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# Youth Perspectives on Green Job Resources and Career Gaps

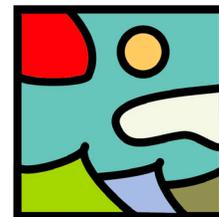
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## Introduction

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### Statement of Problem

Despite the increasing support from the government, non-profit organizations, and companies, underrepresented individuals face difficulty securing employment in the environmental sector due to many systematic barriers.

Furthermore, the lack of green career tools to guide interested youth to secure employment makes the job search more difficult and time-consuming, leading to more difficulties in defining their career path post-graduation.

### Objectives

Our objective is to use this research and the data collected in these focus group sessions to provide recommendations for how governments, employers, and non-profit organizations can expand opportunities and resources for underserved communities looking for environmental employment. Moreover, this policy brief addresses systematic exclusion practices that have been in place to discriminate against BIPOC, youth, and newcomers.

This policy brief also provides information on which type of green career tools are beneficial and what form is the most accessible to all communities wishing to pursue green careers.

### Methodology

The career development team and five intrapreneurs from the Venture for Canada Intrapreneurship Program hosted three focus group sessions with eleven participants to gain insight into the perspectives of young people on green job resources and career gaps (See **Appendix 1** to see questions asked). When selecting participants to join the focus group sessions, we identified demographic groups with higher unemployment rates and rates of discrimination such as BIPOC, the LGBTQ2S+ community, youth, and newcomers.

All sessions were held remotely in English and were approximately one hour in length. Each participant was compensated with an honorarium of \$25 for their time which was funded through our grant from the Youth Harbour. Participants were asked to attend only one session to be inclusive to other potential participants and to gather diverse data. A pseudonym was used for participants who requested that their full names not be disclosed.



All the focus group sessions were recorded using Zoom with the permission of the participants to summarize data findings and participant quotes to be used in this policy brief.

## **Positionality**

The Green Career Centre is a non-profit organization that employs interns and employees of various backgrounds. We are proud of our approach to sustainability with intersectionality embedded in our work, as coined by scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw. We want to create helpful resources that can reduce barriers to employment. These sessions help provide feedback for us to improve our current tools to help underrepresented communities.

Many members of our organization have experienced or know people who have faced difficulties securing employment in the environmental sector. Our team understands that the disproportionate burden of eco-anxiety and environmental degradation is placed on underrepresented communities, especially BIPOC and newcomer communities. This burden cannot be adequately addressed unless more resources and opportunities are provided to BIPOC and newcomer communities. These underrepresented communities should be able to get involved without the worry of unstable or unfair employment practices so that they can take action to address the climate crisis.

We want to learn more about the barriers these communities face and how we can assist underrepresented communities in finding environmental employment, leading to the formation of this policy brief.

## **Participant Eligibility Criteria**

Qualifications that are needed to join the study include:

- To be between 18-30 years old (inclusive)
- To identify with one of the following underrepresented groups (i.e. Black, Indigenous, visible minority, international student/visitor, francophone, LGBTQ2S+, refugee, newcomer, or people with physical and mental health-related disabilities)
- To be seeking environmental employment over the past 12 months
- To reside in what is currently Canada

## Limitations

It should be noted that the demographics of the focus group participants may not fully represent the demographics of job seekers looking for environmental employment or represent job seekers from all provinces and territories as we did not collect information on the participants geography. The full demographics of participants can be viewed in **Figure 1.0**.

We also acknowledge that some participants of underserved groups that would have benefited from joining were unable to join or sign up for the focus groups due to internet connectivity issues and lack of access to digital technology.

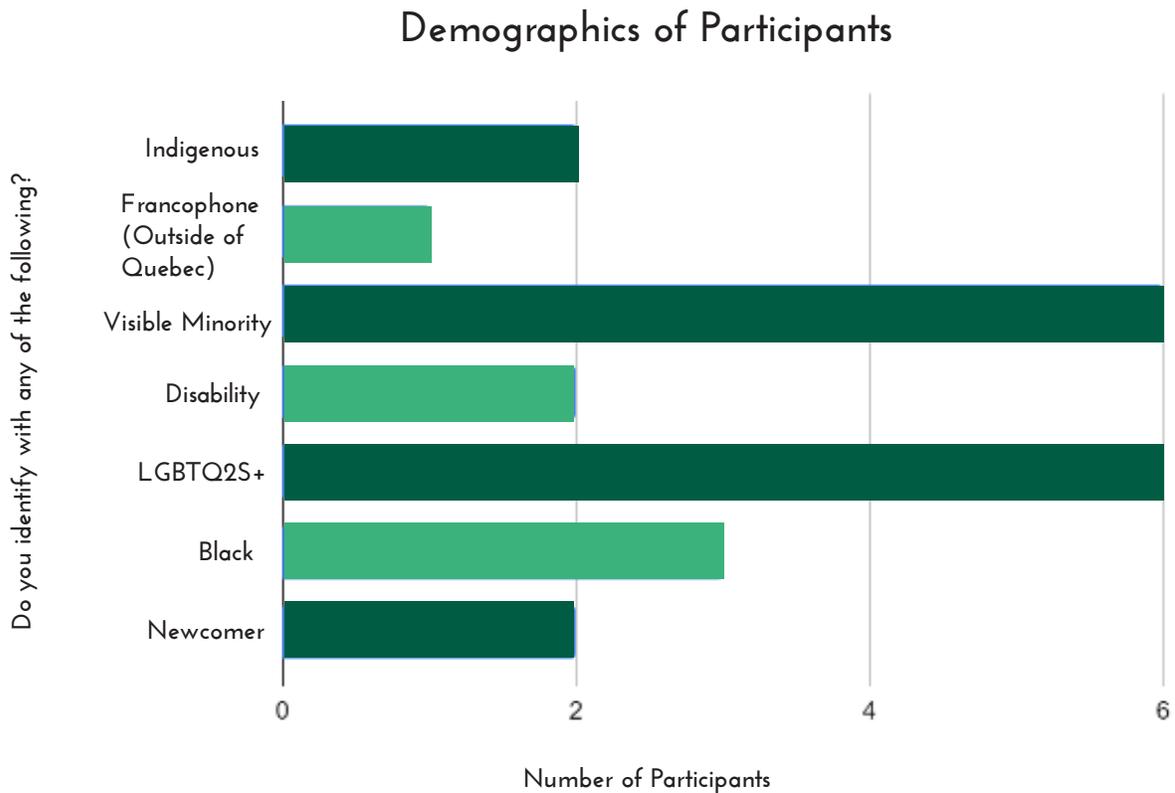


Figure 1.0.



## Key Concerns

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### Systematic Barriers

- Many underrepresented communities feel that they must change how their identity is presented to appear more attractive to employers. For instance, many people of colour often change their names to make them more Eurocentric-sounding or avoid submitting video applications due to concerns about racial bias.

*"I resist from making video resumes because the employer [would be] getting hooked on my accent, name, and heritage." - Christina Mariyato*

- As a result, many people of colour have considered diversity, equity, and inclusion statements when finding environmental employment.
- BIPOC individuals are concerned about racism and discrimination in rural areas, resulting in BIPOC individuals refraining from applying to jobs in those areas.
- Participants felt that it was more challenging to get a green job than other types of jobs. Many jobs require prior work experience. Even when hired, it would usually be a temporary, contractual position that would not provide benefits.
- Moreover, defining what constitutes a green job is not straightforward. Some participants found that certain jobs (e.g. research, environmental monitoring, and field tech positions) are often not included in the definition of what a green job is

*"People define green jobs very differently. I think sometimes, certain types of jobs get left out of the conversation depending on how green jobs are being defined. Jobs like environmental monitoring or restoration or standard environmental field tech jobs or research jobs that aren't geared towards environmental business or policy or environmental management. They're just field tech jobs." - Cecilia Johnson*

### Frustration with Traditional Job Searching

- The traditional job-searching process has been counterproductive for many job seekers looking for environmental employment, especially for disadvantaged communities. Some of our participants found the job-searching process to be inefficient.



*"If you're using LinkedIn solely as a job searching tool, I don't think it works. I don't think it functions very well as a job searching tool." - Cecilia Johnson*

- Participants admit to being ignored or receive no update on their application from recruiters, which is frustrating especially when job applicants have to submit their applications online countless times.
- Focus group participants have attributed most of their success in finding environmental employment to networking compared to employment websites such as Indeed and LinkedIn.

*"I think networking is the most efficient way to get work in the green industry. I got my current job through networking and not applying online." - Anaya Tuolene*

- Oftentimes, employers will require extensive experience and skills for a position with subpar wages and even no benefits. These barriers hurt underrepresented communities and discourage them from applying for such positions.

*"The one thing that jumps out to me with LinkedIn is that the pay doesn't add up to the experience they're asking for. They're asking for two years of experience in an internship, and then they're also only paying you \$16 an hour, which is not a livable wage anywhere in [Ontario]." - Jennifer Kaiska*

### **Pressure on Having an Online Presence**

- Underrepresented communities feel uncomfortable having to market themselves on social media platforms such as LinkedIn, especially when the platform has received criticism for its toxic positivity and competition of success stories. Moreover, the platform has low success rates for young job seekers.

*"I think something that maybe turns me a little bit off from LinkedIn is scrolling through and then constantly reading about success stories from people I barely know or haven't connected with. I feel very detached from a lot of the experiences that I scroll through, or I see on my feed." - Cecilia Johnson*



## **The Resources Needed for Securing Green Employment**

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Over the past few months, the Green Career Centre has developed career and professional development resources to assist job seekers looking for work in the environmental sector. While our resources have received positive feedback from the focus group participants, we acknowledge that more resources are needed to assist underrepresented communities in finding work in the environmental



sector. This section will give an overview of the resources presented during the focus group sessions and how the resources benefit job seekers looking for green careers.

## **LinkedIn Maximization Guide**

The Green Career Centre recognizes LinkedIn as a valuable resource for job seekers for networking and career opportunities. Hence why our team created a comprehensive resource for youth and underrepresented communities to maximize the presence of their LinkedIn profile. The resource provides the best resources for networking, searching for jobs, and updating one's LinkedIn profile with resume accomplishments, keyword-relevant headlines, and detailed yet concise summaries of one's current position and career goals.

Some participants have mentioned that LinkedIn holds toxic positivity where success stories from dozens of professionals can make one feel unconfident or isolated. We want to emphasize LinkedIn's messaging and connections features where you are in control of who you wish to network with. By choosing reliable and reputable connections (which will be covered by this guide), LinkedIn users can curate their feed to avoid some of the toxic positivity and replace it with more useful or applicable content for them.

This straightforward and user-friendly guide benefits users by maximizing search engine optimization for better results on LinkedIn and Google, more connections in their network, and higher chances of finding relevant job opportunities through LinkedIn.

## **Green Equity Guide**

Since many job seekers face systematic barriers while looking for environmental employment, we developed an informational guide for employers to introduce more equitable recruitment, hiring, and employee retention practices that prioritize diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI).

From micro-credentials for upskilling to blind screening processes, the guide provides cost-effective strategies for implementing DEI policies in the recruitment and hiring process and workplace standards for underrepresented communities.



These policies will increase the number of employment opportunities for disadvantaged communities and allow employers to identify strong candidates previously overlooked due to outdated practices.

## Wage Subsidy Tool

One major obstacle job seekers face when searching for environmental employment is the lack of awareness about available work experience and internship programs. In response to those concerns, the Green Career Centre developed an employment resource tool that assists students with finding work relevant to characteristics such as their career interests, citizenship status, location, and educational background.

This tool will help underserved youth to find employment relevant to their career paths, develop in-demand skills, and provide more opportunities for disadvantaged youth to fund their internships and full time roles. The tool is an added incentive for employers to recognize that there is funding out there to hire youth from underrepresented communities



## The Feedback For Green Resources

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### Perception of the Wage Subsidy Tool

- The Wage Subsidy Tool was found to be helpful by participants and a resource they would use. The tool was efficient and easy to understand. One participant mentioned that centralized information in one place is great because it helps users to learn about the wide variety of opportunities nationwide..

*"One of the important things to mention is that the job doesn't need to [already] exist sometimes. You can go to an employer and say, 'here's what I can offer you, and here's the funding that exists.'" - Jennifer Kaiska*

- The ability to toggle categories on the tool's website was considered beneficial for job searching.
- The wage subsidy tool was specifically mentioned as being similar to how some of the participants save their job searches, as well as being in a similar format to a similar tool on the federal government's website, therefore making it user-friendly.
- The website design, the layout and organization of the information displayed were positive. Participants like the simple, clean, and straightforward appearance where it was easy to navigate.



## Accessibility Preferences of Green Resources

- Participants agreed that the PDF is a useful format for accessing these resources. The reasoning behind this opinion was that PDFs can be easily shared with others and are also accessible to individuals offline.
- Many participants would also like to see a website version of the guides.
- Overall, having both the PDF version and a website version would be useful.
- However, some participants agreed that it was too troublesome to submit their name and contact information to access green career tools.

## Green Career Resources Can Help Reduce Barriers

- Overall, the wage subsidy tool in its beta phase helps reduce barriers to finding openings for green job opportunities.
- However, this tool has only been tested by a select few focus group participants and interested LinkedIn group members. Therefore, though the tool has been reviewed well, whether or not it will be helpful on a systemic level is yet to be known.
- The LinkedIn Maximization Guide received ambivalent reception. One group of participants felt that LinkedIn itself did not benefit them in any way in the first place, so it was hard to find much use for the guide.

*"...constantly reading success stories from people I barely know, I just feel very detached from a lot of the experiences I see on my feed. I don't feel like I'm benefitting from spending that much on the website." - Cecilia Johnson*

- On the other hand, a different group of participants with different education and demographic backgrounds found the guide incredibly useful as they find LinkedIn complicated and overwhelming to get started on. The guide serves as a sufficient introduction to build their profile.
- **GCC Tip** -Please note that the demographic we referred to as having a relatable experience with our guide was primarily female-identifying BIPOC (Black Indigenous, People of Colour) with educational backgrounds in green economy-based studies. As mentioned earlier, the Green Career Centre will embark on conducting other sessions in addition to this one to refine our findings constantly. For more information please feel free to contact us at [info@greencareer.ca](mailto:info@greencareer.ca)
- All in all, the online platform LinkedIn, according to our initial focus group, has been perceived by most participants as a barrier in itself. This 'barrier' issue stems from the fact that the participants view the platform as a highlight reel of accomplishments from unrelatable networks. Our focus group has shown thus far that specific users have experienced apathy using



the platform, which has unfortunately stifled their ability to maximize any potential benefits the platform offers. Perhaps more work needs to be done from a UX or overall user perspective to tap into this market that feels unheard



## Recommendations

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### Mentorship Programs & Job-Shadowing

- Some focus group participants recommended that organizations develop more mentorship programs since they help job seekers connect with professionals and advance the professional development of youth.
- Another participant also recommended job shadowing based on their personal experience in the professional world.

*"I did a 2-day workplace shadow once, and the first time it was really good in terms of that they let me do the work as well, such as confidential or high-level tasks. They did show me the bridge between where I was and the work that they do." - Christina Mariyato*

### Career/Job Fairs and Workshops

- Some focus group participants recommended that career and job fairs be offered more often for networking opportunities.

*"I think an online job fair would be so cool. And it gives you that networking ability as well instead of just something on your resume." - Anaya Johnson*

- A workshop to help individuals to start and polish their LinkedIn profiles was also suggested.

### Social Media Networks For Resource Sharing

- Social media can be used to share a diverse range of information, including job opportunities. Focus group participants suggested creating and expanding social media communities that allow users access to resources and job opportunities to help job seekers advance in their career paths.
- These online communities allow disadvantaged youth to find opportunities that they would not have otherwise.

*"I like stuff like LinkedIn, if there [are] blasts (posts) from different green organizations of different jobs that are up, that are current. I've found that some organizations will do that weekly, and that can kind of be great too." - Chantel Jai*



## Additional Work Experience Programs

- Additional funding for experiential programs seems to be a priority for participants. Wage subsidies and government-funded programs are essential for providing more high-quality, paid opportunities.
- Participants also suggested having partnerships between private and public organizations and outcome-oriented training programs (i.e. guaranteed position at the end).

*"I think the government's wage subsidy programs are hugely important. And especially because I think that most organizations are used to bringing people in as volunteers, and not everyone can afford to volunteer for 30 hours a week. I think those wage subsidy programs are essential." - Jennifer Kaiska*



## The Future of Green Resources

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For the climate crisis to be effectively addressed, governments, non-profit organizations, and companies need to provide more resources and opportunities to support underserved communities that are often overlooked when finding environmental employment.

While the Green Career Centre has created resources that participants find beneficial for their career and professional development, these resources have the potential to be implemented more broadly in terms of equitable hiring and recruitment practices, more awareness of available work experience programs, and strategies to optimize jobseekers' online profiles.

Many of these types of resources can also be implemented by all forms of organizations, such as NGOs, NPOs, and businesses, to help reduce barriers and be more inclusive of all communities.





## Appendix 1

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These are questions that were asked during the focus groups sessions. There were other questions asked to continue the conversation with the participants but are not included since they were part of the natural flow of the conversation. These focus group questions were divided into three sections:

### **Introduction**

1. What are ways in which you have tried to secure a green job over the last 12 months?
2. What resources/networks have you used in your green jobs search? Where do you think these resources/networks fall short? How have they supported you thus far?

### **Demonstration of Green Career Centre Resources**

3. Would you use the wage subsidy tool? Do you like how it's designed?
4. Are these guides (green equity guide and LinkedIn maximization) accessible to you? Do you like the .pdf format or would you prefer if it was on a website?
5. What types of resources would help you in your green job search?
6. Would resources like ours (Youth Green Jobs Network, wage subsidy tool, guides, etc.) help reduce those barriers?

### **Active and Ongoing Support (Green Career Centre x Underserved Youth Participants)**

7. What are the barriers that have stood in the way of getting a green job, if any?
8. What are some ways governments, corporations, foundations and nonprofits can help reduce those barriers?
9. How can we best support you in your green job search moving forward (after this focus group discussion)?
10. What does the future of green jobs look like to you and, what would your ideal role look like from a more personal and intersectional perspective?



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