



# **WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

FINDINGS FROM BUSINESS  
WALK DISCUSSIONS IN  
SEAFORTH, ONTARIO

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# Workforce Challenges and Opportunities in Seaforth: Insights from Business Walk Discussions

Workforce challenges in rural areas are multifaceted, including labour shortages, an aging population, skill mismatches, and difficulties in attracting and retaining talent. These issues hinder local economic development, business growth, and productivity. Geographic isolation limits access to training facilities and educational institutions, making it harder for locals to acquire new skills. Additionally, fewer industries and job opportunities in rural areas lead to higher unemployment and underemployment rates. Younger populations often migrate to cities for better opportunities, leaving behind an aging population. Infrastructure issues like unreliable internet and transportation further impede remote job opportunities and business operations. Limited access to healthcare also affects workforce well-being and productivity. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated these challenges, leading to tighter labour markets and increased demand for workforce planning and development (Reddy, 2020; Statistics Canada, 2022b).

Seaforth, a rural community in Huron East with a population of 2,675 as of 2021, faces compounded workforce challenges due to location, limited post-secondary opportunities in the community, and youth out-migration (Statistical Canada, 2021; Cosgrave, 2020; SEDRD, 2024). Addressing these challenges is critical for the sustainability of the local economy and community well-being.

On September 18, 2024, a business walk was conducted in Seaforth as part of research to understand current workforce challenges faced by local businesses. Business walks involve brief in-person survey with local businesses to gather information, identify challenges, and opportunities (Piva et al., 2017; University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2024). The research team from the University of Guelph aimed to engage with various business owners and staff members to gather qualitative insights and better understand Seaforth's local economic landscape.

This report provides a high-level overview of the responses received from business owners. A full analysis of the Business Walk responses and workforce development strategies from other communities can be found at [www.ruraldev.ca/lсна](http://www.ruraldev.ca/lсна).

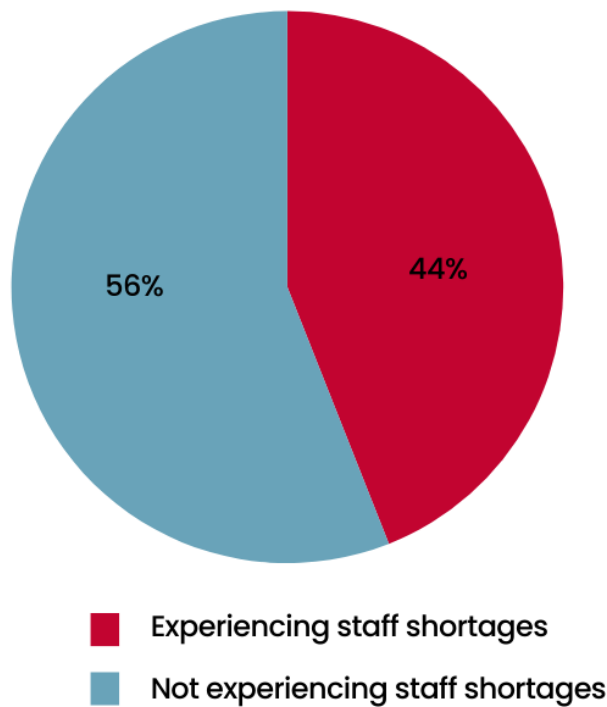
## Who Participated in the Business Walks

A total of 45 individuals working at Seaforth businesses completed the in survey, representing approximately 56% of businesses in Seaforth. The survey included various business types such as auto repair shops, insurance agencies, restaurants, farms, and pharmacies. Respondents identified themselves as owners (44%), managers (20%), or staff (36%).

## Key Findings

A total of 44% of respondents indicated they experienced staff shortages. Of the businesses indicating workforce shortages, 40% reported a shortage of available workers; 27% cited wage

rate expectations as a significant issue; and 22% noted challenges related to applicants' experience, skills, and training.



The top three contributing factors to staff shortages included the shortage of available workforce (40%), applicant skills and experience (22%), and wage expectations (27%). The top two potential solutions identified by participants were:

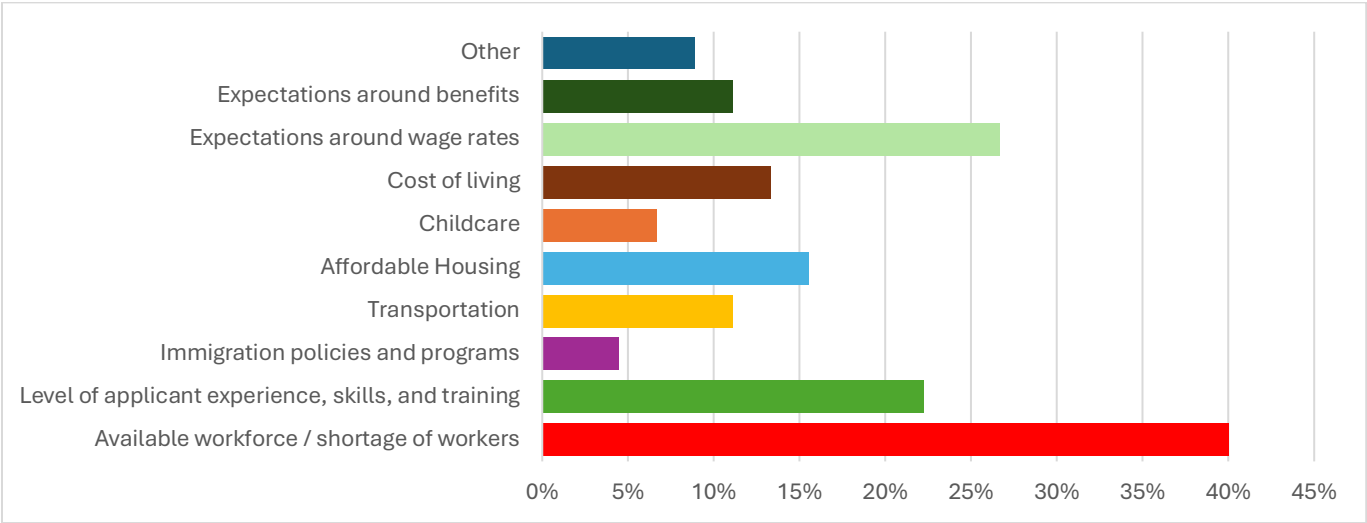
- Employee Recruitment Services (38%). These services are designed to help businesses find and hire qualified candidates more efficiently. Examples include Job Posting and Advertising, Job Fairs and Recruitment Events and Partnerships with Educational Institutions.
- Workforce Attraction Programs (27%). These programs aim to draw talent to specific regions or industries. Examples of these programs can include incentives and benefits, marketing and outreach, community integration support, and career development opportunities.

Both solutions focus on addressing workforce challenges by enhancing the recruitment process and making the region or industry more attractive to potential employees.

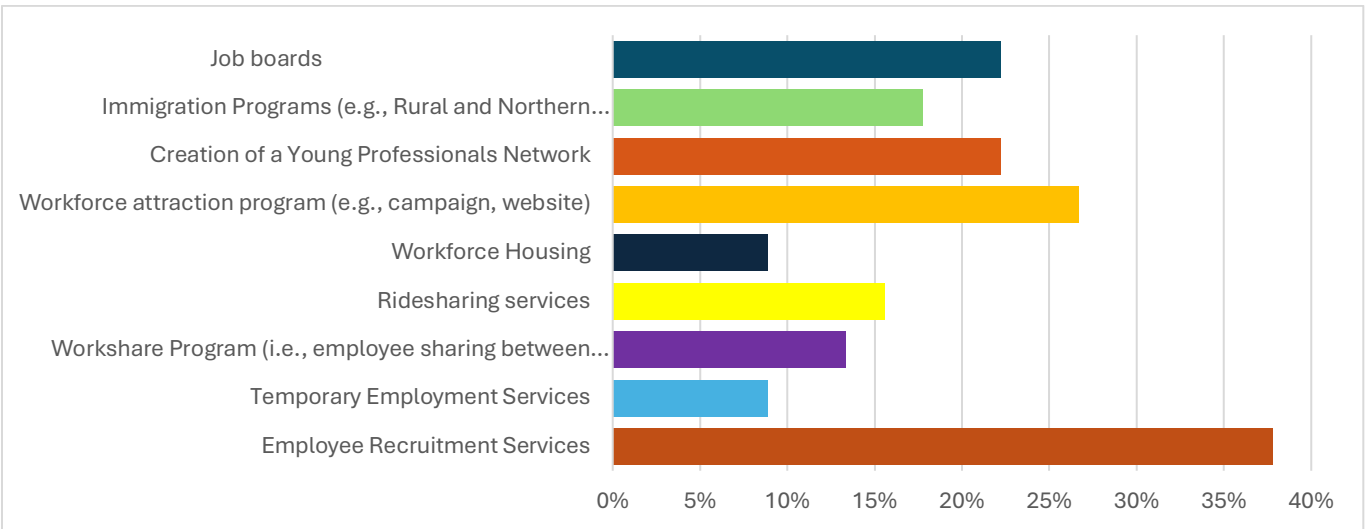
Business Walk participants identified various strategies they have used to avoid or prevent staff shortages and other workforce challenges:

Strategies	Frequency of Response
Creating a Positive Work Environment and Employee Satisfaction	7
Family and Close-Knit Team Reliance	5
Proactive Recruitment Approaches	2
Business Structural Changes	2
Staff Retention and Workplace Culture	1
Avoiding High-Turnover Demographics	1
Financial/Regulatory Considerations Affecting Hiring	1

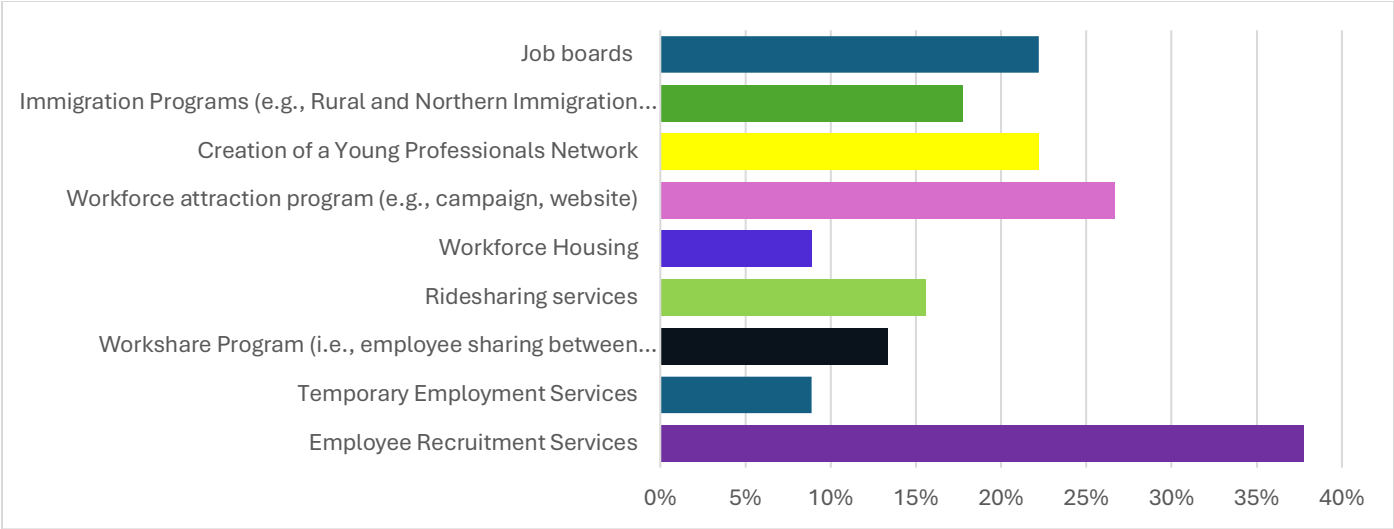
The key factors contributing to staff shortages are represented below



The diagram below illustrates Preferred workforce support services and programs



The diagram below illustrates Preferred workforce support services and programs



## Conclusions

The study highlights workforce challenges in Seaforth, including labour shortages, skill mismatches, and difficulties in attracting and retaining talent. Key factors contributing to these issues are geographic location, limited post-secondary educational opportunities in the community, and youth outmigration. Effective strategies to address these challenges include immigration programs, local workforce development initiatives, competitive wages, flexible employment solutions, and improved housing and transportation. These strategies can enhance Seaforth’s workforce, support local businesses, and ensure sustainable economic growth and community well-being.

## Acknowledgements

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