

# Never been more needed: Developing a new competency framework for career professionals

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***Career professionals from across Canada are collaborating to set a new standard for practice in the field, an exercise that highlights the pride and professionalism of its members***

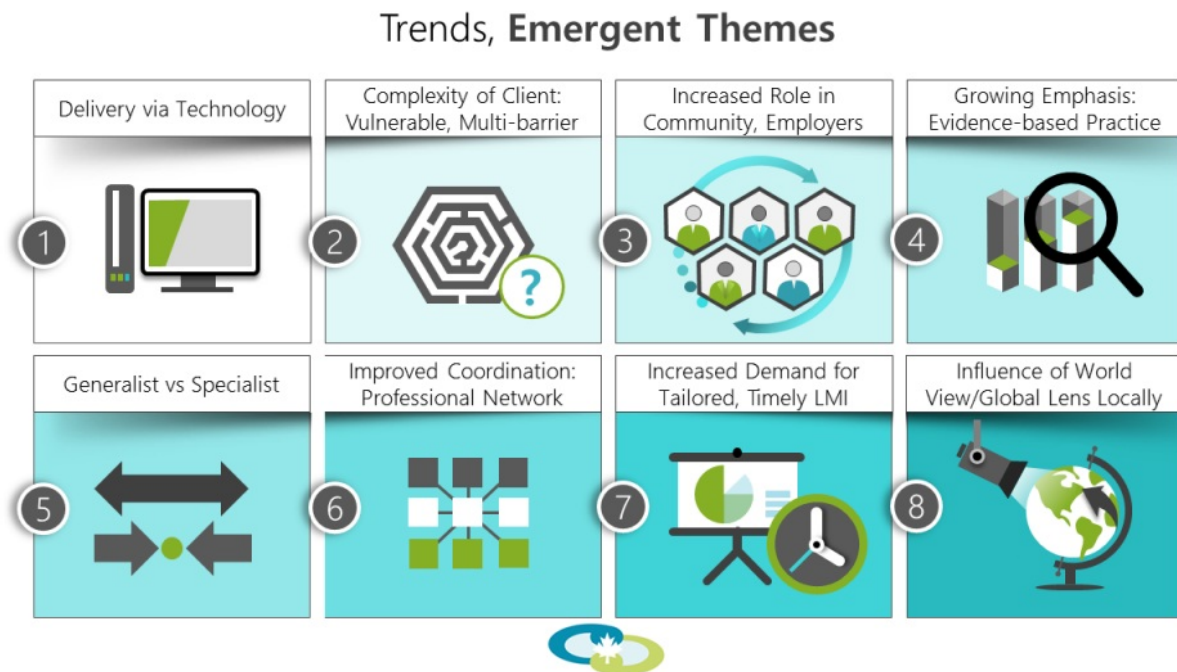
*Kathy McDonald and Philip Mondor*

The contexts in which career development professionals (CDPs) perform their jobs are becoming increasingly complex. As the labour market prioritizes competencies and credentials, greater specificity surrounding jobs and skills, and improved productivity and competitiveness, it is time for the career development sector to claim its role as a shaper of the economic and social well-being of Canadians. Through the development of the new Pan-Canadian Career Development Professional Competency Framework (the Framework), career professionals are gaining coherence to see themselves as their clients do: essential and professional.



## Critical reflections and conversations






The Framework was created using a rigorous social research model centred around listening to and learning from CDPs. From January to August 2019, CDPs helped shape a draft set of competency elements by submitting curriculum, regulations, organization policies, job descriptions, training outlines, occupational standards and certification program information. At the same time, a literature review investigated Canadian norms and how the field of career development is defined worldwide. This research surfaced eight trends and emergent themes: delivery via technology, complexity of client, role with employers and community, evidence-based practice, generalist versus specialist, coordination role with professional network, tailored and timely labour market information, and globalization.



Images courtesy of Canadian Career Development Foundation and Canadian Council for Career Development.

The essence of developing the competencies happened from September to November 2019 in focus group meetings, where CDPs provided rich evidence of the eight trends in their professional practice.

## Examples on how these themes inform competencies...

EMPHASIS	MAIN SERVICES	CONTEXT	NETWORK	OUTCOMES
<p>Diverse client base</p> <p>Some interactions are brief, others are lengthy (weeks – months)</p> <p>Can anticipate client needs beyond scope of profession at times</p> <p>Client-practitioner relationship is key</p>	<p>Sophisticated communication skills</p> <p>Scalable expertise (i.e. could range from basic to advanced)</p> <p>Resourcefulness, ability to collaborate, and solve problems</p>	<p>Necessity of 'World View'</p> <p>Cultural competencies</p> <p>Invested in diversity</p> <p>Need for self-reflection, awareness, professional growth</p> <p>Large body of knowledge and need to maintain currency</p>	<p>Competencies beyond client-practitioner interactions</p> <p>Accessing community resources and fostering collaborative working relationships is essential</p>	<p>Reinforces acute need to be results-driven and foster a culture of measurement, analysis, change</p> <p>Accountability/responsibility is multi-faceted: client, professional network, community</p>
				

CDP subject matter experts (SMEs) convened in four different regions of Canada to define the field of practice. SMEs set the parameters of the Framework and determined the content through consensus. The SMEs ensured that the complete scope of the field was well documented and that the competencies contained the right level of specificity and context.

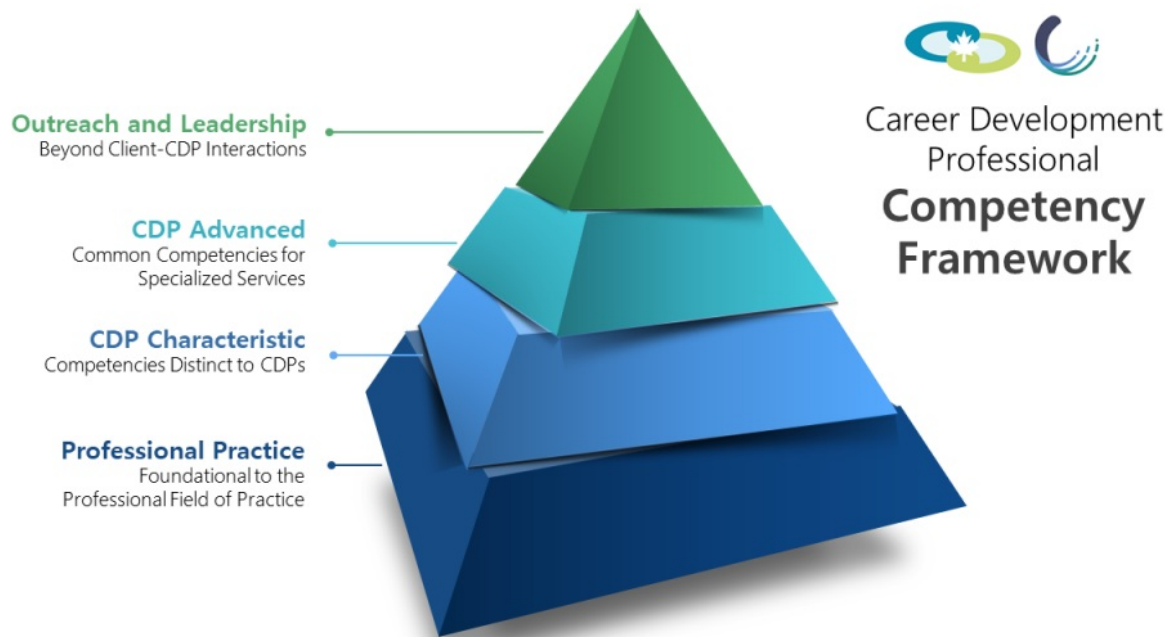
From October to December 2019, we held coffee conversations with more than 600 CDPs across Canada to review the draft competencies. During each session, CDPs discussed specific topics related to the eight trends by describing what they do in their workplace, what is going well and what challenges or issues they face. Participants then reviewed a competency element related to the discussion topic and made suggestions for revision, including adding competency statements or examples and recommending edits.

**Read more:** [Supporting Canadians to navigate learning and work – Updating the Standards and Guidelines for career professionals](#)

Something for everyone – the competency Framework structure

The Framework is a coherent definition of the skills and knowledge required of CDPs in Canada and takes into account varying types of work environments, positions and levels of complexity. It applies to the overall field of career development practice rather than a single context or role; individual CDPs need only select and apply the competencies that are relevant to them.

There are four main types of competencies that make up the career development domain, depicted by the pyramid, which shows the progression from foundational to leadership competencies:



**Professional Practice** comprises competencies foundational to the profession, such as professional responsibility, ethical judgment and decision-making or client-practitioner relationship. These enabling skills are required of all CDPs. These are also the competencies that CDPs have in common with affiliated professions such as counsellors, health professionals, teachers and others.

**CDP Characteristic** refers to competencies that are distinct to the career development field. CDPs do some or all of these in their job and over their careers. During focus groups, we found that specific role responsibilities of CDPs varied, from acting as a generalist to a specialist based on organization location and identity.

A member of the Arctic/Atlantic focus group said exploring the competencies helped illustrate the unique role of career professionals in the North. "Within remote, Indigenous communities, career development professionals are experiencing multi-faceted and complex cases," the participant said. "CDPs serve as a holistic source of support for their clients."

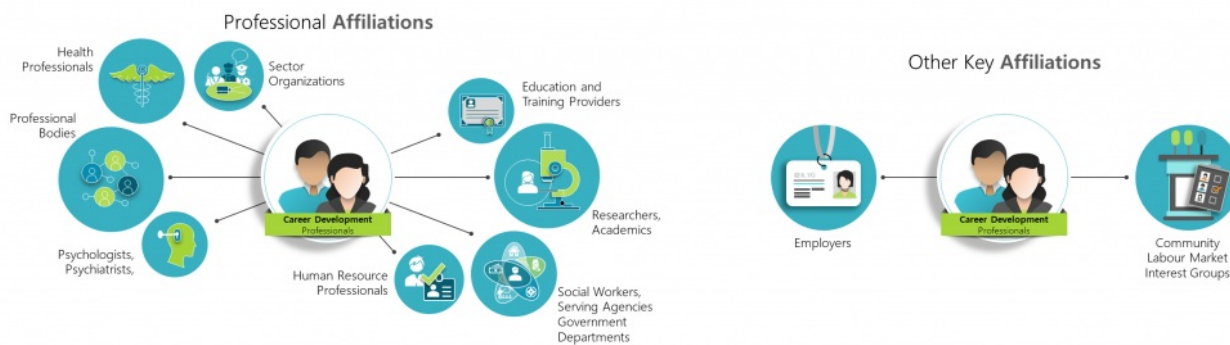
Others echoed the sentiment that the complexity of their clients' needs is increasing, and they are seeing more vulnerable and multi-barriered individuals. As a result, competency elements such as referrals to professional services and tailored services for specific target



populations are included in this section. This section places a strong emphasis on commitment to cultural competence and embracing diversity.

**CDP Advanced** are common competencies for specialized services that usually apply to highly experienced CDPs. Competencies in this area tend to reflect emergent practice. For example, CDPs told us that they are increasingly using technology to deliver services. CDPs also told us that, in some specialized roles, they are expected to have expertise in working with assessment and evaluation instruments and procedures.

**Outreach and Leadership** aims to capture competencies that CDPs require to be effective in working with the community. CDPs told us that in addition to working one on one with individual clients, they are playing a central, co-ordinating role with community organizations and employers. Increasingly, CDPs are leveraging their professional affiliations, helping clients navigate a complex maze of community services to access appropriate support, and also acting in a co-ordination role among organizations, with the client as the focus. For instance, one focus group participant described their need for labour market knowledge and a network of job-shadowing opportunities to support a client.



The Framework builds on the *Standards & Guidelines*, with a focus on benchmarking the profession against accepted standards of practice from around the world. It is forward-looking, containing skills that CDPs require to be responsive to new and emergent skills demands.

### The currency of competencies

The Framework will serve several individuals and groups. Individual CDPs can use it to guide career decisions or for personal and professional development planning. It can help them assess what skills they possess and may still need to acquire. By enabling program articulation, credit transfer and prior learning recognition, the Framework can also act as a *currency* of competencies used by programs where comparisons of type and level are possible. Institutions can use the framework to manage human resource systems and organizational change, to inform curriculum and workforce planning, and to guide policy on improved learner and worker mobility systems.

Over the next 16 months, the Canadian Career Development Foundation (CCDF), the

Canadian Council for Career Development (3CD), provincial and territorial partners, the network of existing certifying bodies and others will work together to create a new Pan-Canadian Voluntary Certification Program for Career Development Professionals. Validation of the Framework will take place between January and March 2020. The multi-phased process will involve broad stakeholder review, and formal ratification and endorsement by the project's National Stakeholder Committee. Ultimately, the designation evolving from this professional certification will be recognized as the pre-eminent credential of CDPs across Canada and their essential role in promoting positive health, social and economic outcomes of individuals, institutions and communities.

*Kathy McDonald, Project Director with CCDF, has worked in key educational leadership roles at the school, school board and ministry levels. She is honoured to collaborate with career development stakeholders across Canada to lead the Supporting Canadians to Navigate Learning and Work project.*

*Philip Mondor is President and CEO of Tourism HR Canada and Emerit Consulting. He has dedicated his career to labour market projects and specializes in competency-based models for both regulated and non-regulated professions. His work spans over 15 industrial sectors and in 11 countries, having worked with foreign governments, pan-global organizations, industry associations, corporations, and various education and training bodies.*