

Connecting Employers  
to Immigrant Talent

# Professional Immigrant Networks Roundtables Summary

*May 2015*

**IEC**<sub>BC</sub>  
IMMIGRANT  
EMPLOYMENT  
COUNCIL OF BC

# Introduction

In response to the 2014 Mind the Gap Summit recommendation that the Immigrant Employment Council of BC (IEC-BC) “Engage Professional Immigrant Networks (PINs) who are important networks for governments, employers and service providers to connect with”<sup>1</sup>, IEC-BC has in the past year engaged PINs, undertaken research to understand their capacity and clearly articulate the talent pool they represent, and most recently held two Roundtables with key stakeholders including employers, government, and several PINs representatives.

On April 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup>, 29 representatives gathered to participate in the two Roundtables. Employers, industry associations, PINs, and government worked together with IEC-BC to explore the value of the relationships between PINs, employers, business and industry, government and other stakeholders, better understand the immigrant talent pool that PINs represent, find better ways to connect the stakeholders and identify next steps for action. The specific objectives for the Roundtables were:

1. Increase the profile of PINs as a viable source of talent for BC employers
2. Identify and disseminate employer ‘best practices’ in hiring and retaining immigrants and creating inclusive workplaces
3. Increase multi stakeholder understanding of PINs membership in BC
4. Identify barriers faced by PINs members in accessing skills appropriate employment

The Roundtable sessions were facilitated by Trevor Van Eerden of PEERs Inc. and Ryan Berlin of Urban Futures presented on a PINs membership survey that was conducted in the month leading up to the Roundtables. This summary provides a brief synopsis of the key points and findings of the Roundtables and the recommended next steps that emerged.

<sup>1</sup> *Mind The Gap 2014 Summit Final Report: A Platform For Moving Forward On Global Talent For British Columbia, June 2014*

# Overview of Professional Immigrant Networks

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 in BC are organized by profession, ethnicity or both. PINs are formal or informal, volunteer-run, immigrant-led, with established membership, leadership and articulated mission and objectives.<sup>2</sup>

Partnerships with post-secondary institutions, professional associations and immigrant serving agencies are common. Some PINs have partnered with private companies to facilitate professional development and foster employment opportunities for members.

Amongst the PINs, membership ranges between 150 – 1,000, however many of the PINs acknowledged that their mailing and distribution lists frequently exceeded their active membership. Most PINs operate as registered non-profit organizations, typically run by volunteers, although the Immigrating Women in Science Program and Latincoover both had paid administrative staff.

Member services offered by PINs vary by organization, however, networking and events to support professional awareness, upgrading or issue based presentations are the norm. Some of the PINs cited job search support, career coaching and professional mentorship as part of their membership services. In addition, some PINs organize family and social events for their members. Of note, some activities may be conducted in the first language, while others are held in English.

Partnerships tend to be individualized to the various PINs, however, examples were cited of agreements with professional or regulatory associations, consulates, and industry or sectoral organizations. Although the PINs noted the absence of a coordinating body for the PINs in BC, some members identified existing Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) with related stakeholders and a willingness to work together.

<sup>2</sup> Immigrant Employment Roundtables Background Document,  
April 2015

## PINS REPRESENTED AT IEC-BC ROUNDTABLES

- ◇ Filipino Canadian Construction Society (<http://fccsbc.wix.com/org#>)
- ◇ Iranian Engineers of British Columbia Association ([www.iebca.ca/drupal15/](http://www.iebca.ca/drupal15/))
- ◇ Latincoover ([www.latincoover.ca/](http://www.latincoover.ca/))
- ◇ Society of Canadian Women in Science – Immigrating Women in Science Program ([www.scwist.ca/programs-and-events/iwis/](http://www.scwist.ca/programs-and-events/iwis/))
- ◇ Society of Iranian Canadian Professionals (<http://www.sicap.ca/>)
- ◇ University of Philippines Alumni Association in BC (<http://www.upaabc.org/>)

# Creating Connections for the PINs Talent Pool

## STRATEGIES FOR CONNECTING WITH EMPLOYERS

PINs identified several practices and approaches to connect their membership with employers and labour market opportunities. The approaches varied among organizations, collectively the following were seen as the most prevalent best practices:

Networking events, targeted career fairs and conferences

Workshops, presentations and seminars

Mentorship program

Consultations with employers or industry associations

Special projects, e.g. work experience initiatives and internships

Foreign credential recognition network in partnership with Consulate General

LinkedIn and social media profiles

PINs Newsletter

MOUs with other organizations and occupational stakeholders, e.g. regulatory bodies, large employers, education

Internal networks, with employed members who can share up to date knowledge and identify job opportunities

## CHALLENGES FACED BY PINS

Despite the professional and employment related focus and the number of activities PINs undertake to enhance employment opportunities for their members, many still expressed challenges in adequately connecting with employers. The most commonly held challenges were:

### 1. Lack of capacity:

- ◇ PINs are often run by volunteers, with few or no paid staff

### 2. Building connections and partnerships with employers takes time

- ◇ Lack of employer representation at events – limited number of employers attend events, but clearly there is greater value for PIN members when employers participate
- ◇ Volunteer opportunities, practicums, placements and other opportunities for PIN members to gain Canadian work experience are rare and very hard to establish

### 3. Limited/ no access to financial support:

- ◇ It is difficult for PINs to access funding (grants or funded activity) because of their limited capacity/ staff or volunteer availability
- ◇ Lack of training/ expertise in proposal and grant writing
- ◇ Lack of awareness of available funding opportunities

## CHALLENGES FACED BY EMPLOYERS

Employers, industry associations and government representatives at the Roundtables recognize that PINs represent a talent pool that is yet to be fully utilized in BC. However, they also clearly stated that there are distinct challenges and some limitations in connecting not only with PINs, but with the numerous and diverse stakeholders vying for their time, expertise and commitments in employment related initiatives. The following provides a summary of the key challenges raised by employers, industry and business:

### **1. Lack of coordination between PINs and other employment and immigrant service providers:**

- ◇ There are numerous PINs as well as other community, employment and immigrant service providers – it is a challenge for employers to choose with whom to engage
- ◇ Employers receive requests from many organizations (e.g. Employment Service Centres, immigrant serving organizations, PINs, other organizations) – it is impossible to follow up and work with everyone

### **2. Lack of coordinated structures/ systems amongst PINs:**

- ◇ Employers stated a preference to work with organizations or networks that already have structures and systems in place with a wider reach

### **3. Lack of HR and recruiting capacity:**

- ◇ Small and medium employers (SMEs) often lack HR departments or designated HR staff
- ◇ Large employers have HR departments/ staff, but their capacity remains limited

### **4. Majority of new immigrants choose to settle in Vancouver:**

- ◇ New immigrants usually only willing to relocate to other areas of BC if they are able to secure a job in their field

### **5. Limited scope of PINs membership:**

- ◇ PINs' focus on ethnic origin can be problematic – especially challenging for large employers who need to work with everyone
- ◇ Employers need to tap into all talent pools – PINs represent a limited spectrum
- ◇ PINs greatest representation in Metro Vancouver contrasts with employers needs or mandates to hire regional or local talent (e.g. opportunities in Northern BC and pressure to hire locally)

### **6. Little or no knowledge and awareness of PINs:**

- ◇ It is likely that many employers are not aware of the role and work of PINs and immigrant service organizations – more information and communication is needed

## EMPLOYERS' EXPECTATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

In response to the employment and connectivity challenges raised within the Roundtables, employers and government representatives shared many of their requirements, expectations and realities for effective connection and communication with PINs and their members. Key points included:

### **1. Canadian work experience is not the barrier it is believed to be:**

- ◇ Canadian experience is not a priority for large employers – open to bringing new talent into the organization and looking for diverse skills
- ◇ Employers are more concerned with ability to do job and “fit” within the organization

### **2. LinkedIn and other social media are essential tools both for organizational and individual profiles:**

- ◇ Used by several recruiters to track potential employees - all job seekers should have an online profile. Many recruiters are not interested in applicants who do not have an online profile. Some employers no longer attend job fairs or participate in networking events
- ◇ Individuals need to be well presented in their online profiles

### **3. Frequently immigrants' applications and resumes are poorly presented:**

- ◇ The majority are not well written and may be too long or use inappropriate formats. Many potential candidates miss out on opportunities because their information is not well presented. Ensure it is easy to read, maximum of four pages (more often two)
- ◇ Applications and resumes need to be tailored to the job/ industry (e.g. trades – should focus on hands-on skills, need to be able to do the job right away - work histories are often not clear if duties were performed by the individual or a team)
- ◇ Employers are interested in facts and figures – previous roles and responsibilities, number of workers supervised, budget, etc.

### **4. PINs need to build relationships with recruiters/ HR practitioners:**

- ◇ Recruiters are often focused on filling specific positions
- ◇ Recruiters are interested in the individuals represented by PINs

### **5. PINs need to offer something for recruiters**

- ◇ Pre-screening applications for credentials and/or skills are important value-added services
- ◇ Employers appreciate direct referrals from employees within their organization. They are usually able to identify candidates who have the necessary skill set and are the right fit for the organization

## 6. Membership in professional associations is a valuable source of employer referrals:

- ◇ Employers look at candidates' membership in professional associations. Job seekers should start the membership and accreditation process as soon as possible

## 7. Applicants need to get to know the organizations they're applying to:

- ◇ Employers look for more than job readiness and skills in potential employees. It is important to know the values and culture of the organization
- ◇ Take time to get to know the needs of different employers. Employers will appreciate the effort and nurture those relationships. Employers appreciate genuine and honest conversations

## 8. Unsuccessful job applicants:

- ◇ Applicants need to be able to accept that they might not be successful. Follow-up from unsuccessful applicants can be overly intense – employers recommend a maximum of one follow-up call

## 9. Work experience for new immigrants:

- ◇ It is becoming more difficult for employers to provide work experience to new immigrants because of the perception of exploiting free labour, as well as liability and safety issues. Frequently unionized work environments and unions do not support internships or other similar programs. Some organizations have a mandate to pay all workers

## 10. BC has an established employment services delivery network:

- ◇ BC Employment Services Centres are funded to provide specialized employment services for skilled immigrants and therefore employment services should not be expected to be provided through volunteer PINs. The focus should be on building connections between different organizations and streamlining where possible

## 11. Requirements for Employment Services Centres:

- ◇ It can be a challenge for Employment Services Centres to work with PINs, as they are required to sign legal business agreements with sub-contractors. For this reason, they may choose to engage with more structured organizations

## OTHER FACTORS IMPEDING PINs MEMBERS CONNECTION TO EMPLOYMENT

The PINs also identified a number of other factors that appear to impede the labour market attachments of their membership. These included:

- ◇ The perceived requirement and difficulty obtaining Canadian work experience
- ◇ The lack of paid, unpaid and volunteer work opportunities
- ◇ Difficulty engaging mentors and/or mentees in mentorship programs, particularly occupation specific matches
- ◇ The variety of needs amongst PIN members – a “one size fits all” employment services model does not work
- ◇ New immigrants often feel overwhelmed by the combined settlement and workforce integration processes and may not be aware of opportunities or requirements in their occupation/ industry
- ◇ A lack of understanding and receptivity to diverse resumes and application packages, and a requirement for HR practitioners and recruiters to better understand and interpret international resumes

# Moving to Action

A number of actions and recommendations emerged from the Roundtables. At this stage they represent the ideas and collective of thinking of the session participants and will certainly require further investigation, effort, and planning to realize. Nevertheless, the recommendations here represent a well-considered and consensual first step to solidifying the connections between employers, PINs and other stakeholders and fully utilizing the talent pool that PINs represent. Recommended actions have been categorized into short term and longer term priorities.

## SHORT TERM ACTIONS

- 1. Conduct further research and a deeper investigations of PINs,** suggested research topics included:
  - ◇ Further examination of PINs employment readiness and occupational against industry and professional qualifications, language, experience, etc.
  - ◇ PIN Member Survey – What employment services have they accessed / not accessed? Are there barriers to accessing existing employment services?
  - ◇ How do PINs align with the BC labour market projections and gaps?
- 2. Create list of PINs in BC:**
  - ◇ Share the list with employers, recruiters, government and/or other key stakeholders
  - ◇ Create a LinkedIn group that employers can access
- 3. Create a PINs BC website:**
  - ◇ Could be used for collaboration between PINs and with employers and recruiters
  - ◇ One-stop shop for employers – information about PINs and job seekers by occupation/ industry/ skills
- 4. Create organizational and individual social media profiles for PINs and their members:**
  - ◇ Increasingly, employers are using social media to hire
- 5. Enhance employment and immigrant service providers' awareness of PINs, PINs membership and the services PINs provide:**
  - ◇ Establish networking events between PINs and employment service providers
  - ◇ Establish opportunities to present at the BC Skills Connect Advisory
  - ◇ Survey BC employment and Skills Connect providers on their awareness and interaction with PINs

## LONG-TERM ACTIONS

### 6. Creation of a formal or informal network or umbrella organization of PINs:

- ◇ Should be supported by both government and the private sector – both would benefit from supporting this network
- ◇ Would increase the capacity to organize events and other activities together
- ◇ Could serve to streamline the contacts and information sharing for employers and other stakeholders
- ◇ Example of a similar structure: ([www.networksforimmigrants.ca/search-pins/association-internationally-trained-professionals](http://www.networksforimmigrants.ca/search-pins/association-internationally-trained-professionals))

### 7. Establish a Coordinated Training Plan for PIN members:

- ◇ How to create online profiles (e.g. LinkedIn)
- ◇ Occupation-specific seminars, job search tips, writing resumes/ applications, following up with employers, etc.
- ◇ Input/ involvement from employers
- ◇ Establish best practices for creating resumes for different occupations/ industries (e.g. lawyers, trades)

### 8. Develop strategies to engage with SMEs:

- ◇ Few SMEs are connected to associations, professional networks and many do not have an HR department. There is a need to develop targeted strategies to reach this extensive BC employment pool

### 9. Identify opportunities for coordination between PINs and other provincial organizations:

- ◇ E.g. Professional associations, Chambers of Commerce, other provincial organizations, and related government ministries

## ROLE FOR IEC-BC AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS

While the Roundtables identified a multiplicity of stakeholders in realizing the goal of engaging PINs to enhance employment outcomes of BC's skilled immigrants, it is clear that coordination and steering is required to further the research and engagement of the appropriate stakeholders. Participants of the Roundtables acknowledged that there are roles to play in the actions listed on previous pages for business, employers, government and certainly the PINs themselves, but further identified that IEC-BC, as the initiator of these early steps and processes, should continue to work with the range of stakeholders to:

1. Establish a committee or working group to review and prioritize the recommended actions;
2. Support the creation of an action plan; and
3. Continue to monitor and evaluate progress at regular intervals.

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