



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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EMPLOYER CHALLENGES IN ATTRACTING AND INTEGRATING IMMIGRANT TALENT INTO BC'S TECH SECTOR

**Final Report Submitted by the Association for
Canadian Studies (ACS) on behalf of the Immigrant
Employment Council of British Columbia (IEC-BC)**

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IEC-BC IMMIGRANT
EMPLOYMENT
COUNCIL OF BC
Connecting Employers to Immigrant Talent

British Columbia is Canada's leader in tech and has one of the fastest growing tech ecosystems in the world. However the current supply cannot meet the industry's growing demands for tech talent. By 2021, there will be an anticipated shortfall of over 30,000 skilled individuals to fill tech-related jobs in the province. Unless immediate action is taken by the provincial and federal governments, tech employers, the settlement and integration sector and other key stakeholders, this employment gap will severely limit the potential growth of the industry in BC. It will also limit economic benefits to be gained, which currently stand at over \$15 billion in GDP annually.

The 2016 Tech Talent BC Report identifies three talent pools that can be tapped into, which can help offset the impending shortage of tech workers in BC: (1) new entrants or recent graduates, (2) immigrants, and (3) other local supply to include career transitioners and people from under-represented groups. The focus of this report is on the second group identified: immigrants. According to the 2016 report, we will need to source 8,500 more immigrants than are currently projected to arrive to BC by 2021 in order to meet the growing tech sector demand.

The Immigrant Employment Council of British Columbia (IEC-BC), in partnership with the Association of Canadian Studies (ACS), carried out a joint research project to identify the specific needs and challenges in attracting and integrating immigrant talent into BC's tech sector. Additional project partners included the Surrey Board of Trade and Greater Victoria Chamber of Commerce along with representatives from 31 different tech companies located in BC's Lower-Mainland/Southwest region who participated in one of three focus groups across the province or individual, on-on-one interviews.

KEY FINDINGS

Results are presented in relation to one of five themes identified in the consultations with BC tech employers. Under Theme 1, focus group/interview participants discussed their **experience with government programs and initiatives** (e.g., Federal Skilled Worker, BC's Provincial Nominee, Temporary Foreign Worker, etc.). Most employers had used at least one of the programs to source international talent and had mixed reviews. There was some confusion when “navigating the system” and knowing what program to choose when, and frustration over the amount of paperwork required. Less was known of the newly launched Canada Global Skills Visa Program, but those who had used it and were past the learning curve had positive reviews.

The second theme concerned **alignment between immigrant talent and tech employer needs** as they relate to soft skills (e.g., language) and hard skills (e.g., technical). With a few exceptions, most employers felt that immigrants' soft skills were in short supply, and in particular, their interpersonal communication styles often do not align with Canadian employer's expectations. “Canadian Experience” was also seen a crucial ‘soft skill’ for newcomers to have before applying for more senior positions in the tech field.

Theme 3 related to **push and pull factors** or those factors that either push foreign talent away from the province or draw tech talent to live and work in BC. Immigrants are enticed by BC's natural beauty, climate and its many green spaces, but also by the province's reputation as a fast-growing tech hub with a lot of different companies to work for. The most prominent push factors were the inordinately expensive housing market, transportation issues and a high cost of living.

The fourth theme reviews **best practices for BC's tech sector** and much of the discussion with employers focused on mentorship and/or buddy programs as well as networking opportunities for newcomers. Most companies had either internal or external mentorship programs in operation (or had developed buddy programs for new hires), but very few had a formal mechanism for tracking successes. Employers from smaller tech companies also tended to use an ‘ad-hoc process’ to help out newly arrived employees find housing, transportation, language training and other professional development opportunities.

The final theme involved **settlement and integration services and supports for newcomers and their families**. Employers identified community-based organizations such as S.U.C.C.E.S.S., Mosaic and DIVERSEcity as accessible service providers in the lower Mainland. Camosun College in Victoria was also recognized for an exceptional class they teach to newcomers called “professionalism in the workplace,” which provides great insight into Canadian business culture. IEC-BC's on-line FAST program was also highlighted, which gives skilled immigrants a head start in the BC labour market before they even arrive in Canada.



RECOMMENDATIONS

The summary discussion also includes a set of recommendations for government policymakers, employers and other vested stakeholders in the BC tech industry.

For **policymakers**, five recommendations were put forth:

- 1 Develop an easy-to-use primer and interactive website detailing all current immigration programs and initiatives that employers can use to source international talent;
- 2 Streamline the amount of paperwork employers must fill out when sourcing international talent, especially with regard to collecting information that has already been gathered from the employer in the past;
- 3 Increase awareness of the new Global Skills Visa Program among employers;
- 4 Provide BC tech employers with access to a database of newcomer's skills and qualifications that are collected during their application process; and
- 5 Build incentives for universities to work with their students after graduation to help them find jobs in BC's tech industry.

For **employers** and **other stakeholders**, the following recommendations were set forth:

- 1 When developing recruitment strategies or "pitches" to attract foreign talent, they portray both the push (e.g., housing 'crisis') and pull factors (e.g., tech hub) to potential candidates;
- 2 Tech companies invest more time and resources into developing formal mentorship opportunities for newcomers to BC's tech industry, with mechanisms for tracking successes and barriers in the mentoring relationship;
- 3 Tech companies compare the costs of the various interventions available for newcomers to the costs of losing skilled workers and having to hire new ones (or not being able to fill vacancies at all).
- 4 The **community and settlement sector** do more to promote awareness of their services and supports for newcomers and their families in BC, and create awareness of programs for employers hiring new tech talent; and
- 5 Employers strongly recommend that newcomers to Canada be taught about Canadian workplace culture and employer needs prior to applying for employment opportunities in the BC tech industry.

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