

— REGIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Okanagan Skilled Trades Outlook

What public evidence can and cannot tell us about regional
demand, training and workforce conversion.

PUBLIC-EVIDENCE EDITION RESEARCH CUTOFF: 21 AUGUST 2026 5 FINDINGS / 19 PRIMARY SOURCES

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What is this Outlook trying to prevent?

This Outlook examines whether publicly available evidence makes the Okanagan skilled-trades system sufficiently legible to support defensible decisions.

It is not a general labour-shortage claim, a forecast commissioned by an industry participant, or a catalogue of construction announcements. Every finding exists to prevent a specific, avoidable misreading of a forecast, announcement or total that could cost a reader time, money or a decision made in good faith on outdated or incomplete evidence.

The report was developed independently and relies exclusively on publicly available evidence. No organization discussed in it commissioned, reviewed, approved or endorsed the findings before publication.

Core question: are regional construction demand, training capacity and apprenticeship conversion aligned by trade, geography and timing?

— BEFORE YOU DECIDE

This report is organized to be found before a decision, not read after one.

Enter a trade, or choose between trades

Read the worker/apprentice section and the trade-by-trade outlook before treating a provincial or Thompson-Okanagan forecast as a promise for your community.

Hire, expand a crew, or bid on work

Read the regional demand finding and the residential/non-residential divergence before assuming the trades move as one market.

Allocate training seats or funding

Read the conversion-layer finding before assuming more seats produces more certified regional workers.

Approve or plan a capital project

Read the municipal capital section before treating a project's dollar value as evidence the labour exists to deliver it.

Cite a labour-shortage figure

Read the verification note and the forecast-vintage table first. Two figures in public circulation during this research window had already been superseded.

How different readers should use what follows

This Outlook is organized so different readers can apply it to the decision in front of them. The table below identifies what to test before a decision, what this Outlook can help verify, and what remains outside its evidence. Every row still requires geography, period and trade to be checked before use.

READER	BEFORE MAKING THIS DECISION	USE THE OUTLOOK TO	WHAT IT STILL CANNOT ANSWER
Contractor or employer	Hiring, bidding or expanding capacity	Test whether broad workforce narratives describe the relevant trade, geography and period	Your actual recruitment, supervision, backlog or margin constraints
Project owner	Approving a project schedule or procurement plan	Identify possible trade-specific exposure and evidence requiring verification	Trade hours, contractor availability or peak work-package timing
College or training provider	Adding seats or changing programs	Compare training direction with trade-level workforce signals	Employer demand, seat utilization, instructor capacity or learner progression
Municipality	Interpreting capital plans as economic activity	Separate approved spending signals from labour-demand conclusions	Contractor awards, scheduling and local workforce requirements
Workforce organization	Designing an intervention	Identify where public evidence becomes weak across the apprenticeship pathway	Which mechanism is the actual regional constraint
Apprentice or worker	Choosing a trade or planning training	Compare trade-specific outlooks and understand geographic limits	Personal employment prospects or a guaranteed job outcome

Before acting on a skilled-trades number, verify five things:

1. Geography
2. Period and publication vintage
3. Trade and sector
4. What the measure actually represents
5. What evidence is still required for the decision

This Outlook also makes several avoidable exposures visible:

- Time can be wasted reconciling superseded sources.
- Funding or capacity plans can be built around announcements that are not yet operational.
- Project spending can be mistaken for immediate workforce demand.
- Provincial or Thompson-Okanagan evidence can be misapplied to the Okanagan specifically.
- A generalized shortage narrative can distort trade-specific planning.
- Training activity can be mistaken for successful apprenticeship conversion.

How to read this report

Each important statement is treated as one of four evidence classes:

FACT

Directly supported by a cited source, with geography and period preserved.

INTERPRETATION

A bounded conclusion drawn from identified facts.

FORWARD SIGNAL

A development that may strengthen, weaken or revise an interpretation.

UNKNOWN

Evidence is unavailable, insufficient or not comparable, not itself a negative finding.

Reading the numbers

The measures cited throughout this report are frequently conflated with one another in public discussion. This table is a reference: consult it whenever a figure needs interpretation.

MEASURE	WHAT IT CAPTURES	WHAT IT DOES NOT CAPTURE
Housing start	Beginning of residential construction	Total construction demand or trade-specific worker hours
Building permit value	Authorized project value	Active construction, labour intensity, or completion
Training seat	Funded or delivered training capacity	Unique apprentices, filled seats, or certifications
Apprenticeship registration	Entry into the registered system	Progression, completion, or continued employment
Credential awarded	An institutional output under the report's definition	A unique person, or Red Seal certification specifically
Capital plan value	Planned expenditure over a defined period	Worker hours, trade mix, or concurrent labour demand
Occupational outlook	A regional, multi-year composite of growth, replacement demand, conditions	Conditions at any single employer or community

Geography is part of the evidence

Okanagan is not a standard statistical geography. Sources variously report Kelowna, the Central Okanagan, North Okanagan, South Okanagan, Thompson–Okanagan and British Columbia. These areas are not interchangeable. A Thompson–Okanagan result includes communities outside the Okanagan Valley, including Kamloops, Golden and Revelstoke. Provincial evidence is used only as system context unless a source provides a defensible regional allocation.

Regional Demand

A market changing in composition, not one moving uniformly up or down: residential starts, permit values, provincial forecasts and municipal capital plans each tell a different piece of the story.

Housing starts, Central Okanagan	2024: 3,790 → 2025: 2,600 (-31%)
Building permit value	2024: \$1.14B → 2025: \$1.35B (+18%)
Kelowna 10-year capital plan	\$2.82B, 79% renewal & maintenance
RDNO 2026 capital budget	\$119.1M, up from \$62.1M in 2025

FINDING 01 • REGIONAL DEMAND

Is regional demand growing, or just changing shape?

Public evidence shows meaningful construction activity, but does not support a single directional claim that Okanagan construction demand is simply rising or falling. COEDC's most recent release, covering January through June 2026, shows housing starts and permit value both below their comparable 2025 levels, while permit value remains above the comparable 2024 level. This refines the timing of the finding. It does not establish a single directional claim about construction across the wider Okanagan or about trade-specific labour demand.

Central Okanagan housing starts declined from 3,790 units in 2024 to 2,600 in 2025, a reduction of approximately 31%. Over the same period, reported building-permit value increased from \$1.14 billion to \$1.35 billion, approximately 18%. **FACT**

Central Okanagan demand indicators, 2024 vs. 2025

MEASURE	2024	2025	CAN SIGNAL	CANNOT ESTABLISH
Housing starts	3,790	2,600	Residential projects entering construction	Total construction demand or trade-specific worker hours
Permit value	\$1.14B	\$1.35B	Authorized value, possible project-mix change	Active work, labour intensity or completion

INTERPRETATION The combined evidence supports a narrower reading: the composition and timing of construction activity changed in 2025. It does not establish that total worker demand increased, that employers experienced a shortage, or that higher permit values created proportionately more hours for any named trade.

Kelowna's current 2026–2035 capital plan contains \$2.82 billion in planned projects, approximately 79% allocated to maintaining and renewing existing assets, 21% to upgrades and new services. **FACT** Transportation represents 25% of the plan, parks 12%, buildings 11%, utilities 21% and the airport 11%. A reader citing Kelowna's previous \$2.57 billion plan after October 2025 would be referencing a plan the city has already replaced.

MATERIAL FINDING

Residential starts weakened while authorized construction value increased. Kelowna's capital plan is weighted toward renewal, and RDNO's 2026 capital program is materially larger than the prior year. Together these sources point toward shifting composition. Neither measure, on its own or together, establishes trade-specific labour demand, contractor backlog, project awards, worker hours or employer capacity. The available Central Okanagan evidence supports neither a simple construction boom or decline conclusion nor a universal skilled-trades shortage conclusion for the wider Okanagan.

What does the most recent 2026 evidence show?

Central Okanagan demand indicators, January–June cumulative, 2024–2026

PERIOD	HOUSING STARTS	PERMIT VALUE
Jan–Jun 2024	–	\$580,195,168
Jan–Jun 2025	1,814	\$660,475,595
Jan–Jun 2026	1,143	\$622,774,925

COEDC's quarterly indicator releases present construction activity cumulatively from the beginning of the year. Its Q3 2025 release explicitly describes January–to–September cumulative activity. BLCKTrades therefore treats the figures labelled Q2 2025 and Q2 2026 as January–to–June totals, not isolated April–to–June activity.

INTERPRETATION

Read against the complete 2024–2025 annual comparison, which showed housing starts declining while permit value increased, the January–June 2026 comparison shows both measures below their 2025 levels. Permit value nevertheless remains 7.3% above the comparable January–June 2024 total. The 2024–2025 divergence between starts and permit value should not be read as a trend that necessarily continued through 2026; the two comparisons use different base periods and cannot be chained into a single multi-year trend line.

INTERPRETATION

CORRECTION

This page was added 24 August 2026. COEDC's Economic Indicators Q2 2026 release was published 20 August 2026, one day before this Outlook's research cutoff, and was not incorporated into the first published edition. The new evidence updates the current Central Okanagan construction signal but does not overturn Finding 01.

Why did the projected labour deficit change so much?

Two independent provincial forecasting systems materially revised their forward views. A forecast should be cited with its vintage, horizon and assumptions, not treated as a permanent labour-market fact.

BuildForce Canada's BC outlook changed across three successive forecast vintages: a projected deficit of 17,700 workers by 2033 (April 2024), rising to 22,700 by 2034 (April 2025), then falling to 7,400 by 2035 (July 2026). FACT

BuildForce Canada BC outlook by forecast vintage

VINTAGE	RECRUITMENT NEED	RETIREMENTS	UNDER-30 ENTRANTS	PROJECTED GAP
2024–2033	54,000	43,200	36,300	17,700
2025–2034	60,100	43,800	37,400	22,700
2026–2035	48,200	46,700	40,800	7,400

Both the April 2025 and July 2026 figures were in active circulation during this report's research window. A hiring plan or funding pitch built on the older number in mid-2026 would be reasoning from a forecast BuildForce itself had already revised by two-thirds. WorkBC's 2025–2035 outlook similarly projects 1,052,000 job openings, roughly 70,000 fewer than its previous edition. FACT

FORWARD SIGNAL BuildForce's July 2026 outlook separates sectors for Thompson–Okanagan: residential employment down 11%, non-residential up 6% by 2035. UNKNOWN The public forecast does not establish how much of this belongs to any single Okanagan community. This is a gap in what is visible, not evidence of a problem.

MATERIAL FINDING

Two independent provincial forecasting systems materially revised their forward views. A forecast should be cited with its vintage, horizon and assumptions, not treated as a permanent labour-market fact.

Workforce Signals

Why pressure varies materially by trade, time period and measure. One regional shortage label would erase differences that matter to workers, employers and training decisions.

Industrial electricians

Good, 2025-2027

HRAC mechanics

Moderate, 2025-2027

Carpenters, sheet metal, heavy equipment

Limited, 2025-2027

Welders & related machine operators

Very limited, 2025-2027

FINDING 03 • WORKFORCE DIVERGENCE

Which trades actually face pressure right now?

No single shortage or opportunity label describes the region's trades. Federal outlooks for 2025–2027 range from Good to Very limited across occupations within the same Thompson–Okanagan geography.

Job Bank employment outlook by trade, Thompson–Okanagan, 2025–2027

TRADE	OUTLOOK RATING
Industrial electricians	Good
Heating, refrigeration & A/C mechanics	Moderate
Carpenters	Limited
Sheet metal workers	Limited
Heavy equipment operators	Limited
Welders & related machine operators	Very limited

FACT Carpenters are a caution case: Job Bank reports the occupation experienced a labour shortage in Thompson–Okanagan during 2023–2025, but assigns it a Limited outlook for 2025–2027. This is a warning against carrying yesterday's shortage language into a different market period.

INTERPRETATION WorkBC projects 1,120 carpenter openings and 430 welder openings in Thompson–Okanagan from 2025 to 2035, while Job Bank rates their nearer-term outlooks Limited and Very limited. The figures can coexist: projected openings include ten years of replacement demand, while Job Bank's rating is a shorter-term assessment of growth, retirements, unemployment and recent conditions.

MATERIAL FINDING

Current Thompson–Okanagan outlooks range from Good to Very limited across trades. One regional shortage label would erase differences that matter to workers, employers and training decisions.

FINDING 04 · TRAINING ACTIVITY

Is trades training activity growing, shrinking, or just shifting?

A stable institution-wide total can conceal substantial program-level movement, while seats, participation, registrations and credentials can move in different directions.

Okanagan College reported 2,216 Trades and Apprenticeship headcount and 2,026 FTE across its institutional footprint in FY2025/26. Across five years, total FTE moved only about 3% (1,970 → 2,026), but the mix moved far more: Mechanical Building Trades FTE rose ~19%, Motor Vehicle 12%, Welding 13%, while Construction Trades declined ~8% and Aerospace declined ~38%.

FACT

Visible training measures vs. missing conversion evidence

VISIBLE MEASURE	RESULT	MISSING CONVERSION EVIDENCE
OC Trades & Apprenticeship	2,216 hc / 2,026 FTE	Unique apprentices by trade/campus; progression
OC apprenticeship credentials	382 awarded	Unique people; certification; employment; retention
Additional OC seats	256, 2026/27	Allocation; delivery; utilization; completion
BC training seats	~29,000	Okanagan share and regional outcomes
BC youth participation	10,205 (-8%)	Okanagan youth entry and persistence

FACT

The Province announced 256 additional skilled-trades training seats for Okanagan College in 2026/27.

INTERPRETATION

This confirms funded expansion; it does not yet establish allocation by trade and campus, filled-seat utilization, instructor availability or completions.

MATERIAL FINDING

A stable institution-wide total can conceal substantial program-level movement, while seats, participation, registrations and credentials can move in different directions. None can stand in for the whole pipeline.

What happens between entering a trade and becoming certified?

Public evidence can describe project activity and training activity more readily than it can show how people move from interest and registration through employment, technical training, certification and regional retention.

UNKNOWN This is an evidence-visibility finding, not proof that the conversion layer is broken. The missing evidence includes active sponsors, apprentice-to-journeyperson capacity, progression between levels, training wait times by trade, post-training employer continuity, certification and regional migration. This finding is supported not by one dataset showing a failure, but by the recurring absence of connection measures across otherwise substantial project, workforce, apprenticeship and training evidence.

— WHAT PUBLIC EVIDENCE CANNOT ESTABLISH ABOUT EMPLOYERS

Employer operating conditions are the weakest public evidence lane. Project plans show intended spending. Training reports show institutional activity. Neither shows whether contractors are bidding, winning work, operating at capacity, carrying backlog, declining opportunities, or recruiting unsuccessfully. **UNKNOWN**

The Outlook therefore does not infer employer conditions from project totals. Until repeatable employer evidence exists, statements about contractor shortages, sponsorship bottlenecks, wage escalation or delivery risk remain hypotheses.

MATERIAL FINDING

Public evidence can describe project activity and training activity more readily than it can show how people move from interest and registration through employment, technical training, certification and regional retention.

Decision implications

The findings above change which questions are worth asking, not simply what is known.

A reader relying on the 2024–2025 annual comparison alone should treat it as the most recent complete annual picture, not as a current–quarter signal. A reader wanting the most current available signal should use the January–June 2026 comparison, understanding it as a partial–year, cumulative figure, not an isolated quarter.

Worker & apprentice

A provincial seat announcement is not a local opportunity. What remains open: whether training capacity in a specific trade exceeds or falls short of local demand.

Training & workforce institution

Seats, registrations and credentials move independently. What remains open: whether the 256 additional seats reach the trades and campuses where demand is greatest.

Employer & contractor

Residential and non–residential are moving differently, provincially and regionally. What remains open: whether hiring difficulty or backlog are the binding constraints.

Project owner & policymaker

A capital plan's dollar value does not reveal labour intensity or trade mix. What remains open: whether concurrent project timing risks simultaneous demand on the same trades.

Forward signals

SIGNAL	WHAT TO MONITOR	REVISION RULE
Residential/non–residential divergence	Starts, projects, employment	Revise if both sectors move the same direction
256 additional OC seats	Allocation, filled seats, completion	Do not count announced seats as delivered workforce
BuildForce forecast	Annual vintage, changed assumptions	Preserve the old forecast and explain the revision
Employer reality	Repeatable regional evidence	Do not promote anecdotes into a regional conclusion

Method and publication standard

This Outlook publishes five material findings. Each was tested across more than one evidence lane and retained only where the evidence supported a bounded conclusion. Claims that failed geography, definition, currency or source checks were corrected, excluded or identified as unknown.

Verification note

All cited links and load-bearing figures were tested against primary sources as of 21 August 2026. Superseded figures are identified rather than silently replaced. One source conflict required a substantive correction: RDNO's staff report records a 2025 capital budget of \$62.1 million and a 2026 increase to \$119.1 million, while RDNO's media release describes the 2025 base as \$57 million. This Outlook uses the underlying staff report. Job Bank maintains multiple alias pages for the same NOC; cited pages were checked against the stated occupation, geography, period and rating.

Evidence-tag reference

FACT

Directly supported by a cited source.

FORWARD SIGNAL

May strengthen, weaken or revise an interpretation.

INTERPRETATION

A bounded conclusion from identified facts.

UNKNOWN

Insufficient evidence, not a negative finding.

DISCREPANCY

Official figures that do not reconcile (used elsewhere on BLCKTrades).

INACTIVE

A closed or paused program (used elsewhere on BLCKTrades).

All 20 sources are issued directly by the relevant government body, municipality, institution or forecasting organization.

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- 02 BuildForce Canada, *British Columbia Is Projected to See Near-term Labour Market Challenges*, April 2024. buildforce.ca
- 03 BuildForce Canada, *Construction Demands Show Signs of Slowing in British Columbia*, 3 April 2025. buildforce.ca
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- 05 City of Kelowna, *Smart Investments, That's What the 10-Year Capital Plan Delivers*, 27 Oct. 2025. kelowna.ca
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- 07 Government of Canada Job Bank, *Carpenters, Thompson–Okanagan Region, 2025–2027*. jobbank.gc.ca
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Digital edition with live updates: blcktrades.ca/reports/okanagan-skilled-trades-outlook