

LEADING PRACTICE GUIDE

Increasing Work- Integrated Learning Opportunities

Introduction

Talent attraction and retention have never been more critical. We live in both an innovation age and a highly competitive market for talent. Businesses of all sizes are under more pressure than ever to set themselves apart as a great place for talented people to work.

Managing and developing talent remains critical to a company's growth prospects. Our region's businesses must rise to the occasion, leveraging best practices and established expertise to build their talent pipeline over time. That's why the Board is pleased to introduce our six Leading Practice Guides, born from our workforce development strategy, "[Unlocking Talent](#)".

Unlocking Talent highlighted how we can turn system gaps and barriers into opportunities in three areas: (i) collaborating to narrow the skills gap; (ii) promoting collective workforce development in the skilled trades; and (iii) growing the region's youth talent pipeline and immigrant talent pipeline.

To build on these areas, the Board convened senior business leaders for a series of roundtables, to share lessons learned and best practices on pressing workforce development challenges and opportunities. As a result, we have focused on 6 urgent priorities for the Leading Practice Guides:



Supporting Employee
Soft Skill Development



Reducing Integration Barrier
for Immigrant Workers



Finding the Right
Entry-Level Workers



Increasing Work-Integrated
Learning ("WIL") Opportunities



Tapping into the
Immigrant Talent Pool



Expanding Mental Health
Supports for Younger Workers

We hope they will be used as blueprints for success, helping businesses of every size contribute to a workforce that thrives in tomorrow's economy.

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Overview

Work-integrated learning (“WIL”) presents significant opportunities for young people to gain work experience, develop skills, and help build their confidence in the workplace. Acknowledged as a critical tool to drive youth employment, all levels of government fund these types of opportunities. There are also multiple resources available for employers to increase participation, including catalogues of financial supports and return-on-investment guides. However, more amplification of these resources is required, as well as specific consideration for WIL programs that can be delivered in a hybrid or remote work environment.

This Leading Practice Guide will:

- Provide best practices and recommendations related to advancing WIL programs with an additional focus on small- and medium-sized employers and considerations for establishing hybrid work arrangements
- Identify and amplify existing programs and funding available to employers



Leading Practices

STEP 1

Understand the Various Forms of Work-Integrated Learning and Potential Benefits to Your Organization

Work-integrated learning (WIL) programs, such as co-op placements, internships, and apprenticeships, offer significant benefits to employers. First and foremost, they provide a valuable talent pipeline, allowing companies to identify and nurture prospective employees early on. By participating in WIL initiatives, employers gain access to a pool of enthusiastic, skilled, and work-ready individuals who can contribute to the company's productivity and innovation. Additionally, WIL programs foster a culture of continuous learning and adaptability among employees, aligning with Canada's rapidly evolving job market and technological advancements. Employers benefit from fresh perspectives and diverse skill sets brought by WIL participants, promoting innovation and competitiveness. Moreover, these programs can help reduce recruitment and training costs by offering a streamlined path to hiring skilled graduates who are already familiar with the organization's operations. In essence, work-integrated learning not only enriches the Canadian workforce but also provides numerous

advantages to employers by enhancing their talent acquisition and development strategies.

Forms of WIL

Broadly speaking, work-integrated learning can be defined as "the process through which students come to learn from experiences in educational and practice settings. It includes the kinds of curriculum and pedagogic practices that can provide and effectively integrate learning experiences in both settings."¹ This definition is intentionally broad and covers a range of practices that embody an integrated learning experience for students. The first key step for organizations looking to leverage WIL opportunities is to understand what the various types of WILs are and how they can potentially serve their needs. The nine different types of work-integrated learning categories identified by the [Business + Higher Education Roundtable \(BHER\)](#) include:

Systematic Training

APPRENTICESHIPS

A combination of in-school training for a skilled trade or occupation, on-the-job workplace training, and other types of trainings as needed.

Structured Work Experience

CO-OPS

Periods of study which alternate with work placements, offering students a structured approach that integrates their studies with work experience in a related field.

INTERNSHIPS

Work experiences, typically lasting a year or more, at or near the end of a study program.

MANDATORY PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

Work arrangements required for a professional license or designation.

FIELD EXPERIENCE

Placements and work-related experiences that prepare students for professional or occupational fields, but are not required for a professional license.

Institutional Partnerships

APPLIED RESEARCH PROJECTS

Students taking on real-world projects, often with industry partners as clients and the students as service providers.

SERVICE LEARNING

A range of activities intended to provide equal benefit to the service provider (the student) and the recipient (the community) while maintaining a focus on learning.

New Digital Economy Formats

INCUBATORS AND ACCELERATORS

Intended primarily to promote entrepreneurship, but the scope of their services has expanded in recent years to include social initiatives. Qualified applicants may receive funding, supervision, and mentorship from experienced practitioners.

BOOTCAMPS AND HACKATHONS

Bootcamps are short-term, intensive courses focused on practical skills development in a variety of fields (software development, data analytics, digital marketing, etc.). These are often viewed as supplementary educational opportunities that target key industry needs. Hackathons are popular events for computer programmers and app designers to develop and showcase their skills by tackling meaningful challenges.

Benefits of WIL programs

In addition to understanding the various forms of WIL, employers must also recognize the value that WIL initiatives can provide for their organizations. The Information Technology Association of Canada (ITAC) provides a list of some of these benefits which include:²

- A cost-effective way to increase talent capacity
- Build a pipeline for talent
- Fill gaps for specific skillsets
- Accessing new ideas and energy
- Professional development opportunities for employees
- Raising your community profile
- Strengthening relations with post-secondary institutions
- Accessing funding opportunities

Benefits: Hybrid work considerations³

Remote WIL can take various forms, including virtual internships, online co-op placements, and remote project-based learning. These approaches have gained prominence in Canada, especially in response to the changing nature of work and the increasing demand for digital skills. Remote WIL not only benefits participants in terms of skill development but also provides employers with access to a diverse talent pool and promotes workforce readiness in a digital age.

Beyond traditional WIL programs, hybrid work WIL programs have their own unique benefits which include:

- Increased flexibility around potential WIL opportunities
- Greater access to a larger and more diverse talent pool
- Improved attractiveness of WIL opportunities to potential candidates
- Reduced space and time requirements to manage WIL programs

Additional resources

(BHER) [Employer WIL Benefits at a Glance](#) – helps employers understand the benefits of WIL and provides important factors for employers to consider when planning the program.

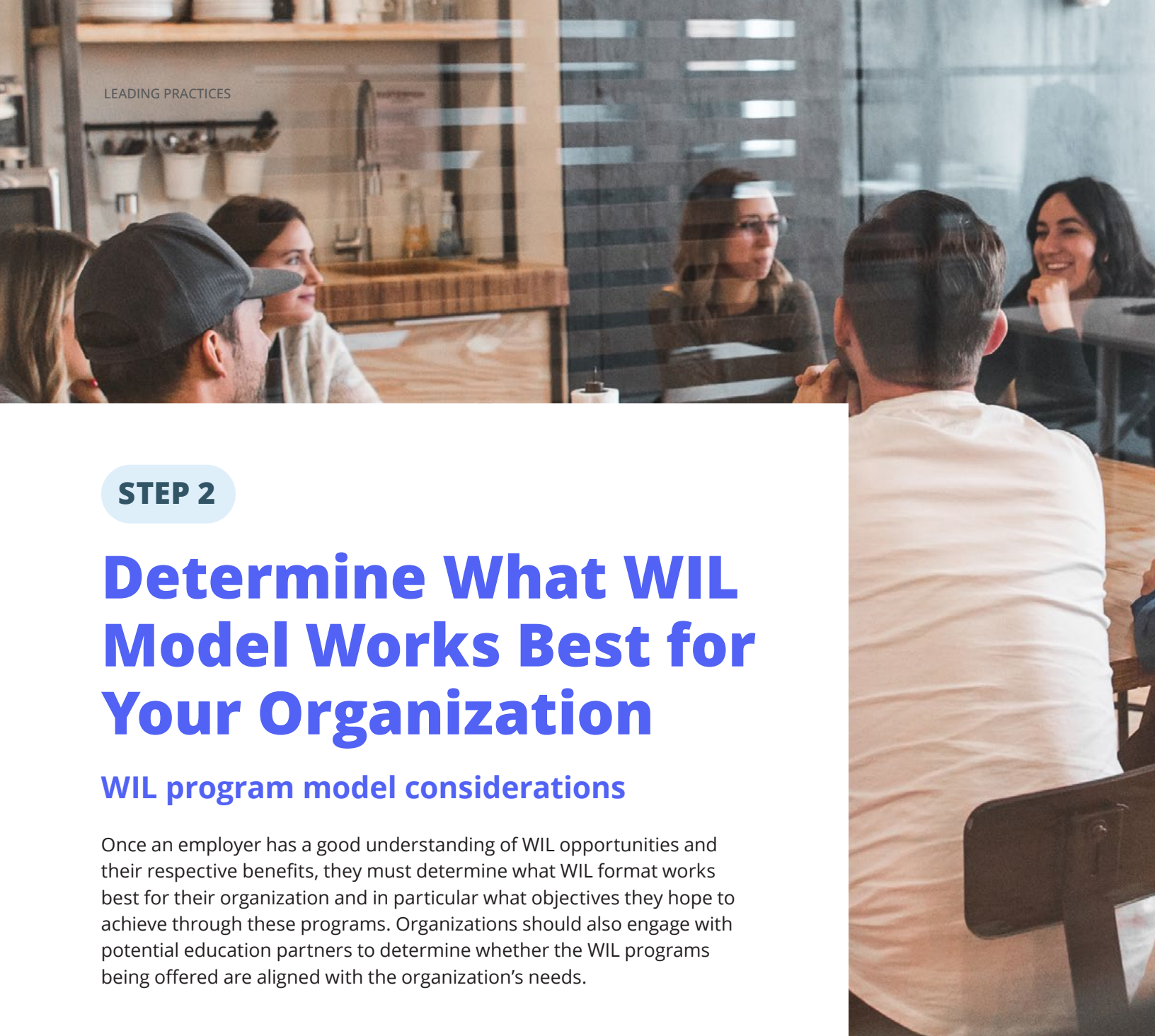
(BHER) [Interactive Return-on-Investment calculator](#) – helps organizations quantify the monetary return-on-investment based on the various programs they may be considering:

- [How to calculate ROI](#)
- [Interactive ROI calculator](#)



Action Summary

1. Understand different types of WIL and their respective arrangements and specifications.
2. Understand the benefits of WIL and how they may address your needs as a business.



STEP 2

Determine What WIL Model Works Best for Your Organization

WIL program model considerations

Once an employer has a good understanding of WIL opportunities and their respective benefits, they must determine what WIL format works best for their organization and in particular what objectives they hope to achieve through these programs. Organizations should also engage with potential education partners to determine whether the WIL programs being offered are aligned with the organization's needs.

Some considerations include:

- Time requirements – are you looking at taking on students for 35+ hours or on a more limited basis?
- Paid – are you willing or able to pay students?
- Capacity – are you able to commit to taking on students on a full-time basis or are you looking for more flexible options that better suit your needs?
- What is the overall objective you are looking to achieve?
 - Short-term research project
 - Long-term engagement on a challenge that your organization faces
 - Building a pipeline of skilled talent

Resources to determine the most appropriate WIL format for your organization

- **(BHER) find your WIL quiz:** A tool developed by BHER to help employers identify new WIL types based on your sector, commitment level, and capacity.
- **Comparative Matrix of Work-Integrated Education and Learning:** A comprehensive matrix was developed by the Association for Co-operative Education and Work-Integrated Learning to develop clarity, common understanding and shared language around these forms of work integrated experiences.

WIL format: Hybrid work considerations

Each of the various WIL formats could have a hybrid work component which will be determined by the requirements of each organization. When considering hybrid WIL arrangements, an organization should consider the nature of the work required as well as any logistical requirements. Among other considerations, organizations should consider the following:

- What proportion of the tasks required of students can be done remotely?
- When, where, and how often do you need students to be available in person?
- Are there any security or hardware restrictions that must be considered?
- Is the right HR capacity available to support a detailed remote learning plan?



Action Summary

1. Determine which type of WIL is most appropriate for your organization.
2. Assess the extent to which your WIL program can have a remote or hybrid component.



STEP 3

Establish Objectives, Needs, and Responsibilities⁴

Objectives

The first step in formally setting up any WIL program is establishing explicit overall objectives and aims for your organization.

1. What are your overall goals?
2. What are the expected learning outcomes?
3. How to measure success?
4. What is the duration and structure of the program?
5. Does the workplace have the right facility and structure to guide and support a student's success?

Needs

Identify the very specific needs that you are looking to address – e.g. is there a particular role or skills gap that needs to be filled?

1. What skills and competencies do we want participants to have?
2. What skills and competencies do we want participants to gain?

Responsibilities

Understand and document both a student's expected responsibilities as well as your organization's responsibilities toward the established program.

1. What is expected from the student during the program and by the end of the placement? What are the outputs and outcomes expected of the student?
2. What documents are students and the employer required to complete and submit during, before, and after the program?
3. What organizational and resource supports are required to support students?
4. How will the employer support student integration?
5. Does the job description accurately reflect the experience a student will get?



Action Summary

1. Establish (a) the objectives of the WIL program, (b) the needs that the program is intended to address, and (c) the responsibilities of the student and employer.



STEP 4

Identify Barriers, Challenges, and Best Practices

Barriers and challenges

Before establishing a formal WIL program, companies should acknowledge the potential barriers and challenges that they may face. These may range from: financial burdens, limited staffing resources to supervise and mentor students, high administrative demands, inability to match students with their needs, lack of suitable work to give students, and difficulty finding students with the skillsets needed.

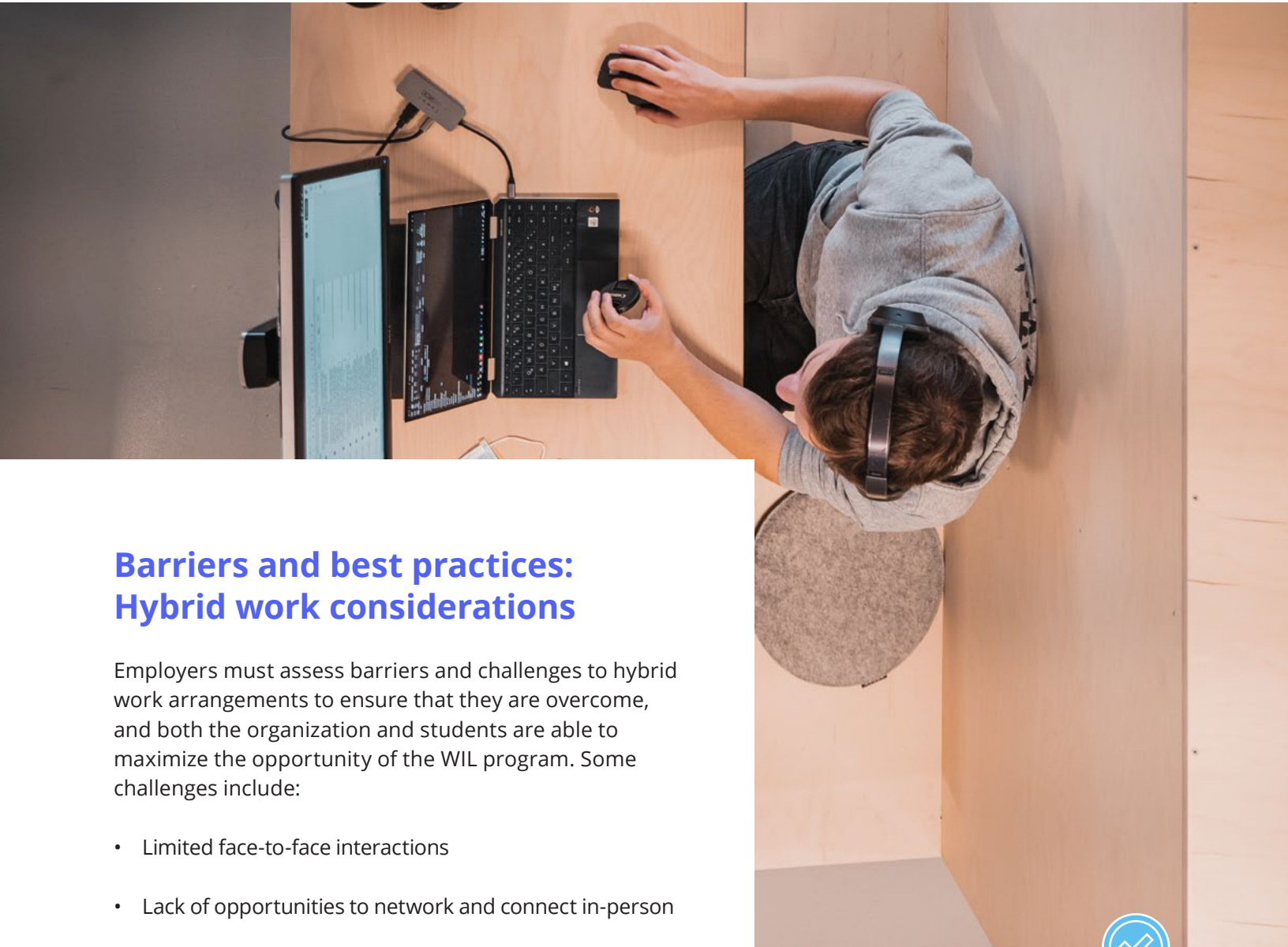
A list of key employer barriers can be found in the following resources:

- [Taking the Pulse of Work-integrated Learning in Canada \(BHER\)](#) (pg 41 – 45)
- [Employer Resource Kit for Work Integrated Learning \(ITAC Talent\)](#) (pg 7)

Best practices

Employers should also take note of best practices that will maximize the potential for success for WIL programs. The University of Waterloo and ITAC Talent have detailed checklists for employers to help set them up for success.

- [WIL Quality Framework Checklist for Business](#) (University of Waterloo) (pg 12 – 13)
- [Career Ready Toolkit Checklist \(ITAC Talent\)](#) (Appendix A, pg 18 – 20)



Barriers and best practices: Hybrid work considerations

Employers must assess barriers and challenges to hybrid work arrangements to ensure that they are overcome, and both the organization and students are able to maximize the opportunity of the WIL program. Some challenges include:

- Limited face-to-face interactions
- Lack of opportunities to network and connect in-person
- Potential for a low productivity environment, particular for younger students
- Difficulties in managing and mentoring students virtually

Resources available to help manage hybrid work arrangements include:

- [Tips for Onboarding Students Remotely \(CEWIL Canada\)](#)
- [Tips for Supervising Students Remotely \(CEWIL Canada\)](#)
- [Tips for Working at Home \(CEWIL Canada\)](#)
- [Tips for Managing WIL Students Remotely \(ACEWIL\)](#)



Action Summary

1. Take note of key barriers, challenges, and best practices for implementing WIL programs.
2. Assess potential barriers related to hybrid work arrangements to ensure WIL opportunities can be maximized.



Considerations

Leverage Existing Programs and Financial Support

Leveraging existing programs and financial supports for work-integrated learning is crucial for cost-effectiveness and accessibility. It eases the financial burden on participants, fosters collaboration, and ensures scalability and sustainability, benefiting participants, employers, and the economy.

Employers can leverage a number of existing programs and financial supports to help establish WIL initiatives for their organizations, including:

- [Employer and Community Partner Tool Kit \(CEWIL Canada\)](#) – funding resources and general interest links
- [Talent Opportunities Program \(OCC\)](#) – an initiative of the Ontario Chamber of Commerce (OCC) designed to help employers located anywhere in Canada hire college and university students on work-integrated learning (WIL) placements
- [Grant and Funding Guide \(INWIL\)](#)
- [Funding Options and Employer Resources \(Vancouver Island University\)](#)
- [Catalogue of National Financial Supports \(BHER\)](#)
- [Catalogue of Provincial Financial Supports \(BHER\)](#)



Youth Immigrants

Unpaid work opportunities hinder upward mobility for immigrant youth due to their added responsibilities, such as family responsibility, one or more part time jobs, etc. Therefore, flexibility in work hours, mentorships, and addressing discriminatory experiences during work-integrated learning programs can be vital to support their future career success in Canada. Lastly, some HR practices limiting international student hiring should be reviewed. Like other equity-deserving population groups, immigrant youth need to be supported with sufficient job opportunities.

- [How WES Canada Supports Immigrant Youth in Building Their Careers \(World Education Service\)](#)
- [Learning Beyond the Classroom: Securing Career Development Opportunities for Emerging Immigrant Talent \(World Education Service\)](#)
- [Going the Distance: Immigrant Youth in Canada's Labour Market \(World Education Service\)](#)

OTHER WIL RESOURCES

Reports

- [Taking the Pulse of Work-integrated Learning in Canada \(BHER\)](#)
- [Future Proven: Take a AAA Approach to Work-integrated learning \(University of Waterloo\)](#)
- [A Practical Guide for Work-integrated Learning \(Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario\)](#)

Websites

- [WIL Hub \(BHER\)](#)
- [Resource Hub – WIL for All \(CEWIL\)](#)



Case Study

Sourcing Top Talent Through Partnerships – 1QBit and Mitacs⁵

COMPANY

1QBit, a Vancouver-based quantum computing company. 1QBit works closely with major clients in the industry and leads the conversation in optimization, simulation, and machine learning.

OBJECTIVE

In order to develop their products in a cost-effective way and accommodate fast-growing demand, 1QBit decided to leverage talent across Canada by partnering with Mitacs.

Approach

To help grow the operation, Mitacs has connected 1QBit with more than 55 interns sourced from both undergraduate and graduate programs across Canada and other international post-secondary institutions. Close to half of 1QBit's team – including four senior researchers – is comprised of previous or current interns through this partnership. These interns have helped develop computing algorithms to study the capabilities of the first commercially available quantum computers.

Outcome

In seven years, 1QBit grew from a four-person startup to a leader in quantum computing with more than 130 employees. The partnership with Mitacs has been recognised by the President and Co-founder of 1QBit as serving as an “invaluable resource supporting the growth of 1QBit”.

Endnotes

- 1 Taking The Pulse of Work-Integrated Learning In Canada. Business/Higher Education Roundtable. <https://www.bher.ca/sites/default/files/documents/2020-08/BHER-Academica-report-full.pdf>
- 2 Employer Resource Kit for Work Integrated Learning (WIL). University of Toronto. <https://utsc.utoronto.ca/mgmt/sites/utsc.utoronto.ca.mgmt/files/docs/Career%20Ready%20Toolkit.pdf>
- 3 Remote Opportunities in Work-Integrated Learning: Considerations for Moving Forward. Center for Engaged Learning. Elo University. <https://www.centerforengagedlearning.org/remote-opportunities-in-work-integrated-learning-considerations-for-moving-forward/>
- 4 Employer Resource Kit for Work Integrated Learning (WIL). University of Toronto. <https://utsc.utoronto.ca/mgmt/sites/utsc.utoronto.ca.mgmt/files/docs/Career%20Ready%20Toolkit.pdf>
- 5 Tech Pioneer Traces Roots Through Partnership. Mitacs. <https://www.mitacs.ca/en/impact/tech-pioneer-traces-roots-through-partnership>

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