

WORK CENTRAL AB

Workforce Planning

Aligning Your Staffing Strategy With Business Goals

A Career Resource from Work Central AB

Workforce Planning for Growing Organizations

Workforce planning connects your business goals to your staffing needs, helping you hire proactively rather than scrambling to fill gaps. This guide covers a practical approach for employers of any size across Central Alberta.

1. Assessing Your Current Workforce

- Map current roles against your organization's near-term goals - where are the gaps between what you have and what you'll need?
- Identify roles with retirement or turnover risk, particularly for specialized or hard-to-replace positions.
- Review skills within your existing team that could be developed further to fill emerging needs, rather than always hiring externally.

2. Forecasting Future Needs

- Align hiring plans with business growth projections, seasonal demand patterns, and any planned expansion.
- Factor in regional labour market conditions - Central Alberta's demand in sectors like health care, trades, and agriculture can affect how competitive your hiring will be.
- Build in lead time for hard-to-fill roles, particularly those requiring credential recognition, apprenticeship completion, or specialized certification.

3. Build, Buy, or Borrow

Three Ways to Close a Skills Gap

Build - invest in training and development for current employees (see our Wage Subsidies & Grants guide for funding options).

Buy - hire externally for the skill or experience you need.

Borrow - use contractors, staffing agencies, or temporary placements to fill short-term or uncertain-duration needs.

4. Succession Planning

- Identify key roles where an unplanned departure would significantly disrupt operations.
- Develop internal candidates for advancement where possible, supported by mentorship and targeted training.
- Document institutional knowledge held by long-tenured employees, particularly ahead of retirements.

5. Reviewing and Adjusting

Workforce plans should be revisited regularly, ideally alongside broader business planning cycles. Track metrics like time-to-fill, turnover rate, and internal promotion rate to understand whether your workforce strategy is working, and adjust as business conditions change.

6. Frequently Asked Questions

Common Questions

How far ahead should we plan? Most organizations benefit from a rolling 12-month workforce plan, revisited quarterly, alongside a longer 2-3 year view for major shifts.

Is workforce planning only for large organizations? No - even small employers benefit from mapping upcoming needs against current team capacity, especially given hiring timelines for specialized roles.

How do we start if we've never done formal workforce planning? Start simple: list current roles, note any known departures or growth plans over the next year, and identify the two or three most urgent gaps to address first.

7. Workforce Planning for Seasonal and Cyclical Businesses

- Many Central Alberta industries - agriculture, tourism, retail - have predictable seasonal staffing swings; build these into your annual plan rather than treating each season as a surprise.
- Maintain relationships with reliable seasonal staff from previous years, since rehiring known, proven workers is faster and lower-risk than starting fresh each season.
- Consider cross-training staff across roles to build flexibility during demand fluctuations, reducing reliance on last-minute hiring.

8. Aligning Workforce Planning With Budget Cycles

- Coordinate workforce planning with your annual budgeting process, so staffing costs are reflected accurately in financial planning.
- Factor in the full cost of a new hire, not just base wages - recruitment, onboarding, training, and ramp-up time all add to the real cost.
- Review workforce plans against actual outcomes each year to refine forecasting accuracy over time.

Workforce Planning Checklist

- ✓ Mapped current workforce against near-term business goals
- ✓ Identified roles at risk of turnover or retirement
- ✓ Determined a build/buy/borrow approach for key skills gaps

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- ✓ Developed a succession plan for critical roles
 - ✓ Set a regular cadence to review and adjust the workforce plan
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Build Your Team With Work Central AB

See our Wage Subsidies & Grants guide for funding to support training as part of your workforce plan. Visit workcentralab.ca/employers.