

Outward Bound Canada hopes Canada's outdoor professionals can better reflect all Canadians.



GUIDING LIGHTS

Outward Bound Canada hopes to make access to outdoor leadership training easier—for everybody

BY NORA O'MALLEY

Outward Bound Canada launched the Training Academy in 2022 with roughly \$8 million in grant funding from the Government of Canada's Sectoral Initiatives Program.

Successful applicants receive free training for certifications like Wilderness First Aid and Assistant Overnight Guides, plus accommodation and meals are fully funded for overnight workshops and expeditions.

Training Academy director Josephine Baran says this new outdoor industry initiative is unique to the sector.

"The scale of funding that we received allowed us to deliver this at a level that has never been delivered before," said Baran, noting that the federal grant is spread out over three years.

Currently, Outward Bound has established courses in British Columbia, Ontario and Alberta. For Canadians looking to pivot to a career as an outdoor professional, the Training Academy builds the knowledge and skills needed to kick start that journey.

"Everything is provided," Baran reiterates.

Part of the immersive training also includes region-specific activities: Albertans go on a multi-day backpacking trips, BC participants embark on a sea kayaking or canoeing expedition,

and Ontarians can experience a flatwater canoe trip.

Baran said 80 people participated in the 2022 pilot year and the programming for 2023, which runs April through December, caters to 200 individuals. They are hoping to take in 300 participants in 2024.

"The demand is there. This year we have 200 spots, but already have 360 applicants for those 200 spots," she said.

At the heart of the Training Academy is creating a pathway that ultimately diversifies the outdoor industry; Outward Bound strongly encourages BIPOC and 2SLGBTQ+ individuals to apply.

"When you think of the archetype of who a paddler is or who your ski instructor is or who that climber is, it really doesn't reflect the diversity of Canada. And so, looking at that workforce piece and recognizing that there are some real barriers in there for equity seeking groups to be able to fully participate in the outdoors and also become leaders in the outdoors," said Baran, adding that the Training Academy will create

opportunities for graduates to be Youth Leaders and/or Outdoor Guides.

For people already in the outdoor industry eyeing the Training Academy as a way to refine their skills, Baran says the program weaves in Indigenous land perspectives by "navigating the natural space in a way that honours reconciliation.

"It's not leaning into that colonial past that the outdoor industry has normally had. How do we do wilderness mental health first-aid? What does it mean to bring a trauma informed approach into your professional practice? All those kind of pieces," she said.

The Training Academy brings in Knowledge Keepers from each of the regions to deliver those teachings.

"It's really important that that knowledge comes from the people that are qualified to give it. Our instructors provide the framework for the program, they'll take people out on the journeys and that technical piece, but we really have a large team of subject matter experts that we work with and contract out to."

While Outward Bound in partnership with the Government of Canada has created this unique, free "open invitation" to educate the next generation of outdoor professionals, Baran emphasized that the outdoor industry has a lot of learning ahead when it comes to diversity and a lot of work to do in terms of building new relationships with First Nations, Inuit and Métis.

"Even think of the way we view our national parks. We visit it for recreation, but we don't honour the fact that many of the spaces that we're entering in for time immemorial has been the land of many Indigenous nations." training-academy.outwardbound.ca ✕

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