as vital.²⁷ These skills are not typically acquired through purely technical or academic training alone. Therefore, any effective employment strategy must integrate the development of these foundational and transferable skills across all program components, from youth confidence-building initiatives to vocational and technical training, and ongoing employment services. This holistic approach ensures that individuals are not only technically proficient but also resilient, adaptable, and effective in a rapidly evolving work environment, enhancing their long-term employability and career progression.



Table 1: Eastern Townships In-Demand Occupations and Sectors (2025-2030 Outlook)

This table consolidates the current and projected labour market demands in the Eastern Townships, providing a strategic guide for educational and workforce development initiatives.

SECTOR	KEY OCCUPATIONS (NOC CODES where available)	DEMAND OUTLOOK	RELEVANCE TO ENGLISH-SPEAKING COMMUNITY/REGIONAL PRIORITIES
Health care and social assistance	General practitioners and family physicians (31102), Dentists (31110), Optometrists (31111), Psychologists (31200), Audiologists and speech-language pathologists (31112), Dietitians and nutritionists (31121), Registered nurses (31301), Licensed practical nurses (32101), Nurse aides (33102), Medical laboratory technologists (32120), Medical radiation technologists (32121), Social and community service workers (42201), Managers in health care (30010)	High (Good/ Very Good)	Leading industry for English speakers ² , consistent job gains ¹⁷ , driven by private retirement home construction. ¹⁷
Manufacturing and trades	Welders and related machine operators (72106), Electricians (72200), Plumbers (72300), Heating, refrigeration and air conditioning mechanics (72402), Heavy-duty equipment mechanics (72401), Industrial electricians (72201), Ironworkers (72105), Machinists (72100)	High (Good/ Very Good)	Highest vacancies in region ² , leading industry for English speakers ² , aligned with Advanced Manufacturing regional strategy. ⁵
Information & Communications Technology (ICT)	Telecommunication carriers' managers (10030), Business systems specialists (21221), Telecommunication carriers' managers (10030), Business systems specialists (21221), Information systems specialists (21222), Database analysts and data administrators (21223), Computer systems developers and programmers (21230), Software developers and programmers (21232)	High (Good/ Very Good)	Key regional growth sector ⁵ , digital transformation is crucial for productivity. ²⁵

SECTOR	KEY OCCUPATIONS (NOC CODES where available)	DEMAND OUTLOOK	RELEVANCE TO ENGLISH-SPEAKING COMMUNITY/REGIONAL PRIORITIES
Business and financial services	Financial advisors (11102), Human resources professionals (11200), Administrative officers (13100), Property administrators (13101), Payroll administrators (13102), Administrative assistants (13110), Medical administrative assistants (13112), Library assistants and clerks (14300), Sales Supervisors (Retail) (6211), Technical Sales Specialists (Wholesale Trade) (6221), Insurance agents and brokers (6231), Financial sales representatives (6235)	Moderate to High (Good/Very Good)	Important for regional economic activity, supports various sectors. ¹⁹
Education	Elementary school and kindergarten teachers (41221), Secondary school teachers (41220), College and other vocational instructors (41210), post-secondary teaching and research assistants (41201), Early childhood educators and assistants (42202)	High (Favourable Outlook)	Leading industry for English speakers ² , consistent demand. ²⁸
Retail and wholesale trade	Wholesale and retail trade occupations ¹⁷	High (Consistent Job Gains)	Leading industry for English speakers ² , consistent job gains. ¹⁷
Tourism	Tourism-related occupations (e.g., Accommodation and Food Services) ²⁹	Emerging /Growing	Main tourism hub of Eastern Townships ⁵ , strategic investment priority. ²²
Emerging sectors	Life sciences, clean technologies, Micro-nanotechnologies, Advanced manufacturing (general roles)	High (Strategic Growth)	Explicit regional economic development priorities requiring specialized skills. ⁵

Table 2: English-language Vocational and Technical Programs in the Eastern Townships

This table provides a consolidated overview of existing English-language post-secondary training options in the Eastern Townships, highlighting their alignment with in-demand sectors.

INSITUTION NAME	PROGRAM TYPE	SPECIFIC PROGRAMS OFFERED	ALIGNMENT WITH IN-DEMAND SECTORS	NOTES
Lennoxville Vocational Training Centre (LVTC)	DVS, AVS	Accounting, Health Assistance & Nursing Care, Professional Sales, Sales Representation, Secretarial Studies, Welding	Business & Financial Services, Health Care, Manufacturing & Trades	Offers DVS and AVS; bilingual instructors; direct workforce entry. ⁸
Eastern Townships School Board (ETSB) - Campus Brome-Missisquoi	DVS	Computer Graphics, Food and Beverage Service, Industrial Construction and Maintenance Mechanics, Machining Techniques, Professional Cooking, Welding and Fitting	IT/Business Services, Manufacturing & Trades, Tourism	Offers bilingual programs. ¹¹
Eastern Quebec Learning Centre	Vocational Studies	(Specific programs not detailed in snippets, but offers vocational studies)	Various, focused on employment rates	Provides English-speaking academic environment for adult students. ¹²

INSITUATION NAME	PROGRAM TYPE	SPECIFIC PROGRAMS OFFERED	ALIGNMENT WITH IN-DEMAND SECTORS	NOTES
Champlain College- Lennoxville	Technical DCS	Accounting And Management Technology, Computer Science Technology, Nursing, Special Education Techniques	Business & Financial Services, IT, Health Care & Social Assistance	Offers pre- university and technical programs; DVS- DCS bridge available; career counselling services. ¹³

C. Fostering Employer-Led On-the-Job Training and Partnerships

To effectively integrate youth into the workforce and address existing skill gaps, a robust system of employer-led on-the-job training, underpinned by strategic partnerships and federal funding, is paramount.

Developing Collaborative Models with Companies and the Table des MRCs

The development of on-the-job training programs hinges on strong partnerships with companies and the Table des MRCs, supported by federal funding. The regional tables des MRCs (Regional County Municipalities) are crucial local governance bodies in Quebec, explicitly eligible for funding under the Quebec Economic Development Program.⁶² They are integral to Quebec's "decentralization policy focused on community development partnerships," which has successfully leveraged significant development funds for regional entrepreneurship and economic innovation.⁶³

Quebec boasts a unique "partnership dynamic on labour force development" involving the Commission des partenaires du marché du travail (CPMT), which convenes employers, unions, educational, and community organizations. Regional Councils of Labour Market Partners (CRPMT) also exist, providing a structured framework for collaboration at the regional level.⁶⁴ "Training mutuals" in Quebec exemplify an innovative, Quebec-based approach where Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) pool and coordinate resources to meet training requirements and reduce costs.⁶⁵ The success of these mutuals is contingent on the active involvement of institutional actors and their complementarity with other local organizations.⁶⁵



Successful public-private-civil society (PPCS) ventures, such as CEDEC's initiative to match English and bilingual job seekers with employers in Quebec City, demonstrate effective models for regional workforce development that can be replicated in the Eastern Townships. These partnerships have proven capable of optimizing recruitment processes and filling positions requiring specific language skills.⁶⁶ While employer-sponsored training in Canada can sometimes be limited and concentrated ⁶⁷, it often favors on-the-job and at-workplace delivery, focusing on immediate needs like onboarding, technology adoption, and addressing skills gaps.⁶⁷ This provides a practical foundation upon which to build more structured and comprehensive on-the-job training (OJT) programs. The explicit mention of the *tables des MRCs* as partners for on-the-job training is significant. Research confirms their eligibility for economic development funding and their established role within Quebec's broader labour market partnership framework.⁶²

Quebec's history of decentralized community development and funding further positions RCMs as natural conveners for local initiatives.⁶³ Therefore, the RCMs in the Eastern Townships should be strategically empowered and adequately funded to act as central coordinating bodies for workforce development. This involves facilitating comprehensive needs assessments, brokering direct partnerships between English-speaking community organizations, educational institutions, and local businesses, and streamlining access to federal and provincial funding for employer-led training. This approach ensures that training is demand-driven and directly addresses regional and local labour market needs. While employer-sponsored training often prioritizes immediate return on investment⁶⁷, federal and provincial programs like the Workforce Training Measure (MFOR) and the Youth Employment and Skills Strategy (YESS) support broader skills development. These programs encompass "vocational, technical, college, and university training aimed at developing professional skills," as well as "generic competencies such as teamwork, problem-solving, information technologies".⁶⁸ This indicates a clear opportunity to elevate OJT beyond basic onboarding. On-the-job training initiatives in the Eastern Townships should be designed as structured pathways for career progression. This means integrating formal learning components, mentorship, and the development of essential "Skills for Success" alongside practical work experience.²⁷ Leveraging federal and provincial funding can help cover the costs of these more comprehensive programs, making them attractive to employers and highly beneficial for long-term employee development and retention.

Leveraging Federal and Provincial Funding Programs

A variety of federal and provincial funding programs are available to support employer-led training and workforce development initiatives:



- Quebec's Workforce Training Measure (MFOR): This program offers financial and technical assistance to private and non-profit companies in Quebec for employee skills development. It covers up to 50% of eligible expenses (up to 75% in specific cases, and 100% for literacy training, including participant wages up to \$25/hour), with a maximum of \$100,000 per agreement. Eligible training includes vocational, technical, college, and university training, generic competencies (teamwork, problem-solving, IT), and trainer training.⁶⁸ Eligible entities span private companies, groups of companies, municipal administrations, Indigenous communities, non-profits, and cooperatives.⁶⁸
- Canada Job Grant (CJG): This federal program assists employers in investing in employee skill development by covering 50%-100% of third-party training costs. Employers can receive up to \$10,000 per employee annually, with a maximum of \$300,000 per fiscal year. Trainees must be Canadian citizens or permanent residents, and the training must be delivered by an eligible third-party trainer.⁷⁰
- Quebec Wage Subsidy Program: This program provides financial assistance to employers to reimburse a portion of a new hire's salary for a specified period, and potentially the salary of an in-company support person, to encourage hiring and skill development. It targets unemployed individuals or those facing difficulties in finding or retaining employment.⁷¹
- Youth Employment and Skills Strategy (YESS): This comprehensive federal program, designed for youth aged 15-30 (particularly those facing barriers), provides funding for activities that facilitate their transition into the labour market. It includes wage subsidies for quality job placements, accredited skills training, entrepreneurship skills training, and employment services (such as resume writing, interview advice, and job placement support), along with crucial support measures like mentorship, coaching, and case management.⁶⁹ The Canada Summer Jobs (CSJ) component is a key part of YESS, offering short-term work experience and mentorship.⁶⁹
- Enabling Fund for Official Language Minority Communities (EF-OLMC): This federal program directly supports the vitality of Official Language Minority Communities (OLMCs), including their economic and human resource development. Recent amendments in 2024-25 have provided additional funding to strengthen capacity and offer adapted training and employment services.⁷⁴
- Quebec Economic Development Program (QEDP): This program supports non-profit organizations, economic development organizations, municipalities (including RCMs), and businesses in their innovation, growth, and competitiveness efforts.⁶²



Tailoring Training to Specific Industry Needs and Future Demands

Training initiatives must be dynamic and responsive to both current and future labour market demands.²⁵ This requires ongoing labour market intelligence and a flexible approach to curriculum development. A strong emphasis should be placed on developing the "Skills for Success"²⁷—adaptability, creativity, digital literacy, communication, collaboration, and problem-solving—as these are increasingly vital across all sectors. Training must be explicitly aligned with the Eastern Townships' strategic economic development priorities, encompassing life sciences, clean technologies, micro-nanotechnologies, information and communications technologies (ICT), advanced manufacturing, and tourism.⁵

D. Enhancing and Integrating Employment Services

The existing Employment Services program, which focuses on CVs and interview skills, can be significantly enhanced by adopting best practices for integrated service delivery and proactively addressing the unique barriers faced by English-speaking job seekers.

Optimizing the Existing Employment Services Program (CVs, Interview Skills)

The current program for CV development and interview skills training provides a foundational element to build upon. Best practices for employment services, particularly for "high-need job seekers," suggest a more comprehensive approach. This includes adjusting intake practices and assessment tools to effectively identify and flag high-need clients, and assigning staff to flexible schedules with dedicated time for follow-up outreach and "high-touch" service provision, including longer appointments for resume development, job search activities, and training program counselling.⁷⁶ Implementing real-time tracking systems to monitor and troubleshoot job seeker progress through services is also crucial, allowing managers to prioritize support and delegate responsibilities effectively.⁷⁶ Furthermore, streamlining the application process for training scholarships and providing comprehensive resources on training options and expected employment outcomes is essential.⁷⁶ Cultivating a pool of quality employers and providing increased support to both employers and clients during the post-hire period is a recommended practice.⁷⁶ Finally, matching job seeker data to wage record data to measure client outcomes and continuously improve service delivery ensures accountability and effectiveness.⁷⁶ YES Montreal, an English-language service provider in Quebec, offers free one-on-one employment counselling, skill-building workshops, career planning resources, and access to job boards, emphasizing personalized support tailored to individual needs.⁵⁰

The existing employment services program needs to evolve from a transactional approach to an integrated, case-management model. While current services address basic



job search mechanics, best practices advocate for a much more comprehensive, "high-touch" approach that includes identifying "high-need job seekers," providing dedicated follow-up, and ensuring seamless integration with external support services, such as mental health or childcare.⁷⁶ This indicates that a purely transactional approach is insufficient for overcoming the deep-seated barriers faced by many, especially within a linguistic minority. This transformation requires significant investment in staff training, robust tracking systems, and strong collaborative partnerships with other community and health services, moving beyond mere job placement to addressing the holistic needs of English-speaking job seekers, including underlying issues related to confidence, mental health, and access to crucial French language training.

Best practices for employment services highlight the importance of utilizing data to measure client outcomes and cultivating strong relationships with employers.⁷⁶ This shifts the focus from simply placing individuals in jobs to ensuring long-term, sustainable employment and building responsive relationships with businesses based on their actual needs.⁷⁷ The employment services program must implement robust data collection and analytical capabilities to track long-term employment outcomes, identify successful pathways, and continuously refine its offerings. Furthermore, it needs to proactively engage with employers to understand specific skill needs, workplace culture, and hiring challenges, ensuring that English-speaking candidates are not just "job-ready" but also well-matched to specific opportunities, fostering higher retention and career growth.

Addressing Unique Barriers for English-speaking Job Seekers

English speakers in the Eastern Townships face significant limitations in career opportunities due to the perception of insufficient French language skills.¹ This perception, regardless of actual proficiency, acts as a substantial barrier. The lack of access to appropriate training programs is also identified as a major impediment to employment.¹ PERT specifically recommends policy changes to address French language training for English speakers, including advocating for access to free French language training for all Quebecers (irrespective of age, education, or employment status), strengthening profession-specific French training, and developing remote French-language training programs.⁵⁹ Furthermore, English speakers are more likely to work temporary positions, fewer average weeks, and part-time compared to French speakers, indicating a higher degree of labour market precarity that needs to be addressed through targeted support.³



Strengthening Community-Based Employment Support

Organizations like YES Montreal are vital English-language service providers across Quebec, offering a range of career and business support. Their model of personalized, one-on-one coaching, workshops, and networking opportunities, delivered by experienced counsellors and mentors, has proven highly effective.⁵⁰ The Carrefour jeunesse-emploi (CJE) Network offers services for youth aged 16-35, including job search assistance and confidence building, serving the entire Sherbrooke RCM.⁵² The federal Enabling Fund for Official Language Minority Communities (EF-OLMC) provides crucial funding to organizations that strengthen community economic development and human resource development within OLMCs ⁷⁴, directly supporting the capacity of local English-speaking community groups to deliver employment services.



Implementation Strategy and Recommendations

The successful implementation of this strategic framework requires a phased, collaborative, and data-driven approach, leveraging existing resources and addressing systemic barriers.

Phased Approach and Pilot Programs

Implementation should commence with targeted pilot programs in specific communities or Regional County Municipalities (RCMs) within the Eastern Townships. These initial pilots should focus on areas demonstrating the highest need and readiness for collaboration. This phased approach allows for rigorous testing of interventions, refinement of strategies based on early outcomes, and robust data collection before scaling programs more broadly. Exploring existing models such as "training mutuals" in Quebec, where small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) pool resources for training, could serve as a valuable pilot for employer-led initiatives, particularly in sectors with high vacancies like manufacturing.²

Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration Model

Effective workforce development is inherently a collaborative endeavor, necessitating robust partnerships across various sectors. The implementation model should explicitly involve:

- Education Sector: Active participation from the Eastern Townships School Board (ETSB)⁹, Lennoxville Vocational Training Centre (LVTC)⁸, Champlain College-Lennoxville¹³, and Bishop's University¹ is vital. Collaboration among these institutions is crucial for establishing and promoting seamless DVS-DCS pathways.⁵⁴
- Industry/Employers: Companies operating in key growth sectors (Manufacturing, Health Care, Retail, and emerging sectors like life sciences, clean tech, ICT, advanced manufacturing, tourism) must be actively engaged.² Their direct participation ensures that training programs are demand-driven and directly address industry needs.
- Government: Engagement from federal departments, including Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) for programs like YESS, and Canadian Heritage for the Enabling Fund for Official Language Minority Communities (EF-OLMC)⁶⁹, is essential. Provincial ministries, such as the Ministère de l'Éducation and Emploi-Québec (for MFOR and wage subsidy programs)⁶⁸, are also key. Furthermore, effort should be made to promote participation in Francisation Quebec's Services d'apprentissage du français, which is open to all Canadian citizens over the age of 16.⁸²
- Crucially, Regional County Municipalities (RCMs) play a central role in local governance and economic development.⁶²



- Community Organizations: Organizations such as Townshippers' Association¹, Provincial Employment Roundtable (PERT)¹, Pathways to Education³⁰, Maison Jeunes-Est³⁴, YES Montreal⁵⁰, and Carrefour jeunesse-emploi (CJE)⁵² are critical partners. Principles from successful models like King's Trust⁴² and Confident Kids Canada⁴⁴ should also be considered for integration.
- To effectively represent the English-speaking community at the RCM level, Townshippers' Association will develop a framework for a resource that will have the responsibility to manage the operational and administrative requirements of several RCM-based organizations such as the Corporations du Développement Communautaire (CDCs). This resource will not be dedicated to one organization but will be a shared resource that will be managed by Townshippers' Association. Priorities will be set based on Townshippers' Association's operational capacity.⁸³
 - Assign a Community Agent: Where resources are available and requirements dictate the need, a dedicated resource will be assigned to support and develop an Advisory Group (if one does not exist) of interested recognized community organizations or, if required, community members. In all cases community organizations will take precedence.
 - Collaborate with Community Tables: The Community Agent will work with selected RCM-based Community Tables and their Sectoral Tables to identify and address the specific needs of the English-speaking community. The selection of Tables will be based on Townshippers' Association's mandate as outlined above, and the individual RCM Advisory Groups' recommendations.
 - Facilitate Communication: The Community Agent will serve as the primary point of contact between the RCM-based community organizations, the advisory group, and Townshippers' Association.
 - Coordinate Efforts: The Community Agent will coordinate, based on available resources, the operational and administrative requirements of the Advisory Group and the selected tables as identified above to ensure alignment with Townshippers' Association's overall goals.
 - Memoranda of Understanding: Formal agreements will be established to outline the terms and conditions of each community representation.
 - Board Approval: All representations will be reviewed and approved by the Board of Directors of Townshippers' Association.



Specific, Actionable Recommendations and Policy Considerations

Based on the comprehensive analysis, the following actionable recommendations and policy considerations are put forth:

Policy Recommendation 1: Enhance Accessibility and Professional Relevance of French Language Training.

The perception of insufficient French language skills and the lack of access to adequate French language training are significant systemic barriers to employment for English speakers in the Eastern Townships.¹ The Provincial Employment Roundtable (PERT) has explicitly recommended free, universal, and profession-specific French language training, including remote options, to directly address this issue.⁵⁹ Improving French proficiency, particularly for professional contexts, is crucial for enhancing economic mobility and building confidence within the English-speaking community. Therefore, it is recommended to advocate for provincial policy changes that expand eligibility and funding for French as a Second Language (FSL) training for all Quebec residents, specifically targeting professional and technical French for English speakers in the Eastern Townships. Furthermore, promoting and investing in online and blended learning models for FSL will be critical to overcome existing geographical barriers to access.

Policy Recommendation 2: Incentivize and Promote DVS-DCS Bridge Program Development.

The identified gap in college-level technical training in English, despite strong vocational programs, presents a clear opportunity. Existing DVS-DCS bridges offer a natural and efficient progression pathway from vocational studies to college-level technical education.⁵⁶ However, recent provincial policies impacting English CEGEP enrollment could hinder the effectiveness of this pathway.⁷ Strengthening these bridges is essential for creating clear, attractive post-secondary options that encourage continuation beyond high school. It is recommended to advocate for increased provincial funding and a streamlined approval process for English-language CEGEPs, such as Champlain College-Lennoxville, and vocational centres to develop more technical Diploma of College Studies (DCS) programs. Concurrently, efforts should focus on strengthening existing DVS-DCS bridges, particularly in identified high-demand and emerging sectors. Active promotion of these pathways to high school students, parents, and guidance counselors within the English-speaking community is also necessary to ensure clear recognition of prior learning from DVS programs and to highlight the career advantages of these integrated pathways.



Policy Recommendation 3: Empower Table des MRCs as Local Workforce Development Hub.

The Tables des MRCs, as local government entities, are eligible for economic development funding and are integral to Quebec's established labour market partnership framework.⁶² Their inherent local presence and mandate make them ideally positioned to act as central coordinators for regional workforce initiatives. Leveraging their existing structure can lead to more localized, responsive, and effective solutions. It is recommended to secure increased provincial funding and a clear mandate for the Table des MRCs in the Eastern Townships to function as a central convener and facilitator for integrated workforce development. This expanded role should include conducting granular local labour market needs assessments, actively brokering partnerships between employers, educational institutions, and English-speaking community organizations, and coordinating the application and utilization of federal and provincial funding for on-the-job training and skills development.

Policy Recommendation 4: Integrate Foundational "Skills for Success" Across All Programs.

Employers consistently emphasize the critical importance of "soft skills" in hiring decisions²⁶, and the "Skills for Success" model provides a comprehensive framework for these essential transferable competencies.²⁷ These skills are vital for long-term employability, adaptability, and career progression in a rapidly changing economy, extending beyond purely technical proficiencies. It is recommended to mandate or incentivize the systematic integration of foundational and transferable skills, such as critical thinking, communication, collaboration, digital literacy, adaptability, and problem-solving, into all youth development programs, vocational training curricula, technical education, and employment services. This comprehensive integration will require dedicated professional development for educators and counsellors, along with the development of learning activities that explicitly foster these competencies in practical, real-world contexts, ensuring that individuals are not only technically proficient but also well-equipped to navigate complex professional environments.



Conclusion

The English-speaking community in Quebec's Eastern Townships faces a confluence of complex challenges, including disproportionately high unemployment rates, lower median incomes, significant high school dropout rates, and limited post-secondary continuation. These issues are exacerbated by perceived language barriers, access limitations to training, and a demographic trend of out-migration, particularly among youth.

However, the region possesses foundational strengths, including established English-language vocational training centres, a CEGEP, and a university, alongside a burgeoning awareness of in-demand sectors and occupations. By strategically implementing an integrated framework that addresses these challenges holistically, the Eastern Townships can foster a more confident, skilled, and economically vibrant English-speaking community.

The proposed framework emphasizes cultivating confidence and academic resilience in youth through targeted dropout prevention, life skills development, and robust mentorship. It advocates for strengthening and diversifying post-secondary training pathways by leveraging existing vocational strengths, expanding English-language technical college programs, and promoting seamless DVS-DCS bridges. Crucially, it calls for fostering employer-led on-the-job training through an empowered Table des MRCs and strategic partnerships, maximizing available federal and provincial funding. Finally, it recommends enhancing existing employment services by adopting integrated, high-touch models that address the unique barriers faced by English-speaking job seekers and embed essential "Skills for Success."

This comprehensive approach, grounded in local labour market realities and leveraging collaborative models, is designed to reverse negative trends, empower the English-speaking community to thrive, contribute fully to the region's economy, and secure a more prosperous future in the Eastern Townships.



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