

## **2015 Forum:**

# Professional Immigrant Networks - Building Your Brand

*June 16, 2015*

BC will have a shortage of 265,000 workers by 2022 and there will be more than one million job openings in BC by the end of this decade<sup>1</sup>. Pressures on the labour supply side include a relatively low BC fertility rate, faster aging workforce, geographic and sectoral mismatches and a disconnection between the supply and demand of labour. Throughout the Province and Canada, the unemployment and underemployment of skilled immigrants remains pervasive – a phenomenon that is costing the Canadian economy billions of dollars annually.

Currently there are many Professional Immigrant Networks (PINs) in BC - PINs are groups of immigrant professionals who have organized themselves to forge connections between members, employers and community agencies, all with the goal of advancing immigrant employment. PINs are comprised of highly skilled and experienced individuals representing high growth industries, including finance, information technology, construction and engineering, yet they remain a largely untapped talent pool. PINs are a viable source of talent, however, they face barriers in integrating their members into the workforce, and one of the biggest barriers include “employers have little or no knowledge and awareness of PINs”<sup>2</sup>.

In response, the Immigrant Employment Council of BC (IEC-BC) coordinated consultation activities and events including two Roundtables, where PINs, government and employers met to bridge the connection between PINs members and BC employers. Several themes emerged including:

- Increasing employer awareness of PINs by building the online brand of PINs
- Enhancing PINs members’ job search through social media
- Increasing PINs’ ability to connect with small and medium businesses

Following the Roundtables, IEC-BC held a Forum, “PINs: Building your Brand” on June 16, 2015, in collaboration with a PINs Advisory Group representing seven PINs from in-demand sectors, including engineering, construction, and information technology. The Forum included a panel discussion with three experts and break-out groups. Over 40 PINs members and leaders heard from expert panelists on how to effectively engage employers through online branding and tips for connecting with small and medium businesses. Break-out sessions were held for participants to share ideas and develop practical solutions to address the three themes.

The Forum was intended to be a strategic platform for deeper and sustained action towards the effective labour market integration of PINs members in BC. Ultimately, this requires the leadership and involvement of multiple stakeholders, including PINs, IEC-BC, employers and government.

*“Currently there are many Professional Immigrant Networks (PINs) in BC... yet they remain a largely untapped talent pool”*

<sup>1</sup> BC Labour Market Outlook 2022

<sup>2</sup> Professional Immigrant Networks Roundtables Summary - Immigrant Employment Council of BC, May 2015

# Executive Summary:

## Key Themes

Despite the professional and employment related focus of PINs and the number of activities they undertake to enhance employment opportunities for their members, many still expressed difficulties in adequately connecting with employers. Without exception, all PINs representatives noted they had a lack of capacity to connect with employers. There was agreement on the following themes:

1

### **A strong organizational online brand is critical**

Employers have little or no knowledge of PINs. Recruiter and employers are increasingly using social media to find talent. A strong web presence is required to promote PINs and build “brand awareness”. It is critical to grow PINs online presence, both for PINs organizations and their members. A strong online brand presence would increase employer awareness of PINs and facilitate employer engagement with PINs.

2

### **A training plan is needed to build the capacity of PINs and their members to connect with employers**

The need for education and training for PINs members, including workshops and online tools and resources was identified. It was suggested to explore a “train the trainer” approach to tap into the expertise and skills of PINs members while building PINs’ capacity to provide and sustain ongoing education and training.

3

### **Coordination among PINs is required to attract employers**

There is a lack of coordinated structures/ systems amongst PINs. Employers have definitively stated a preference to work with organizations or networks that have coordinated or “umbrella” structures and systems in place.

An umbrella organization would leverage the collective power of PINs to build their brand awareness and facilitate the implementation of network wide, collective communications and marketing initiatives including branding, a central repository of resources and a one stop website. This was one of the strongest themes to emerge and led into a discussion of a centralized “employer focused” site of all BC PINs – making it easier for employers to become aware of and to engage with PINs and their members.