



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

ANNUAL REPORT 2017-2018



ABOUT IEC-BC

The Immigrant Employment Council of BC (IEC-BC) is a not-for-profit organization that provides BC employers with solutions, tools and resources they need to attract, hire and retain qualified immigrant talent. We believe that the successful integration of skilled newcomers into the BC workplace is critical to both their success and the province's long-term economic performance. We work with employers, government, and other partner stakeholders to ensure that BC employers can effectively integrate global talent.

MISSION

Integrating immigrants into the labour market builds BC's economy.

VISION

Newcomers to British Columbia are quickly integrated into our labour market at a level that uses their skills, training and education. Successful attachment to the labour market allows immigrants to fully contribute to our society and economy, and through their contributions BC prospers. By being able to tap into a labour pool of talented newcomers, BC employers are able to grow their business through using immigrants' skills.

A MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR AND THE CEO OF THE IMMIGRANT EMPLOYMENT COUNCIL OF BC

As we mark our 10-year anniversary, we reflect on a remarkable journey and share our vision for the future. IEC-BC emerged from the summit on immigrant employment co-hosted by the City of Vancouver and the Vancouver Foundation in October 2008. While there were many groups working with immigrants, there was no organization devoted to helping employers connect with global talent and build their capacity for an immigrant workforce.

For founding CEO, Kelly Pollack, our call to action was clear: develop evidence-based initiatives that are employer-focused, rooted in best practices and help resolve the issue of immigrant underemployment and unemployment.

Fast-forward to 2018, and we have now given hundreds of BC employers the tools and resources they need to grow their business and advance BC's economy by connecting with global talent.

Our most notable achievements over these 10 years include:

- **the first comprehensive province-wide consultation** that provided a clear insight into what BC employers want and need to successfully attract, hire and retain immigrants;
- **Employer Forums in Northern BC** that built regional capacity to connect with global talent;
- the **Employer Innovation Fund** that awarded \$1.4 million to employer-led initiatives aimed at integrating skilled immigrants into BC's workplaces;
- the **MentorConnect program** that has offered unique leadership opportunities to almost 600 Canadian professionals and helped more than 550 immigrant participants find employment in their chosen field within six months of program completion;



BEN HUME (L) AND PATRICK MACKENZIE (R)

- the **FAST** program that effectively shifted the focus from credential recognition to competency assessment – helping BC employers demystify immigrant hiring;
- **BC JobConnect**, which responded to employers' desire to connect with refugees from Syria and other countries and has since become an online platform for all newcomers to BC who are seeking employment.

By engaging partners across a wide array of industries and sectors, we brought a whole-of-society approach to achieving our strategic goals. Thank you all for your inspiration and support!

Over the past year, we continued to expand our programs and forge new partnerships – with a view to helping immigrants better understand how their skills fit with the Canadian labour market and making it easier for employers to realize what talents newcomers bring to the table.

As you read this report, you will find more about the solutions we have developed to create immigrant-inclusive workplaces in BC. You will also learn how our work has made a difference for organizations and has impacted the lives of individuals.

Ben Hume, Chair, IEC-BC Patrick MacKenzie, CEO, IEC-BC



2017–2018 YEAR IN REVIEW

Through our programs, tools and resources, we help businesses of all sizes, from all sectors across the province, build their capacity to integrate immigrants into the workplace. In 2017–2018, we strengthened the continuum of our pre- and post-arrival services to ensure that employers can effectively connect to the immigrant talent that is ready for the Canadian labour market.

We expanded two of our core offerings – FAST and BC JobConnect. Initially designed to facilitate access to three skilled trades in British Columbia, FAST has now evolved into a comprehensive set of services and resources for immigrant workers in 35 skilled trades, 16 occupations in IT and Data Services, and 17 occupations in Biotechnology and Life Sciences. We have expanded BC JobConnect to give an opportunity for all newcomers to showcase their skills, education and work experience to BC employers looking to hire.

We achieved important program milestones for MentorConnect. Almost 600 established Canadian professionals have now mentored newcomers to our country and prepared them for success in the local labour market. The Connections Networking Events, which we pioneered last year, offer new ways to raise employers’ awareness about the immigrant talent that is already in BC.

We produced a new tool to help BC businesses hire and retain global talent. IEC-BC’s *Onboarding Newcomers: A Toolkit for BC Employers* illustrates how purposeful initiatives can support any employer to be more diverse and inclusive.

We actively engaged employers in identifying innovative solutions. Together with representatives of various public and private organizations across the Lower Mainland, we set up an Employer Advisory Group. Members of the Advisory Group help IEC-BC deliver programs that boost employer capacity to create diverse and inclusive workplaces.

“With the competitive job market and unemployment rates in BC below 6%, we have found it very challenging to find good production workers.”

MIKE CARROLL, TROWELL TRADES

We mapped refugee skills and employer challenges to building a workforce inclusive of immigrants. With input from over 40 employers and 140+ refugees in Abbotsford and Surrey, we identified the skills and occupational profiles of the refugees who are currently looking for work, and uncovered the challenges faced by local employers in connecting to this talent pool. We also spoke with 45 leaders from BC's growing tech industry and mapped ways to maximize the benefits of hiring skilled immigrants to offset current and future shortages of workers in the sector.

We continue to bring the employer perspective to the immigration debate. IEC-BC led an in-depth discussion about using the human capital of immigrants at the *Unlocking the Diversity Dividend in BC* event. We shared best practices of connecting employers to refugee talent at the *International Metropolis Conference in the Hague*. We looked at the ways to integrate inclusive hiring practices into organizations' HR policies and procedures at *The Brave New World: SFU Community Summit 2018*. IEC-BC offered viable alternatives to credential recognition at the *Eliminating Barriers to Foreign Qualification Recognition: Emerging and Best Practices Joint IRCC/ESDC Conference*.

Over the past year, we continued to expand our programs and forge new partnerships — to make it easier for employers to realize what talents newcomers bring to the table.



FAST: GIVING EMPLOYERS A TRUSTED SNAPSHOT OF IMMIGRANTS' COMPETENCIES

A few months before moving to Vancouver, Olufemi Ogunji would regularly get back from work around 6 pm, go to bed by 11 pm, and wake up by 3 am – to make sure he could participate in the live webinars hosted through the FAST Program. On some nights he would just go without sleeping.

Femi, as he likes to call himself, is an IT professional from Nigeria. He credits FAST with helping him get a job in his field with the *Adoptive Families Association of BC* just six weeks after arriving in Canada. To “hit the ground running” in his new homeland, Ogunji had signed up for several pre-arrival programs, and he found FAST was the best fit.

“I got the best mileage by far from FAST,” he says. “The industry-specific content was important, but so was information about the Canadian workplace etiquette and culture.”

FAST gives skilled immigrants a head start in the Canadian labour market – all before they actually move here. Along with a comprehensive assessment of industry-specific competencies, the program provides recommendations to improve their knowledge in specific areas when needed. It also offers current labour-market information customized to each individual’s needs – including job outlooks and suggestions for alternative careers where his/her skills are in demand.

FAST demystifies immigrant hiring for employers, presenting them with a trusted snapshot of the abilities a prospective candidate brings to the table. Following its expansion in spring 2017, the program now offers its clients an opportunity to receive industry certification and designation in 33 occupations across IT and biotech. The Information Technology Professional (ITP) designation is available to FAST participants through a partnership with Canada’s *Information and Communications Technology Council (ICTC)*, and it evaluates candidates’ international experience and skills against Canada’s industry standards. The BioReady™ designation is offered by another partner, *BioTalent Canada*, and it showcases candidates’ skills in a way that resonates with Canadian employers.

Femi successfully completed the FAST IT “Prepare for Work in Canada” modules and earned an ITP designation. The program helped him polish his soft skills and offered a good understanding of what working in Canada is really like. It also gave him confidence to present his credentials and expertise to BC employers.



Olufemi Ogunji and Mariel Martes are FAST graduates who found employment in their fields of expertise just weeks after arriving in Canada.



FAST AT A GLANCE

- > *Since its launch in September 2016, the program has served close to 600 immigrants.*
- > *FAST completion rate is now almost five times higher than the industry average for voluntary, self-guided online courses.*

“I might be new to Canada but I have a fairly good understanding of how the Canadian system works, and my skills have a seal of approval from an industry leader,” he adds.

IEC-BC’s industry partners are as excited about FAST as are its clients.

“With the increase in immigration into Canada, as well as very significant skills shortages in the Canadian bio-economy, programs like FAST are vital to getting newcomers prepared to work before they arrive in Canada,” says Rob Henderson, CEO of *BioTalent Canada*.

To date, FAST has served close to 600 clients in skilled trades, biotechnology and life sciences, and IT and data services. Currently, 48% of the clients that register, finish the program – a completion rate that is almost five times higher than the industry average for voluntary, self-guided online courses. One of the key motivators for candidates to complete FAST is access to e-mentoring sessions and connections to industry experts that the program offers.

Early indicators of FAST employment outcomes are also impressive. About 65% of those who have landed in Canada have found employment in their fields within eight weeks of arrival.

Marisel Martes is one of those successful FAST graduates. A native of the Philippines, she worked progressively in office management, supply chain, finance and logistics in Saudi Arabia before moving to Vancouver in October 2017. She says FAST helped her approach the job search “the Canadian way.”

“What I love about FAST, is that it takes away your fears about a new country and a new professional environment, and it gives you confidence to pursue your dreams,” she notes.

Marisel who was hired as a logistics and purchasing associate at *Hospitality Designs* in Richmond just three weeks after arriving, was most impressed with the real-life workplace scenarios offered in the program modules. She says they are very relevant to her current professional situation.

She also likes how seamlessly she could connect with IEC-BC’s post-arrival programs, having registered for BC JobConnect and MentorConnect.

“My professional goal here in Canada is to become a supply chain analyst, and I am learning a lot about what is needed to make that happen,” she adds.

By significantly boosting the job-readiness of FAST participants, the program gives employers access to a wider talent pool.

“With skills shortages on the rise, finding the right people is a challenge,” says Mindy Gobbi, Mobility and Relocation Specialist at *Canadian Forest Products Ltd.* “FAST can help facilitate our access to skilled talent, supporting the growth of our business and Canada’s economy.”

IEC-BC’s partners are also optimistic about the program’s future.

“With its step-by-step, tailored resources, FAST creates enhanced pathways to employment for immigrants,” says Sandra Saric, VP of Talent Innovation at *ICTC*.

“This is a great platform that can be easily expanded to new markets, audiences and industries.”

BC JOBCONNECT: OPENING THE WINDOW TO AN UNTAPPED TALENT POOL

Trowell Trades Accessories Ltd. is a family-run manufacturing business in Surrey with a 50-year history. Recently, the company has been experiencing a workforce crunch and reached out to BC JobConnect, IEC-BC's free online tool, to help meet its hiring needs.

"With the competitive job market and unemployment rates in BC below 6%, we have found it very challenging to find good production workers," says Mike Carroll, Business Development Manager at *Trowell Trades*. "BC JobConnect provided us with quick access to qualified candidates."

BC JobConnect was originally started to help BC employers connect with refugees from Syria and other countries. In the summer of 2017, the tool was expanded to include all permanent residents, and it now has the profiles of over 800 newcomer candidates with a wide range of education levels

and skills – from high-school diplomas to PhDs, in industries such as IT, engineering, finance, manufacturing and life sciences.

BC JobConnect has helped *Trowell Trades* find employees, "who work hard all day and seem genuinely happy" to be with the company. "It will absolutely be my first stop when it comes to any staffing requirements going forward," Mike adds.

Unlike a traditional job board, BC JobConnect allows employers to navigate potential employees' inventory of skills with ease and determine how they can plug them into the workplace.

"That's how I got my current job," says Grace Zakko who arrived from Syria in September 2016 and signed up for BC JobConnect four months later. "Through the key words I entered in my profile, I was able to identify both the industries and fields that were of interest to me, and present my education and experience in a way that resonated with employers."

A few months after setting up her profile she was contacted and subsequently hired by *EY's* Vancouver office. She says she has already recommended the tool to all her friends.

"It saves you so much time and effort," Grace says. "There is no need to search endlessly for an employer who will consider hiring you even if you have not previously worked in Canada."

More than 400 employers have already registered for BC JobConnect, and Demash Kristanto is one of them.



BC JobConnect allows employers to determine how they can plug immigrants' inventory of skills into the workplace.



BC JOBCONNECT AT A GLANCE

Since its creation in February 2017:

- > **800 + candidates created profiles on BC JobConnect.**
- > **400 + employers registered on the portal.**
- > **Almost 200 employers connected with qualified job seekers.**

Demash used the tool to find candidates while he worked in HR at the *Vancouver Aquarium* and in his new role as HR Specialist at *Ingram Micro's Richmond office*. He has successfully hired through the tool's candidate search function, and he has also posted openings on the BC JobConnect Job Board – the tool's newest feature.

"BC JobConnect is a window to an untapped talent pool," Demash says. "These candidates came to Canada looking for a better life, and they have the motivation and the drive to make it here."

Almost 70% of employees at *Ingram Micro's Richmond office* are immigrants, and Demash knows how to look beyond "Canadian experience" when assessing candidates' competencies. He also looks beyond credentials, which he calls "just pieces of paper," when hiring.

"I look for attitude, aptitude, and an eagerness to learn," he says.

For some newcomers, this means learning how their skills can be applied in different ways in Canada so that they are making a meaningful contribution. By connecting them to employers, BC JobConnect helps immigrants explore alternative career paths.

"I found out that there is a difference between civil engineering and construction in terms of credentialing," says Diogo Alves who has worked as a head engineer at a construction company and a chief planning consultant in his native Brazil. "And while I work towards my engineering accreditation in Canada, I can still work in construction."

Diogo, who found a job as a project coordinator with *PCL Constructors Westcoast Ltd.* just three months after arrival, got connected to his current employer through BC JobConnect. He is looking forward to bringing his skills, experience and, most importantly, his spirit to the role – something that forward-looking employers appreciate.

"You get people from other parts of the world telling you – hey, we have done things differently, let's try that," says Demash. "And in order to innovate, to move forward, you have to consider these different perspectives."

"These candidates came to Canada looking for a better life, and they have the motivation and the drive to make it here."

DEMASH KRISTANTO, INGRAM MICRO

MENTORCONNECT: BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN IMMIGRANTS AND THE BC LABOUR MARKET

Amid the hustle and bustle of the public library in Mount Pleasant, Tijana Corluca would look for a quiet spot. Just a stone's throw away from her office, this vibrant community space was perfect to meet with her mentees. An architect with *GBL Architects* and a mentor with IEC-BC's MentorConnect program, Tijana has been building her leadership potential while helping internationally trained architects understand the Canadian context of their profession.

"They were all at a critical point in their careers," says Tijana who has mentored three new immigrants this year. "My role was to help them connect to the professional community here and get a better understanding of how they can gain a competitive edge in the labour market."

IEC-BC's MentorConnect matches job-ready new Canadians with established local professionals.

Over a two-month period, mentors provide occupation-specific coaching and help skilled immigrants gain first-hand knowledge of their industry in Canada. The program offers unique professional-development opportunities for participating companies and individuals, with over 160 of IEC-BC's mentors returning to build their capacity to foster inclusive and diverse workplaces.

Tijana's mentees were most interested in the best ways to upgrade their skills to meet Canadian requirements and gain professional registration as architects in BC. They were also eager to learn how to present their skills and expertise to potential employers effectively.

One of Tijana's mentees is Tarza Ali, who appreciated the insights into the local hiring process and networking.

"Every minute of this mentoring was valuable for me," Tarza says. "Tijana helped me take my first steps here. To this day she keeps motivating and supporting me."

MentorConnect significantly improves immigrants' employment prospects, with 70% finding jobs in their field within 6 months of program completion. Two of Tijana's mentees have successfully launched their professional careers in Canada.

"I am very glad to have been part of the MentorConnect program," says Noof Al-Khshali, who recently started working as a junior architectural technologist at *Studio One Architecture Inc.* in Vancouver. "My mentoring partnership has been very enriching, and I am grateful for the guidance to start my career here in BC."



Through MentorConnect, mentors build their leadership potential and immigrants gain an edge in the labour market.



MENTORCONNECT AT A GLANCE

Since the launch of MentorConnect in 2011:

- > **Almost 600 mentors have participated in the program.**
- > **Over 160 mentors have returned to work with mentees again.**
- > **Over 550 participants have found work in their field within six months of program completion.**

For Tijana, it was a chance to learn how to adjust the coaching pace to her mentees' individual needs. She was also happy to help them get a head start in BC's thriving architecture industry.

"There is a lot of work in the industry – for us and for everybody else – and the projections for the future are good," she says.

By providing career-specific, real-time industry information and helping skilled immigrants build professional networks, MentorConnect equips them with the tools to succeed in their chosen field.

"On many occasions, newcomers do not have information that is relevant to what they are looking for in Canada, and they end up taking random courses or pursuing alternative careers," says Aadil Ghelani, who has mentored four immigrants with backgrounds in construction management. "MentorConnect helps them make timely and appropriate decisions, and it acts as a bridge between the newcomer and the local market."

Qaiser Jamil, an experienced HR professional from Pakistan who arrived in Canada in July 2017, could not agree more. He credits IEC-BC with helping boost his career chances in Canada.

"You try to understand the individual perspective, you find the best mentor fit, and you offer one-on-one connections," he says.

Currently, Qaiser works for *BC Hydro* and is on his way to obtaining the designation of Chartered Professional in HR with *CPHR BC & Yukon*.

With low unemployment and job openings in many industries in BC, what new immigrants often need is encouragement and a bit of direction from their Canadian peers.

"They are usually so close to achieving their goals, and I do not want them to lose their focus," says Arturo Pallares, who has worked with four mentees through MentorConnect.

A registered physiotherapist who practises at the *Vancouver General Hospital (VGH)*, he has also been affiliated with *UBC's Internationally Educated Physiotherapists Exam Preparation Program (IEP)*. Arturo is a skilled immigrant himself and knows full well the value of having a local professional mentor.

"I did not have anyone to guide me when I arrived from Colombia almost 20 years ago," he says. "There are certain specifics of how physiotherapists work here, and I want my mentees to get a first-hand knowledge of what is needed to succeed."

Arturo says that with persistence and commitment, and with support from their local mentors, skilled immigrants have every chance to live their professional dreams in Canada.

"There is a huge need for their services," says Arturo. "There are currently 15 full-time openings for physiotherapists in this building alone."

THE ROAD AHEAD: EMPLOYER-FOCUSSED, EVIDENCE-BASED, PARTNERSHIP-DRIVEN

Close to a million new job openings are projected in the province through 2027¹, and BC employers have to be creative and intentional when looking for talent. Immigrants who bring diverse perspectives, international connections and grit, are one of the attractive candidate pools organizations can tap into.

IEC-BC will continue to help businesses across the province attract workers with the skills they need for the changing economy – including critical thinking, communication and collaboration – to compete with the rest of the world.



Our approach will continue to be employer-focussed, evidence-based and partnership-driven. We will expand the reach of our programs to ensure that those who are interested in effectively using immigrant talent have the necessary tools, resources and capacity to do so. And we will build on the cross-sectoral partnerships and synergies with a view to identifying the challenges and opportunities for employers who want to attract immigrant talent to in-demand sectors.

To this end, we have just launched a new research project in partnership with Carleton University that will assess local practices in the recruitment and retention of immigrant talent in the tech sector. This joint initiative will provide insights to inform policies and programs to attract needed talent.

We will continue to help employers better understand how immigrants' skills and experience can benefit their business – expanding the number of competency assessments we can do. This will give BC employers better access to the talent they need while helping newcomers integrate into appropriate jobs more quickly.

The road to building a truly dynamic and innovative workplace that makes full use of immigrants' talents is not without its challenges, and success requires buy-in from all stakeholders. It requires that employers commit to long-term organizational growth and change, and it also requires that newcomers gain a solid understanding of the nuances of the Canadian work environment to make informed decisions about their career paths here.

In response to this need, IEC-BC plans to develop a workforce-readiness program, which is driven by employer needs and will be delivered through our community partners. It will improve employment outcomes for immigrants while helping employers reap more benefits from this human capital.

We want talented people from all over the world to think of BC first when they are looking for a new home, and we want employers to be fully equipped to welcome this vibrant talent pool. As a catalyst for change and a champion of employer solutions, IEC-BC will continue to work tirelessly to help them succeed.

¹ *British Columbia Labour Market Outlook: 2017 Edition*

A BIG THANK YOU TO OUR PARTNERS FOR HELPING US MAKE 2017-2018 SUCH A SUCCESSFUL YEAR

Abbotsford Community Services
AbbotsfordWorks
Abbotsford Chamber of Commerce
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BOARD OF DIRECTORS

The IEC-BC Board is currently chaired by Ben Hume, Past President, Sheppards Building Materials Inc., and consists of influential BC leaders in business, labour, and immigrant service organizations.

Ben Hume

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Past President, Sheppards Building Materials Inc.

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IEC-BC IMMIGRANT EMPLOYMENT COUNCIL OF BC

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