

THE GREEN GAP: TOWARD INCLUSIVITY IN TORONTO'S GREEN EMPLOYMENT

The Green Gap was a multi-year collaborative community-based research project focused on the inclusion of racialized people in Toronto's transition to green jobs and the green economy.

In-depth interviews and focus groups were conducted with members from five stakeholder groups, including: (1) **green energy business leaders**; (2) **green energy and green jobs policy key informants**; (3) **labour organizations and trade union key informants**; (4) **green jobs training program organizers**; and (5) **green job seekers from diverse racialized communities**.

The study sought to foster community dialogue and build a more inclusive green economy by addressing three research questions:

- What are the multiple social constructions of green jobs by various stakeholders?
- What do green jobs mean for racialized communities?
- What do various stakeholders see as solutions to moving the green agenda forward?

The following is a summary of the key insights and dialogue emerging from stakeholder interviews and focus groups around the experiences of racialized jobseekers with the green employment market and opportunities for building a more inclusive green economy.* The jobseekers involved in this study included both racialized “green trained” jobseekers who had done specific courses to prepare for a green job, and racialized “untrained in green” jobseekers who were interested in a green job but had not yet done any specific job training for a green job.

OPINIONS FROM JOBSEEKERS

All trained and untrained jobseekers said that they would be **willing to complete more training and education if necessary**, however they would prefer to use their current skills to find a position, and then acquire relevant education as needed.

The jobseekers interviewed focused their job searches largely on **local authorities, municipalities, and public sector organizations**. Many also had increased expectations around sectors with retiring workers.

These jobseekers integrated **volunteering, interning, networking, informational interviews, personal connections, referrals, and online resources** into their job searches. They structured their searches based on short term, medium term, and long term goals, with the immediate goal being to secure employment in their field of interest.

Canada's competitive job market has led to higher **credentialism**, excluding many jobseekers. The onus should be shifted to employers to provide on-the-job skills training rather than having overqualified jobseekers in roles which do not require their level of education and do allow them to utilize their skills.

Newcomer jobseekers highlighted the **cultural differences between the Canadian job market and international markets**. Canada's competitive employment landscape requires a form of aggressive networking that is not considered appropriate in other parts of the world. Additionally, the anonymity of submitting online applications is intimidating to jobseekers originating from areas where face-to-face contact is preferred.

Many racialized jobseekers had experienced **discrimination** in their job searches based on accents, names, and addresses.

*DISCLAIMER: Please be advised that the views and opinions expressed in this summary are those of the study participants and are not necessarily representative of the stakeholder groups as a whole.

Discriminatory hiring practices were especially noticed outside of the Greater Toronto Area. Some racialized jobseekers had considered relocating outside of Toronto for employment, but did not feel secure enough to.

While most jobseekers viewed **volunteer positions and internships as offering potential pathways to employment**, many expressed frustrations that **these programs often do not lead to jobs**. Particularly with unpaid internship programs, some jobseekers felt exploited by employers who had indicated that long-term involvement would lead to a paid position, despite having no intention of hiring them.

OPINIONS FROM OTHER STAKEHOLDERS

Training and education representatives and green business employers alike highlighted **increasing competition amongst jobseekers**. The majority of people accessing services and applying for positions are very talented, educated, and skilled; and all are very eager to secure employment. Most bring several years of international experience, some have more than one degree, and many have pursued licensing with the appropriate regulatory bodies to have their skills recognized.

Training and education representatives stressed that **the traditional green jobs sector is small and difficult to break into**. Existing traditional green employment networks including waste management, renewable energy, clean water technology, and green building professionals are very strong, and hiring practices generally favour personal contacts over unknown applicants. Jobseekers with potentially less experience but the right connections gain employment more easily than experienced jobseekers with limited ties to relevant professional networks.

Green business employers recommended that newcomer jobseekers focus on developing their **soft skills rather than acquiring more education**. Outside of essential education requirements, recruiters look for how job applicants will adapt to various interpersonal situations including interactions with clients and fellow colleagues. Successful candidates have excellent communication skills and awareness of the workplace culture.

Green business leaders explained that **employers often see overeducated, undertrained jobseekers as a liability**. Even when they have more education than workers already established in a sector, jobseekers without practical work experience are seen as incompetent and requiring too much investment by employers with limited resources.

Green business employers emphasized the **imperative of strong English language skills**. Especially in engineering and science fields, report-writing, email communication, and stakeholder engagement necessitate high levels of competency in reading, writing, listening, and speaking to minimize the time and resources required for training new recruits.

Green business leaders suggested that, in some cases, **jobseekers might have more success creating their own green jobs**. This might involve entrepreneurial ventures in which jobseekers develop their own green businesses or become independent consultants, or intrapreneurial ventures in which employees identify opportunities for green growth and development in the organizations they are currently involved with and implement changes from within.

Training representatives stated that **many green jobs are administrative or managerial rather than technical**. Jobseekers with project management skills, experience in quality assurance, business administration, urban planning, or government are increasingly needed in the green sector.

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Please visit <https://greengap.org/> for more information about the study.