



acifa

Alberta Colleges & Institutes Faculties Association

Submission to *Alberta 2030: Building Skills for Jobs*
October 2020



Executive Summary

This document represents the feedback of the Alberta Colleges and Institutes Faculty Associations (ACIFA) to the Government of Alberta's *Alberta 2030: Building Skills for Jobs* review currently being conducted by McKinsey and Company. We thank the Government for the opportunity to lend our insight into this process.

ACIFA knows that Alberta is at a turning point in its history, with generational challenges being faced on so many fronts. From steep declines in resource prices that have created harmful reverberations throughout the economy and the provincial treasury, to the once-in-a-century pandemic that is creating public health impacts and piling on to our province's economic concerns, there can be no doubt that Alberta is in a challenging position. ACIFA members know Albertans, though, and we know how tough they are. We've gone through tough times in this province before, and we'll make it through these times as well.

That's part of the reason ACIFA is optimistic about our province's future, and why we are champing at the bit to help relaunch our province's economy. As subject matter experts with the skills to prepare Albertans – both young people starting their careers and those looking for new opportunities – for the future, we look forward to working with government to achieve economic and employment growth, so that our families and communities can come through these challenges and return to prosperity as soon as possible. Alberta's Colleges and Technical Institutes will be vital to the future of our province's work force, and their faculty are well-positioned to help grow and diversify our economy into the future. Apropos of this review's title, ACIFA members are perhaps the most important link connecting Albertans with the skills they need for jobs, while creating opportunities for new industries and building on the strengths of our existing sectors.

ACIFA knows that these changes won't be painless, and that the government has a series of unpalatable options in front of it. If there is one theme that runs through this document, it's ACIFA's desire to see stability in our sector, and for government to take a long-term view of the promise of Alberta's post-secondaries. We believe that stability and smart, long-term investments will create environments that will improve our province's participation rate, amplify the quality of education that students and workers receive, and create the foundation for innovation and entrepreneurship that will fuel this province for generations to come. Beyond this, we wish to emphasize the enormous benefit that our diverse institutions provide to the people and communities of our province. With our province-wide network of institutions, we can provide regionally sensitive programming that bolsters strengths and provides opportunities for learning to sister institutions across the province. ACIFA believes that any move that involves the retraction of this network would be short-sighted, and not in the best interest of Albertans seeking to relaunch our province's economy.

Finally, ACIFA would be remiss if we did not single out the less tangible ways in which higher education improves our communities and the lives of Albertans. We know for a fact that post-secondary learning is highly correlated to a number of very positive outcomes that are more difficult to measure in the economic context, including better quality of life and job satisfaction, better health outcomes, increased community service and volunteerism, and many other indicators that suggest education improves the lives of families and communities. It is for these many reasons that improved access to higher education is part of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals.





ACIFA worries that substantial reductions to post-secondary education in our province not only threatens our economic future, but the quality of life in our communities more generally.

All told, faculty members at Alberta's Colleges and Institutes want to see our province, our communities, and our students succeed. This is our home, and we want to see it flourish and grow. We are in a unique position to help our province relaunch, and to build a brighter future for our neighbours and families. We look forward to working with the government to help bring that vision to fruition.





Table of Contents

Part I: Impressions of Alberta’s Post-Secondary System.....	4
Part II: Producing highly skilled and globally competitive graduates for the future.....	6
Part III: Creating a more cost-efficient system.....	9
Part IV: Strengthening post-secondary participation rates and accommodating growing enrolment.....	13
Part V: Commercialization of research.....	16
Part VI: System governance.....	18
Part VII: Post-secondary institutions’ role in a world-class research and innovation ecosystem.....	19



Part I: Impressions of Alberta's advanced education system

- A. What do you believe are the current strengths and weaknesses of the system?
- Currently, we have strong institutions, and a diversity of options for students.
 - Not only do we have a wide range of options – from world-class comprehensive research institutions to strong community colleges and polytechnics – we also have the strength of institutions with regionally-sensitive programming.
 - Tied to this is the current system's ability to accommodate rural and remote students while allowing them to stay near their home communities.
 - The quality of credentials coming from Alberta's PSIs is strong, and we have a well-developed workforce to show for it.
 - Alberta's Apprenticeship system is well respected around the world.
 - Alberta's credit transferability is robust, but could use further discussion to ensure it is meeting the needs of students.
- B. How do you think Alberta's advanced education system performs against its peers in Canada and abroad?
- While there is room for improvement, Alberta's system stacks up well.
 - In ACIFA's experience, we have heard from stakeholders in the economy (both domestically and internationally) that our graduates compare very favourably with those coming from other jurisdictions, and that they arrive ready-to-work and with a wide knowledge base that is the result of the well-rounded educations they receive in our province.
- C. What are some of the changes that Alberta's advanced education system needs in order to remain competitive nationally and globally in the next 5-10 years? (What should start/stop/continue?)
- The system, above all else, needs stability. Constant restructuring of funding agreements, and changes to the way that institutions are funded only serve to hamper long-term planning and resilience.
 - We need investment in operations, specifically investing in teaching staff. In ACIFA's opinion, base grants are too often used to contribute to administrative densification and are not invested in teaching and learning supports.
 - At times, due to onerous reporting requirements, this can contribute to increases in red tape that distracts from the system's core mandate.
 - Resources must be committed to the core mandate in PSE – education. Too often resources are drained away from the classroom to provide ancillary services and reporting.
 - Government needs to have a long-term vision for the sector that is not dependent on the whim of budget or election cycles. Post-secondary education will be vital to our province's relaunch, and our economic diversification moving forward, and as such, we need to make sure that this sector is on solid footing and can attract and retain talented instructors and students.
- D. Do you believe the business model for Alberta advanced education is changing, and if so, how and why?
- ACIFA knows this is a dynamic time for the public sector in our province, framed around precipitous drops in resource prices and a global recession made worse by our protracted battle with the coronavirus pandemic. All of these things create not only challenges and change, but an opportunity.
 - We believe that now is the time to invest heavily in institutions like polytechnics and colleges,



where meaningful applied research can lead to new industries and a diversified economy, and where young people can train to take advantages of those opportunities.

- The business model for Alberta’s institutions is changing – as it always has in our dynamic and entrepreneurial province - but we believe that any changes to the way we do things needs to be gradual, thoughtful, and done with an eye toward ensuring access and promoting economic and employment growth.
- These changes – driven by technology, COVID-impacts, and reductions in public funds – need to be harnessed correctly to provide the key advantages that our institutions offer: student-focused instruction, hands-on learning opportunities, and access to subject matter experts.





Part II: Producing highly skilled and globally competitive graduates for the future

- A. How well does the current system produce highly-skilled graduates for the jobs required by employers today?
- In our experience, Alberta's system is doing a fine job of producing graduates that are able to contribute meaningfully to not just the economy, but to our communities and province in other, less tangible ways.
 - In particular, our province's system is excelling at allowing Albertans to gain the skills they need in the communities in which they already live and work. This in turn provides both tangible and intangible benefits to communities large and small throughout the province.
 - ACIFA believes that young people, as well as Albertans desiring to change career paths, are well-served by our post-secondary system, but that there are improvements that could be made at both a system and institutional level.
 - Because faculty at Alberta's Colleges and Institutes have often worked in the relevant industries and maintain direct contacts those industries, the instruction that we provide maintains relevance and applicability to what employers expect.
 - In most, if not all, of our member institutions, there are robust feedback systems through which institutions and industry work together to fine tune programming to ensure that it is relevant and applicable to the needs of the marketplace.
 - We have industry-based advisory committees that provide feedback, and Institutions also hold routine program reviews develop appropriate adjustments based on the feedback.
- B. What steps should our post-secondary system be taking to ensure students are learning skills for the future?
- ACIFA represents a broad range of instructional staff here at Alberta's Colleges and Institutes, and we believe that each and every one of us contributes to ensuring that our students leave with the tools and resources to contribute to our economy and communities.
 - Currently, one of the strengths of the College environment that lends to students learning skills that they need, is that our faculty are subject matter experts with strong experience in industry, and with connections among current practitioners.
 - There are a number of ways our system should contribute to ensuring students are future-ready:
 - **Instilling an ethos of life-long learning, and providing opportunities to do so**, so that graduates know that while their credential may be completed there is always room to grow and opportunities to improve their skills.
 - **Ensuring that there are strong linkages between the institutions and the communities in which they are located.** This not only means that students are civic-minded citizens when they leave, but new doors open to career paths they may not have considered if they were isolated in academic settings.
 - **Providing paths for young faculty to make careers in Alberta.** There is an emerging trend toward precarious work for many of our younger faculty. We certainly know that older faculty provide a wealth of experience and knowledge that can be of great service to students, but young faculty bring fresh perspectives and new skills to the table, as well as current industry connections, that will help prepare students for the future. Institutions need to be supported in offering meaningful career paths for these young instructors so that students can benefit from their knowledge and experience.
 - Giving faculty and institutions the tools they need to **ensure that instructors and the equipment they need, are up to date** and present a reasonable facsimile of what students will encounter in the workplace.



- C. What role should industry and employers play in shaping educational programs at Alberta's post-secondary institutions (e.g., experiential learning)?
- ACIFA believes there is a wide role for experiential learning for students in our province. Some of our most innovative and successful programs have relied on close cooperation between industry and our institutions.
 - We do, however, wish to caution government that this is not a blanket endorsement. Under no circumstances should industry's input serve to limit the scope of what instructors feel they should impart to their students, or impose artificial boundaries on curriculum.
 - ACIFA believes that students benefit from interaction with potential employers, but that they also benefit from understanding other perspectives and ways of doing things that may depart from what certain employers (both public and private) would prescribe as a course of study. Further, this diversity provides mobility and flexibility in the workforce.
- D. What can be done to strengthen employment prospects for graduates?
- Alberta needs to embrace new and innovative technologies, not just by developing more of them here at home, but by quickly and expertly training our citizens to work in the industries created by innovation.
 - Alberta also needs to embrace its pre-existing strengths by encouraging innovation and cutting edge training in industries in which we already succeed: things like energy, agriculture, and tourism. Colleges are vital for these connections to employment in burgeoning and dynamic fields.
 - Take for instance Lethbridge College's wind turbine technician program, which is training energy workers for new industries while strengthening a regional advantage we already have.
 - Research at various levels of PSE in Alberta can serve to support our regional strengths but also to create new opportunities by developing new pathways and expertise in our local communities. We wish to caution that research and teaching funds should not be intermingled, and that if Colleges and Institutes are expected to do more applied research, there must be dedicated revenue streams for that work.
 - Advisory Councils composed of related industries, local employers, and students is a model that has worked to help ensure that students are emerging from our programs with skills, networks, and knowledge that is in demand.
- E. How can work-integrated learning (e.g. COOP placements) be used to better prepare students with the skills that employers need?
- The networking opportunities and introduction to work culture that students experience in work-placement settings are often vital for their career and personal development. There is also value in students learning to apply skills they may have learned in academic contexts to practical problems.
 - It is worth noting that this is not without challenges, however. Introducing students to meaningful work experiences, especially in smaller communities, and especially in instances where there might be challenges or disruptions in the local labour market.
 - There does, however, need to be measures in place to protect students. While most institutions already have measures in place, we wish to stress that these opportunities should not put students in positions where their safety, well-being, or mental health are at risk.
 - Further, we believe that students should not be used as an alternative to paid, permanent staff as that would prevent the normal functioning of the labour market.
 - Finally, given the realities of local economies and job markets, especially in our current context, there are also meaningful challenges finding meaningful work experiences for

- students, as opposed to menial tasks with little educational value.
- The Alberta Apprenticeship model demonstrates opportunity for work-integrated learning on a larger scale. The blended format of work and shorter term, more focused education has proven to be very successful in creating a responsive and flexible workforce while limiting student long term debt load.
- F. What are the roles of different institutions (e.g., colleges, research universities, technical colleges) in achieving this vision?
- In Alberta, we are fortunate to have excellent relationships among institutions, our communities and regions, and with important stakeholders in major industries. The development of those partnerships in a regionally-specific way is vital.
 - From our perspective, Colleges and polytechnics are key connective tissue between research universities, private industry, and other stakeholders. By sharing academic resources and instructional know-how with our partners at universities and leveraging that with existing relationships we have from our alumni base in industry, there is a tremendous amount of opportunity in Alberta's colleges.
 - Further, we would like to emphasize that Colleges are important pieces of the post-secondary system because we can take leading-edge research and help to translate it to common practice and economic spinoffs by integrating that work into the way we train students.
- G. What are the roles of other stakeholders (e.g., civil society organizations) in supporting this vision?
- PSIs have a very limited role in job creation but job creation is critical in most of the metrics being discussed. PSE has to respond and support but cannot be responsible to create the jobs.
 - ACIFA believes that Alberta needs to take an all-hands-on-deck approach to our economic recovery and approach to diversifying our employment sector.
 - For us, this means extending cooperative and hands-on learning beyond the for-profit private sector, and into the not-for-profit and non-governmental sectors. Civil society, we would like to emphasize, is also an employment sector in Alberta's economy.
 - For ACIFA, Alberta's economic relaunch has to be more than just economic growth as measured by GDP or other similar metrics. This relaunch needs to strengthen employment prospects across industries and across sectors so that Albertans – both those starting their education and those seeking new opportunities – have a wide range of options when considering how they want to contribute to their communities.
 - Further, civil society organizations should be consulted to find ways in which private philanthropy and other resources can be leveraged to promote and unlock broad-based participation and equitable access to our system. This should be in addition to public-sector efforts toward these goals.
 - Finally, it's important for ACIFA to note that we do not believe civil society, industry, or other third parties should be tasked with being primary educators of our work force, but that these sectors should be considered resources to broaden and diversify the independent, fulsome education received from public institutions.



Part III: Creating a more cost-efficient system

A. What would a cost-efficient system mean to you? Please define cost-efficient as part of your answer.

- Cost efficiency means a good value for dollar. Just like an individual making a major investment, ACIFA believes that we need to consider both the cost and reward sides of the ledger when making value judgements. The most cost-efficient system is not always the cheapest, and the best quality is not always the most expensive, but the inverse of each of these statements is almost never true.
- Given current strictures on government dollars, ACIFA understands that the solution coming from Edmonton likely won't be to make large-scale monetary investments in PSIs through generous block grants. We do think that current funding levels can be used more appropriately to get the results from our institutions that the government would like to see.
- We are in agreement – to a degree – that funds received by colleges and universities need to reach the classroom rather than being diverted into administration or other non-instructional areas.
- This is not to suggest that good work does not happen among administrators or other support staff, but that Alberta needs to be honest with ourselves: there has not been a meaningful investment in our PSI teaching capacity in quite some time, and that this needs to change if we are going to come out of this pandemic stronger than we were before.
- There are cost efficiencies to be realized by providing a stable reliable workforce in PSE. This will require PSE to attract suitable candidates from industry, including the private sector, and providing a reasonable reliable compensation package. This will not be achieved through the use of precarious workers in PSE. ACIFA believes that the ancillary costs related to hiring short-term, precarious faculty is higher than those associated with stable, long-term hires, especially when we take a holistic view of our resources.
 - According to the American Institutes for Research,¹ there is some emerging evidence that suggests overuse of sessional instructors can lead to poorer outcomes for students such as lower graduation rates and poorer overall retention of students, though this work is in its early stages and needs more verification.
 - More than student results, however, precarious employment at our institutions has a tremendous impact on the health, well-being, and economic opportunities of those who teach. According to recent research by the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT)², more than 40% of contract academic staff cite mental health concerns created by their employment with PSIs, with 87% of those respondents citing the precarity of their position as the main contributor to those mental health concerns.
- ACIFA would like to emphasize that any efforts to decrease costs balance the need to preserve the quality of instruction. In the past, efforts to reduce expenditures at our institutions have had the impact of increasing workloads for instructors, which has the impact of decreasing available time for course improvement and relationship-building with students which are two key advantages of a college environment.
- Finally, there is a need to consider that PSIs, while needing to be efficient, are also important economic drivers for communities in and of themselves. Sizeable reductions to these

¹ Desrochers, Donna M and Kirshtein, Rita. 2014. "Labor Intensive or Labor Expensive? Changing Staffing and Compensation Patterns in Higher Education." *Delta Cost Project for the American Institutes for Research*. Accessed online.

² Foster, Karen and Birdsell Bauer, Louise. 2018. *Out of the Shadows: Experiences Of Contract Academic Staff*. Accessed online.





institutions would not just impact those workers, students, and faculty, but our communities at large – especially in some of the smaller communities that are home to our province’s colleges. Businesses that count on students, contracts with the PSIs, or the economic spinoffs of large employers will be hurt, which will further impact employment and prosperity, especially in our smaller communities.

B. What are the opportunities for the system to increase revenues?

- ACIFA believes that there needs to be a balance between accessibility and investment by students in their own education. We also need to ensure that students aren’t merely “paying their way in,” and that our system is empowering Albertans who would otherwise be at a disadvantage. We strongly suggest that any further increases to tuition fees be considered in light of the economic position in which many prospective students find themselves.
- Though there are a few ways in which institutions can increase revenues, ACIFA strongly believes that PSE should not be a revenue-generating sector, and should be viewed instead as an investment in the future of our province.
- In any effort to generate revenue, PSIs have to be careful not to put ourselves in competition with the industries we serve, and in any effort that we do make the needs, safety, and well-being of students needs to be foregrounded.
- Further to this, any revenue-generating model that relies on the labour of students needs to be dealt with very carefully so as not to produce aberrations in the labour market that depress employment opportunities.

C. What are the opportunities for the system to decrease costs?

- After years of reductions, or holding in the line in the face of growing student populations and inflations we believe our institutions would not be well-served by decreases to funding envelopes.
- While we don’t believe there are obvious ways for institutions to decrease costs, we do suggest that there are opportunities for revenues to be reallocated internally in order to better deliver on the system’s mission and the Government’s priorities.
- For instance, ACIFA believes that more dollars need to be directed to the actual teaching, learning, and researching activities of the system, in opposition to current trends that have seen administration grow significantly and continuously.
- We have for many years noted the densification of administration at our institutions, and believe that our Campus Alberta grants need to find their way into the classroom.
- This doesn’t mean government should provide fewer dollars to our institutions, just that those dollars need to be spent in the classroom rather than the board room.
- ACIFA would also like to note that over the last several years, our institutions have been asked to do more, and provide an increasing array of services to students and our community, all inside of their limited budgets. For instance, mental health services have been placed in our institutions. While ACIFA agrees that mental health supports should be available to students and faculty, we believe that the best delivery for these services would likely be within the context of Alberta’s public health system – which would provide not only cost savings to institutions, but may also offer the advantages of economies of scale when providing these services to Albertans.



- D. What are the opportunities to remove red tape for post-secondary institutions, students and researchers?
- ACIFA would suggest that further efforts to track performance and pursue targets would be counterproductive to the Government's stated goal of reducing red tape in our institutions.
 - There is a general sense among our membership that these sorts of changes would actually serve to divert more resources out of the classroom and into administration as institutions worked to prove they deserved the full funding allotted under performance targets.
- E. How should system performance be measured or tracked? (e.g., enrolment, participation, graduation rates, research impact, employment outcomes?)
- This is incredibly difficult to answer, as we look to post-secondary to do so much for our students and communities. Of course, we want our students to succeed in the workforce, but so many of us believe that we haven't succeeded if our students don't become informed citizens and plugged-in members of our community. These are less tangible and harder to measure.
 - There may be some merit to monitoring various indicators, but we believe strongly that these indicators should not be used to withdraw funding from institutions. Inevitably, this will lead to a vicious circle whereby institutions won't do well (sometimes by no fault of their own), and will have their funding cut, and as a result will struggle to succeed due to those funding cuts.
 - Further, there are concerns around the validity and accuracy of data used for these measures. Basing decisions on funding on data taken in previous years, or may be based on subjective measures will compromise government's ability to incent the changes it wishes to see in the system.
 - ACIFA suggests that any measures that are developed are highly legible, simple, and can be contained in an easy-to-access and highly transparent dashboard. These measures should be based around items that are within the institution's control and that actually portray the degree to which institutions are properly directing public dollars into the mandate to teach – items like ratio of faculty to students, number of FTE faculty with direct teaching responsibilities, etc.
- F. As many jurisdictions grapple with funding for outcomes, what should be considered? What should be the link between education funding and performance?
- As ACIFA has written in previous submissions to government,³ there is a wide swath of literature across various contexts that suggests outcome-based funding do not provide the intended results, and often create “winning” institutions and “losing” institutions, with students at the latter being punished through no fault of their own.
 - As such, ACIFA would suggest that if the government wishes to move forward with conditional funding programs, these indicators need to be carefully considered and divorced from educational outcomes.
 - We suggest that any indicators aim toward simplicity, legibility, and that they be easily identifiable and within the institution's control (for example, ratios faculty v. other staff).
 - ACIFA would emphasize the importance of considering regional and local diversity in this regard, especially the economic, demographic, and student body differences between institutions. We certainly believe that the performance metrics and links with funding need

³ Alberta Colleges and Institutes Faculty Associations. 2017. *ACIFA's submission on the funding model review*. Accessed Online.



to consider that some institutions will succeed easily at some things, while struggling in others through no fault of their own.

- There are complexities that should not be ignored in this process that may seem at first glance to be performance failures, but actually make specific institutions vital threads in the fabric of our system.
- Institutions with high proportions of their student base being rural or indigenous, for instance, may not always have high enrolments, but they are necessary for creating favourable conditions for the participation of under-represented groups.
- We cannot allow a system to exist whereby challenges are met by additional funding challenges. That will create huge access problems down the line.





Part IV: Strengthening post-secondary participation rates and accommodating growing enrolment

- A. Why do you think post-secondary participation in Alberta is lower than other provinces, despite lower tuition costs?
- The Conference Board of Canada⁴ suggests this likely has to do with historically strong economic realities, in which post-secondary wasn't necessary to obtain well-paying employment. Also, Alberta's net-migration trends over the last two decades have meant that a disproportionate number of new Albertans are bringing credentials with them from other provinces, rather than being educated here in the province.
 - As we see erosions in both of these trends, there is reason to believe that post-secondary enrollment will begin to progress toward the national average.
 - There is also a need for further integration between the K-12 system and the PSE system, where teachers, students, and institutions work to ensure that students are encouraged to pursue higher education, and feel comfortable in whatever educational context they arrive in after high school. ACIFA believes this will also help to bolster participation among rural and indigenous students.
- B. What are some of the unique needs that are faced by Indigenous students? Please outline strategies that could be used to increase post-secondary participation among this group.
- There are a number of challenges faced by indigenous students that ACIFA does not feel qualified to address in full, but we do think that geographic accessibility is important.
 - We wish to express that there are many issues related racism, colonialism and the legacy of residential schools that complicate post-secondary learning for indigenous students, but that the Government of Alberta should consult directly with First Nations and Metis stakeholders to better understand how to combat these issues and improve access for indigenous learners.
 - From ACIFA's perspective, allowing students to be near their communities and support systems by supporting institutions and programs close to their home communities, helps students feel more comfortable and increases opportunities for success.
 - ACIFA wishes to echo some of the observations made in the recently published report of the College's Economic Recovery Task Force⁵, including encouraging the provincial government to work with Indigenous leaders and the federal government, and to encourage the construction of broadband infrastructure in First Nations and Metis communities in our province.
- C. What are some of the unique needs that are faced by rural students? Please outline strategies that could be used to increase post-secondary participation among this group.
- Geography, cost, and support systems are huge parts of the equation for rural students.
 - First, students will likely have to travel long distances to access the programs they need. Again, ACIFA believes that having a wide variety of programming available at institutions around the province can help to lower this barrier and encourage participation.
 - Second, there are costs not related to tuition or other fees that need to be considered. In many cases, students will have to move from rural communities where the costs of essentials like housing are much less expensive than they are in the cities that host major institutions.

⁴ Kachulis, Eleni, and McKean, Matthew. *Building Skills Connections Series: Alberta in a Nutshell*. Ottawa: The Conference Board of Canada, 2018.

⁵ Alberta Colleges Economic Recovery Task Force. 2020. *Alberta Colleges Economic Recovery Task Force*. Accessed Online





Further, the wage disparity between what a student's family might earn in rural Alberta versus what a similar family would earn in our cities may make costs a bigger concern for students from outside our cities.

- Regional institutions serving unique needs of rural students are vital to encouraging these students to participate, as they also prepare students for industries that are preponderant in their region.
- Finally, students from smaller centres may feel more comfortable in smaller centres. A student from Didsbury, for instance, may be more comfortable in Olds or Red Deer than they would be Edmonton or Calgary.

D. How can technology and remote learning be leveraged to accommodate growing enrolment?

- While there are certainly opportunities for technology to be used for these purposes (and perhaps for post-diploma-or-degree micro-credentialling and corporate education purposes), ACIFA wishes to urge pragmatism on this question.
- We believe that especially in a college setting where many skills are hands-on or require one-on-one teaching there are limitations on the degree to which these tools can be employed.
- There needs to be due consideration given to learning styles, content, and accessibility (especially given internet connectivity issues in rural Alberta and in indigenous communities) before these tools are broadly rolled out.
- Since the introduction of online learning as a result of COVID, we have many students who have responded that they do not like the environment and feel that the social interaction and the connections formed are major benefits of a postsecondary education. Failure to recognize and respond to these concerns may drive more people away from PSE.

E. If you are or were a student at an Albertan post-secondary institution, what are some of the challenges you faced that affected your ability to participate, complete your credential and/or thrive in the transition to the workforce?

- N/A to ACIFA

F. What actions, aside from financial actions (e.g., access to loans, change tuition fees) could be taken to increase the post-secondary participation and completion rates?

- Though there is a lot of very good work being done in the K-12 system, we believe that further cooperation between systems and stakeholders to inform students of their options out of high school would help in this endeavor.
- Access to information and applications regarding post-secondary education should be widely available, accessible via mobile web and text-based support, and supported by GOA-led advertising campaigns. In this way, we can shift the question away from "do I want to go this college" toward "I need to go to a college, now I just need to find one that works for me." These information campaigns may also allow institutions to save money on their own advertising and communications budgets which are undoubtedly creating costly duplications among institutions.
- Government, the K-12 system, and PSIs should activate parents of high school students into the conversation, as research shows that parents are a key determining factor in decisions to attend post-secondary. Messaging here must be two-fold: first, reiterate to parents the importance of PSE to their children's future, and second, emphasize the advantages that Alberta's system offers.





- G. How well do K-12 and foundational learning supports prepare students to access post-secondary pathways and attach to the workforce?
- Proactive programming from institutions has helped with much of this, but there remains much work to be done.
 - Instructors have expressed a desire for improved literacy, numeracy, and communication skills from students leaving our K-12 systems, which may increase the chances of success once they arrive in our classrooms.



Part V: Commercialization of research

- A. From your experience how would you describe the current approach to research commercialization in Alberta?
- There is room to grow, but we are seeing promising advancements under the existing system. We fear that another revamp to our innovation system will set back projects and processes that are already on-going.
 - There has been a great deal of disruption in Alberta's innovation and economic development framework over the last decade. This lack of stability has caused issues with building durable, long-term partnerships and enabling large-scale investments into our innovation ecosystem.
 - Alberta, and Canada, have a long history of successfully commercializing research from our institutions to create economic prosperity. One has to look no further than our two major industries (agriculture and energy) to see the ways in which our PSIs (and those in other prairie provinces) have created jobs and contributed to our communities.
 - The federal government, through its introduction of partnership grants and strategies for tri-council awards has shown promise. We encourage the provincial government to work in cooperation with the federal government to ensure that barriers are removed as much as possible, and that provincial schemes work to leverage these new systems as much as possible.
- B. What are the strengths and limitations of the current approach to research commercialization in Alberta?
- ACIFA feels that there are emerging needs for smaller-scale, more practically applicable research capacity in the province. We support continued funding, where possible, of basic research at universities, but some of our member institutions are finding success in small, case-specific instances where subject matter experts at our colleges are able to provide expertise or equipment that supports private industry or partners in civil society.
 - Unfortunately, some of this capacity, and certainly the ability to grow it, is based on grants that may change from year to year based on budget cycles. ACIFA wishes to comment that Alberta's granting system is tightly tied together – and that Government needs to be careful that cuts in one area do not create unintended consequences that inhibit our capacity to grow applied research and innovation in our province.
 - For instance, some of the work being done at Lethbridge College is funded through Agriculture and Forestry, so those grants under the Canadian Agricultural Partnership (CAP) are as vital to innovation as anything given through the tri-council agencies or Alberta Innovates.
- C. What are the unique challenges that industry and post-secondary institutions face in creating partnerships?
- Stability is a major question preventing faculty and other staff from working on longer term contracts with the public, or with private industry. Whether its uncertainty related to employment at our institutions, or a lack of clarity on the future of granting programs, we feel this is majorly inhibiting the growth of research programs at our colleges.
 - Further, current Intellectual Property configurations at our colleges is a disincentive to taking risks in an unstable environment. If one loses a position at a College or Institute, there is a real chance that IP is left behind and faculty that helped to create it are left without any compensation for that innovation.
 - Further, at many Colleges, there is no compensation for research activities, as our core missions centre on classroom activities. If government would like to see more research

throughput at our colleges, there will have to be some compensation framework developed in partnership with faculty and institutions.

- Costing and assigning value for services rendered to private sector – it's important that industry is not subsidized by our institutions. Overhead that has been paid for by the public or through student dollars needs to be factored into to any contracts or relationships that are developed.
- D. What can the system do to deepen partnerships between industry and post-secondary institutions?
- Government, if it wishes to see higher participation from the private sector in these innovation activities needs to ensure that there is capacity in place, and that industry knows how to access it.
 - Currently, applied research personnel are highly engaged in conversations and granting applications, but capacity has to be built very much on an ad hoc basis in our colleges. Increasing faculty capacity for these types of activities – by hiring more subject matter experts, and allowing for current faculty to spend more time outside the classroom if they wish to engage in these activities is the key starting point.
- E. What else could strengthen research excellence and accelerate the translation of knowledge into advancements in Alberta?
- We can learn lessons from institutions in our province that are already beginning to show promise in applied research.
 - Developing centres of excellence in specific areas of applied research may create interdisciplinary opportunities and economies of scale. This may also help to build profile and attract funds from agencies and industries primarily located outside the province.
 - Creating, maintaining, and fostering networks of graduates that are engaged in and a part of these activities is crucial. This creates opportunities for entrepreneurship, and developing new technologies once our graduates are in the field.

Part VI: System governance

A. What are the strengths and challenges of the current governance model?

- ACIFA believes that Alberta's six sector model is working well, and would be reticent to see structural changes made to it. We believe that it offers a degree of diversity that encourages participation among students, teaching excellence, and research and innovation.
- Further, we believe that empowered Boards of Governors at each of our institutions are vital to ensuring that the diverse, regional needs of each institution is important and needs to be continued.
- Related to this, we believe that collective bargaining should continue to take place between individual faculty associations and the individual institutions in which their members teach. We strongly stress our desire to have regionally-sensitive, institutionally-driven bargaining and negotiating, and feel that a one-size-fits-all approach would be deleterious to teaching, learning, and research in our province, which would ultimately stunt our province's economic relaunch.
- At many of our institutions, we believe that most of our issues can be solved through discussion within our institution, and that the bulk of our challenges aren't governance related, but tend to do more with concerns around stability and budgeting.
- There are some concerns related to information that's getting to Boards of Governors, as they only receive information from senior executives. We hope that Boards take the opportunity to hear from faculty as much as possible.

B. What changes are required to further optimize governance of advanced education in Alberta?

- ACIFA believes that our system has come a long way, and that faculty has contributed hardily to ensuring that Alberta's PSIs are functioning as efficiently as possible, delivering excellent value for the taxpayer dollars we receive.
- At the end of the day, we believe that any changes made to the governance of Alberta's system needs to be focused on improving student experience. While some programming cooperation among institutions may help with this, we believe that Alberta, more than ever, needs more opportunities for education, not fewer.
- As a result, we would not support any changes that result in fewer course offerings or program reductions. Our province's educators are already hard at work laying the groundwork for our economic recovery – we need the government's support to bring that to fruition and program cuts would be counterproductive at this time.
- Reduce the reporting requirement to the extent that institutions can plan in advance and position themselves to perform.



Part VII: Post-secondary institutions' role in a world-class research and innovation ecosystem

- A. When we say research and innovation ecosystem, what comes to mind when thinking of your experience with Alberta's post-secondary institutions?
- ACIFA knows that research and innovation happens at each and every one of our institutions across the province – whether that is through innovating in the instructional space or growing our subject matter expertise. While most of us tend to think of our large universities when we consider innovation, it's important to note the growing applied research programs happening at some of our comprehensive community institutions.
- B. What are the strengths and challenges of Alberta's post-secondary institutions in the current innovation ecosystem?
- ACIFA believes that Alberta's colleges, if given the opportunity and resources can be important pieces in this puzzle, but that because of disinvestment many of these opportunities have gone unrealized.
 - Broadly, our system struggles from a garrison mentality, that institutions need to jealously guard their spaces and hunker down in order to survive the next round of cuts or instability.
 - This hampers our ability to grow programming and engage in what really needs to be done: finding ways to facilitate economic diversification through education, and where possible, by adapting leading-edge technologies to specific, local challenges to create opportunities.
- C. What should be the role of post-secondary institutions in the innovation ecosystem in Alberta?
- As mentioned above, Alberta's Colleges and Institutes are an incredible resource that has largely gone untapped due to system instability that has persisted over the last decade.
 - ACIFA believe that, due to our geographic and regional diversity, and our location in smaller hubs and communities, our institutions can serve as hubs for knowledge translation.
 - By working with industry, universities, our own subject matter experts, students, and alumni, we believe we can create economic opportunities by translating knowledge, applying it to local challenges in our key industries, and activate a new workforce with the skills to service and update these innovations for years to come.
- D. How can Alberta's post-secondary institutions broaden their participation in the innovation ecosystem?
- Alberta's innovators have always been most successful when they focus on areas in which we are already leaders. Though there is no doubt that we need to be engaged in the global conversation on technology, artificial intelligence and other cutting edge industries, we should focus on how we grow our advantage in things we're already good at: things like agriculture, forestry, energy (both renewable and non-renewable), and tourism.
 - By encouraging focus on key industries, we can create local networks more easily, and build innovation capacity.
 - To do this, ACIFA would like to reiterate that we need support of our institutions and our government to build out capacity and programming.





- E. What role should government play in fostering post-secondary institution participation in the ecosystem?
- Government should be there to support institutions and researchers, and to provide stability in the marketplace.
 - By narrowing institutions to their core mandates, and by endlessly pushing for efficiencies from our members, government is creating an environment in which applied research is increasingly a challenging proposition for the subject matter experts that ACIFA represents.

