



IMII Workforce Development Challenge Program

New Pathways for Youth

Saskatchewan is the world's largest producer of potash and second largest of uranium. Our province is home to more than a dozen world-class potash and uranium operations, and several others are under development and planned. These operations employ several thousand people from across our province in high paying and rewarding occupations, and more opportunities will be created with every new operation.

However, like many sectors in Saskatchewan, the minerals industry faces significant challenges in finding the skilled workforce needed to sustain and expand its operations.

To address this, IMII has worked closely with its industry members to better understand these workforce gaps and explore potential solutions. This collaboration has led to a shift in focus toward workforce development, with two key priorities identified:

- Creating new pathways to engage young people outside of the traditional school system in post-secondary education and careers in the minerals industry.
- Developing pathways to help youth complete post-secondary education and fill high-demand occupations in the sector.

IMII believes attracting the next generation of mining talent requires a multifaceted approach that emphasizes innovation, sustainability, and inclusivity. IMII also believes that by investing in innovative education and training programs to create new pathways for young people to join the minerals industry is a key approach.

IMII is seeking proposals and projects that aim to create innovative, flexible programs to meet these needs in the following areas:

FlexPath: Non-Linear Pathways to Industry Careers

IMII seeking proposals

IMII believes that Saskatchewan's minerals industry offers fulfilling career opportunities along with competitive remuneration, exciting opportunities for global travel, and companies committed to health and safety at work. IMII's minerals member companies also support learning at work, gender equality and social responsibility.

Notwithstanding, young people are not entering the minerals industry or related post-secondary programs in sufficient numbers. One reason, IMII believes, is that the traditional linear education model—moving from kindergarten to grade 12, then directly into higher education or the workforce—does not always reflect the reality for many young people. Some may not finish high school in four years or may not immediately pursue further education or a trade. As a result, many young people are left without clear pathways to meaningful careers.

IMII is therefore interested in creating new, flexible pathways for young people who find themselves outside of school and without a career, to consider joining the minerals industry.



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FlexPath (a working title) is one example of a new pathway. The objective is to create non-linear pathways for both entry into and retraining/upskilling while in the minerals industry for young people outside of the high school system. As conceived, FlexPath is to feature:

- Strong connectivity to the minerals industry as represented by two or more of IMII's minerals company members.
- Flexibility in training and education, with options like night classes or industry-sponsored skill upgrades.
- Focus on competencies rather than traditional academic credentials, allowing youth to gain practical experience and certifications tailored to the minerals sector.

An example of how FlexPath could be developed and delivered follows:

- Youth are introduced to the industry through targeted outreach activities, such as engaging presentations and mentoring from industry professionals.
- Mentees work with employees in entry-level positions to explore career progression and upskilling opportunities.
- Post-secondary institutions partner with minerals companies to offer flexible training programs that fit the needs of youth seeking skills without committing to long-term academic programs.
- Minerals companies and accreditation bodies collaborate on creating pathways that are focused on competencies rather than credentials.

Proposals must offer new ways to engage and support both minerals' companies and post-secondary institutions in delivering such a program. Outcomes must demonstrate how young people who are "outside" of school and the industry can be brought into academic programs leading to employment in the minerals industry or directly into employment in the industry.

Pre-Pre-Employment Training for Mining

IMII seeking proposals

Feedback from IMII's membership (industry and post-secondary institutions alike) suggests that current pre-employment programs may fail to provide a realistic sense of what working in the minerals industry is like. This is especially true for remote or rural areas, where young people may not have direct exposure to industry. A *pre-pre-employment* program would give participants hands-on experience, allowing them to build confidence and enthusiasm for a career in mining.

Key features of the program:

- Provide an immersive, site-based experience that mirrors real work conditions.
- Introduce participants to the industry's shift-based mindset and working environment.
- Combine training with a wage subsidy and strong support, including on-site instructors and field liaison staff.



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The goal is to give youth exposure to the industry before they commit to formal pre-employment programs, enhancing the likelihood of success and making future training more purposeful.

AI Supported Remote Learning

IMII seeking proposals

IMII's minerals company members have offices located in Saskatchewan's two major cities - Saskatoon and Regina, and the surrounding areas are home to many minerals industry workers. Their operations, however, are in rural or northern Saskatchewan, and residents in rural, remote, and reserve communities often face challenges in accessing relevant training. IMII believes there is an opportunity to use innovative technologies like artificial intelligence (AI) to bring training directly to young people in these communities.

Proposals could include:

- Leveraging AI, mixed reality, and 3D models to provide hands-on, interactive learning experiences where young people live.
- Delivering educational content to rural or remote communities through mobile-friendly platforms.
- Creating community hubs where training can be accessed collaboratively, addressing housing and logistical challenges.

By using these technologies, IMII aims to make minerals industry training more accessible to youth in communities underserved by "brick and mortar" schools, without requiring relocation to larger cities.

Digitally Transformed Apprenticeships

IMII seeking proposals

The rapidly changing landscape of the minerals industry presents an opportunity to reimagine traditional apprenticeship models. IMII is exploring the potential for a digitally transformed apprenticeship program that uses augmented reality (AR), AI, and flexible learning structures to better meet industry needs.

Proposals should explore:

- The use of AR and AI for hands-on training and skill development.
- Competency-based certifications rather than time-based requirements.
- Hybrid learning models that combine online education with in-person experiences, allowing for accelerated learning and certification.

These digitally enhanced apprenticeships would align with high-demand occupations and help fill critical skills gaps in the industry.

Proposals in this area could also be aligned with one of industry's high needs occupations. An example of a program IMII is working to pilot can be found under New Pathways into High Needs Occupations. Further information on high needs occupations can be found in a 2024 publication of the Saskatchewan Mining Association ([SK Mining Labour Market Analysis final resized for email.pdf](#)).



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Other Opportunities for Young People

IMII seeking proposals

IMII has identified several other ways to engage youth outside of the traditional school system and guide them toward successful careers in the minerals industry:

- **Connected Summer Programs:** Short-term, “stackable” summer programs that allow youth to earn a “sponsored seat” in post-secondary programs.
- **Apprenticeship Pathways:** New initiatives to attract underrepresented youth into mining-related apprenticeships, including diploma and degree apprenticeships.
- **Powerful Post-Secondary Stories:** Using media and community outreach to share inspiring stories from the minerals industry, encouraging youth to pursue careers in mining.

These initiatives are designed to create more pathways for youth to enter and succeed in the minerals industry, helping to build a diverse, skilled workforce for the future. IMII is open to proposals in these areas too, particularly those which speak to some of the other opportunities to attract young people into the mining and minerals industry.