

WCB - Alberta Labour Market Assessment Employability Profiles

Rationale for Use of an Independent Research Firm

WCB - Alberta's Employability Profiles are prepared by an independent research firm in order to ensure that the profiles provide an unbiased and objective portrayal of occupations as they currently exist in the Alberta labour market.

The research firm has been engaged by WCB - Alberta to conduct interviews with employers regarding the requirements of different occupations of interest to the WCB, compile the information provided, and develop occupational profiles from this information.

The research firm is contracted to provide research services to WCB - Alberta but does not have formal ties to the organization, and operates at arms-length when conducting this research. The research personnel conduct all research activities from the research firm's own offices, do not receive day-to-day supervision from WCB - Alberta staff, and are not exposed to or influenced by the WCB's activities in assessing claims or recommending employment and/or training options. Furthermore, the firm is able to apply a research process with protocols designed to gather accurate factual information from employers and to analyse it in an impartial manner.

By using a professional research firm, the profiles:

- are prepared by staff who are not exposed to or influenced by WCB Alberta,,
- ensure the employers interviewed are selected using random sampling techniques within target industries associated with the occupations of interest,
- use a structured interview guide to ensure consistency in the way questions are asked and clarified,
- use a computerized system with built-in checks and prompts for clarification of contradictory or unusual information,
- use staff trained in conducting unbiased research interviews and entering information exactly as interviewees provide it,
- use standardized protocols for recording the information obtained through the interviews,
- have an analysis of the information in aggregate using statistical analysis software, and
- have the use of professional researchers to prepare the profiles who are knowledgeable about issues associated with labour market analysis and occupational definitions and who are bound by a professional code of ethics.

The research firm that has conducted the profile research to date is a Gold Seal member of the Market Research Intelligence Association and of the Canadian Evaluation Society, and follows the research practice guidelines and codes of ethics recommended by both organizations, both of which underline the importance of conducting impartial research and reporting findings objectively.

Qualifications of the research firm

The research firm that has conducted the profile research to date, R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd., is a professional program evaluation and market research firm with offices in Edmonton and other locations across Canada. The firm has conducted numerous labour market research projects for industry sector councils and various levels of government that have required the firm to compile information on a wide range of occupations, and prepare statistical and analytical reporting on the results. The firm has well developed research protocols for conducting labour market research and years of experience in conducting thousands of in-depth interviews with employers about their workers on topics such as hiring practices, vacancy rates, compensation, benefits, turnover, experience, qualifications, job duties, training needs, working conditions, and other related issues. The firm's professional research staff has expertise in labour market economics, statistical analysis, survey research, and program evaluation. The firm has developed occupational profiles and reported labour market information on numerous occupations for public sector clients across Canada, including professional associations, industry associations, industry sector councils, and various levels of government.



The Employability Profiles are developed using a consistent and controlled process

The employers selected to take part in the survey are randomly selected from a database of employers in the province classified according to the six-digit North American Industry Classification System, without regard to the possible characteristics of employers or any previous dealings with WCB. Occasionally, for less common occupations, the research staff may turn to supplemental lists of employer contacts developed from yellow pages listings or web searches, but without selection bias or pre-screening other than for a possible match with the type of occupation sought.

The interviews are conducted using an interview questionnaire programmed in a Computer Assisted Telephone Interview (CATI) system that is structured to obtain detailed information as required for the development of the profiles. The questionnaire includes definitions and explanations of key concepts as part of the interview, standardized coding of question responses, open-ended fields to certain types of information verbatim as provided by employers, skip patterns to ensure that all relevant follow-up questions are asked, automatic prompts to clarify contradictory or unusual information, and formalized clarification text to ensure that interviewers are able to explain the intent of questions. This ensures that every employer interview follows the same format, is applied consistently, relies on the same definitions and clarifications, and has responses stored in a consistent format.

The firm's research interview staff receive training in conducting impartial survey research and are not directly supervised by WCB staff. Interviews are conducted from a centralized call centre with direct oversight provided by supervisory and management staff. Interviewers may be monitored for quality

control purposes by a survey supervisor or survey house manager. The staff who conduct the interviews are not involved in the data analysis nor are they involved in reviewing the aggregated results used in developing the profile. While they receive feedback on relevant definitions and how to probe for the precise information required, their employer interviews are not biased by knowledge of whether the resulting profile is appropriate for workers with physical or other restrictions. This removes any temptation to modify their interview style or interpretation of employer answers to fit a preconceived notion of what kind of result either WCB or an injured worker might prefer.

The aggregated responses from all employers are assessed for each question as a whole. Data are aggregated with response frequency tables that do not identify which employer provided which answer, but allow the data analyst to easily identify the majority response amongst all responses provided. Only when potentially contradictory or confusing results are encountered are the full interviews for a given employer reviewed in context. Occasionally, if the information provided by employers is ambiguous or cannot lead to a conclusive statement about some aspect of the occupational requirements, it may be necessary to follow up with the same employers again to clarify their answers.

When developing the profiles, the firm's analysts follow strict guidelines with respect to how the aggregated data are reported. For most types of questions, the majority response is reported, being the response indicated by at least four out of the seven employers interviewed. For questions requiring answers on a scale (for example, the frequency of a physical work demand, or the weight lifted), the majority response is the highest observed response on the scale when working upwards from the lowest answer provided to the highest answer provided until a majority of employers are accounted for. In reporting the results, the firm has also developed guidelines for the language to be used in describing the results (i.e., definitions of the proportion of employers who must respond for words like `majority` or `few` to be used). For a few questions, all employers' verbatim responses are aggregated and summarized for reporting in the profile. In all instances, the profiles are developed only from information provided by employers – i.e., secondary sources are not used in the preparation of the profiles, except in the rare instance where it may be necessary to confirm provincial regulations or certification requirements governing certain occupations.

The draft profiles are quality controlled by a senior analyst who reviews the conclusions of the analysis carefully before submitting the profiles to WCB for review. When WCB requests clarification of an aspect of the employability profile, the research team will review responses provided by employers but will only revise the requirements if warranted by the data obtained from employers during initial interviews, follow-up interviews with the same employer, or in rare instances information from additional employers (e.g., when a `tie-breaker` response is required).