



CASE STUDY: RBC

Delivering the RBC Career Launch Program in a Virtual Environment

The following case study illustrates how RBC’s Career Launch Program – a one-year paid internship that provides a unique experience for youth to bridge the transition from academics to employment – overcame the impact of a new world created by COVID-19. In Spring 2020, very suddenly, there were significant restrictions on in-person contact, physical distancing rules, and a shift to remote work. In less than two weeks, RBC was able to re-imagine the Career Launch Program and find new ways to work with incoming Associates in a completely virtual setting.

RBC is Canada’s largest bank, with more than 85,000 full and part time employees, serving more than 17 million clients in Canada, the U.S. and globally.

About the RBC Career Launch Program

The RBC Career Launch program was created in 2014 and has helped more than 600 graduates to build their confidence and future skills while applying their fresh perspectives in the workplace. These foundational elements, combined with practical work experiences, have enabled Career Launch Associates to successfully enter the world of work.

The Program helps to break the no experience, no job cycle for college and university graduates, 24 years or younger, in 17 cities across Canada. In a recent survey, only 20% of participants felt they had sufficient opportunity to use their skills, knowledge and capabilities before entering the Program. After completion, more than 85% were employed and reported feeling confident about their future.

Also, in collaboration with Children’s Aid Foundation of Canada, RBC reserves 10 of the 100 spots annually who have been in the foster care system and have faced obstacles to build meaningful careers.

RBC’s challenge: Delivering the RBC Career Launch Program in a virtual environment

RBC Career Launch experienced a number of challenges as a result of COVID-19, including:

- > Virtually onboarding Career Launch Associates and effectively sharing RBC’s culture, values and robust professional development opportunities.
- > Virtually setting up Associates with technology (e.g. network access).
- > Identifying alternative arrangements for Associates as their first rotations at RBC’s branch locations were no longer an option as in-person work assignments.
- > Finding creative ways to support Associates through coaching, mentorship and networking opportunities.

DID YOU KNOW...



Canada’s labour force has suffered during the COVID-19 crisis. From February to April 2020, the pandemic forced businesses to close or downsize their workforces, affecting 5.5 million Canadian workers and resulting in 3 million job losses.

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What RBC Did

Pivoting in a time of unprecedented change

RBC's Director of Development Programs, Rehana Ciriani worked with the Career Launch Program teams to review the original program expectations and operations to identify opportunities to pivot, allowing RBC to develop dynamic solutions that would benefit Associates without compromising the program's objectives. These included the following solutions:

- > RBC utilized Workplace by Facebook as an onboarding tool that didn't require access to RBC's network. In weekly online sessions, RBC facilitated interactive webinars for Associates to learn about the company's culture and values. Other development opportunities included virtual sessions on resilience, collaboration, psychosocial safety, emotional intelligence, and personal branding.
- > In previous years, Associates were able to access the RBC network through their work placements at branch locations. In this new environment, Associates were given remote access privileges to perform work virtually.
- > RBC quickly worked with key stakeholders to identify assignment opportunities for Associates within the organization where facilitated training sessions could be conducted virtually. Associates were placed in operational groups within Personal & Commercial Banking and Wealth Management where they could support back office processing of client transactions and inquiries.
- > Streamlined mentorship programs and networking opportunities virtually with RBC's NextGen Employee Resource Group.
- > RBC surveyed Associates frequently to check in and see how they were adjusting to their placements and the Program.

YOU MAY NOT KNOW, BUT...




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Youth who have reached 19 years of age and 'aged out' of foster care often report feeling higher levels of isolation and loneliness (submissions to the Ontario legislature as part of Our Voice Our Turn, 2012) and often lack opportunities to build social capital (Greeson & Thompson, 2017). Mentorship may be a potential intervention to mitigate feelings of loneliness among former foster youth. Youth with supportive non-parental adults had better self-esteem and heightened mental and physical health (DuBois & Silverthorn, 2005; Knoke, 2009).

- Dana Mills, Mentors to Reduce Loneliness Experienced by Foster Children (2018)

DID YOU KNOW...



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The negative effects of COVID-19 on the labour force is compounded for youth who are entering the job market this year. For example, about one-third of Canadian students have lost or delayed their work-integrated learning placements due to COVID-19, and engaging them in a struggling economy will remain a longer-term challenge.

RBC's recipe for success

RBC's Director of Development Programs, Rehana Ciriani worked with the Career Launch Program teams to review the original program expectations and operations to identify opportunities to pivot, allowing RBC to develop dynamic solutions that would benefit Associates without compromising the program's objectives. These included the following solutions:

> **Agility, continuous improvement and collaboration are key to dealing with ambiguity**

To deal with the ambiguity brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, it was key to keep the response based on simplicity, creative thinking, and self-experience. Being agile also meant accepting that aspects of the program would not be delivered as originally expected. However, it is important to continue to iterate the approach to respond to new information and continuously improve the program. Other organizations can learn from this experience. RBC was able to re-imagine this program in a very short period of time, showing that quick pivots are attainable with an agile mindset along with the necessary resources (e.g. team, budget, technology, surveys).

> **Virtual has its business benefits**

By working virtually, Associates were able to be deployed to the parts of the businesses where resources were needed the most at that time. While this approach also introduces a different kind of structure and more ambiguity, it can allow employees to learn to adapt more quickly to changing environments – a key skill in today's working world.

> **Leverage leading practice for virtual work**

RBC leveraged leading practices for virtual working throughout this program. For example, they created a longer onboarding period to keep broadcasts under 90 minutes and workshops under 3 hours. They also introduced group networking, as opposed to individual networking to allow Associates to network with RBC managers and avoid online fatigue by reducing the amount of additional time spent online to meet Associates individually. In addition, the program enabled Associates to create a community among themselves to get to know each other, share learnings, exchange ideas, and offer support during their onboarding, their assignments and their learning and development. This community was enabled through Workplace by Facebook and then migrated to RBC's Career Launch Program Connect Community for Associates. These Associates also gained access to the broader RBC Connect Community where they could engage with employees across the organization to share and learn.

> **Offer culture in bite-sized learning workshops**

While it can be challenging to demonstrate corporate culture in a virtual setting, it is possible to do so. To provide Associates with an understanding of the RBC culture, RBC hosted a series of workshops to help Associates feel welcomed and included in the culture at RBC. Ninety-eight percent of Associates felt they could apply the information they learned in the workshops to positively contribute and be successful in RBC's culture. In addition to the connections through mentorship and coaching, these workshops helped integrate Associates into the RBC culture.

The KPMG Spotlight: Mapping the road ahead

RBC's Director of Development Programs, Rehana Ciriani worked with the Career Launch Program teams to review the original program expectations and operations to identify opportunities to pivot, allowing RBC to develop dynamic solutions that would benefit Associates without compromising the program's objectives. These included the following solutions:

> **Focus on inclusion and belonging (particularly in a virtual environment) from the start**

Creating a sense of inclusion and belonging is an essential component to building a strong team and workplace community. By emphasizing inclusion and belonging from the start of the program, Associates will understand it as a priority for RBC. An example of how RBC can enhance D&I in the Career Launch Program is to begin with an open discussion on mental health: how to care for yourself and how to care for each other.

> **Consider enhancing Career Launch mentorship to include reverse mentorship**

Mentorship is traditionally focused on a mentor sharing their experience and learnings with their mentee. Today, we are seeing a new generation of workers bringing perspective and skills to the workplace that their more experienced colleagues do not necessarily possess (e.g. technology-centric skills). By introducing reverse mentorship – wherein the mentee, in turn, shares perspective and experience with their mentor – RBC can support work-integrated learning, while also helping mentor- mentee pairs enhance their relationship. In addition, encouraging Career Launch Associates to mentor their mentor can contribute to developing key skills – like communication and collaboration – that are core to the Career Launch program. While reverse mentorship can arise organically in a mentor- mentee relationship, it can also be introduced to mentors as part of their orientation and training. If mentors

set personal goals, it may be beneficial to encourage them to incorporate reverse mentorship into at least one of their goals so they can later reflect on its effectiveness (and so the program can determine whether to further incorporate it into the mentorship process).

> **Incorporate facilitated discussions to enrich the team-building experience**

The program leads have recognized that the teams that succeed in its Next Great Social Innovator Challenge (NGSI) tend to be the teams that gel and work well together. NGSI is a capstone learning initiative for the Career Launch Associates, to apply the skills they've learned to address a real-life social issue. Associates work together in teams in an agile way to identify innovative solutions. A key component of building a collaborative team is building a strong sense of mutual understanding between team members. This means not only focusing on work-related skills, but also learning about each other's life experience. A facilitated personal discussion can be an effective way to emphasize and understand differences in team members, break down potential barriers, and create a shared sense of belonging. This type of discussion may be built around a series of questions that aim to enable colleagues to share their personal story in a way that is not typically done at work.

> **Further recommendation**

While the RBC team had to significantly pivot their approach to the Career Launch Program due to the COVID-19 pandemic, some changes have had positive effects on the outcome of the program, including:

- > Placing Associates in business areas where needed most
- > Utilizing technology to keep Associates connected
- > Leveraging group networking, rather than a 1-on-1 networking approach
- > Incorporating bite-sized learning workshops.

As part of RBC's efforts to continuously improve the program, a hybrid approach (virtual and in-person) may be an effective engagement model going forward.