

## THE NEXT GENERATION OF WORKERS ARE THE FUTURE FOR CANADIAN ENERGY

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**Summary:** According to a recent report by Electricity Human Resources Canada, young workers (those between the ages of 18 and 36) are motivated to pursue careers that allow them to use cutting edge technologies to tackle big-picture issues. In particular, young workers are keen to use their skills and knowledge to mitigate the effects of climate change.

As our sector faces demographic change, as well as the challenges of the global pandemic, we need to remember: 86% of new jobs in energy will come on board as a result of retirement. Prioritizing early-career hires is an important way of driving innovation in our sector. Young workers bring with them current knowledge and new perspectives. For a sector at the forefront of innovation in energy efficiency and sustainability, this cohort holds momentum to drive these changes forward.

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Today's energy landscape looks very different than it did when veterans of our industry began their careers decades ago. From the evolving expectations of customers, to rapidly shifting technologies and an increased need to reduce operational carbon emissions on a large scale, electricity relies on an adaptable and resilient workforce in order to power the country.

We know from *Generation Impact: Future Workforce Perspectives*, one of our recent research reports, that Canadians between the ages of 18 and 36 are interested in careers that allow them to use cutting-edge technologies to tackle big-picture issues. These findings present an opportunity for Canada's electricity sector to leverage the skills of young workers to drive the integration of new technologies to meet both current and future needs. This includes the ongoing demand to be more and more efficient with both energy generation and consumption.

Our research and engagement with youth entering the workforce demonstrates that this generation is eager to use their specialized skills for projects they can feel good about. As our sector navigates demographic shifts in the workforce, economic uncertainty due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and rapidly changing technology, recruiting and hiring young workers in all areas of energy will be critical not only for responding adeptly to change, but for proactively ensuring a competitive and vibrant sector.

## Generation Impact: Insights and Observations

Young people are entering the workforce with cutting-edge knowledge and technical skills gained from college and university programs, often with work-integrated learning placements. As a result, recent grads are well-equipped to begin working towards specific technology-oriented jobs in the energy sector. However, the results of Generation Impact show that young workers are not necessarily enthusiastic about technology in general, they are more interested in the application of technology to address the specific problems they see in the world.



For example, according to Generation Impact, “messaging about clean energy and being a part of something innovative are important for these generations, as they are looking for work that is fulfilling and allows them to be a part of the solution to big problems. This may...explain why the message that directly mentions the problem of climate change did not change opinions as much as messaging about the solutions the industry is putting forward.”

In the report, Millennials and Gen Zers reacted positively to messaging that linked technology and innovation to Canada’s renewable electricity grid. Their impressions improved when told about how the electricity sector was using

technology to improve efficiency. They were also interested in the specific jobs that would be created as the sector continued to adopt new digital infrastructures. This speaks to the potential for organizations working specifically in energy efficiency to leverage young workers.

Companies in the energy sector looking to position themselves competitively should not discount the value of hiring youth. Although they may have fewer years of experience, this group demonstrates a personal and professional

interest in actively using new technologies to tackle big-picture issues. Engaged employees produce better results, and engaging young workers with problems they care about can have a dramatic impact on a company’s ability to be agile and innovative.

Yet, the new generation are also not content to spend decades working up the corporate ladder. They are looking for opportunities to grow quickly and have a voice. Employers will need to spend

time understanding new workers’ values and what it is they want in a job, company, or industry.

So what do Millennials and Gen Z Canadians look for in a career, and how can they be encouraged to pursue in energy-sector jobs? Generation Impact shows that young workers have multiple priorities when considering career paths. Millennials and Gen Zers list stable pay, job security and the opportunity to undertake interesting or fulfilling work as the three most important factors they look for in a job. While many assume that young people are either obsessed with technology or only want to work somewhere that is based on their passions, the reality is that they seek the same fundamentals as earlier generations.

Millennials and Gen Zers desire to be a part of something that challenges them. They are interested in “putting their minds to work and going home at the end of the day knowing that their work contributed to something bigger”<sup>1</sup>. Canada’s energy sector, which provides an essential service to the entire country, certainly provides that opportunity. Further, in the context of decarbonization and energy efficient technologies, the energy sector has many areas for innovation, which are attractive to young workers.



About half of respondents in Generation Impact had positive views about careers in the electricity sector, while a third had neutral impressions, and the remainder had negative impressions. This outcome is mainly the result of a lack of knowledge and awareness on the part of Millennials and Gen Zers about what the sector offers, as impressions increased among 40% of respondents with messaging about the sector’s opportunities and advantages.

Employers can access top young talent by communicating more effectively about the wide variety of career paths that exist in the sector, many of which may not be obvious. While largely technical, the industry also employs workers who

are not involved with the science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) disciplines—think legal, marketing, customer service, human resources, finance, and more. Every one of those jobs is just as crucial to ensuring that our organizations and systems work.

Messaging about jobs that combine technology or problem-solving with purpose resonates well. Tell stories about jobs with an innovation focus; for example, how we are going to see new types of digital work and jobs evolve while still managing

our legacy systems. By doing this, the sector can position itself competitively to capture a young skills market against employers in tech or other industries.

Attracting young workers is not only important from a technological standpoint, it is also a necessary action for ensuring a resilient workforce for the future. Our industry faces massive demographic challenges: in the next few years, 86% of new jobs in the electricity sector will be

the result of retirements. Additionally, mindful employers can fill these gaps by hiring new workers that better reflect the Canadian population and address the sector’s current diversity shortfalls.

### Work-Integrated Learning: Getting Started with Your Future Workforce

Attracting the best young workers can begin while they are still completing their studies. Demand among students for work-integrated learning opportunities, such as co-op placements and paid internships, has never been higher. The benefits are twofold: students gain experience and professional skills in a field of interest, while employers develop a talent pipeline for future employees.

<sup>1</sup> Generation Impact: Future Workforce Perspectives. Electricity Human Resources Canada, 2020.

Students who complete a work placement while in the process of their studies also bring with them knowledge of new developments and innovations in various fields that they've studied in class. Access to these ideas is critical for driving change in industry, and employers can benefit immensely from having students on their teams. Didier T, an employer, recently shared a story about their experience with a work-integrated learning student:



"[Our student] has developed—from scratch—an incredibly powerful dashboard that has unlocked the data we have been collecting. She went the extra mile by figuring—mostly on her own—how to deploy it securely on a server. She also developed numerous Python notebooks that we use to configure data acquisitions, and has researched, developed and implemented functions to collect and process data required by our platform. The quality and quantity of her work, her reliability, and the level of initiative she has taken, have vastly exceeded my expectations."

Employers may also choose to participate in work-integrated learning to meet their financial and strategic goals, such as increasing capacity for short term projects, supporting local hiring, or reaching their diversity and inclusion goals (which may not be possible by hiring internally).

As previously established, many young people

overlook the energy sector when they think of innovation and technology. Tech startups and e-commerce firms have done a good job at establishing their "cool" factor, which makes them a strong recruiter of sharp, skilled, and enthusiastic workers. Work-integrated learning placements can go a long way in breaking the stereotypes that young people may hold about the energy sector. Students who learn first-hand about the diverse range of opportunities available

to them in energy, how the work environment functions in practice, and the exciting ways they can be involved in tackling big-picture issues, will tell their own story to their friends and family, helping to bust common misconceptions.

Brian M, a student who completed an engineering placement, shared, "I was able to connect my theory learning with hands on practical experience in the field. It was great to work with the

equipment I learned about in school, to now see it and maintain it in real life. I was able to learn about shift work and have a taste of that which is a big factor in this industry. This placement was excellent as I now know 100% that this is the field that I want to work in. I am more excited and motivated to push through school for the end result."

EHRC's paper on work-integrated learning, *Empowering the Next Generation Workforce*, offers two recommendations for industry. First, that employers should enhance the quality of work placements they offer in order to benefit from greater engagement and deeper talent development. This involves placing an emphasis on a student's development of professional skills like critical thinking, reading comprehension, and collaboration. Second, that employers should expand their involvement in work-integrated learning beyond co-op placements. Companies

can integrate different models, including applied research projects, internships or practicums in order to better develop their talent pipeline and to take advantage of the cutting-edge research and knowledge coming out of post-secondary institutions. When set up correctly, a work-integrated learning placement offers tremendous benefits for both the student and the employer.

## Conclusion: Youth Must Be Part of Your Hiring Strategy

Amidst significant demographic, technological and social change, electricity is an essential service that millions of people rely on every day. To best serve the needs of our customers and stakeholders, we must continue to adapt and innovate. Hiring young talent is an essential part of this work.

The ability to innovate nimbly and successfully is closely tied to workforce development. We should remember that in the next few years, a large percentage of new jobs in the sector will be the result of retirements. This is an opportunity to invigorate the talent pipeline: investing in young workers can drive the innovation process through the introduction of new perspectives, ideas and priorities.

Young people are eager to put their skills to work and tackle today's most pressing energy concerns. To meet them, the energy sector has many opportunities for creativity and out-of-the-box thinking. By engaging young workers, we can ensure a resilient energy future for our workforce and our sector.