



Learning Sandbox Potential-Focused Recruitment Guide

Version française disponible.

Funded by the Government of Canada

Canada



Contents

What Does “Potential-Focused Recruitment” Mean?	3
Building the Talent Pool	4
SalesCamp Case Study	7
Success Stories	11

What Does “Potential-Focused Recruitment” Mean?

There are many approaches to recruitment and admissions for upskilling programs. Some are open to anyone who is interested, while others focus on those who are unemployed, or who require specific education or professional experience to become employed.

Potential-focused recruitment refers to a recruitment and admissions process designed to evaluate a person’s transferable skills gained throughout their life (e.g. previous careers, volunteer positions, school, personal commitments). Additionally, potential-focused recruitment evaluates a person’s potential to succeed in the field, rather than just their previous academic or professional accomplishments. Evaluating potential means assessing transferable skills, as well as an applicant’s motivation to move into a new career and willingness to learn.

Why focus on potential

Typical hiring processes use certain indicators or value signals to tell the employer whether a candidate can do the job. However, many traditional indicators and value signals used in hiring processes create barriers for applicants. Examples of these traditional value signals include:

- Sector experience.
- Educational attainment or a specific degree.
- Having direct experience in the same role.
- Having Canadian or North American experience.
- Being a referral.

Potential-focused recruitment is a recruitment and admissions process that aims to assess an individual’s transferable skills acquired over the course of their life.

Relying on these signals can create barriers for many high-potential candidates with the right transferable skills, because their experience may not reflect traditional value signals demanded by the market.

Employers are struggling to find talent despite Canada’s highly skilled workforce. By relying on traditional skills signals, employers are missing out on high potential candidates.

The idea of potential-focused recruitment is built into our upskilling model as a way to help break down these barriers, and recognize transferable skills of candidates. The benefits of this component of our model are significant. Not only will it enable greater opportunity for Canadians, and facilitate cross-sectoral career growth, but it will help create a larger talent pool in fast-growing industries, so that employers can meet their skills needs quickly.

Purpose of the guide

This guide will share examples of how we have identified hidden talent pools based on the skills needs of employers and the steps we have taken to evaluate potential. We hope that this guide will:

- Help you discover hidden talent pools for recruitment.
- Help you design your admissions process to evaluate foundational skills and potential.

Building the Talent Pool



To build a talent pool that is potential-focused, start by establishing the foundational skills employers look for when they hire, and then identifying other roles where individuals may have acquired these skills.

Understanding your talent pool is essential for identifying the 'hidden' workers employers have not been tapping into. This process will also help you more effectively recruit and find applicants for your programs.

01

Identify foundational skills employers are looking for

Identifying the foundational skills employers are looking for can be done through your [employer discovery interviews](#) and program design validation phases. Questions that we have used to understand what employers look for include:

- When you think of where your business will be in 6 months to 2 years, what skills will your employees need to have to get you there?
- When you see an employee succeed in this role, what skills do you see that contribute to that success?
- What does the day-to-day look like for an individual in this role or in this industry?
- What might make someone an automatic yes or no to hire?
- How do you know if someone has what you are looking for?
- What are your current approaches to looking for new hires?

Initial responses to these questions might sound a lot like a job description. Asking follow-up questions to dig into the 'why' of their responses is important to get to the heart of what really matters.

The answers to these questions will help you understand the skills employers are looking for, and the signals they are using to assess if candidates have those skills.

With that information, your job will be to understand if new skills signals are needed, and if so, what they should be. These new signals will get built into your recruitment process, to avoid replicating existing market biases.



02

Understand who works in the industry right now

Labour market research can help you learn who predominantly works in the roles you are targeting through your program. Knowing information about the gender, age, location, educational attainment of who currently works in the role will help you identify who may be part of the 'hidden' talent pool for this role.

For example, in our SalesCamp program, we know that tech sales is a male-dominated industry which attracts mostly younger workers. One talent pool we focus on is women and people who identify as women, and mid-career workers, as the current workforce would indicate these groups are being overlooked through the existing hiring practices.

03

Identify other roles that require similar skills

Often, employers will search for people who already have sector experience. This eliminates many qualified applicants who have the transferable skills and knowledge for their role. Identifying the types of roles that possess/require these skills will expand your talent pool.

One way to find these other, yet similar roles is to search the skills employers are looking for in job aggregators such as Indeed or LinkedIn, or to search for specific skills in government websites that link skills according to the National Occupation Classification ([NOC](#)), the Labour Market Information Council ([LMIC](#)), or the Occupational and Skills Information System ([OaSIS](#)).

For example, tech sales roles require individuals with customer-facing experience. Numerous other roles require customer-facing skills, such as retail workers, servers and bartenders, or fitness trainers.

04

Start recruiting

There are many approaches you can take to recruit from your talent pool. One approach we have found works well is to meet the talent pool where they are. For example, for some talent pools, LinkedIn will be a great platform, while others will prefer Instagram or Reddit. Working with employment agencies or other community-based organizations can also connect you directly with jobseekers interested in transitioning careers.

Whatever the main recruitment channel you use, be sure to share sufficient information about what the program is, the career paths it can lead to, and the different ways non-traditional applicants can bring value to that career path.

Remember that potential-focused recruitment is an ongoing process that will be refined as you go. Be willing to listen, learn, and pivot as needed.

Evaluating Potential

Evaluating potential means:

- Decoupling the skills required for a job from traditional ways employers have assessed whether a person can do the job. We refer to these assessment methods as value signals. Our goal is to provide alternative value signals that align with potential.
- Creating eligibility requirements which place value on an individual holistically.
- Looking for alignment between what an employer is seeking, where an applicant is currently at, and whether any gap can be bridged through the upskilling program you offer.



For example, some ways you can evaluate potential include asking:

- Has the applicant demonstrated acquisition of transferable skills through past employment or volunteer work?
- Has the applicant demonstrated they are willing and able to learn something new?
- Has the applicant demonstrated they have a growth mindset, and will implement feedback in real time?
- Has the applicant demonstrated they are ready to make the transition into a new career following the upskilling program?

These questions can be assessed through application forms, interviews, or challenge assignments.

SalesCamp Case Study

We know evaluating potential is not an easy task. Over the past four years, we have tried different approaches to evaluate potential in our SalesCamp applicants, and help typically overlooked candidates find B2B tech sales roles.

Our recruitment and application processes are participant-focused. We place value on lived experience, which is beyond the traditional sphere of educational attainment level or in-field experience that is standard for the market. We identify the skills needed for a participant to be successful, and decouple these skills from traditional value signals by creating eligibility requirements and personas which place value on individuals more holistically.

Through these approaches, we have helped older workers, newcomers, and individuals without previous B2B sales experience—those traditionally overlooked by employers—successfully launch new tech sales careers.

Here's what we have found works for us:



We analyze the essential abilities and set up the qualifications required for achieving success.

Team structure

Palette Skills has a dedicated admissions manager and admissions specialist, with additional staff cross-trained to support application review and interviews as needed. The manager sets the process for admissions and ensures it is followed. They also oversee the pipeline of applicants, review applications, and interview applicants. The admissions specialist reviews applications, interviews applicants, and documents the outcomes of both against pre-established criteria aligned with employer needs.

Our recruitment team partners with other community-based organizations to connect with talent pools and to educate and share information about program opportunities. They also support direct participant recruitment activities by responding to inquiries from interested members of the public, and by connecting directly with individuals from aligned talent pools to let them identify transferable skills in the relevant industry.

Admissions steps

Before an applicant applies to SalesCamp, we encourage them to complete an [eligibility questionnaire](#). We use this as a tool to support participants to understand their eligibility and potential fit for this program. It is designed to empower people in their decision-making process. The questionnaire clarifies the hard eligibility requirements such as province of residency, Canadian work status, years of work experience, and language requirements.

Our recruitment team partners with other community-based organizations to connect with talent pools and to educate and share information about program opportunities.



Once an individual decides to apply to SalesCamp, they go through a two-step admissions process:

#1 Application form

The first step is for applicants to fill out an application form. The application form includes a few questions that give applicants the opportunity to share why they are interested in a career in sales, and articulate the transferable skills they possess.

#2 Interview

The second step is inviting an applicant to an interview. We schedule our interviews for 30 minutes, and use this time to learn about the applicant's career goals, determine alignment with program expectations and outcomes, and give them an opportunity to showcase their potential to be successful in the program by highlighting their previous experiences.



Here are some examples of what we look for to assess potential throughout the admissions process:

Standard	Purpose
Applicant has an interest in a B2B tech sales career.	A candidate's potential to successfully make a career transition is assessed and determined through their level of interest, awareness, and knowledge of the industry they are transiting into. Jobseekers who are informed about their transition into a new career path tend to be more successful in gaining employment after the program.
Applicant demonstrates transferable skills that are needed by industry. Transferable skills can be acquired through professional, volunteer, or other personal experiences.	Many applicants have developed aligned transferable skills in spheres outside direct work experiences (e.g. through volunteer experiences, family commitments). By opening the scope of our questions, we can assess an individual's potential more holistically.
Applicant demonstrates alignment to program outcomes and a level of commitment to making career transition.	<p>This helps determine the alignment of a candidate's career goals with the industry they will be transitioning into. It is essential that candidates have a strong understanding and expectation of their career path, as it is an important factor in supporting resilience in the job search process. This is because candidates who know what to expect in their career transition will be more confident about the decision they are making for themselves.</p> <p>Second, it is important that the candidate recognizes the value of the program, and understands how we provide value to them. This question evaluates potential as it aims to highlight a candidate's awareness, readiness, and commitment to transition into a new career. Those who clearly understand their career goals, and who find value in our program tend to be more successful in the program, and during their job search.</p>

Success Stories

By applying a potential-focused recruitment approach to admissions, we have accepted participants with a wide range of experience who had been struggling to break into tech sales in Canada. These participants are now excelling in their B2B tech sales careers.

Here are some examples* of our success stories:

**The names mentioned in these examples are fictitious and were used for clarification purposes.*



#1 Derek G.

- A mid-career worker from the retail industry with a high school diploma.
- Value placed in their client-facing experience as it relates to skills needed for the desired role.
- Completed our program and successfully transitioned into a sales role.
- Has experienced ongoing career growth since initial transition.

#2 Sara A.

- Mid-career worker.
- Background in fashion and fine arts.
- Significant lived experience and skills developed as an artist.
- Value was placed on the candidate's transferable skills as a freelance artist, they had extensive experience with business development to source clients and related activities to communicate and close deals with clients.
- Completed program and transitioned into a tech sales role aligned to passions and values.

#3 Rajveer K.

- Newcomer to Canada.
- Previous sales experience in their home country.
- Told repeatedly they were unqualified due to lack of "in-market" experience.
- Completed program, received 2 promotions in less than 2 years.



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