

BC EMPLOYER CONSULTATION REPORT

RECRUITING & RETAINING
IMMIGRANT TALENT

April 2012

IEC_{BC}
IMMIGRANT
EMPLOYMENT
COUNCIL
OF BRITISH COLUMBIA



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With their global knowledge, professional connections and cultural savvy, new Canadians can play a huge role in British Columbia's efforts to market itself "as the preferred destination for international investment" and convert the strengths of the province into "competitive advantages to turn opportunity into lasting economic benefit for all British Columbians"

(Canada Starts Here: The BC Jobs Plan, Province of BC, 2011).



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LETTER FROM IEC-BC

April 30, 2012

The Immigrant Employment Council of British Columbia commissioned this independent study to provide insight into BC employers engagement in, and issues relating to, the recruitment and retention of skilled immigrant talent. This study represents the most recent comprehensive qualitative research initiative with BC employers that addresses this critical workforce development issue.

We are entering an era of unparalleled talent scarcity and increasing global competition for this crucial resource that British Columbia's future economic growth depends on.

With over one million job openings expected in BC by 2020 and an aging workforce, we must ensure that we have an adequate supply of skilled workers to meet demand. The BC Employer Consultation study clearly demonstrates that BC employers understand the business case for immigrant hiring, but are not leveraging these opportunities. The research indicates that the majority of BC employers are unhappy with the status quo; the confusing array of resources and information is seen as a deterrent that leaves employers uncertain where to turn for help.

IEC-BC calls for greater employer involvement in connecting their workforce needs with immigrant talent, and a stronger voice for employers in the development of policies, programs and services.

It is essential that we facilitate the integration of immigrant talent into British Columbia. That we match talent supply with market demand, streamline the process and supports for employers to access and leverage that talent, and give immigrants the opportunity to fully utilize all the skills and experience they bring to our Province.

This report provides a real-time perspective on the challenges currently faced by BC employers. Action needs to be swift and effective to enable British Columbia to compete successfully. Specifically, reform of the Federal Skilled Worker Program and coordination of information to employers about immigration programs and processes are key priorities moving forward.

Given that most of BC's future new labour supply will come from immigration, action is critical. Failure to tap into the global talent pool will render us uncompetitive, incur significant economic consequences and impact our province and our country.



Bob Elton

Chair, Board of Directors

Immigrant Employment Council of BC

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge and thank the many people and organizations that made this project a success.

Foremost, I would like to thank the 156 participants in fifteen focus groups throughout British Columbia who gave of their time and provided invaluable insights to help us with this important issue and report. Mostly small and medium-sized enterprises, I know how challenging it was to step away from one's day-to-day pressures to actively participate in a focus group.

I would also like to thank the hosts or partners of each of the focus groups, particularly local chambers of commerce and industry associations (the specific organizations are noted in Appendix 2) throughout the province. This project would not have succeeded without them; and I give special thanks to John Winter of the BC Chamber of Commerce.

The Board of Directors and Employer Resources Working Group of the Immigrant Employment Council of BC also provided important advice and feedback during the planning for and execution of this project.

I would also like to acknowledge and thank Kelly Pollack, IEC-BC Executive Director, and her staff of Daisy Quon, Javier Ojer, Roley Chiu and Cenk Guven for all of their advice and help during this project. The staff's input during the focus groups and their assistance in planning and preparing for the employer focus groups and in the follow up on them is very much appreciated.

Lastly, I would like to thank my associates – Geoff Stevens, Stuart Clark and Victoria Pazukha – for their capable work on this project. Their facilitation of focus groups, logistical support, documentation of outcomes and help in drafting this report was very much appreciated.



Kerry Jothen, Project Leader
Chief Executive Officer
Human Capital Strategies

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. INTRODUCTION: IMPERATIVE FOR ACTION

“We are entering the era of unparalleled talent scarcity, which, if left unaddressed, will put a brake on economic growth around the world, and will fundamentally change the way we approach the workforce challenges”

(Global Talent Risk – Seven Responses, World Economic Forum, 2011, p. 5).

As a recent Deloitte report on The Future of Productivity in Canada indicates, a jurisdiction has two basic means for obtaining needed human capital:

“Countries have two basic levers to improve the overall quality of their human capital and ensure an effective matching of skills to business needs. They can build the capabilities of people within their borders through education, and facilitate the immigration of skilled workers from other countries” (Deloitte, 2012, p. 28).

One of the biggest challenges for British Columbia’s economic future is ensuring labour supply meets labour demand to support significant economic and employment growth. Existing and new immigrants, foreign workers and international students represent a growing talent pool for the Province’s employers to draw from.

In fact, most of BC’s future new labour supply will come from this source of human capital in the coming decades. If policy-makers, employers, the business community, and regional stakeholders throughout the Province do not significantly tap into this human resource pool, Canada and BC will lose the talent war and suffer huge economic and competitiveness consequences.

2. IEC-BC REPORT COMMISSION

The Immigrant Employment Council of BC stimulates the integration of skilled immigrant talent into BC’s workforce. As a champion of BC employers, our role is to foster solutions, build connections and be a catalyst to help employers compete and succeed.

Since 2008, IEC-BC has been working closely with employers, business associations and other key stakeholders to improve hiring practices, encourage new public policies and programs, and change perceptions about immigrants in order to grow BC’s economy through effective immigrant labour market integration.

As part of this mandate, IEC-BC commissioned Human Capital Strategies to conduct an independent study to consult with employers throughout the Province to obtain their views and advice on needs and solutions regarding hiring and retaining immigrants in their workforces.

This study represents one of the most comprehensive engagement initiatives with BC Employers that addresses the critical area of Recruiting and Retaining Immigrant Talent in British Columbia.

The resulting report prepared by Human Capital Strategies presents the findings of this extensive employer consultation process on immigrant employment. Importantly, the report also details concrete recommendations for governments, employers and business associations, and IEC-BC for improving immigrant employment outcomes in BC.

3. SITUATIONAL CONTEXT

“No country, no organization can remain competitive unless talent – the engine force of economies – is there to ensure success of organizations in turbulent times, handle the political, social agenda and boost research and innovations”

(Jean Charest, Premier of Quebec in Global Talent Risk: Seven Responses. World Economic Forum, 2011, p. 5).

The first thing that needs to be said about the situational context for this employer consultation and report are two strong trends: the ubiquitous nature of the immigration topic in Canada and BC (and the world) today; and the changing policy landscape in recent years and as this report was written.

As indicated, there is clear evidence in the global, pan-Canadian and BC contexts of an imperative for employers to step up their recruitment and retention of immigrants.

There are overwhelming indications that, due to the convergence of economic and demographic factors, immigration will need to play an essential and strategic role in Canada’s and BC’s economic growth and prosperity. Competition in the global “war for talent” among the leading industrialized countries is intensifying as countries vie with one another to attract immigrants as a means to deal with emerging skill and labour shortages.

The federal, provincial and territorial governments of Canada are now fully engaged in addressing the increasing need to recruit skilled international talent to meet labour market demand. Numerous reports and analyses assert the critical role that immigration must play and, importantly, the kinds of measures that are necessary to improve the performance of the system.

4. PROJECT TERMS OF REFERENCE & METHODOLOGY

“It frustrates the hell out of me...We’re bringing hundreds of thousands of people into our country to end up, many of them, unemployed or underemployed in an economy where there are acute labour shortages”

(Jason Kenney, Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, “Kenney in a Hurry to Recruit World’s Top Talent”, The Globe and Mail, April 5, 2012, p. A1).

The BC Employer Consultation was a qualitative initiative conducted from December 2011 through February 2012 that included fifteen focus groups across seven communities and eight industry sectors in British Columbia with over 150 participating employers.

The objectives of the project were to:

1. Confirm real and perceived barriers
2. Identify effective practices
3. Determine missing tools and supports
4. Obtain suggestions regarding policies and programs

The scope of the BC Employer consultation project included:

- Employers throughout all regions of BC, with a particular emphasis upon small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)
- Eight key sectors of the BC economy: Construction, Manufacturing, Mining, Oil and Gas, Retail, Technology, Tourism & Hospitality, and Trucking
- Seven communities: Comox Valley, Cranbrook, Fort St. John, Kelowna, Prince George, Surrey and Vancouver
- Employers with some degree of experience in recruiting and hiring immigrants and foreign workers

5. KEY THEMES

Key findings from employers across the fifteen focus groups were clustered into the following ten themes that relate to public policy concerns, barriers to immigrant employment and opportunities for solution development:

1. **Government policies, programs and processes** – Many BC employers are frustrated with the Federal Immigration Points System and the Temporary Foreign Worker Program process. The Provincial Nominee Program was seen as positive, although some employers were concerned about backlogs and other shortcomings. Employers also want to see streamlining of the Federal Skilled Worker Program as well as improved pre-immigration screening in source countries.
2. **English language proficiency** – The lack of English language fluency was one of the top two issues raised by employers. In addition to general English proficiency, employers need immigrants to have business and sector/occupation specific English and to be able to apply their English in various work situations.
3. **Foreign credential assessment and recognition** – The difficulties of translating, evaluating and assessing the equivalency of foreign credentials and qualifications was noted by many employers, particularly for regulated occupations. Facilitation of the recognition of qualifications by professions is also seen as part of this challenge.
4. **Importance of Canadian experience** – Employers view a lack of Canadian work experience as a clear impediment to hiring more immigrants, primarily because they see a cost associated with training and mentoring.

- 
5. **Awareness and information** – Most employers have bought into the value proposition for immigrant hiring but do not know how to navigate the plethora of information and resources. “One-stop” resources and effective packaging and distribution of information to employers are critical – resources and packaging must be user-friendly and accessible.
 6. **Geographic differences among employers** – Employers in some rural BC communities felt they have little opportunity or capacity to attract immigrants and their families. Rural employers called for support to help them participate in immigrant attraction and recruitment, and incentives to immigrants to land or re-settle in rural areas. Employers in regions outside Greater Vancouver do recognize they need to “onboard” immigrants into their communities – not just into their workplaces – if they want them to settle and stay.
 7. **Coordination of service providers** – Employers would like to see better coordination of service agencies that work with immigrants, and improvements in their capacity to interface with and support employers. Employers see service providers as almost solely focusing on the needs of the immigrants, without much consideration or focus on demand-side requirements. This was reinforced in the responses to the survey of over 110 employers conducted for this project; they showed employers relied much more on their own recruitment tactics than on immigrant agencies services, despite the latter being funded to serve a large numbers of immigrants.
 8. **Employer capacity-building support** – Employers indicated they need easy access to other supports such as on-line tools/tool-kits for employers (e.g. recruiting plans, in-house mentoring, etc.) that are immigrant-specific. Employers feel that chambers, industry associations and other employer groups are best positioned to facilitate this in conjunction with a provincial regional resource.
 9. **Employer best practices in recruiting and retaining immigrants** – Employers identified a number of domestic and international best practices that they feel have the potential to be replicated and/or expanded.
 10. **IEC-BC profile and role** – While employers knew little about IEC-BC, once advised about its mandate and services, many identified it as an appropriate resource to provide much needed employer (and service provider) support and coordination. Employers offered some specific ideas on IEC-BC’s role as a “connector” and “solution-developer.”

6. PRINCIPLES FOR ACTION

“Immigration can be a powerful tool for supporting a country’s economic growth and prosperity, but its success in accomplishing that objective depends on well-designed and carefully implemented immigration policies that deliberately and strategically facilitate immigration’s economic contribution”

(D. Papademetriou and m. Sumption, Eight Policies to Boost The Economic Contribution of Employment-Based Immigration, June 2011, p. 1).

The recommendations resulting from the BC Employer Consultation and their eventual implementation should be guided by the following principles for action that are relevant for all immigrant employment “facilitators” including government, employers, business groups, and service providers.

1. Move quickly beyond research and consultation into an action/solution-oriented implementation mode.
2. Solutions and program development for workforce integration must be employer led. Any workplace/workforce-targeted funding must be employer-driven, not service provider-driven as is often the case.
3. Clear outcomes and success metrics must be created for any pilot and demonstration projects; those projects should then be adjusted based on evaluation, continually moving to action.
4. Leverage and build upon existing labour market programs, services and initiatives in communities and regions throughout BC.
5. Concentrate available scarce resources for immigrant employment on a small number of priority solution areas where investments and efforts can be sizeable, critical mass can be achieved, and significant outcomes will result.
6. Align, where appropriate, IEC-BC, government or industry immigrant employment initiatives with other workforce strategies (e.g. Regional Workforce Tables, Sector Workforce Strategies, Aboriginal employment, international education, Employment Program of BC for unemployed, etc.).
7. Facilitate improved coordination of the system since the available pathways for employers to access programs, resources, tools and information are often confusing and unclear.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

The BC Employer Consultation yielded the following recommendations that provide direction for the action that governments, employers, business associations and IEC-BC can and should take to enhance BC employers' (particularly SMEs') capacity for recruiting, hiring, retaining and integrating immigrants into their workforces.

We recognize that service providers, training institutions, immigrants themselves, and others all have important roles to play in the "system" of immigrant employment. However, since this consultation project is employer-facing, recommendations are directed at the above-mentioned audiences.

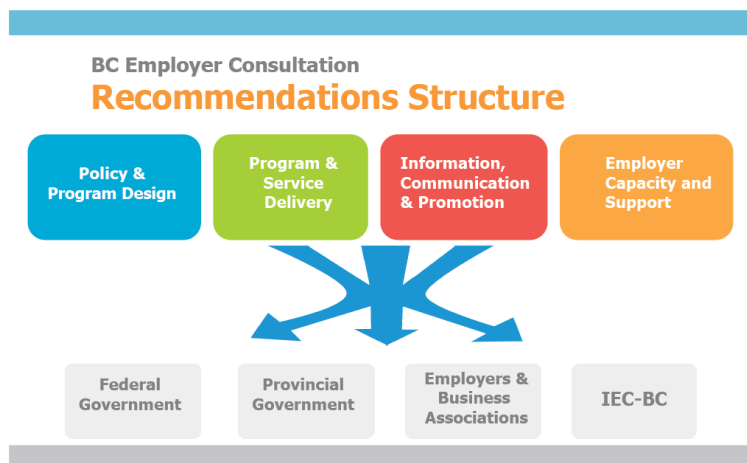
Thirty recommendations resulted from the Consultation and are organized by type of organization (federal and provincial governments, employers and business associations, and IEC-BC) and scope of recommendation (policy and program design, program and service delivery, information/communication/promotion, and employer capacity and support). As a few of the recommendations are relevant for different types of organizations, they are repeated where appropriate.

Noting that not all recommendations are of equal importance or priority, the most important recommendations were determined to be ones that are:

- Of strategic importance for employers
- Potentially highly impactful
- Urgent to address
- "Quick/early" wins to establish momentum

In prioritizing the above-mentioned criteria, cost and feasibility were also considered.

The Top 10 Recommendations are listed below. Recommendations are grouped by organization and identified as fitting one of the following categories: policy and program design; program and service delivery; information, communication and promotion; and employer capacity and support. The full set of recommendations is found in the main body of the report.



Federal Government

1. Improve the Temporary Foreign Worker Program:
 - (a) Streamline client service procedures and processes for the Temporary Foreign Worker Program to provide a more expedited and service-oriented approach for employers seeking to integrate immigrants into their workforces. *(policy & program design)*
 - (b) Recognize and reward employers who demonstrate that they have been consistently responsible in recruiting, hiring and integrating immigrants by providing them with simplified, expedited application procedures for the Temporary Foreign Worker Program. *(policy & program design)*
2. Work with the Province of BC to coordinate information to employers about immigration programs and processes. *(policy & program design)*
3. Reform the Federal Skilled Worker Program points and occupation system to align it more with provincial (BC) and regional (sub-BC) labour market and employer needs and realities (e.g. greater emphasis on priority technical and skilled trades occupations). Also, continue to refine the federal Action Plan for Faster Immigration, including an on-going review and adjustments of the priority occupations. *(policy & program design)*

Provincial Government

4. Improve the Provincial Nominee Program:
 - (a) Continue to improve the Provincial Nominee Program to address backlogs, expedite the application process, respond to regional priorities and requirements, and, ultimately, increase the number of nominees to BC. Place extra priority on promoting the program to regional/rural employers. *(policy & program design)*
 - (b) Recognize and reward employers who demonstrate that they have been consistently responsible in recruiting, hiring and integrating immigrants by providing them with simplified, expedited application procedures for the Provincial Nominee Program. *(policy & program design)*
5. Create a short-term task force with IEC-BC, employers, provincial government and ESL training providers on developing a workplace English language training action plan and recommendations. *(policy & program design)*
6. Support IEC-BC and the employer community to develop, implement and evaluate one or more immigrant employment demonstration projects tied to regional and/or sectoral labour market demand with a view to expanding and/or replicating it after evaluation. *(policy & program design)*
7. Consolidate the current myriad of information sources, programs and services, into a coordinated and accessible knowledge base for employers and business associations, with easy-to-navigate pathways through which employers can obtain information and support. *(information, communication & promotion)*

Employers and Business Associations

8. Recognize, communicate and champion employer best practices within regions and sectors to employers and other stakeholders. Work with IEC-BC to package best practices as employer tools. *(employer capacity & support)*

Immigrant Employment Council of BC

9. Facilitate, with financial support from the Province, the implementation of an immigrant employment demonstration project tied to regional and/or sectoral labour market demand requirements. *(program & service delivery)*
10. Convene an annual Immigrant Employment Forum with employers, government groups and other stakeholders focused on employer needs, best practices and strategies for expanding immigrant employment. *(employer capacity & support)*

8. CONCLUSION

This was a major unprecedented consultation involving over 150 employers in fifteen focus groups, across seven industry sectors and eight communities across the Province. When considering how to connect more immigrants with BC employers looking for skilled talent, we heard the following from employers:

- Employers need to play a leadership role in improving immigrant employment.
- Employers are challenged by the myriad of services and service providers, resulting in employer confusion and a low level of awareness.
- Employers have a critical need for concrete solutions and outcomes.
- Employers are frustrated, feeling they do not have a voice or a role in addressing the workforce challenges they face.

There is no quick fix solution, as the issues of integrating skilled immigrants into the BC workforce are complex and involve many challenges.

While the recommendations are focused on individual audiences (governments, employers, IEC-BC), it is important that the solutions to addressing immigrant employment be multilateral – partnerships and collaboration among all immigrant employment role players, focused on enhancing employer capacity.

1 INTRODUCTION: IMPERATIVE AND IMPETUS

1.1 THE IMPERATIVE FOR ACTION

As a recent Deloitte report on The Future of Productivity in Canada indicates, a jurisdiction has two basic means for obtaining needed human capital:

“Countries have two basic levers to improve the overall quality of their human capital and ensure an effective matching of skills to business needs. They can build the capabilities of people within their borders through education, and facilitate the immigration of skilled workers from other countries” (Deloitte, 2012, p. 28).

One of the biggest challenges for British Columbia’s (BC) economic future is ensuring labour supply meets labour demand to support significant economic diversification, wealth creation and employment growth.

In BC, global market challenges, the retirement of “baby-boomers” and projected economic growth, are increasing the need for additional labour force. According to the annual BC Labour Market Outlook 2010-2020 released in July 2011:

- Over one million job openings are expected in BC by 2020;
- Close to two-thirds of job openings will be due to retirements and aging workforce;
- One-third of job openings will be new jobs due to economic growth;
- Almost 80% of job openings over the next decade will require some post-secondary education and training or a university degree.

The competition for talent—internationally, nationally and locally—is getting much stronger. For example, the majority of recently polled small business owners across Canada (74%) believe it is getting harder to find good employees; and nearly one-half (46%) anticipate a labour force shortage in the coming years. A further 32% are concerned about the impact this will have on their operations (American Express Small Businesses Services Report, December 2011).

Meanwhile, international immigration is fuelling population growth in Canada, and BC in particular has been an example of attracting the best and the brightest in the world. Immigration accounts for more and more of Canada’s labour force growth, and soon all the net gain will come from this source.

According to the latest Statistics Canada Census 2011, almost two-thirds (65%) of BC’s population growth was due to international migration since 2006. Further, immigration could account for 80% of population growth within the next 20 years, and nearly 100% by the year 2061 (Statistics Canada, Census 2011, February 8, 2012).

“We are entering the era of unparalleled talent scarcity, which, if left unaddressed, will put a brake on economic growth around the world, and will fundamentally change the way we approach the workforce challenges”

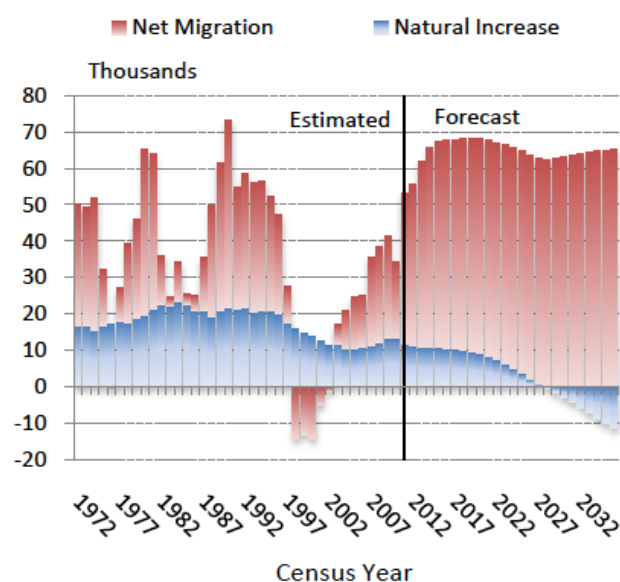
(Global Talent Risk – Seven Responses, World Economic Forum, 2011, p. 5).

Combined with a worldwide talent shortage poised to hit employers by 2015, a declining birth rate and a retiring baby boomer generation—the strategic value of tapping into our province’s vast pool of professional, well-educated and well-qualified immigrants as a way to replace the labour force becomes more pronounced than ever before.

Over the next several years, competition among industrialized countries—all facing labour force shortages and all vying for international talent—will increase dramatically.

This places greater pressure on BC employers, making it imperative to look beyond today’s economic challenges and engage in strategic action in order to stay ahead of the curve. Addressing the systemic barriers to hiring and integration of recent immigrants in BC workplaces will help maximize the use of this human resource and, most importantly, will help employers in their business growth and expansion.

While not quite a panacea, international immigration will contribute the large majority of BC’s net new labour force supply in the coming decades, as the following BC Stats chart poignantly shows (BC in 2036: PEOPLE 36, BC Stats, September 2011).



1.2 PROJECT IMPETUS

The Immigrant Employment Council of BC stimulates the integration of skilled immigrant talent into BC’s workforce. As a champion of BC employers, our role is to foster solutions, build connections and be a catalyst to help employers compete and succeed.

Since 2008, the Immigrant Employment Council of BC (IEC-BC) has been working to build awareness about the strategic economic and social benefits of integrating immigrants into BC’s labour market. IEC-BC has been developing effective solutions to connect businesses with this unique talent pool to improve their bottom line, build local communities and grow the province’s economy.

IEC-BC has been working closely with employers, business associations and other key stakeholders to improve hiring practices, encourage new public policies and programs, and change perceptions about immigrants in order to grow BC's economy through effective immigrant labour market integration.

As part of this mandate, IEC-BC commissioned Human Capital Strategies to conduct an independent study to consult with employers throughout the Province to obtain their views and advice on needs and solutions regarding hiring and retaining immigrants in their workforces.

With particular focus on small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)—the backbone of the BC economy—the overarching goal of the consultation was to identify and implement more effective provincial practices, policies, programs and services.

The consultation included special emphasis on SMEs, as 98% of all businesses in BC have less than 50 employees, and 82% have fewer than five employees (Small Business Profile 2011, Western Economic Diversification Canada and Ministry of Jobs, Tourism and Innovation, October 2011). Any strategy to increase employer capacity for hiring and retaining immigrant talent must reflect an understanding of SMEs' human resource challenges and realities.

This study represents one of the most comprehensive engagement initiatives with BC Employers that addresses the critical area of Recruiting and Retaining Immigrant Talent in British Columbia.

The resulting report, prepared by Human Capital Strategies, presents the findings of this extensive employer consultation on immigrant employment. Importantly, the report also details concrete recommendations for governments, employers and business associations, and IEC-BC for improving immigrant employment outcomes in BC. It has been written to assist IEC-BC and its partners in moving ahead in a strategic and focused way on increasing the employer capacity to recruit and retain immigrants throughout the province.

It is also important to recognize that immigrant employment involves a system of players in which each has a critical to play. While this project and report are employer-focused, and recommendations are focused on certain players, all in this system have key roles to play in the solutions—governments, employers and business associations, IEC-BC, institutions, service providers, immigrants themselves, and others.

"A lot of new immigrants are not aware of cultural norms and business practices in the Canadian workplace and this creates workplace communication barriers with supervisors and customers."

(Technology sector employer)

"Immigrants are becoming the preferred choice for us due to positive work ethic and loyalty."

"For our sector, it would be very useful if immigrants entering the sector had the basic, pre-requisite certifications (e.g. Fall Protection, Safety, WHIMIS, etc.)."

(Construction sector employers)

2 SITUATIONAL CONTEXT

Before outlining the project methodology, reporting on the consultation findings and providing recommendations, it is important to consider the international, Canadian and BC contexts for this project. This appropriately positions the recruitment and retention of international talent as an issue of strategic importance to BC's economic competitiveness.

The first thing that needs to be said about the situational context for this employer consultation and report are two strong trends: the ubiquitous nature of the immigration topic in Canada and BC (and the world) today; and the changing policy landscape in recent years and as we speak.

Everywhere one turns, immigration issues and trends are front and centre in the Canadian media. Most recently, the Government of Canada has announced major changes in its immigration policy and programs including significant reforms in its Federal Skilled Worker Program and resuming management of federally funded settlement programs in BC that have been administered by the Province under a federal-provincial agreement.

2.1 THE GLOBAL TALENT WAR

The search for talent is global and increasing as aging populations in industrialized countries drive the need to recruit and hire skilled workers to sustain and grow economies throughout Europe, Asia and North America. Both knowledge and resource-based economies and the industries and businesses that drive them are all engaged in the search for qualified employees. As the Economist Intelligence Unit pointed out in its report on the outlook to 2015:

"Big demographic trends such as population aging remain unchanged, and improving economic performance in the major economies over the next few years are likely to result in demand for talent again outstripping supply...Talent remains an important component of countries' and businesses' long-term competitiveness. How they develop, attract and retain talent should therefore remain high on the agenda of policymakers and business leaders for the foreseeable future"

(The Global Talent Index Report. Harrison and Struggles, p. 2).

Canada is projected to rise from 15th to 11th by 2015 in the thirty countries rated on their abilities to attract top talent in the Global Talent Index Report. China, Singapore, Brazil and Australia rise more rapidly in points allocated to the process. Indeed, of all countries in the index, China registers the largest score improvements based upon "Beijing's willingness to embrace foreign workers, a change in approach triggered in part by the impending decline of young indigenous workers entering the labour market" (Harrison and Ruggles, p. 8).

"No country, no organization can remain competitive unless talent—the engine force of economies—is there to ensure success of organizations in turbulent times, handle the political, social agenda and boost research and innovations"

(Jean Charest, Premier of Quebec, in Global Talent Risk—Seven Responses. World Economic Forum, 2011).

Global Talent Index 2011

(The Global Talent Index Report, Heidrick & Struggles, Economist Intelligence Unit, 2011)

2011 RANK	COUNTRY	SCORE/100
1	United States	74.2
2	Denmark	64.7
3	Finland	63.2
4	Norway	61.9
5	Singapore	60.2
6	Australia	60.1
7	Sweden	59.5
8	Hong Kong	59.1
9	Switzerland	58.5
~10	Israel	58.3
~10	Netherlands	58.3
12	United Kingdom	58.2
13	Germany	57.9
14	Canada	57.8

Similar increases in the search for global talent can be expected from countries in the European Union (EU) and the United States (US) as these countries are reviewing their immigration programs with the aim of simplifying the foreign worker recruitment process (Werner Eichhorst et al., The Integration of Migrants and Its Effects on the Labour Market, a Study Conducted for the European Parliament, September 2011).

In this regard, a report published in June 2011 for the European Union on improving US and EU immigration systems, entitled Eight Policies to Boost the Economic Contribution of Employment-Based Immigration, advocated that:

“Openness to the most talented requires policies that ensure applications are satisfied quickly and reliably and are not subject to per-country or other numerical limits, and involve only the lightest reasonable administrative burden” (D.G. Papademetriou and M. Sumption, p. 3).

This report also pointed out that some nations offer “fast-track” application procedures to facilitate entry for workers with “urgently needed” skills. For instance, American employers can reduce processing times for some visas from many months to three weeks by paying a “premium processing fee” of US \$1,225 (p.3).

In the earlier referenced 2011 report commissioned by the World Economic Forum and developed by the Boston Consulting Group, Global Talent Risk—Seven Responses, a clear warning is issued: “The talent crisis demands bold responses. Skills for high-demand jobs in 2020 must be developed now” (p.7). The initiative of the BC Government to create IEC-BC is cited as a best practice example. The report goes on to put forward seven responses to address the talent crisis, and four of these are centered on international immigration planning and recruitment:

1. Introduce strategic workforce planning.
2. Ease migration. Innovative points-based migration systems and a “migration friendly” branding by states and companies are necessary to attract the right talent.
3. Foster brain circulation.
4. Increase employability.

“‘Aftercare’ support for immigrants is really important; more of this needs to be provided in a coordinated, strategic way, including involvement of immigrant service agencies. One example of an important support was financial services for immigrants to help them get credit established.”

(Kelowna employer)

“I think that combining a variety of resources from existing immigrant serving agencies, sector-based organization and IEC-BC, and promoting these resources to the industry would be helpful.”

(Retail sector employer)

5. Develop a talent “trellis” – offering horizontal and vertical career and education paths.
6. Encourage temporary and virtual mobility.
7. Extend the pool – tap into the skill sets of women, older professionals, the disadvantaged and immigrants.

The New Reality – TALENT MOBILITY

“The physical movement of workers within or across organizations, industries, or countries, and globally, or the professional movement of workers across occupations or skill sets. Mobility may be temporary or permanent and may also involve moving people from unemployed to employed, moving jobs to people or allowing for virtual mobility.”

(Talent Mobility Good Practices, World Economic Forum, 2012, p. 7.)



The World Economic Forum followed up this report in 2012 with a report entitled Talent Mobility Good Practices, which stressed that “collaboration among multiple stakeholders is at the core of successful talent mobility practices” among governments, service agencies and business enterprises and that “collaboration requires new skills and new thinking” (p. 3). The report goes on to delineate good examples of collaboration among stakeholders, including the Quebec-France Understanding on the Mutual Recognition of Professional Qualifications (p. 13) and the initiatives of the BC Hydro and Power Authority to recognize immigration as a business solution to scarce talent (p. 56).

Clearly, the search for global talent to address the workforce requirements of employers is international and an increasing priority for industrialized countries as they strive to address demographic trends and ensure continuing economic growth.

2.2 PAN-CANADIAN CONTEXT

The immigration system in Canada is overseen by the federal government and over the past decade has annually processed over 250,000 permanent newcomers to the country over the past decade. In recent years, there has been a calculated shift in priority to attracting skilled immigrants in the economic class. There have been numerous reports and analysis on the growing emphasis to recruit skilled workers to strengthen Canada’s economy in the face of an aging population and workforce.

A special report by TD Economics in February 2012, entitled, Knocking Down Barriers Faced by New Immigrants to Canada, observed that, “Canada has one of the highest immigration rates in the OECD—behind only France and the United States in

“If we are going to flourish as a country, we’ve got to be very receptive to foreign capital, foreign thinking and foreign skills to maximize our potential.... The problem is not just individuals suffering social injustice or underemployment. Rather it is about Canada squandering its own growth potential because it delays the ability of newcomers to put down roots by buying homes, saving for their children’s education or investing for retirement”

(Gordon Nixon, CEO Royal Bank of Canada).

absolute numbers, and Luxembourg and Australia on a per capita basis.” The report further stated that:

In 2010, the country accepted more than 660,000 permanent and temporary residents from abroad. Of this total, 280,000 were permanent residents, which largely consist of skilled workers, investors, entrepreneurs, family class immigrants, and refugees. The remainder were admitted on a temporary basis—i.e., for short-term work or student visas—or based on humanitarian situations (TD Economics, Alexander, Burleton and Fong, February 2012, p. 5).

The impact of the immigration program is enormous. The TD Economics report pointed out that immigration inflows are “1% percent of the domestic population on average each year.” A current analysis published by RBC Economics in December 2011 also stressed this perspective:

More than 20% of the Canadian population (and the labour force) is foreign born. Furthermore, immigrant to Canada tend to be highly educated, with more than 40% of incoming immigrants possessing a bachelor’s degree or higher. This compares with 17% among the Canadian-born (RBC Current Analysis, December 2011, p.1).

However, the immigration system has challenges that need to be addressed. The RBC analysis went on to state:

Collectively, these immigrants are an important driver of labour force growth and economic activity in Canada; however, while Canada has done a great job of attracting foreign talent, integrating newcomers effectively has proven to be more of a challenge. On average, new immigrants to Canada have both higher unemployment rates and lower wages than Canadian-born workers, despite their higher education levels (p.1).

The TD Economics report pointed out immigrants “who landed between 2000 and 2004 earned just 61 cents on the dollar relative to a Canadian-born (p.6), and went on to state that:

“...simply raising the employment rate (the share of the working-age population that is employed) of immigrant workers to the same level as non-immigrants is equivalent to roughly 370,000 additional people working. A recent estimate of the potential increased personal income if newcomers’ skills were rewarded on par with that of native-born Canadians topped \$30 billion or 2 percent of GDP (TD Economics, Alexander, Burleton and Fong, February 2012, p. 7).

These numbers are significant to the Canadian economy and employers in both helping to address skills shortages and enhancing consumer spending.

Recently the Federal Government announced Canada’s intention take over direct management of settlement services in BC (and Manitoba) in two years when the Canada-BC Immigration Agreement expires (“Government of Canada to Strengthen Responsibility for Integration of Newcomers”, News Release, Citizenship and Immigration Canada, April 12, 2012). The Minister emphasized this will not mean less funds for such services.

“The certification of foreign credentials is an overriding concern among employers in our region, particularly those seeking to recruit skilled trades and technical workers.”

(Cranbrook employer)

“Employers need help with advertising job opportunities for specific ethnic groups of population to meet customers’ needs.”

(Greater Vancouver employer)

Boosting Employment-Based Immigration

...the most important lesson from the range of international practices outlined here is that successful economic-stream immigration systems are transparent and flexible, create predictable outcomes, and remain open to constant adaptation and experimentation.”

(Eight Policies to Boost the Economic Contribution of Employment-Based Immigration, D. Papademetriou and M. Sumption, 2011)



Immigration and Multiculturalism Minister Jason Kenney has expressed frustration about “bringing in hundreds of thousands of people into the country to end up... unemployed and underemployed in an economy where there are acute labour shortages (The Globe and Mail, April 5, 2012, p. A1).

Governments in Canada have been taking steps to address these issues by formulating and implementing changes to the immigration program to make it more employer-oriented and responsive. Examples of such initiatives include the expansion of the Provincial Nominee Program (PNP), implementation of the Canadian Experience Class (CEC) for temporary foreign workers and foreign students, and changes to the Federal Skilled Worker Program (FSWP). All of these reforms are focused on making the system more flexible and transparent, expediting processing and reducing backlogs and bureaucratic hurdles. Several specific reforms are underway:

On March 30, 2012, Jason Kenney, Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism announced the elimination of the backlog in the FSWP. His announcement indicates the federal government will transform “its suite of economic immigration programs to create a just-in-time system that recruits people with the right skills to meet Canada’s labour market needs, fast tracks their immigration, and gets them working in a period of months, not years” (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, March 30, 2012). Further, Minister Kenney also announced a proposed new requirement that would mean applicants wanting to immigrate as Federal Skilled Workers would have their foreign credentials assessed and verified by designated organizations before they arrive in Canada.

Along with other FSWP changes to be specified later this year, the federal government will create a “separate and streamlined program for skilled tradespersons” (“Citizenship and Immigration Canada Announces its Intention to Create a New Skilled Trades Program”, News Release, Citizenship and Immigration Canada, April 10, 2012). This announcement was quickly lauded by construction and labour groups across the country (Chris Wattie, “Labour Groups Welcome Changes to Immigration Rules for Skilled Workers.” The Globe and Mail, April 13, 2012.)

With their global knowledge, professional connections and cultural savvy, new Canadians can play a huge role in British Columbia’s efforts to market itself “as the preferred destination for international investment” and convert the strengths of the province into “competitive advantages to turn opportunity into lasting economic benefit for all British Columbians”

(Canada Starts Here: The BC Jobs Plan, Province of BC, 2011).

POPULATE: Re-Tool the Immigration System to Attract & Fully Utilize Skilled Immigrants

"The Canadian immigration system is not exclusively focused on attracting people with high-demand skills. In fact, only 24% of immigrants admitted from 2007-2008 were approved on the basis of their education, skills and experience..."

...In order to attract, retain and fully utilize skilled immigrant talent, Deloitte believes that several key dimensions of the immigration system must be recalibrated."



(The Future of Productivity: An Eight-Step Game Plan for Canada, Deloitte, 2012, pp. 30, 34)

Very recently, the Canadian Chamber of Commerce identified Canada's "skills crisis" as its highest priority for 2012 among a list of Top 10 Barriers to Competitiveness. Its concern includes attracting and keeping (permanent and temporary) foreign workers, international students, and integration services for immigrants (February 2012; Skills Development Discussion Paper, March 2012).

A 2006 study by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business (CFIB) found that, despite SMEs need for workers, most small businesses do not undertake workforce planning:

"Seventy-eight percent of owners reported not hiring any immigrants in the previous four years and that small and medium sized organizations are often not engaged in human resource planning and may not be familiar with the business case for immigration" (Immigration and Small Business. CFIB, 2006, p. 3).

2.3 THE BRITISH COLUMBIA CONTEXT

This brings the focus closer to home and to the most immediate purpose of the IEC-BC project to consult BC employers and industries on the recruiting, hiring and retention of immigrants.

International immigration is fuelling population growth in Canada and particularly BC. According to Statistics Canada, by 2031, 25-28 percent of the Canadian population could be foreign-born. In BC, it is projected that 75.8 percent of all population growth will be through immigration (BC Stats, June 2010). According to BC Stats (June 2011), over the past three years almost 130,000 international migrants have landed in BC:

- 2008 – 43,992
- 2009 – 41,444
- 2010 – 44,183

Preliminary analysis of the numbers for 2011 indicates that close to 45,000 international immigrants have again landed in BC.

"Absolutely, to me it is survival. It is the only way my business can be successful" – in response to "Are you planning or would you be willing to introduce programs in your organization to support a diversified workforce?"

(Fort St. John employer)

In 2010, over one-third of the new arrivals were in the skilled worker class (16,659). Another 4,900 were Provincial Nominees, a group bringing specific skills and attributes to BC. As well, there were 10,865 family class immigrants—many of whom seek to enter the labour market (BC Stats, June 2011).

In the first quarter of 2011, there were 7,220 international immigrant landings—5,252 arriving from Asia (BC Stats, June 2011). Immigration accounted for 65 percent of the province's population gain between 2006-11. As part of a continuing trend, in February 2012 the unemployment rate among the province's immigration population aged 15+ was 8 percent, well above the overall unemployment rate of 6.9 percent (BC Stats, Labour Force Statistics, p.2).

BC industries are actively recruiting from overseas. For example with the decline in the European economy and employment from the global financial crisis, the BC Construction Association and member companies recently traveled to Ireland to recruit skilled workers ("Irish Eyes Smile on BC Job Delegation", Victoria Times-Colonist, March 1, 2012, p. C1).

The recruiting, hiring and integration of immigrants into BC workplaces is essential for economic growth. Immigrants, on whole, are better educated than non-immigrants—39% have a university degree compared to 22% of native-born Canadians and this number rises to almost 42% in BC—and they are highly skilled in business, finance and administration with almost 60% holding qualifications in these key areas (Statistics Canada, 2006 Census).

It is a reality that nearly one-half of Canadians aged 15 and over will be foreign-born or have at least one foreign-born parent by 2031. In fact, 40% of the population of metro Vancouver and 27.5% of the population of BC as a whole was foreign-born in 2006 (Statistics Canada, 2006 Census). Preliminary analysis of the 2011 census shows this trend line continuing. Just over 70% of immigrants to BC were from Asian countries, followed by European (13.1%) and the rest of North America (5.4%). China alone accounted for 22% of the immigrants, with India accounting for 13% (Infoline Report, BC Stats, February 2012).

A major change shows that an increasing percentage of immigrants (27.2%) are choosing to locate to regions outside the Lower Mainland, particularly Vancouver Island and the Southern Interior. This reflects a national trend, where ten years ago 75% of immigrants settled in Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver and today this share have declined to less than 50% (Knocking Down Barriers Faced by New Immigrants, TD Economics, p.7).

As the competition for global talent has increased over the past decade, the BC Government has increased its efforts in working with industries and employers to attract skilled immigrants to the province. In active engagement with the federal government, the Province has played a major role in implementing economic immigration programs.

Between 2005 and 2010, 203 entrepreneurs received permanent resident status in BC, investing over \$423 million and creating 1,100 jobs, with more than half of the total investments and jobs outside of Metro Vancouver. During the same period more

"Recognition of foreign education and experience is critical. Foreign credentials are not recognized and we are losing workers (doctors, technicians, engineers) in our region because of that."

"Attract immigrant families, not individual workers; we need to focus on those who want to work and stay here."

(Oil and Gas sector employers)

"We are attempting to bring in 15 trades workers from South Africa and have 150 vacancies we are trying to fill in our BC operations. But the process is too long (18 months in some cases)."

(Mining sector employer)

than 10,000 workers were nominated under the PNP and employed by over 4,600 businesses (BC Provincial Nominee Program Evaluation Report, Grant Thornton LLP, June 2011, p. 6). The same report revealed that 94% of the nominees “continue to live in BC and 86% remain in the community they lived or planned to live at the time of the nomination (p. 18).

The BC Jobs Plan projects 1.1 million job openings through economic growth and retirements by 2019, and the Ministry of Jobs, Tourism and Innovation estimates that one-third of them will have to be filled by new immigrants (BC Labour Market Outlook 2010-2020, Ministry of Jobs, Tourism and Innovation, 2011).

As the Province has increased its involvement in the immigration process, business organizations such as the Business Council of BC (BCBC) have also focused attention on the economic streams of the immigration process. In an October 2011 report, the Council urged greater involvement of the BC Government in the immigration process and recommended that the cap for the PNP be doubled and “even stretched to 10,000” nominees for the province. The Council also addressed the integration process, stating that:

“New and expanded bridging and mentoring programs are also needed to facilitate immigrants’ transitions into the job market. While a number of programs are in place to help to help immigrants move into the workforce, new and more innovative approaches are necessary” (People, Skills and Prosperity: the BC Labour Market in a Post-Recession Context, October 2011, p. 47).

The BC Government has been prioritizing immigration policies and programs. Recently, Premier Christy Clark met with her counterparts in Alberta and Saskatchewan to announce a joint strategy for these provinces to play a greater role in directing the immigration system. The Premier called for a “national discussion about what further tools provinces need to grow the national economy” and stated, “The biggest one for us in the West is immigration. It’s one of the most important economic levers any government has and we don’t have it. We need to devolve immigration to provincial governments” (Globe and Mail, March 12, 2012).

Another important development in the BC Government’s immigration activities was the BC Immigration Task Force, led by Member of the Legislative Assembly John Yap and appointed December, 2011. The Task Force was charged with reviewing the government’s involvement in key immigration programs in order to increase the number of skilled immigrants and investors to the province. Its specific mandate was to engage employers and industry associations to “examine the current system of economic immigration to Canada and BC,” including a review of:

“Immigrant service agencies play an important role but there is a disconnect among them; there needs to be better coordination. Also, uncertainty about government funding and Ministry of Social Development changes worry immigrants and their advocates about impacting service levels for immigrants and TFWs.”

(Kelowna employer)

“There is an urgent need to improve the Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP) process. The structure of the program does not meet current business needs. It is cumbersome, confusing time-consuming, bureaucratic and its rules change with little notice.”

(Surrey employer)

- The Provincial Nominee Program;
- The Federal Skilled Worker Program
- The Canadian Experience Class; and
- The Federal Immigrant Investor Program.

The Task Force was expected to table its findings and recommendations at the end of March 2012.

2.4 FROM CONTEXT TO SOLUTIONS

It is in this situational context that IEC-BC launched its comprehensive consultation process with employers in key industry sectors and communities across the province to determine needs and supports for them to more fully engage in and benefit from the recruitment, hiring and retention of immigrants.

In BC, tapping into the province's vast pool of professional, well-educated and well-qualified immigrants will be crucial for the creation of long-term jobs, investment and economic development.

These developments and trends place greater pressure on BC employers, making it imperative to engage in strategic action aimed at effective integration of recent immigrants into BC workplaces. Not only will this help maximize the use of this unique resource, but also most importantly, it will help employers in their business growth and expansion.

3 PROJECT TERMS OF REFERENCE AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 PROJECT IMPETUS

One of the biggest challenges for BC's economic future is ensuring labour supply meets labour demand to support significant wealth creation and employment. IEC-BC's mandate is to connect more immigrants looking for employment with BC employers looking for skilled talent.

Whereas much of the focus in the immigrant employment arena tends to be on the needs of immigrants themselves, there has been insufficient attention paid to the views, requirements and issues faced by employers. This demand-side perspective is essential in all efforts to improve immigrant outcomes in the BC labour market.

Consequently IEC-BC commissioned Human Capital Strategies to conduct an independent consultation with employers throughout the province to obtain their views and advice on needs and solutions regarding recruiting, hiring and retaining immigrants in their workforces.

"Another significant barrier for us is the time, paperwork and cost of applying for a Labour Market Opinion and to other immigration programs. There's a time-lag for approval at different steps and the challenge of dealing with CIC and HRSDC staff from afar in Vancouver, Ottawa and Halifax (including the time difference); and only being able to reach them by fax and not by e-mail."

(Prince George employer)

"Absolutely, to me it is a survival. It is the only way my business can be successful" – in response to "Are you planning or would you be willing to introduce programs in your organization to support a diversified workforce?"

(Fort St. John employer)

3.2 OBJECTIVES

The specific objectives of the employer consultation project were to:

- Confirm (real and perceived) barriers to the immigrant hiring process being experienced by BC employers, and their level of interest in hiring immigrants;
- Identify employer recruitment, hiring and retention best practices and provide examples of successful initiatives with the potential for expansion;
- Determine and describe tools and supports, beyond what are currently available, required by employers to fully engage in the successful implementation of immigrant hiring initiatives; and
- Obtain specific employer suggestions for changes to existing and proposed new public policies and programs.

BC Employer Consultation

Consultation Objectives

Confirm real and perceived barriers

Identify effective practices

Determine missing tools and supports

Obtain suggestions re: policies & programs

The original intent of the project was to solicit the views and experiences of BC employers in hiring individuals who were either landed immigrants to Canada or foreign-born individuals who had fairly recently obtained Canadian citizenship. However, as early as the first focus group, it became clearly apparent that employers also wanted to talk about recruiting and retaining temporary foreign workers and international students.

3.3 PROJECT SCOPE

The scope of the BC Employer Consultation project was defined as:

- Employers throughout all regions of BC, with a particular emphasis upon small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs);
- Employers with some degree of experience in recruiting and hiring immigrants and foreign workers;
- Eight key sectors of the B.C. economy: Construction; Manufacturing; Mining; Oil and Gas; Technology; Retail; Tourism & Hospitality; and Trucking; and
- Seven communities: Comox Valley; Cranbrook; Fort St. John; Kelowna; Prince George; Surrey and Vancouver.

“Employers don’t feel supported or helped by professional bodies – they are perceived as perpetuating immigrant under-employment and in extending the time it takes to recruit and integrate immigrants into the workplace.”

“The Province should work with IEC-BC and immigrant service agencies to streamline the latter’s services, and increase employer awareness of them.”

“It would have been nice to sit down with federal and provincial government administrators to discuss policy and program shortcomings; government needs to listen to us and take appropriate action.”

(Manufacturing sector employers)

3.4 ANTICIPATED PROJECT OUTCOMES

The key intended outcomes for the project included:

- Delineate a set of recommendations for the Government of Canada, the Province of BC, the employer community and IEC-BC that could be used to develop and/or refine policies, programs and services that are intended to link employers with the immigrant talent pool and thereby facilitate labour market development and economic growth;
- Identify concrete tools, resources and effective best practices for employers that can assist them in recruiting, hiring and retaining immigrant employees; and
- Provide IEC-BC with key employer-provided insights into immigrant employment that can be used to inform its strategic planning and development of services and resources.

3.5 PROJECT METHODOLOGY

A two-stage process was used in the planning and execution of the Employer Consultation Project as follows.

Phase One – Consultation Planning (September – October, 2012)

This phase entailed key informant interviews with 31 individuals, the majority from the employer/business community in order to solicit their views as to how best to conduct an employer consultation on immigrant employment.

The resulting plan, reviewed and approved by IEC-BC, detailed project scope, objectives and outcomes for the consultation project and a recommended qualitative methodology that centered on conducting a series of regional/ community and sectoral focus groups.

Criteria were articulated and applied for the selection of target regions/communities with the result that the following were recommended and accepted by IEC-BC:

Sectoral Focus Groups

- Construction
- Manufacturing
- Mining
- Technology
- Retail
- Tourism & Hospitality
- Trucking
- Oil & Gas

“Talent is the fuel that drives the engine of the global economy. The physical mobility of talent within or across organization, industries, countries or globally and the professional movement of workers across occupations or skill sets can help balance global human capital markets and stimulate economic growth in both developed and developing countries”

(Talent Mobility Good Practices, World Economic Forum and Mercer, 2012).

Regional / Community Focus Groups

- Comox Valley
- Cranbrook
- Fort St. John
- Kelowna
- Prince George
- Surrey
- Vancouver

Phase Two – Consultation Execution (December 2011 – February 2012)

This first part of Phase Two was focused on pre-consultation preparation and logistics including:

- The finalization of the focus group structure/agenda;
- The finalization of the consultation questions to be used in each focus group (see Appendix I for the focus group questions);
- The preparation of a project backgrounder for participants;
- The preparation of a standard PowerPoint presentation to be used in each session;
- The development of a pre-focus group online survey for participants.
- Recruitment of focus group participants through the BC Chamber of Commerce and individual Chambers of Commerce for the regional community focus groups (see Appendix 2 for a full list of supporting organizations).

The second part of Phase Two focused on convening the actual focus groups in the six regions and with eight sector groups. An additional trial Vancouver focus group with a cross-section of employers was convened first in order to test and refine the methodology. This trial focus group proved to be a successful meeting and its outcomes are included in this report as one of fifteen focus groups.

In summary, over 150 employers participated in fifteen focus groups in seven communities and eight key industry sectors during the consultation process, making it the most comprehensive, qualitative consultation process with BC employers on immigrant employment in recent years.

4 PROJECT FINDINGS: IN EMPLOYERS' VOICES

4.1 PRE FOCUS GROUP SURVEY RESULTS

BC Employer Consultation Employer Scope

150 employers

111 survey responses

15 focus groups

7 communities

8 industry sectors

- Comox Valley
- Cranbrook
- Fort St. John
- Kelowna
- Prince George
- Surrey
- Vancouver
- Construction
- Manufacturing
- Mining
- Oil & Gas
- Professional & Technical
- Retail
- Tourism
- Trucking



All focus group participants received background material and an invitation to respond to a short online survey a few days before each focus group. Of the more than 150 focus group participants – almost 95% employers and industry representatives – there were 111 completed survey responses.

Some of the key pre focus group survey findings include:

- 96% of respondents have hired or attempted to hire in the last 5 years.
- When confronted with difficulties in hiring, the majority of employers responded by hiring someone who did not meet their requirements.
- 38% of respondents characterized their hiring difficulty as a skill shortage, while 19% indicated it was a labour shortage, and about one-third (34%) said it was both.
- Referrals from friends and employees was the most common way for respondents to recruit.
- One-quarter of respondents did not hire any recent immigrants over the past 5 years. Twenty-three percent did so for entry-level positions only.
- 73% of employer respondents indicated they think it will become harder to find employees in the next five years.
- 33% of respondents identified deficient English language skills as an obstacle to hiring immigrants while 20% indicated the lack of Canadian work experience as the next most significant obstacle.

“There is a lack of promotion of the North among potential immigrants. Once they come to Canada and settle in bigger cities, they are not willing to move to the North. There needs to be a communication strategy about the community.”

(Fort St. John employer)

- 27% of employers recruited recent immigrants through those that approached their businesses; community or non-profit organizations and private placement agencies were the least frequent options. This is striking since governments fund local agencies to serve a large number of immigrants – yet employers are not connecting.

The full summary of the pre focus group survey results is contained in Appendix 3.

4.2 GENERAL FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS

This is the most comprehensive and qualitative consultation of BC employers on immigrant hiring and retention in recent years. The resulting rich body of knowledge complements earlier IEC-BC work and positions it to speak with authority on what employers need.

There are few surprises in what was heard from employers; this reinforces earlier IEC-BC work and that of others, and underlines the need to move from talking to action – a strong call to action from employers. The imperative is now and it is time to move to solutions. More specifically, the important added value of this work includes:

- A real-time BC employer perspective;
- Employers feeling heard and indicating they want to be part of the solution development;
- The need for more employer involvement in connecting their workforce needs with immigrant talent;
- Some important best practices and success factors were uncovered; and
- While the what needs to be changed is not new, employers identified some unique “how to’s” for making change.

The majority of employers who participated in the sessions fully understand and accept the business case for immigrant employment. Most are actively recruiting/employing immigrants and/or foreign workers, or are planning to. Those few who had little or no experience in this area were eager to get more information on how to get started. There were clear indications from employers that immigrant recruitment will need to be an increasing part of their future hiring plans.

Employers in the more rural regions/communities understand the business case but showed a very clear tendency to not consider the pool of untapped immigrant labour already in BC and largely concentrated in urban areas. Their focus instead tends to be on offshore recruitment to meet workforce requirements through mechanisms such as the Temporary Foreign Worker Program.

While many of the employers experience various degrees of success in recruiting and employing immigrant workers, by and large they are unhappy with the status quo in terms of government support, policies, programs and services. The confusing array of resources and service providers is regarded often as an impediment, leaving employers uncertain as to where to turn for assistance.

“There is a problem with keeping temporary foreign workers here. We train people who come here on a work visa and then they leave because they are not able to renew the visa.”

(Trucking sector employer)

“All of our companies have and are involved with the TFW program; it has become the primary mechanism for recruiting and hiring immigrants. It is regarded as essential to the future of our companies’ talent management strategies.”

(Mining sector employer)

4.3 KEY THEMES

Key findings of employer input across the fifteen focus groups can be clustered into the following ten themes that relate to public policy concerns, barriers to immigrant employment and opportunity for solution-building:

1. Government policies, programs and processes

Many employers are frustrated with the federal immigration points system and the Temporary Foreign Worker Program process. The Provincial Nominee Program was seen as positive, although some employers were concerned about backlogs and other shortcomings. They also want to see streamlining of the Federal Skilled Worker Program and would also like to see improved pre-immigration screening in the source countries.

2. English language proficiency

The lack of English language fluency was in the top two issues raised by employers – not simply general English proficiency, but employers need immigrants to have business and sector/occupation-specific English and to be able to apply their English in various work situations.

3. Foreign credential assessment and recognition

The difficulties of translating, evaluating and assessing the equivalency of foreign credentials and qualifications was noted by many employers, particularly for regulated occupations. Facilitation of recognition of qualifications by professions is also seen as part of this challenge.

4. Importance of Canadian experience

Employers view a lack of Canadian work experience as a clear impediment to hiring more immigrants, primarily because they see a cost associated with training and mentoring.

5. Awareness and information

Most employers have bought into the value proposition for immigrant hiring but do not know how to navigate the plethora of information and resources. “One-stop” resources and effective packaging and distribution of information to employers are critical – these need to be easily accessible and friendly to SMEs.

6. Geographic differences among employers

Employers in some rural communities felt they have little opportunity or capacity to attract immigrants and their families. They called for support to participate in immigrant attraction and recruitment and incentives to immigrants to land or re-settle in rural areas. Also, employers in regions outside Greater Vancouver recognize they need to “onboard” immigrants into their communities – not just into their workplaces – if they want them to settle and stay.

7. Coordination of service providers

Employers would like to see better coordination of service agencies that work with immigrants, and improvements in their capacity to interface with and support employers. Employers see service providers as almost solely focusing

“We really support services that help with applications and translate resumes into English. Service providers should assist employers to verify previous work experience and references.”

(Tourism sector employer)

“The biggest obstacle to successful recruitment and retention (particularly the latter) for these participants is language, particularly nuances, work/job English, understanding and processing English (as opposed to simply speaking it), and more advanced language training.”

(Prince George employer)

on the needs of the immigrants, without much consideration or focus on demand-side requirements. This was reinforced in the responses to the survey of over 110 employers conducted for this project; they showed employers relied much more on their own recruitment tactics than on immigrant agency services, despite significant government funding to such agencies for serving large numbers of immigrants.

8. Employer capacity-building support

Employers indicated they need easy access to other supports such as on-line tools/tool-kits for employers (e.g. recruiting plans, in-house mentoring, etc.) that are immigrant-specific. Employers feel that chambers, industry associations and other employer groups are best positioned to facilitate this in conjunction with a provincial/regional resource.

9. Employer best practices in recruiting and retaining immigrants

Employers identified a number of domestic and international best practices that they feel have the potential to be replicated and/or expanded. Part of the challenge heard from employers was that this information was not getting into the hands of individual employers, nor are many tools developed to help them apply promising practices to their workplaces.

10. IEC-BC profile and role

While employers knew little about IEC-BC, once advised about its mandate and services, many identified it as an appropriate resource to provide much needed employer (and service provider) support and coordination. Employers offered some specific ideas on IEC-BC's role as a "connector" and "solution-developer."

Note that key findings from Individual Focus Group sessions can be found in Appendix 4.

"Immigrants are motivated loyal employees and have already made life-altering decisions. They do not have a sense of entitlement and recognize that they have to work hard and produce in order to achieve employer recognition."

(Comox Valley employer)

"Approach immigrants before they come to Canada and promote opportunities within our region, within small communities. It is really hard to move immigrants here while they are settled in bigger cities like Vancouver or Toronto. It's important to be telling the story of the traditional small town community so that immigrants know more about the country."

(Fort St. John employer)

5 RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

This extensive consultation yielded clear insight into what employers in BC want and need in order to enhance their capacity to recruit, hire, retain and integrate immigrants into their workforces.

BC employers need public policies and programs that are enabling, accessible and flexible. These policies and programs need to be part of a long-term strategic approach to increasing employer capacity.

5.1 PRINCIPLES FOR ACTION

The recommendations and their eventual implementation should be guided by the following principles for action. While these will be important for IEC-BC, they should also apply to other immigrant employment “facilitators” including government, employers and business groups, and service providers.

1. Move quickly beyond research and consultation into an action/solution-oriented implementation phase of activity.
2. Solutions and program development for workforce integration must be employer led. Any workplace/ workforce-targeted funding must be employer-driven, not service provider-driven, as is often the case.
3. Clear outcomes and success metrics must be created for any pilot and demonstration projects; they then should be adjusted based on evaluation, moving to continuous action.
4. Leverage and build upon existing labour market programs, services and initiatives in communities and regions throughout BC.
5. Concentrate scarce resources for immigrant employment on a small number of priority solution areas where investments and efforts can be sizeable, critical mass can be achieved and significant outcomes will result.
6. Align, where appropriate, IEC-BC, government or industry immigrant employment initiatives with other workforce strategies (e.g. Regional Workforce Tables, Sector Workforce Strategies, Aboriginal employment, international education, Employment Program of BC for unemployed, etc.).
7. Facilitate improved coordination of the system since the available pathways for employers to access programs, resources, tools and information are often confusing and unclear.

Promising Practices

“The Living and Working in Prince George Committee initiated the Chamber’s Living and Working Ambassadors program for prospective immigrants/ foreign workers coming for an interview or after arrival. This program provides the individual with information – independent of the employer – on Prince George during a drive around the city. The Committee won a BC HRMA innovation award a few years ago based on this program.”

(Prince George Employer)

5.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the employer consultation, the following recommendations are provided from the perspective of actions governments, IEC-BC and employers and businesses can and should take to enhance BC employers' – particularly SMEs – capacity for recruiting, hiring, retaining and integrating immigrants into their workforces.

It is recognized that service providers, training institutions, immigrants themselves, and others have important roles to play in the BC “system” of immigrant employment. However, since this consultation project is employer-facing, these recommendations are directed at that the above goal.

Thirty unique recommendations are organized by type of organization (federal and provincial governments, employers and business associations, and IEC-BC) and scope of recommendation (policy and program design, program and service delivery, information/communication/promotion, and employer capacity and support. As a few of the recommendations are repeated for different types of organizations where appropriate.

Of course, not all recommendations are of equal importance or priority. There are several ways priority can be assessed and how recommendations can be prioritized:

- Short-term versus long-term;
- Ease of implementation and feasibility; costs;
- Span of influence over implementing a recommendation;
- Urgency or immediacy;
- Time it takes to implement a recommendation;
- The impact(s) of a recommendation; and
- The audience for prioritization.

After considering more intricate or sophisticated ways of prioritizing the following recommendations, we have tried to simplify this by taking a more general approach.

In Human Capital Strategies judgment—the independent experts facilitating the consultation—the most important recommendations to flag for IEC-BC and the other audiences for this report are ones that are:

- Of strategic importance for employers;
- Potentially highly-impactful;
- Urgent to address; and/or
- “Quick/early” wins with which to establish momentum for IEC-BC’s enhanced direction.

Obviously, in referencing these criteria, we have also tried to keep in mind costs, feasibility, etc.

Below we have listed what we consider are the Top 10 recommendations based on the above criteria in the context of what we heard from employers. We provided an

Promising Practices

“Workplace English language tutoring model such as was used by VANOC for immigrants could be very beneficial.”

(Construction sector employer)

Promising Practices

“The Filipino community in Fernie has done an excellent job in organizing cultural support and integration services for new workers and their families. They are excellent networkers and help to attract newcomers to area.”

(Cranbrook employer)

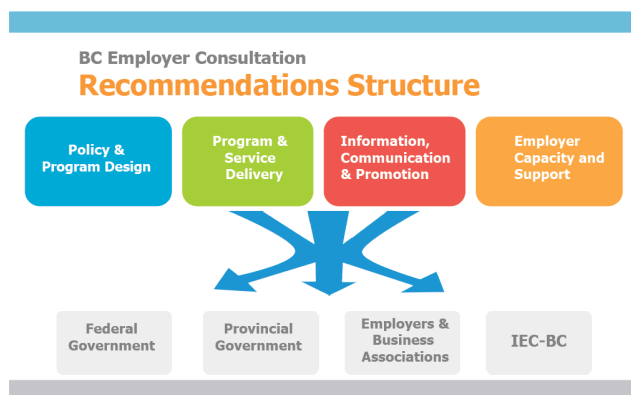
additional 22 recommendations following. It is important to regard these other 22 recommendations as important to consider for action, but perhaps not as urgent, immediate or impactful as the Top 10.

The full list of recommendations is organized according to four audiences and by the following categories:

- Policy and program design;
- Program and service delivery;
- Information, communication and promotion; and
- Employer capacity and support.

5.2.1 TOP 10 RECOMMENDATIONS

These Top 10 recommendations are presented in order of the four audiences, but otherwise are not presented in order of importance.



Federal Government

1. Improve the Temporary Foreign Worker Program:
 - (a) Streamline client service procedures and processes for the Temporary Foreign Worker Program to provide a more expedited and service-oriented approach for employers seeking to integrate immigrants into their workforces. *(policy & program design)*
 - (b) Recognize and reward employers who demonstrate that they have been consistently responsible in recruiting, hiring and integrating immigrants by providing them with simplified, expedited application procedures for the Temporary Foreign Worker Program. *(policy & program design)*
2. Work with the Province of BC to coordinate information to employers about immigration programs and processes. *(policy & program design)*

Promising Practices

“One employer shared one personal story of helping his family member to get professional recognition through the Applied Science Technologists and Technicians of BC (ASTTBC). The employer facilitated the hiring process of a technologist from Columbia through the provisional certification with ASTTBC and additional training and coaching. This employer suggested developing company-wide employee support and career development strategies and practices that enable hiring for career (long term) not only for a job (short term).”

(Technology sector employer)

3. Reform the Federal Skilled Worker Program points and occupation system to align it more with provincial (BC) and regional (sub-BC) labour market and employer needs and realities (e.g. greater emphasis on priority technical and skilled trades occupations). Also, continue to refine the federal Action Plan for Faster Immigration, including an on-going review and adjustments of the priority occupations. *(policy & program design)*

Provincial Government

4. Improve the Provincial Nominee Program:
 - (a) Continue to improve the Provincial Nominee Program to address backlogs, expedite the application process, respond to regional priorities and requirements, and, ultimately, increase the number of nominees to BC. Place extra priority on promoting the program to regional/rural employers. *(policy & program design)*
 - (b) Recognize and reward employers who demonstrate that they have been consistently responsible in recruiting, hiring and integrating immigrants by providing them with simplified, expedited application procedures for the Provincial Nominee Program. *(policy & program design)*
5. Create a short-term task force with IEC-BC, employers, provincial government and ESL training providers on developing a workplace English language training action plan and recommendations. *(policy & program design)*
6. Support IEC-BC and the employer community to develop, implement and evaluate one or more immigrant employment demonstration projects tied to regional and/or sectoral labour market demand with a view to expanding and/or replicating it after evaluation. *(policy & program design)*
7. Consolidate the current myriad of information sources, programs and services, into a coordinated and accessible knowledge base for employers and business associations, with easy-to-navigate pathways through which employers can obtain information and support. *(information, communication & promotion)*

Employers and Business Associations

8. Recognize, communicate and champion employer best practices within regions and sectors to employers and other stakeholders. Work with IEC-BC to package best practices as employer tools. *(employer capacity & support)*

Immigrant Employment Council of BC

9. Facilitate, with financial support from the Province, the implementation of an immigrant employment demonstration project tied to regional and/or sectoral labour market demand requirements. *(program & service delivery)*
10. Convene an annual Immigrant Employment Forum with employers, government groups and other stakeholders focused on employer needs, best practices and strategies for expanding immigrant employment. *(employer capacity & support)*

Promising Practices

“A number of Kelowna employers have benefited from a partnership involving the recruitment of skilled workers from Jamaica. This successful partnership was repeatedly referred to and involves major hospitality (e.g. Manteo Resort), retail (e.g. Craftsman Collision), mining (e.g. Teck) and other employers (e.g. Coast Mountain Bus). In addition to significant numbers, employers reported high retention rates (e.g. 5 of 6 in one case, 10 or 12 in another, and 22 of 24). Other positive features include Okanagan College’s role in participating in the source country assessment/testing and basic training, followed by further training and employment in BC.”

(Kelowna employer focus group)

5.2.2 ADDITIONAL KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Federal Government

11. Continue to review and promote international best practices on immigration policies and programs (at both national and regional levels of government) in order to learn from and, potentially, apply measures that are working in other jurisdictions (e.g. Australia). (information, communication & promotion)

Provincial Government

12. Balance the investment in both supply and demand immigrant programs and services (i.e. both employer-facing and immigrant-facing resources and priorities need to be reflected within provincial funding initiative). (policy & program design)
13. Continue to strategically influence federal Temporary Foreign Worker Program policies and processes. (policy & program design)
14. Utilize IEC-BC capabilities and capacity to better coordinate and connect immigrant employment programs, services and service providers in a way that works for employers and avoids duplication and confusion. (program & service delivery)
15. Ensure that any workplace-targeted or demand-side initiatives (e.g. Welcoming and Inclusive Communities and Workplaces Program) are developed and ideally led by employers. (program & service delivery)
16. Hold professional associations and licensing bodies accountable for identifying more effective mechanisms for determining when foreign credentials do and do not meet their high standards, and recommending training and internship programs that should be developed to help immigrants bridge any gaps to complement existing skills. (program & service delivery)

As Deloitte states, “...we encourage governments to ensure that professional associations are acting in the best interests of the Canadian economy, and allow labour market needs to be addressed” (The Future of Productivity, 2012).

17. Continue to review international best practices on immigration policies and programs (at both national and regional levels of government) in order to learn from and, potentially, apply measures that are working in other jurisdictions (e.g. Australia). (information, communication & promotion)
18. Increase the promotion to BC employers of a clear value proposition for immigrant recruitment and retention in partnership with IEC-BC. (information, communication & promotion)
19. Work with regional and sectoral employer groups and the IEC-BC on coordinating international recruiting and developing region and sector specific immigrant employment strategies. (employer capacity & support)

Promising Practices

“go2’s Foreign Worker Guide for Tourism & Hospitality Employers (Edition 3.0, March 2011) is one the most useful sector-specific resources for employers.”

(Tourism sector employer)

Promising Practices

“Coastal Black Winery was given as an example of an employer that has successfully utilized the Temporary Foreign Worker Program, employing thirty seasonal Mexican workers in their operations. The operation provides accommodation, medical services and pays well. They have taken advantage of the NAFTA agreement to re-employ the workers each year.”

(Comox Valley employer)

Employers and Business Associations

- 20.** Champion and partner with IEC-BC on regional and sector-specific strategies to support employers in their efforts to recruit and retain immigrants. (program & service delivery)
- 21.** Promote the awareness of IEC-BC activities to employers through such groups' communications channels. (information, communication & promotion)
- 22.** Identify and profile employer champions and roles, as immigrant employers of choice. (information, communication & promotion)
- 23.** Encourage chambers of commerce, industry associations and other business and employer groups to promote awareness and the value proposition of recruiting and retaining immigrants, including providing such groups with tools to do so. (employer capacity & support)
- 24.** Engage, promote and provide support to employers to increase diversity and cross-cultural practices in workplaces within a broader theme of more inclusive workforce development and talent mobility and management. (employer capacity & support)
- 25.** Promote to employers in sectors and regions formal mentorship and coaching models and tools for developing and retaining immigrant talent. (employer capacity & support)

Immigrant Employment Council of BC

- 26.** Expand IEC-BC current focus on employer strategies to recruit, hire and retain landed immigrants to include employer-facing strategies and services for integrating other important immigrant groups such as temporary foreign workers and international students. (policy & program design)
- 27.** Refine the IEC-BC brand to increase its profile as, and clearly position it as the partner of employers and facilitator of building employer capacity for recruiting and retaining immigrants. (information, communication & promotion)
- 28.** Work with employers and business association to create a brand for employers who use exemplary and successful immigrant recruiting and retention practices (e.g. The Globe and Mail's "Top 35 Best Employers for New Canadians"). (information, communication & promotion)
- 29.** Establish and sustain an online panel of employers with which to periodically (e.g. quarterly) obtain input on key immigrant recruitment and retention priorities and research. (information, communication & promotion)
- 30.** Publish a web-based "BC Immigrant Hiring and Retention Best Practices" compendium that it is linked to tools and resources that enable employers and others to adapt and apply. (employer capacity & support)

Promising Practices

"The majority of the participants have been involved with the Skilled Trades Employment Program (STEP) and have found it very useful in assisting to meet their workforce needs. For example: our 42 employees are almost all immigrants from the Philippines and we have used STEP extensively. We find that immigrants we hire tend to be loyal, honest and hard working and in turn we are prepared to invest in internal and external training for them

(Construction sector employer)

- 31.** Enhance the IEC–BC web portal with planned new features and tools designed to assist employers in recruiting, hiring and retaining immigrants. (employer capacity & support)
- 32.** Establish and maintain, through a dedicated staff position, a capacity to sustain relationships and communication with a variety of regional, sectoral and provincial business and employer groups, including the BC Chamber of Commerce, the BC Business Council, the Vancouver Board of Trade, key industry sectors and others. (employer capacity & support)

In Human Capital Strategies’ opinion, the single most important recommendation for IEC-BC could be to create a new dedicated staff position to liaise directly with employers and business associations – Recommendation #32. While this project is about increasing employers’ capacity to hire and retain immigrant talent, a key means to this end is enhancing IEC-BC’s capacity on the ground.

5.3 CONCLUSION – IMPLICATIONS FOR ROLES

This was a major unprecedented piece of consultation involving over 150 employers in fifteen focus groups. When considering how to connect more immigrants with BC employers looking for skilled talent, we heard the following from employers:

- 1.** Employers need to play a leadership role in improving immigrant employment; their involvement in developing workforce solutions is critical to the successful integration of immigrants. The immigrant employment system – labour supply and demand generally – needs to be balanced by programs and resources that are employer-facing, not merely immigrant-facing.
- 2.** Employers are challenged by the myriad of services and service providers, resulting in confusion and a low level of awareness. SMEs in particular do not have the resources or patience to navigate the systems for relevant information and services; nor the ability to work with multiple service providers.
- 3.** Employers have a critical need for concrete solutions and outcomes – tools, resources, and information – that will help them attract, hire and keep skilled immigrants. They are increasingly aware of immigrants being an important part of the solution, but many employers do not know where to start or how to connect with the solutions.
- 4.** Employers are frustrated, feeling they do not have a voice or a role in addressing the workforce challenges they face. They do not want more discussion or consultation; they want a role in developing on-the-ground strategies that lead to action.

These findings validate IEC-BC’s employer focus and its role in creating and championing solutions to address the needs of employers, so that the macro end goal of integrating more skilled immigrants into the BC workforce is achieved.

Promising Practices

“Chemistry Consulting from Victoria has had demonstrated success in working with restaurant operators to employ temporary foreign workers on a seasonal basis, particularly in regional resorts.”

(Tourism sector employer)

Promising Practices

“Another critical success factor in this region is the role of the Central Okanagan Economic Development Commission. It appears very on top of all immigration/ foreign worker programs, provides support to employers, and actively facilitates immigrant recruitment within BC/ Canada and overseas, etc.”

(Kelowna employer)

Other Role Players

Of course, IEC-BC is only part of the immigration system in BC. The federal and provincial governments, the employer community itself, and service providers all have roles to play in increasing employers' capacity to hire and recruit immigrant talent.

Since the federal government makes decisions on who is admitted to Canada and the number coming each year – including foreign workers and foreign students – it has a tremendous impact on employers. Therefore, reform and streamlining of its policies, programs, processes, services, etc. are critical and necessary parts of the solution to enhancing employers' capacity to hire, retain and integrate immigrants into their workplaces.

Currently under the Canada-BC Immigration Agreement, the BC Government shares responsibility with the federal government for settlement and integration of immigrants. Various provincial entities work with federal departments, local governments, community organizations and regulators on language training, settlement services and education, credential and skills recognition. In addition to immigration settlement programs administered by the Province, the Ministry of Jobs, Tourism and Innovation and other ministries offer various labour market and employment programs and services for employers and others.

The Labour Market Development Agreement and Labour Market Agreement programs and funding can be accessed by employers to hire, train and retain immigrants.

BC also nominates prospective immigrants to the federal government for permanent residence, and markets itself as a destination for prospective immigrants.

Provincial government agencies have more flexibility and ability to include demand-side, employer-facing programming through its funding under the Agreement and through its general labour market programs.

While service providers (e.g. community organizations, multicultural agencies, employment agencies, training and education providers, etc.) have not been the focus of this project, they were certainly identified as a key success factor by employers and a potential barrier or obstacle to employer hiring and retention of immigrant talent.

Immigrant service providers in BC are funded by governments to serve thousands of immigrants each year including delivering or managing various training and employment programs and services.

While we have heard from employers in BC that they appreciate the work of immigrant service providers, they would like to see more focused employer-facing services (e.g. translation of transcripts, assessment of credentials, work English, orientation to the world of work and specific industries, etc.) and better outreach from service agencies to employers and industry associations. Employers identified a current disconnect that needs to be bridged, and services and agencies need to be better coordinated if service providers are to play a pivotal role in enhancing employers' capacity to hire and retain immigrant talent.

Promising Practices

"STEP is a good example of a sector specific solution that was created by industry. We are a small firm that has had a very positive experience with our two immigrant workers. We now attempt to hire only immigrants due to work ethic."

(Construction sector employer)

STEP was identified as a model that could be expanded to other sectors.

Employers themselves – individually and through their associations – must step up to the plate and play an active role in recruiting and retaining immigrants. The voices of over 150 employers in key industries and communities of the province in this consultation need to be heard; they were asked (and answered) what is needed to help employers – particularly SMEs – attract, hire and retain immigrant talent. As indicated, these employers get it – they know it is in their best interests to tap all talent pools; they know that immigrants will represent an increasing proportion of potential new labour supply in BC and Canada.

There is no quick fix solution as the issues of integrating skilled immigrants into the BC workforce are complex and involve many challenges.

With focused, achievable strategic objectives and strategies, IEC-BC can help to achieve positive outcomes for immigrant labour market integration.

While the recommendations are focused on individual audiences (governments, employers, IEC-BC), it is important that the solutions to addressing immigrant employment be multilateral – partnerships and collaboration among all immigrant employment role players, but focused on enhancing employer capacity.

We have tried to respect the theme and central purpose of the IEC-BC Employer Consultation Project in this report by reflecting in employers’ voices our findings and recommendations.

Promising Practices

“An example of one recent recruitment mission was hiring 300 framers and drywallers in Germany during the boom of 2007, where the employers used a German-speaking Canadian to promote to and work with immigrants.”

(Kelowna employer)

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APPENDIX I

EMPLOYER FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

December 14, 2011 through February 17, 2012.

1. What has been your own organization's experience with recruiting, hiring and retaining immigrants (Roundtable)?

What aspects of hiring immigrants and integrating them into your workplace do you think your organization and other employers need most help with? Why?

What would help you and other employers to hire immigrants more easily, quickly and efficiently? Please explain your rationale.
2. What best or effective practices or solutions (i.e. practices demonstrated to work, demonstrated solutions) used by employers to hire or to retain immigrants are you aware of?
3. What government policies, programs, or services are you aware of that provide assistance to employers in recruiting, hiring and retaining immigrants?
4. What role do government policy and programs play in helping or hindering you from hiring immigrants?
5. What should governments do to support employers to hire and integrate immigrants into the workplace?
6. Who do you think is best positioned/qualified to provide assistance you require?
7. What tools, supports and information do you think would be most helpful to assist employers in hiring and integrating immigrants into the workplace? Please be specific.
8. To what extent do you think programs or tools that are tailored to your sector and/or geographic region would be useful in helping employers hire and retain immigrants. Why or why not?
9. To what extent have you experienced any cross-cultural challenges (e.g. communication misunderstandings, religious holidays, etc.)? How have you dealt with any challenges?
10. Are you planning or would you be willing to introduce programs in your organization to support a diversified workforce? Why or why not?

APPENDIX 2

LIST OF SUPPORTING ORGANIZATIONS

REGIONAL/COMMUNITY EMPLOYER FOCUS GROUPS

BC Chamber of Commerce, December 14th, 2011 Greater Vancouver Employer Focus Group

Fort St. John Chamber of Commerce, January 12th, 2012 Fort St. John Employer Focus Group

Prince George Chamber of Commerce, January 19th, 2012 Prince George Employer Focus Group

Cranbrook Chamber of Commerce, January 24th, 2012 Cranbrook Employer Focus Group

Comox Valley Chamber of Commerce, February 7, 2012 Comox Valley Employer Focus Group

Kelowna Chamber of Commerce, February 8, 2012 Kelowna Employer Focus Group

Surrey Board of Trade, February 10th, 2012 Surrey Employer Focus Group

SECTORAL EMPLOYER FOCUS GROUPS

Energy Services BC, January 13th, 2012 Oil and Gas Sector Employer Focus Group

BC Trucking Association, January 18th, 2012 Trucking Sector Employer Focus Group

Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters (BC), January 25th, 2012 Manufacturing Sector Employer Focus Group

Retail Council of Canada and Shelfspace, February 2nd, 2012 Retail Sector Employer Focus Group

Mining Association of BC, BC Mining HR Task Force, February 3rd, 2012 Mining Sector Employer Focus Group

Vancouver Regional Construction Association, February 7th, 2012 Construction Sector Employer Focus Group

go2, February 9th, 2012 Tourism Sector Employer Focus Group

Applied Science Technologists and Technicians of BC, February 17th, 2012 Technology Sector Employer Focus Group

Human Capital Strategies would like to sincerely thank these organizations and would also like to thank John Winter of the BC Chamber of Commerce for his help in connecting with the local chambers of commerce.

APPENDIX 3

EMPLOYER PRE FOCUS GROUP SURVEY RESULTS

I. INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND

Focus group participants received background material and an invitation to respond to a short (10-question) online survey a few days before each focus group. Of 156 focus group participants – almost 95% employers and industry representatives – there were 111 completed survey responses.

This summary provides the questions and responses to each question. While the distribution of responses by focus group (community or sector) is provided, this summary does not compare responses by focus group because in most cases the sample sizes are small and any differences would not be statistically significant.

II. SUMMARY OF RESPONSES

Please specify which focus group you are attending (select one only)

Focus Group (Community/Sector)	Count	Percent
Community		
Fort St. John (Fort St. John Chamber)	11	10.8
Prince George (PG Chamber)	10	9.8
Cranbrook (Cranbrook Chamber)	8	7.8
Comox Valley (CV Chamber)	6	5.9
Kelowna (Kelowna Chamber)	6	5.9
Vancouver Metro (GVRD)	6	5.9
Surrey (Surrey Board of Trade)	1	1.0
Sector		
Technology (ASTTBC)	16	15.7
Oil and Gas (Energy Services BC)	10	9.8
Mining (Task Force)	9	8.8
Retail (RCC)	9	8.8
Construction (VRCA)	6	5.9
Manufacturing (CME)	4	3.9
Tourism and Hospitality (go2)	0	0.0
Trucking and Buses (BCTA)	0	0.0
Not identified	9	n/a
Total	111	100

Overall the Technology focus group included the largest number of responses. The other single largest responses were in the rural regions (Fort St. John, Prince George, Cranbrook) and in the Oil and Gas, Mining and Retail focus groups.

**1. Has your business hired or attempted to hire in the past five years?
Select only one.**

Ninety-six percent of respondents have hired or attempted to hire in the last 5 years.

**2. If your business had difficulties hiring, how did you manage?
Select all that apply.**

The most frequent response to this question was that the employer hired someone even though the person did not meet the requirements; 43 or 12.4% of respondents indicated this. Of similar frequency were passing some responsibilities onto other employees and recruiting outside their area (12.1%), hiring temporary help (11.6%), and functioning with fewer employees or passing up business opportunities (11.3%).

2. Would you describe your company's hiring difficulty as a skills or labour shortage? (A skills shortage is when there is a lack of workers with the required education, experience or skills applying for vacant positions in your business. A labour shortage is when there are too few workers applying for vacant positions in your business, including entry level or unskilled workers. Select only one.

Thirty-eight percent of respondents characterized their hiring difficulty as a skill shortage, while 19% indicated it was a labour shortage, and about one-third (34%) said it was both.

3. What type of skills is your business in most need of? Select only one.

The most frequent response to this question was "other," however when looking at those responses, 9 or 8% of all respondents identified "drivers" as a needed skill. Otherwise, services skills (17.6%), skilled trades (14.8%), technical (13.9%) and professional (11.1%) skills were most frequently identified as needed by employers responding to this survey.

**4. What are your most effective means of recruiting employees?
Select all that apply.**

Referrals from friends and employees were the most important way for respondents to recruit (20%). Job advertisements in newspapers and magazines and employer websites were the next most frequent means of recruiting (13.8%). Government employment centres and programs, professional recruiters and immigrant agencies were relatively low as recruitment options for employer respondents.

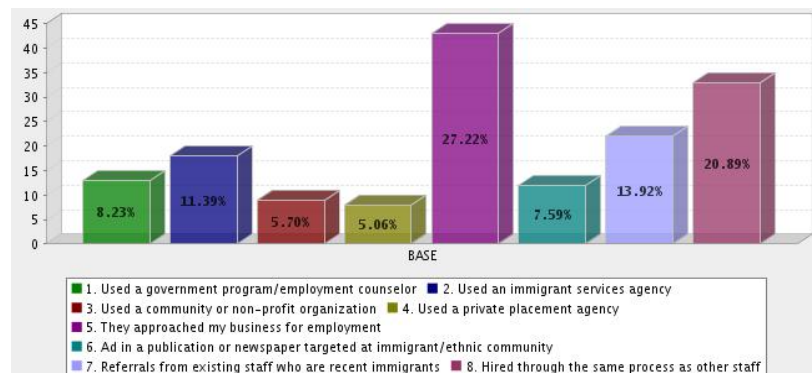
Recruiting Means	Count	Percent
Referrals from friends, employees	73	20.0
Job advertisements in newspapers, magazines	51	13.8
Own website	51	13.8
External website (Workopolis)	34	9.2
Unsolicited applications	29	7.8
Post secondary institutions (co-op programs)	28	7.6
Social media (e.g. LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook)	22	5.9
Government employment centres	20	5.4
Professional recruiter	17	4.6
Immigrant agency/organization	16	4.3
Other	12	3.2
Help wanted signs at your operation	11	3.0
Government programs	7	1.9

6. Have you hired any recent immigrants in the past five years? Select only one.

One-quarter of respondents did not hire any recent immigrants over the past 5 years. Twenty-three percent did so for entry-level positions only; and 19% did so for very specific skills like language, IT, and other technical skill sets. A further 22% of respondents indicated that they had hired for “various positions.”

7. How did your organization recruit recent immigrants? Select all that apply.

The single largest response to this question was that employers recruited recent immigrants through those that approached the business (27.2%); next most frequent response was that they hired immigrants through the same process as other staff (20.9%). Community or non-profit organizations and private placement agencies were the least frequent options.



8. From what categories of recent economic class immigrants has your business hired? Select all that apply.

Respondents indicated that recent immigrants with permanent resident status (37.5%) and temporary foreign workers or students (34.4%) were the most prevalent categories from which they recruited.

9. Do you think it will become easier or harder to find employees in the next five years? Select only one.

A large majority (72.7%) of employer respondents indicated they think it will become harder to find employees in the next five years; only 3.6 thought it will be easier.

10. What have been the obstacles to you hiring an immigrant (either prevented you from hiring one or reduced the extent to which you hired immigrants? Select all that apply.

Almost one-third (32.8%) of respondents identified deficient English language skills as an obstacle to hiring immigrants. One-fifth (20.3%) of respondents cited a lack of Canadian experience as the next most significant obstacle, while not knowing where to find skilled immigrant candidates was identified by 11.5% of employer respondents. Of the 12% who indicated “other”, many of these identified the time it took for them to make application and receive approval, etc.

APPENDIX 4

KEY FINDINGS FROM INDIVIDUAL FOCUS GROUPS

This section provides brief summaries of the key findings from each sectoral and regional/community focus group. Full summaries of each of the sectoral and community/regional focus groups are available from IEC-BC.

REGIONAL EMPLOYER FOCUS GROUPS

Greater Vancouver Employers, December 14, 2011

- English language proficiency is a major barrier to integrating new immigrants into the workplace.
- Recognition of foreign credentials and/or assessment of international education and experience would help employers.
- Cultural training for employers is expected to improve employers' understanding.
- Funding helps to make a hiring decision, and to support immigrants in recognized Canadian training; tax credits and/or any other reimbursement for training would be useful to employers.
- Access to clear information is critical (e.g. assistance identifying immigrant status and eligibility to work in Canada, tools to conduct a background check on applicants' international experiences).
- SMEs rely on their own resources and networks rather than on government agencies or other institutions.
- Government processes need improvement: consistent proactive interaction and communication with SMEs.
- Idea: a catalog on countries, culture, religions, norms, expectations, working conditions, business practices and other relevant information.

Fort St. John Employers, January 12, 2012

- To develop a "Made in the Northeast" program tailored to local needs. This program should be developed through a consultation with local employers, employees, community organizations and local government.
- Majority of employers use the TFW program as a solution to solve labour shortages.
- The Northeast region has unique labour and community needs; therefore, programs should address these needs accordingly.
- There is lack of promotion of the North among potential immigrants. Once they come to Canada and settle in bigger cities, they are not willing to move to the North. There needs to be a communication strategy about this region.

- Both provincial and federal governments need to support the development and growth of the resource extraction sector in the North.
- Community development needs to become a priority to attract and retain people.
- There is a need for developing strategies to integrate people into small communities. This is different from Vancouver where new immigrants can find cultural and social support.
- The provincial government needs to understand the challenges of the employers in region. There is a need to react fast to the fast changing work environments.
- Idea – Use this community as a pilot project for regions.

Prince George Employers, January 19, 2012

- The participants see their best options for recruiting immigrants – given a very small pool of existing ones in the Prince George vicinity – to encouraging immigrants to land directly in Prince George and recruiting recent immigrants from Alberta and the Atlantic provinces.
- Employers are experiencing significant delays, paperwork and time-consuming detailed processes regarding TFWs (Labour Market Opinions and TFW work permits) as well as when recruiting permanent immigrants.
- There needs to be a local capacity to “hand-hold” employers to navigate the immigrant recruitment process.
- Government funding is needed for on-the-ground local capacity to help employers and immigrants; this has been reduced in recent years when we need this support most.
- Prince George has a foundation of capacity to build on with work by the Chamber of Commerce, Initiatives Prince George, Immigrant & Multicultural Service Society and Welcome Prince George. A plan is needed and seed funding is needed to take action.

Cranbrook Employers, January 24, 2012

- The certification of foreign credentials was an overriding concern among the participants, particularly those seeking to recruit skilled trades and technical workers.
- Employers indicated they spent inordinate amounts of time trying to determine if foreign workers and recent immigrants qualifications were equivalent to Canadian standards.
- All participants felt that there should be better government-funded support for skills and credentials assessment.
- There was also a concern that foreign worker recruiting agencies were not regulated or accredited and examples were given of expensive and misleading practices.

- There was a strong consensus that the foreign worker recruitment process – both for permanent and temporary workers – was convoluted and frustrating and very time consuming for employers.

Comox Valley Employers, February 7, 2012

- Employers are experiencing significant delays, paperwork and time-consuming detailed processes regarding TFWs (Labour Market Opinions and TFW work permits) and for recruiting permanent immigrants.
- There needs to be a local capacity for “one stop” service to assist employers to navigate the immigrant recruitment process and provide ongoing support to integrate them into the workplace and their families into the community.
- Government funding for on-the-ground local capacity to help employers and immigrants has been reduced in recent years at a time when this support is of growing importance.
- There was a strong need expressed for assistance to employers in assessing the credentials of recent immigrants and establishing equivalencies.

Kelowna Employers, February 8, 2012

- Most employers were experienced in recruiting immigrants and foreign workers through PNP, FSWP and TFWP. They indicated positive levels of success in such recruiting and in the retention of immigrants.
- Unlike some other regions and sectors, employers in this focus group did not identify English language deficiencies as a significant barrier to employment or retention.
- Employers identified a key partnership between employers, the local college, and others involving the recruitment, training, testing and certification of skilled workers from Jamaica in which some of the screening, training and testing was done in that country before they came to BC.
- A critical success factor in this region is the role of the Central Okanagan Economic Development Commission and all the work it has done to facilitate the recruitment of immigrants.
- Employers thought there was a lot of information and resources available of which employers are not aware and which needs to be coordinated and connected to a portal for the region (and province).
- Employers indicated that “aftercare” support for immigrants is really important, and suggested more of this needs to be provided in a coordinated, strategic way.
- Employers expressed concerns about backlogs of approvals under both TFWP and PNP, and did not feel listened to by government. They were also concerned about standards adopted by the federal government on wage rates and other rules that do not make sense for this region (or BC).

- The employers were very positive about immigrants' attitudes, their appreciation of having a job and their interest in "fitting into" their workplace culture. This was contrasted by employers' perceptions of the attitudes of local people – youth and other job-seekers – whom they saw as having more of an entitlement perspective.

Surrey Employers, February 10th, 2012

- Potential immigrants need to be better informed about labour market conditions, employment rules, regulations and timelines prior to their arrival to Canada. Government is responsible for providing this information to newcomers.
- All employers agree that immigrant workers have good work ethics and high potential to succeed. Employers want immigrants to understand business and company needs, and adjust their academic and practical experience to local requirements.
- Government needs to recognize that the immigration point system is not effective; immigrant employment is a multifaceted process. All levels of government, industries and regions need to work together (pre-landing information support, pre-screening based on industry/region needs, skill based assessment, job matching, credentials recognition, and other relevant activities).
- A majority of employers think that the credentials recognition process does not support interprovincial and international labour mobility; consequently, it creates a lot of barriers for both workers and employers.
- Employers suggested incorporating technology in the hiring of foreign workers and immigrants in their home countries (on-line screening, interviews).
- SMEs do not have enough time and resources to deal with many HR related issues. They need more help with immigrant hiring in form of information support, training programs, credential recognition support, and other. There was a suggestion to create a local Employer Resource Centre.

SECTOR EMPLOYER FOCUS GROUPS

Oil and Gas Employers, January 13th, 2012

- A majority of employers meet their labour demands by using TFWP, hiring from a wide range of countries including United States, Mexico, Colombia, Philippines, and others.
- Employers think that there should be a regional strategy on employment in the North. Government support is needed to implement this strategy.
- There is a need to promote work and life among new immigrants and Canadian workers in Northeast BC.
- There is a need for housing and community development to support new workers and their families.
- Employers need more information on immigrant workers as an alternative to current TFW practices.

- Employers need support on recognizing foreign credentials and certifying skilled immigrants according to the industry standards.

Trucking/Transit Employers, January 18th, 2012

- Participants requested industry specialized government regulated training and certification of truck drivers.
- Pre-screening candidates before arrival and making sure immigrants match labour market demands for the BC economy including the trucking sector are priorities.
- Identify industry labour demands and develop immigration policies according to the current and future labour demands.
- Establish an evaluation service in the country of origin and have industry representatives manage this service, possibly through the BC Trucking Association or a recognized training school.
- Ensure basic language proficiency among immigrants so that workers can integrate more effectively.
- Develop and establish industry-driven and industry-recognized training to ensure workers skills meet market demands.
- Establish a centralized service of assessment of qualifications.
- Manufacturing Employers, January 25th, 2012
- The employers are having mixed results with recruiting and retaining immigrants, using TFWP, PNP, and FSWP. They have no trouble attracting potential immigrant employees; the challenge is in retaining and integrating them.
- Inadequate English language skills is the top challenge facing these employers. They referred to “business English” including reading, writing, interpreting and apply work language and documentation (e.g. policy and procedures, quality control manuals, etc.). Employers can no longer afford to pay for remedial English language training, and now use English skills as an up-front screening criterion.
- The second big challenge for these employers was government policies and the time-consuming processes involved in obtaining approvals. Governments “control the immigration tap” and therefore the federal government in particular needs to streamline procedures. Employers and immigrants need quicker responses.
- Another key challenge for employers is being able to evaluate the credentials and training of internationally trained workers. Many are smaller businesses without the time or resources to do this and they do not know where to start. They also called for more of this to be done before a person immigrates to Canada.
- Some employers found immigrant agencies like MOSAIC helpful with resume/ transcript translation and pre-screening services. They would like to agencies offering more of these services. Partnerships between these agencies, employers, training institutions and government agencies should be supported and expanded.

- Most employers did not feel supported or helped by professional bodies – they are perceived as perpetuating immigrant under-employment and in extending the time it takes to recruit and integrate immigrants into the workplace.
- Many of the employers have hired over-qualified immigrants with professional credential for basic production or laboring positions, with the view to helping them eventually move into skilled positions and/or into their previous profession.
- Many employers commented on the good attitude, work ethic and appreciation of being employed among immigrant employees; and how this offered positively rubbed off into their broader workforce.

Retail Employers, February 2nd, 2012

- A majority of employers are currently experiencing skills and labour shortages.
- All participants have varying degrees of immigrants and/or temporary foreign workers in their workforces.
- All employers are planning to hire new immigrants in the future and need more information on where and how find the right talent from skilled immigrant pool.
- Retail sector jobs require a specific skill-set including good command of English, communication and entrepreneurial skills.
- A majority of employers agreed that cultural and diversity training in the workplace makes immigrant integration more effective.
- Employers who hire through the TFW program find the Labour Market Opinion process confusing and time consuming.
- Employers need more information on available immigrant pool and would like to support an organization that would provide help with selecting, hiring and developing an immigrant workforce.
- Some employers invest in “high-potential” immigrant workers and support their advancement in management roles. However, they experience some difficulties due to cultural biases, barriers in communication and a lack of motivation among some immigrant employees.

Mining Employers, February 3rd, 2012

- Mining companies are having an extremely difficult time in recruiting and retaining the skilled workforce they require.
- A majority of employers meet their labour demands by using the TFWP. However, there is an enormous frustration with the approval timelines for the TFWP.
- While not specifically targeting in-country immigrants, mining employers are prepared to hire them if they have the required skills and qualifications.
- Immigrants may not be that willing to re-locate to remote, rural areas where mining operations are located.

- Australia is regarded by mining employers as a significant competitor in the global war for mining talent and also has clear best practices that Canada can learn from.

Construction Employers, February 7th, 2012

- Immigrants are becoming the preferred choice for some firms due to a positive work ethic and loyalty.
- English language ability is perhaps the greatest barrier to expand the hiring of immigrants – it is an essential skill.
- English language training programs need to be more applied and oriented to the workplace.
- The costs of service delivery for immigrants and employers should be shared more equitably by individuals, industry and government.
- Governments' role needs to focus on policy and financial supports, not the direct delivery of services.
- Industry associations are well positioned to provide services to employers.
- BC Construction Association's Skilled Trades Employment Program (STEP) is a good example of an effective, sector specific program delivered to and by a specific sector – there are possibilities for replication.
- STEP should enhance its communication to various sectors and among immigrant organizations and service providers.

Tourism and Hospitality Employers, February 9th, 2012

- Employers expressed frustration with the TFWP, particularly unwieldy processes required to recruit and employ temporary workers on a seasonal basis. One common complaint was that the process was very expensive and time consuming for the tourism and hospitality sector.
- There needs to be a "one stop" service to assist employers as they go through the TFWP process.
- Participants suggested that there needs to be greater emphasis placed on hiring recent immigrants who are under-employed; government and agency assistance should be provided to help address cultural differences that impact communications and public interactions.
- Foreign credential assessment is not a major problem for the tourism and hospitality sector.

Technology Employers, February 17th, 2012

- A majority of employers are currently experiencing difficulties in finding the right talent for available positions.
- All employers find that English language proficiency and cultural competency are key factors for immigrants to succeed in the workplace.

- Most employers think that Canadian certification and/or professional license enhances immigrants' ability to find work faster.
- Most employers think that the immigration system based on a point system needs major restructuring to reflect a fast-changing labour market climate.
- Employers who are unable to fill positions through local hiring use TFWP and PNP. They find the TFWP process extremely time and resource consuming.
- There is a need for employers to invest in workforce training and "hire not for a job but for a career," to attract the right talent.
- The Applied Science Technologists and Technicians of BC and the Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists are the only regulatory bodies in Canada that introduced the "provisional status" as an intermediary milestone to getting a full technologist or engineering license.
- Employers need more information, resources and human resource tools on immigrant assessment, hiring, training, and retention.

