

LABOUR MARKET NEWS

Alberta Employment and Immigration



Slave Lake • High Prairie

Careers in office administration

Geneva Reeves is an expert at multi-tasking. Each day at the Viterra Crop Production Centre in High Prairie, you'll find her behind the front counter answering phones, greeting customers, reviewing commodity prices, writing contracts, invoicing and doing data entry on her computer.

If she's not at her desk, she's likely outside keeping track of grain deliveries. She also sells seed and fertilizer to farmers.

"I am an administrator but I do more than just admin because there's only three employees in the High Prairie office," says Reeves. "I enjoy my job because it's never the same thing each day. It keeps me on my toes."

Office administration jobs are plentiful in the Slave Lake-High Prairie region. There are regular job postings in local newspapers for administrative assistants, office

clerks, secretaries, receptionists, office managers and data entry clerks—just a few of the titles office administrators are called.

No matter what the title, it's a great career choice for people looking for challenging and interesting work.

"Administration support people do many jobs in the office. It's more than just typing, answering the phone and filing," says Donna Feschuk, an instructor with the

Office Administration program offered by Northern Lakes College.

In fact, administrators are essential support staff who help keep offices running smoothly and efficiently. "We do a lot of the behind-the-scenes work. We're definitely support for everything else that goes on in an office," says Bev Auger, office manager at Exact Oilfield Developing in Slave Lake.

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Slave Lake health care receptionist Kim Myles books an appointment for a patient. Careers in office administration are diverse and plentiful in the region.

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Job duties

The variety of tasks they do each day is what many office administrators like about the work.

“There is a lot of repetitiveness in the work we do, but different jobs require different tasks. There’s enough variety here that you’re always learning,” says Auger, who has been in this line of work for 20 years.

Typical office administration job duties can include:

- Greeting and assisting clients at the front desk or over the phone
- Directing clients to the appropriate person
- Computer data entry using word processing, spreadsheets and other software
- Scheduling appointments
- Writing letters, memos, reports and other documents
- Attending meetings and taking minutes
- Opening, sorting and distributing mail, faxes and e-mail
- Researching information
- Maintaining records (hard copies or on the computer)



Administrative assistant Lucille Harmon weighs mail in her Slave Lake office.

- Invoicing and basic bookkeeping
- Operating office equipment such as photocopiers and voice mail messaging
- Ordering office supplies

Training

A few years ago, many employers were often willing to hire office administrators with no experience as long as candidates had a Grade 12 diploma.

Reeves, for example, started working in administration in 2003 after graduating from high school. She learned through on-the-job training.

But today, more and more employers are looking for applicants who have an office administration certificate or equivalent experience. “When I started, the boom was on and the demand for staff was there, whereas now it might be different,” notes Reeves.

Northern Lakes College (www.northernlakescollege.ca) offers a full- or part-time Office Administration certificate program at multiple campuses including Slave Lake, High Prairie, McLennan, Wabasca, Grouard and Driftpile. Students take their courses through distance delivery. Full time, the course takes 10 months to complete. For details, go online or call the college at 1-866-652-3456.

Individuals may also gain work experience and skills through the Workplace Training program (see page 8 for details).

Important skills

In the past 10 to 15 years, modern technology has changed the way office administrators do their work. Today, having computer skills is essential. Basic knowledge of word processing, spreadsheet, database or presentation software is usually a minimum requirement. Good keyboarding skills and

BOOKKEEPING: BY THE NUMBERS\$

Many office administration jobs are combined with bookkeeping duties, so knowledge of bookkeeping practices like invoicing and payroll may be required. Experience using accounting or spreadsheet programs would also be an asset.

If you like working with numbers, some companies employ bookkeepers (also called accounting clerks or accounting technicians), who specialize in this area of the business. They use computers to calculate, prepare and process invoices, accounts payable and receivable, payroll and other financial records.

Some employers will provide on-the-job training for bookkeeping, although related experience or post-secondary schooling is usually preferred. The Northern Lakes College Office Administration program includes courses on basic accounting.

knowing how to use e-mail and the Internet is expected in most offices.

Office administrators also need to be able to work independently in a fast-paced environment. They may have to meet deadlines, so being organized is a key skill. "I'm kind of a stickler for neatness with papers. It's pretty easy to lose stuff if you're not organized," says Auger.

Excellent customer service skills are also a must in this line of work. Office administrators are usually the first person a client sees or talks to, so they need to be courteous, professional and friendly.

"I like working with the public—that's why I'm in this line of work," says Raven Taron, administrative assistant with the M.D. of Opportunity in Wabasca. Much of her day is spent at the front desk, assisting taxpayers who visit the M.D. office. "I answer questions that citizens have about the municipality's services, such as taxes, utilities, bylaws," says Taron.

Employers also look for office administrators who can work well with other staff.

"A key skill that we look for is the ability to work in a team environment," says Randy Renauer, executive director of Community Futures in Slave Lake. The agency has one administrative assistant on staff who works closely with other staff members. "We need to work together with our administrative assistant to coordinate things and have a successful office," says Renauer.

Other job requirements

Some employers may require a Class 5 driver's licence to run errands or attend meetings. A criminal record check may be required to work in areas such as education or health care.

Work conditions

Office administrators usually work standard office hours from Monday

to Friday. However, some jobs may require weekend or evening shifts (see page 4 for information on medical office administration jobs).

There are opportunities to work full-time, part-time or casual positions. Women still make up the majority of workers, possibly because many employers offer flexible hours that allow them to work around family commitments.

Where is the work?

In the Slave Lake-High Prairie region, office administration staff can find work in many different industries, at large corporations or small businesses. They could work in law and dental offices, for government, for non-profit agencies, for industrial companies in oil and gas, trucking or forestry, in retail or service sectors or in schools or hospitals, to name a few options. Job postings can be found in local newspapers or online at www.jobbank.gc.ca.

Advancement

There are opportunities to move into office management or, depending on the size of the company, administrators can move into different departments. Employers will often provide professional development or training to help administrators advance their skills and move into different positions.

Pay and benefits

Wages vary depending on experience and education.

According to the 2007 Alberta Wage and Salary Survey, administrative assistants and receptionists working in the Athabasca-Grande Prairie region (which includes the Slave Lake-High Prairie area) earned an average wage of \$15.58 to \$17.52 per hour.

The survey found that starting wages are around \$12 to \$13 per hour. Many employers also offer benefit packages.

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There's enough variety here that you're always learning.

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I enjoy my job because it's never the same thing each day. It keeps me on my toes.

HEALTH CARE ADMINISTRATION

‘Without us, things don’t get done’

Working in hospitals, medical clinics and other health care settings, administrative staff provide support on the front lines and behind the scenes. They are often a patient’s first contact with the health care system, whether the patient is visiting a hospital with an illness or injury or calling their doctor’s office to schedule an appointment.

Depending on the facility, the work environment can be calm and quiet, or noisy and hectic. Administrative staff must be able to handle stressful situations and work well under pressure.

“Working in a hospital, you see tons of different people every day,” says Megan Jardine, a medical secretary at the Slave Lake Healthcare Centre. “You need to be able to deal with the public. Those that can’t usually don’t last long.”

Jardine does a variety of office administration jobs at the hospital. She may be greeting patients at the front desk, assisting nurses at a baby clinic, booking appointments for the rehabilitation therapy clinic or entering data from patient charts into a computer system.

“Office administration is not as boring as people think,” says Jardine. “There are so many different areas in the hospital that need support, you’re never doing the same thing twice. Without us, things don’t get done, things don’t run as smoothly.”

Office administrators in health care have a variety of different titles.

Unit clerks typically work at nursing stations. Medical secretaries (also called administrative assistants, administrative support or program assistants) assist doctors, other



Megan Jardine enters information from patient files into the hospital's computer system.

health care professionals and management.

Staff in these roles perform a wide variety of clerical, administrative and reception duties such as:

- Greeting, screening and directing patients or visitors
- Scheduling and confirming medical appointments
- Answering the telephone
- Completing insurance and claim forms
- Preparing invoices, financial statements, case histories and medical records
- Processing doctors’ instructions and organizing forms for patient charts
- Interviewing patients to complete intake forms and documents
- Using word processing, spreadsheet, database and other software

Training

Grade 12 is the minimum job requirement although some post-

secondary training or related work experience is usually preferred.

Knowledge of medical terminology is an asset, especially for unit clerks. Grande Prairie College (www.gprc.ab.ca) offers an 18-week Unit Clerk certificate program. Northern Lakes College (www.northernlakescollege.ca) has an Office Administration certificate program.

To view complete job descriptions, go online to Peace Country Health (www.pchr.ca) or Aspen Regional Health (www.aspenrha.ab.ca).

Hours

Casual, full-time and part-time shifts are usually available. Depending on the facility, unit clerk and medical secretaries may work standard office hours or they could work evening, weekend or night shifts.

Pay

Wages vary depending on the job and the employee’s experience, but unit clerks and medical secretaries in the region are generally paid \$14 to \$20 per hour.

profile



Avis Gagne

Avis is a program assistant for Alberta Children and Youth Services in McLennan.

Avis works in the First Nation Liaison Unit for the Northwest Region. She provides program support and trains other staff. Her work requires creativity and innovation and it's a job she finds exciting, challenging and rewarding.

“Administrative professionals are the glue that holds organizations together.”

Profiles are prepared for various occupations featured in Labour Market News, to put a friendly face on the stories.

Q Briefly describe your career path.

A I have a certificate in office administration and have been employed with the Government of Alberta for 17 years, starting as a receptionist. Nine years ago, I was transitioned to the newly created First Nation Liaison Unit within Alberta Children and Youth Services.

Q How does your job affect your lifestyle?

A I travel to First Nation Child and Family Services agencies across the northwest and the rest of the province quite regularly, as well as to our corporate offices in Edmonton. I miss being at home sometimes. The flip side is I get to meet and work with many people who are dedicated to supporting safe, healthy and whole families and communities.

Q What are the rewards of your job?

A I really enjoy the fast pace, the opportunities for learning, the challenges of public service and the opportunity to work with people across the province. My favourite days are spent at the First Nation Child and Family Services offices, working with the staff and visiting the communities.

Q What are some of the challenges you face?

A Delivering services to children and families is constantly changing to meet the needs of our changing society. This constant change demands

constant learning and a significant part of my job is providing training to other agency staff. Keeping my own learning at a level where I feel comfortable training others can be a struggle.

Q What kind of person is suited to this job?

A People who like to be challenged, who like a great variety of work, who are good at crisis management and who are innovative and creative will do well in administration.

Q What advice would you give someone considering an office administration career?

A There is such a broad spectrum of jobs within the field. The opportunities are endless and there will always be room for learning and growth. Administrative professionals are the glue that holds organizations together.

Q Has technology changed the way you do your job?

A Paper records and communications are quickly becoming obsolete in my office. It is much faster to deliver a letter or memo using the Internet, and it is quicker to locate a record or document in a computer than in a filing cabinet.

Q What are your future career goals?

A Hopefully, I will remain with Children and Youth Services. I'm really at home with this team.

profile



Ursula Valiquette

Ursula is an executive secretary for Alberta Employment and Immigration in McLennan.

Ursula works in the Northwest Regional Office in McLennan. She is secretary to the regional director and has worked for the Government of Alberta for 26 years.

“Challenges include meeting deadlines, balancing workload, scheduling and completing assignments.”

Profiles are prepared for various occupations featured in Labour Market News, to put a friendly face on the stories.

Q Briefly describe your career path.

A I have been doing administrative work since 1969, when I received a Clerk Typist diploma from Alberta College. In 1975, I received a Health Care Administration certificate from the University of Saskatchewan. I started with the Government of Alberta in 1982 as a casual clerk typist and soon moved into a permanent position.

Q How does your job affect your lifestyle?

A Normally, my hours of work are 8:15 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday to Friday. On occasion I travel to various locations throughout the Northwest Region. When my children were still at home more scheduling and balancing was needed.

Q What are some of the challenges you face?

A Challenges include meeting deadlines, balancing workload, scheduling and completing assignments. There is always something different that creeps into a day’s activity. These are sometimes frustrating, but in the end the challenge is worth it – most often becoming a learning experience.

Q What are the rewards of your job?

A I like the challenges, the opportunity to work with people from all levels of the organization and the ability to travel to various worksites within the Northwest Region.

Q What kind of person is suited to this job?

A For this type of position one needs to be flexible, honest, capable of multi-tasking, have good communication skills, have patience and on occasion be able to work under very short timelines.

Q What advice would you give someone considering an office administration career?

A No matter what profession you choose, as long as you make the commitment to do the best that you can, you will succeed.

Q Has technology changed the way you do your job?

A Technology, as it exists today, was not there in the late ‘60s/early ‘70s. I was first exposed to computers when I started with the government. That was a tremendous change from what I was used to. Technology has evolved on a daily basis throughout my years of employment with the government. Sometimes, before you learn and became comfortable with one thing, the next phase is already here.

Q What are your future career goals?

A I am nearing the end of my career with retirement on the horizon. However, I am a firm believer in life-long learning. There are so many opportunities and interests that one can pursue.

profile



Teri Comeau

Teri is a certified registries clerk for Hendry's Licensing in High Prairie.

Teri assists clients with vehicle registries and operator licensing. She also helps clients with various provincial government services, such as ordering birth, marriage and death certificates, doing lien searches, taking fine payments, issuing raffle licences and searching land titles.

“Being a registries clerk is like being an information station for a wide range of services in Alberta.”

Profiles are prepared for various occupations featured in Labour Market News, to put a friendly face on the stories.

Q Briefly describe your career path.

A I was first interested in this career in high school from organizing fundraisers and helping with graduation planning. I had my first administrative job at a local clinic and enjoyed helping clients. I decided to take the Northern Lakes College Administrative Assistant program in Grouard. With assistance from the Alberta Employment and Immigration Workplace Training program, I was hired as a registries clerk and have learned specifics of the job through on-the-job training and self-taught modules.

Q How does your job affect your lifestyle?

A It works out great with my lifestyle. I work 8:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. I am able to be at home every night and never have to be on call or work weekends.

Q What are some of the challenges you face?

A The biggest challenge in my line of work is getting information from people so that I can accurately and correctly do services for them. It's sometimes hard when the client doesn't know exactly what they want or need to do.

Q What are the rewards of your job?

A The reward that I like the most is helping people every day. Being a registries clerk is like being an information station for a wide range of

services in Alberta. We don't just deal with vehicle registrations and licensing.

Q What kind of person is suited to this job?

A A person who enjoys dealing with the public and is very personable. The type of person who enjoys being very knowledgeable and informative. Being an office administrator means you will most likely be the first person clients deal with, so you should probably be welcoming, inviting and eager to head them in the right direction.

Q What advice would you give someone considering an office administration career?

A This is a great career and there are many areas they can specialize in, such as health care, the oil and gas industry, accounting and more.

Q Has technology changed the way you do your job?

A Technology has greatly affected the way I do my job. I use the Internet and computers daily. Without the technology we have, services would be a lot slower and a lot more paper would be used.

Q What are your future career goals?

A My future career goal is to stay with Alberta Registries and one day become certified to do Corporate Registries, along with what I do already.

Working part-time: Explore your options

Take a quick look through the help wanted section of local newspapers. You'll find a great variety of part-time and casual job postings in sectors ranging from health care and education to retail sales and service.

Many positions are entry-level, so you won't need a lot of experience to get started. On-the-job training is often provided. Depending on your personal situation, there are many great reasons to work part-time.

College students—earn while you learn

For college students, working part-time is a good way to make some extra cash to help pay for tuition and living expenses. Many employers offer flexible shifts, so work doesn't have to interfere with your studies.

If you can find a job in your chosen field, it's also a great way to gain experience and build your resumé. If you make a good impression, it could also lead to full-time work when you graduate. Student funding assistance programs are available for Albertans who want to pursue part-time post-secondary studies. For details, go to www.alis.alberta.ca/ec/fo/studentsfinance/parttime.html.

Stay-at-home parents

Many stay-at-home parents want to work, but family commitments make full-time employment difficult, if not impossible. Working part-time is often a more realistic option and many employers are willing to work around family schedules.

Pops Hardware and Building Centre in High Prairie, for example, offers part-time day shifts. "We've got mothers who drive their children to school and then come here for the day. They leave in time to pick up their children or be home after school with their children," says Pops owner Marilyn Stevens.

Another example is Slave Lake Veneer. The company recently advertised for weekend clean-up crew members for Saturday and Sunday shifts. Stay-at-home parents were encouraged to apply for the job, which has a starting wage of \$19.40 per hour.

Besides providing some intellectual stimulation, working part-time while raising kids has another benefit—it's a good way to keep up your job skills and keep a toehold on your career. When you're ready to return to work full-time, you'll have recent work experience to put on your resumé.

Seniors

If you're retired, returning to work for a part-time job



Where are the jobs?

Looking for part-time work? Here are some ideas to get you started:

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Educational assistant | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Bartender |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Lifeguard | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Hotel front desk clerk |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Coach | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Office administrator/
bookkeeper |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Fitness instructor | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Hospital food services |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> School bus driver | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Housekeeper/janitor |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Retail sales clerk | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Bank teller |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Cashier | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Customer service
representative |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Shelf stocker | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Real estate agent |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Restaurant server | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Health care aide/
community support
worker |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Kitchen helper | |

can be a great way to supplement your retirement income and share your expertise with a younger generation. Whether you return to a field that is familiar or try something completely new, it's a great way to stay active and in touch with the community.

Medical concerns and disabilities

If you have medical concerns or a disability that keeps you from working full-time, then a part-time job may be a good alternative. Accredited Supportive Living Services (www.aslslimited.org) offers supportive employment programs for people with disabilities and barriers, connecting them with local employers in northwest Alberta. Disability Related Employment Supports (DRES) helps individuals with disabilities overcome employment barriers (call 310-0000).

Part-time perks

Some part-time workers are eligible for benefits, depending on how many hours they work. Local health regions, for example, offer benefits to administration support staff who work a minimum two days a week. Some companies offer part-time staff scholarships that can be used for post-secondary schooling. Others provide discounts on products and services.

Computer skills: It's never too late to learn

Don't know a megapixel from a mega cab? Think a website is where spiders live, spam is a luncheon meat and phishing is what you do with a rod and reel? Then it might be a good time to learn some basic computer skills.

Computers are everywhere. In today's world, having computer skills is becoming more and more important, especially in the workplace.

But don't worry. Learning to use a computer is easier than you might think and it doesn't have to cost anything to get started. First, ask friends, family or coworkers for help. If that's not an option, there are plenty of other resources.

Local libraries and employment centres are a good place to find free help. Staff can provide tips on the basics, such as how to use a mouse, surf the Internet, apply for a job online, open files or send and receive e-mail.

Free help at the library

"We offer hands-on training for people coming in off the street," says Lori Herdzik, manager of the Slave Lake Municipal Library. A library membership isn't required.

Herdzik usually has a couple clients a day looking for computer help. "There are still lots of people who have never used computers," she says. "It's never too late to learn."

Many clients want to know how to use the Internet to search for jobs. "A lot of jobs are advertised only online and for a lot of jobs, you also have to apply online. We can help people do that," says Herdzik.

With a membership at public libraries in High Prairie, Kinuso, McLennan, Red Earth, Slave Lake and Wabasca, clients can also take free computer tutorials through the Peace Library System website (www.peacelibrarysystem.ab.ca).

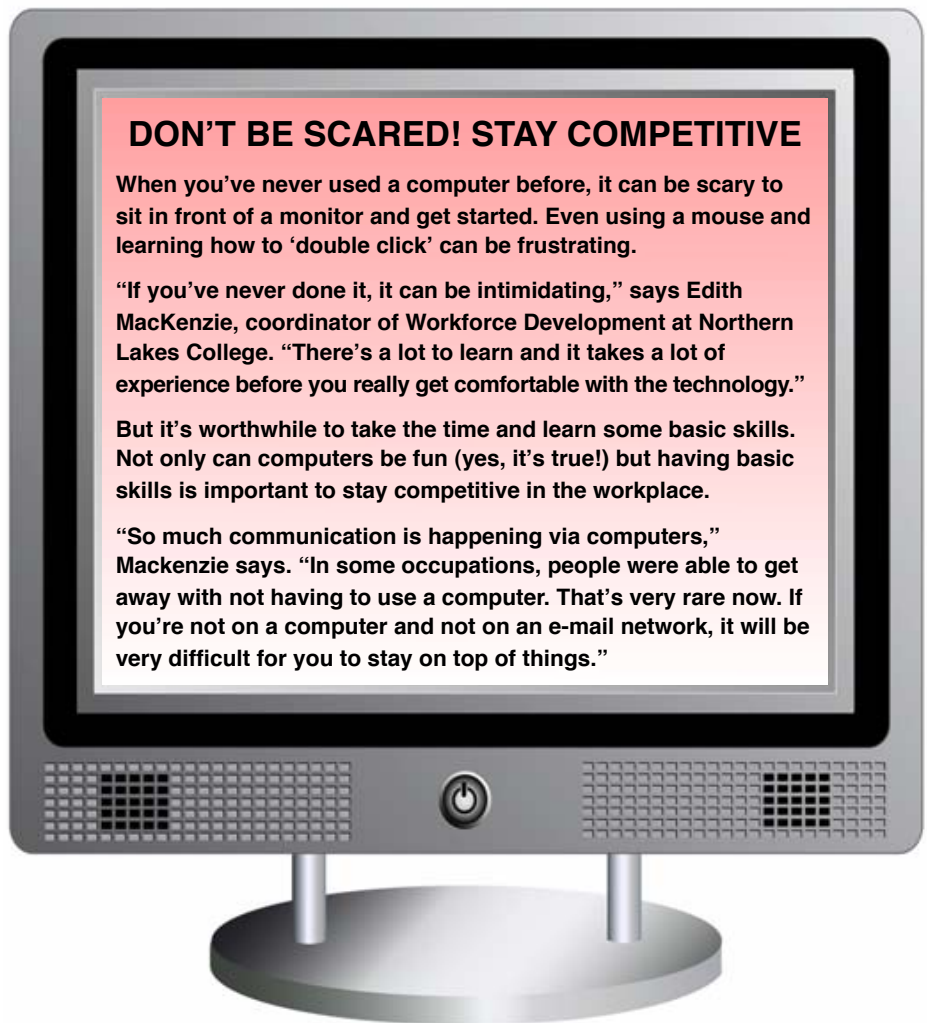
Free help at employment centres

Staff at employment centres across the region also offer basic computer help. At your local Labour Market Information Centre, for example, staff can show job seekers how to navigate their way around a computer, how to write a resumé using a word processing program and how to post a resumé online. (See page 8 for a listing of local employment centres.)

Upgrading at NLC

Workforce Development, through Northern Lakes College (www.northernlakescollege.ca), offers various computer courses.

Introduction to Computers is a class for people who are new to computers. Classes are held in High Prairie and Slave Lake a couple nights a week over four weeks, for a total of 24 hours in training. Students learn about operating systems, the Internet, e-mail and the basics of word processing, spreadsheets and databases. There is no pressure and no grades—just a supportive learning environment. Call 1-866-652-3456 for program details.



Looking for career and employment information?

All Alberta Employment and Immigration (E&I) offices provide in-depth assistance to job seekers and career researchers. E&I's mission is to provide services and information that enable individuals to succeed in the changing workforce, foster safe and healthy workplaces and assist people in need.

How E&I can help you find a job

E&I offices and contracted service providers help Albertans find satisfactory employment through:

- career counseling
- resume building services and workshops
- job placement and workplace training programs
- skill development services and self-employment programs
- free photocopying, faxing and Internet services for job searches

For those seeking training, E&I also provides:

- a place to apply for programs, scholarships and bursaries
- information about potential funding options



L'Association canadienne-française de l'Alberta in Falher.

E&I services for employers

E&I helps employers find staff and can provide a place to conduct interviews or host job fairs.

Contact us

To find out more about E&I services, contact the office nearest your community from the list to the right, or call 310-0000 toll-free from anywhere in Alberta. You can also visit our website at employment.alberta.ca.

Alberta Employment and Immigration Offices

Slave Lake

Alberta Service Centre Slave Lake
Labour Market Information Centre
Phone 780-849-7290
Youth Connections, Phone 780-849-1979
2nd Floor Lakeland Centre, 101 Main St. S

Alberta Job Corps
1008-7 St. NE, Phone 780-849-7194

High Prairie

Alberta Service Centre High Prairie
Labour Market Information Centre
Phone 780-523-6794
Youth Connections, Phone 780-523-4881
4929-51 Ave.

Alberta Job Corps
4120-53 Ave., Phone 780-523-6630

Wabasca / Desmarais

Labour Market Information Centre
891 Main St., Mistassiniy Road South
Phone 780-891-8906

Alberta Job Corps, Phone 780-891-3930

Trout Lake / Peerless Lake

Alberta Job Corps, Phone 780-869-3991

Other career & employment services

Slave Lake

Community Futures, Suite 1—100 Poplar Lane (Information Centre, 2.2 km east of Hwy. 2 and Hwy. 88 intersection)
Phone 780-849-3232

Métis Nation of Alberta Employment Assistance Service Centre, 349 Main St.
Phone 780-849-4660

Slave Lake Native Friendship Centre
416-6 Ave. NE, Phone 780-849-3039

High Prairie

Métis Nation of Alberta Employment Assistance Service Centre, 4910-51 Ave.
Phone 780-523-2004

Falher

L'Association canadienne-française de l'Alberta 308 Main St.
Phone 780-837-5168

Wabasca

Métis Nation of Alberta Employment Assistance Service Centre
2691 Strawberry Lane
Phone 780-891-2363

Gain job skills with Workplace Training

Workplace Training provides work-site training opportunities to unemployed and marginally employed individuals who are having difficulty entering the workforce due to a lack of skills or work experience.

Individuals must be 18 years old, out of high school and have an employment goal. Training is usually four to 34 weeks, for a minimum 30 hours a week. For more information on eligibility, visit employment.alberta.ca/workplacetraining or contact your local Labour Market Information Centre (see list above right).

We want your **feedback!**

Forward comments, suggestions and requests for articles to:

Phone: 780-425-6741

E-mail: ei.webmaster@gov.ab.ca



Want to see all the employment news and information from the Slave Lake / High Prairie Area? Go online to:

employment.alberta.ca/northwest

For information on resources and services about career and education decisions:

Call the Alberta Career Information Hotline at
780-422-4266 or 1-800-661-3753 or 310-0000

or visit the Alberta Learning Information Service website at

www.alis.alberta.ca. You can search ALIS by career title or by NOC code (National Occupational Classification).

For online employment listings, check out www.alis.gov.ab.ca/worksearch or www.lakesideleader.com or www.southpeacenews.com