



BRIGHT IDEAS IN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

#### LOCATION

Thompson  
Okanagan

#### ECONOMIC BASE

Agriculture,  
tourism, mining

#### INNOVATORS

Okanagan College,  
Kelowna



### AEROSPACE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT IN KELOWNA

# Workforce Development Partnership Reaching New Heights

### SYNOPSIS

The Aerospace Department of Okanagan College has doubled the number of graduates that KF Aerospace can hire, and the region is well-positioned to fill the almost 300 aerospace maintenance engineer job openings expected to appear by 2027, thanks to a strong and ongoing partnership between the two institutions.

## INTRO

The [Aerospace Department](#) of Okanagan College, based in Kelowna, enjoys a longstanding relationship with the local firm [KF Aerospace](#). KF's support for the college runs deep. The company provides space in its corporate hangars for college programming, and donated \$500,000 which gave lift to the KF Aerospace Atrium in the College's new trades complex (the company also donated a chrome Cessna 172 airplane which is suspended from its ceiling).

The strength of this relationship can be seen in Okanagan College's [Aircraft Maintenance Engineer \(Structures\) program](#). The college has been offering structures courses for around 10 years, with practical instruction delivered in one of KF's hangars.

Students spend the 37-week program learning alongside KF technicians, and many have the option to land positions with the company when they graduate.



## THE CHALLENGE

KF Aerospace's operations have been booming, as the company's record of success makes it a star candidate among cargo companies trying to keep up with the demand for point-to-point shipping.

In 2017, there were [around 450](#) aerospace maintenance engineers in the region, and [almost 300 jobs](#) are expected to open by 2027. Although some students choose to take their diplomas elsewhere, KF

Aerospace's workforce is dominated by Okanagan College graduates.

With the company's expanded hangar capacity, it was clear that its need for skilled labour outpaced the number of trained structures engineers available. While KF was hiring entire classes of graduates, Okanagan College simply could not train enough people to supply KF Aerospace with the workforce it needed.



For more information, visit [gov.bc.ca/economicdevelopment](http://gov.bc.ca/economicdevelopment)



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## THE STRATEGY

It would have been easy for KF Aerospace to believe it had exhausted the capacity of the Okanagan region and focus on recruiting graduates from aerospace programs at other colleges in B.C.

Instead, KF put faith in its long-time partners and was determined to explore a local solution. Working with partners in the college's aerospace department, they got to work on a solution: expanding the structures program to include a complete second intake of students.

Okanagan College needed four things to produce the number of structures technicians that KF required:

1. First they would need the [Industry Training Authority of B.C. \(ITA\)](#) to fund the instructors for a new program, which the ITA eagerly did.
2. Next they would need space. KF, knowing how much it could benefit from this second intake, set about renovating another area of its hangar to serve as a new on-site instruction space.
3. Third, the program would need a whole new set of tools for the students to use. The [Aerospace Industries Association of Canada](#), which was aware of the skill shortage in the Okanagan, joined the partnership and invested \$20,000 to support the program with tools and equipment.
4. Finally, the program would need another 18 students to fill the new class. KF and the college knew that if they could get people in the Okanagan to realize how much demand there was for these skills, students would be sure to enrol. So, they worked together on a new marketing campaign, including [jointly hosted open houses](#), targeted social media ads, and [videos](#) emphasizing the opportunities at KF for aerospace graduates.



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## SUCCESSES

### APPRENTICES READY TO WORK

- With everything in place, Okanagan College's additional cohort of structures technicians is [set up for success](#). The program began in November 2017 and will complete in August 2018, with apprentices taking their places in aerospace companies across the country, though most of the graduates are likely to join KF Aerospace.

### EAGER STUDENTS

- KF Aerospace sees the program as the answer for its skilled labour needs of the future. The company suggested offering two sessions of the structures program again in the 2018-19 academic year, the college agreed, and the ITA gave its support. The upcoming intakes, set for September 2018 and February 2019, are already full with a growing waitlist.

### LOCAL LABOUR FORCE

- This successful partnership has increased enrolment at Okanagan College, introduced economic benefits to the region, and has helped KF Aerospace secure a reliable, locally grown labour force to support its future.

## LESSONS LEARNED & FINAL THOUGHTS

- Even when local resources seem to be falling short, **use the strength and innovation of your community** to meet your needs.
- Sectors that are struggling to attract local labour may just be under-exposed. **Try promoting your opportunities** before determining that there is a lack of interest in your region.
- **Partnerships are never static.** Keep exploring what else you can accomplish with your current connections.

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