



## BuildUP Program Surpasses Expectations as Demand from Trades Founders Grows

With applications exceeding capacity, the Innovation Cluster's new program is proving a game-changer for Skilled Trades entrepreneurs.

**PETERBOROUGH, ON – July 29, 2025** — Two months after the [Innovation Cluster - Peterborough and the Kawarthas](#) ("Innovation Cluster") announced its new [BuildUP](#) program, the program is already surpassing expectations and generating significant momentum among skilled trades workers looking to make the leap into entrepreneurship.

With over **70 applications** received for just **20 spots**, the program saw an overwhelming response from trades professionals across the region. **Eighty-seven percent** of applicants met the eligibility criteria, and many have prior business experience—**11 percent** of applicants already owned and operated a business.

Due to the exceptional demand and quality of applications, the Innovation Cluster increased the first cohort size to **35 participants**.

The group represents a dynamic mix of Ontario's skilled trades landscape:

- **54% are licensed by Skilled Trades Ontario**
- **40% are currently working in the trades**
- **6% are completing their apprenticeships**

The top trades represented among applicants include:

- **17% Carpenters**
- **17% Electricians**

- **11% HVAC Specialists**
- **6% Plumbers**
- **3% Millwrights**

Participants in the first BuildUp cohort are already realizing the impact:

*"As I prepare to write my Red Seal and launch my electrical business, the BuildUp program has been a huge help in filling the knowledge gaps around things like taxes, incorporation, and payroll. It's given me the knowledge and tools I'll need to launch my electrical business with confidence and keep growing."* - Mike Thurston, **Apprentice - Electrical**

*"As a tradesperson, I know how to build houses—but not how to build a business. The BuildUp program connected me with experts who broke down things like incorporation, startup funding, and taxes in a way that finally made sense and gave me the confidence to move forward."* - Trevor Steinsky, **Licensed JourneyPerson - Carpentry**

*"BuildUP is helping grow my trade business with accessible data and resources. I am now able to understand business structure and taxes, to create the proper foundation to seek startup financing."* - Adolphina Wilson, **Precision Machinist - CNC**

*"Getting direct access to experts in each session has been incredibly valuable—normally, you'd have to pay for that kind of advice. Even just asking a few targeted questions each week has helped me move forward with more clarity and confidence."* - Patrick Carty, **Licensed JourneyPerson - HVAC**

"It's clear that there's a strong appetite for entrepreneurship among skilled trades workers in our region," said **Nicole Stephenson**, Chair of the Innovation Cluster Board of Directors. "We knew there was a gap, but the response to BuildUp has proven just how much untapped potential is out there. We're excited to see skilled trades workers embracing this opportunity to build businesses and strengthen their communities."

The **free, 8-week program** gives skilled trades workers the business skills and support they need to start and grow successful companies. Led by experienced trades entrepreneurs and business experts, the curriculum covers essentials such as business setup, taxes, customer acquisition, hiring, and financial planning. Sessions are delivered in a flexible, hybrid format to accommodate busy working professionals.

## **Fall 2025 Cohort**

The Fall cohort will begin on October 14, 2025. Prospective participants are encouraged to sign up for notifications and to complete the waitlist form at [innovationcluster.ca](https://innovationcluster.ca). The Innovation Cluster encourages all journeymen, upper-year apprentices, and experienced skilled trades workers to apply. **BuildUP is provided at no cost to accepted participants.**

## Eligibility Requirements

- Open to journeypersons, upper-year apprentices, and experienced tradespeople.
- Must reside in Ontario.
- Must be a company based in Ontario.

All interested and eligible prospective participants are encouraged to apply online in August 2025.

**This Employment Ontario program is funded in part by the Government of Canada and the Government of Ontario.**

## About the Innovation Cluster

The Innovation Cluster - Peterborough and the Kawarthas is a non-profit organization that supports small and medium-sized enterprises in hard and soft technology. The organization aims to propel regional growth and entrepreneurship by establishing Peterborough and the Kawartha Lakes as a Centre of Innovation. Visit [www.innovationcluster.ca](http://www.innovationcluster.ca).

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