## SUMMARY FINDINGS

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

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**IEC-BC** | IMMIGRANT EMPLOYMENT COUNCIL OF BC

10 YEARS 2008 - 2018

*Connecting Employers to Immigrant Talent*

## INTRODUCTION

**B**ritish Columbia has emerged as one of the leading tech ecosystems in Canada and the world, with a host of successful companies in information and communications technology, interactive and digital media, clean tech, life sciences, and IT/engineering services.

BC's high tech sector now comprises more than 9,500 companies - from startups with a few employees to multinational firms employing thousands of people. Information Technology roles are in the highest demand, including systems engineers, programmers and software developers (BC Tech Association 2017).

Despite tremendous growth for BC's tech sector, the province is on the verge of a major shortfall of tech talent. According to the 2016 TechTalentBC report, there will be a demand for over 47,000 tech workers by 2021, but only 16,500 of these vacancies will be filled through current employment growth rates and the talent available in the province. This leaves 30,500 unoccupied tech-related jobs for BC in 2021 (BC Tech Association 2017).

The study summarized herein was carried out by the Association for Canadian Studies (ACS) on behalf of IEC-BC. It presents the findings from a series of three focus groups and five one-on-one interviews with tech employers in BC. Companies participating in the study ranged in size from small and medium corporations to large multinational firms and represented multiple tech industries.

# WHAT IS BEING SAID ABOUT IMMIGRANT TALENT IN BC'S TECH SECTOR

## Growth of BC's Tech Sector

Tech is the fastest-growing sector in British Columbia, with revenues growing at a compound annual rate of 6 percent (see Figure 1). Since the 2008 recession, BC's tech GDP has grown at double the pace of the provincial economy, and in the last 15 years, BC's tech sector has grown by 91 percent to generate over $15 billion dollars in GDP per year (KPMG 2016).

## Facing a Tech Talent Shortage

The 2016 Tech Talent BC Report quantifies three objectives that need to be accomplished in order to meet the tech labour force gaps as described above:



FIGURE 1. ANNUAL GROWTH RATE OF THE BC TECH SECTOR
*Source: 2016 TechTalentBC Report*

**1** 8,500 more *immigrants* (defined here as individuals who have immigrated to Canada within the past year) than are currently projected to arrive in BC will be required by 2021 to meet the growing sector demand.

**2** 12,500 more *new entrants* (i.e., graduates from BC post-secondary institutions) will be needed by 2021 to meet tech sector demand.

**3** 9,500 more *career transitioners* (i.e., those who are upskilling to transition into tech jobs from other sectors) and *individuals from underrepresented groups* (women, First Nations, individuals with disabilities) will be needed by 2021 than are currently expected.
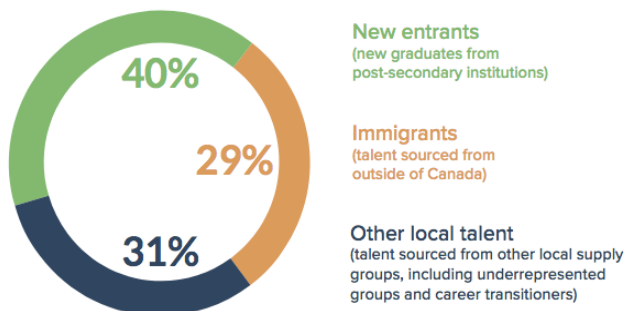


FIGURE 2. BC TECH TALENT RECRUITMENT POOLS
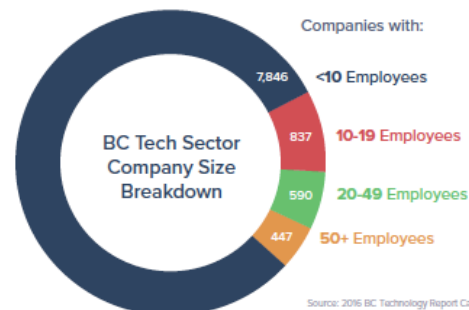*Source: 2016 TechTalentBC Report*

FIGURE 3. BC TECH COMPANY SIZE
*Source: 2016 TechTalentBC Report*

## Barriers and Opportunities for Growth

The tech sector in BC has historically relied on immigrants to fill gaps in the local talent pool and meet the industry's fast-growing needs. Nearly one in three job vacancies in BC tech companies are filled by immigrants. Keeping these roles filled with qualified, talented individuals in the tech industry is critical for company growth and competitiveness on a global scale.

The number of immigrants arriving to BC has remained stagnant or even declined in recent years, despite the increasing need for international talent in the tech sector. In 2014, British Columbia attracted 35,174 or 13.5% of all immigrants to Canada, the lowest level observed in the past 25 years (Statistics Canada 2016). BC has also seen its share of recent immigrants decrease over the past 15 years, from 19.9% in 2001 to 14.5% in 2016 (Statistics Canada 2017).

## Government Programs for Sourcing International Talent

Top channels currently used by tech employers to bring international talent to BC are through the Federal Skilled Worker Program-Express Entry (22%), BC's Provincial Nominee Program (20%), or the Temporary Foreign Worker Program (16%). Other immigration pathways are via NAFTA (14%), post-graduate work permits (13%), transfers from multinational companies (8%) and International Experience Canada (7%) (See 2016 TechTalentBC report).

Recent changes to Canada's visa program were intended to reduce barriers and help attract specialized international talent to BC's (and Canada's) tech industry. As part of its Global Skills Strategy, the Canadian government's *global skills visa program* launched a 24-month pilot project in June 2017 designed to allow high-growth firms to bring in international talent within two weeks, rather than up to a year, which is how long it usually takes.

## Incentives to Work in BC Tech

Once international talent arrives in the province, there needs to be a strong incentive for them to stay here. The percentage of new immigrants settling in British Columbia has been on the decline over the past four censuses, with economic factors such as housing costs playing a significant role in where recent arrivals end up (Globe and Mail, 25 October 2017). This "brain drain" of tech talent from BC to other provinces, the United States and other countries has been substantial and has hurt the province's economy.

Some tech companies in BC are creating special incentives for tech talent to stay in the province that go beyond regular medical and dental benefits. These include unlimited vacation and flexible work hours.

BC's proximity to major tech hubs such as Seattle and Silicon Valley has also contributed to rapidly rising salaries for tech workers.

## Current Initiatives, Tools and Resources

### BC PNP TECH PILOT

BC's Ministry of Jobs, Trade and Technology is responsible for establishing BC as a preferred location for new and emerging technologies, and removing barriers to attracting skilled workers. In support of these priorities, a pilot under the BC Provincial Nominee Program (BC PNP) works to ensure the technology sector can attract and retain the talent it needs to be sustained and to grow the sector further. BC PNP staff work with local tech employers to address their talent needs by providing a fast-track, permanent immigration pathway for in-demand foreign workers and international students.

### BCTECHBASE

The BC Tech Association launched the BCTechBase, a database with an interactive dashboard that displays information about 3,000+ of the province's technology companies. The tool displays recent financing and acquisition activity, and it enables users to parse information about companies by growth stage, tech subsector, and workforce size.

### IMMIGRANT EMPLOYMENT COUNCIL OF BC

The Immigrant Employment Council of BC (IEC-BC) is a not-for-profit organization that provides BC employers with solutions, tools and resources they need to attract, hire and retain qualified immigrant talent. IEC-BC has developed innovative tools and resources to help employers access this untapped talent pool and build a diverse and inclusive workplace.

- **BC JobConnect** brings together employers seeking skilled people to fill specific roles, and newcomers residing in BC. Registered employers have access to a constantly updated database of job-ready newcomer candidates who have uploaded their profiles through an on-line tool.

- **Onboarding Refugees Toolkits** were produced to assist employers to recruit, hire and retain a diverse workforce that includes refugees more effectively. This series of three publications includes tips, guidelines and best practices from employers who have successfully onboarded refugees.

- **FAST Program** – a suite of free, web-based services targeting 68 occupations in skilled trades, IT, biotech and life sciences. It gives individuals pre-approved to immigrate to Canada a head start even before they land here. Key features include occupation-specific competency assessments, resources, training on Canadian workplace culture and communication, and direct connections to BC employers.

- **MentorConnect** provides participating mentors with valuable professional development and leadership skills, while helping mentees gather local insights, access professional networks and enhance employment opportunities. Since its inception in 2011, more than 500 mentors and close to 2,000 immigrants have participated in the program with 70% of mentees finding employment in their field.

## METHODOLOGY

This research project used three key methods to collect data: a scan of the literature on the needs of BC's tech industry to identify challenges faced by employers in attracting and integrating immigrant talent, a series of three focus groups and five individual (one-on-one) interviews with employers in BC's tech industry.

IEC-BC organized three focus groups and five one-on-one interviews with tech employers across three regions in BC: Vancouver, Victoria, and Surrey/Fraser Valley. A targeted approach was used to recruit eight to 10 participants per group across the three locations through its current networks, employer partners and business affiliations in the BC tech industry.

The first of three focus group consultations was held on January 30, 2018 in the IEC-BC offices in downtown Vancouver. The second group was held on February 1, 2018 at the Greater Victoria Chamber of Commerce in Victoria, BC. The third focus group session was held at the Surrey Board of Trade in Surrey/Fraser Valley on February 2, 2018. One-on-one interviews were held during the last week of February and first week of March 2018.

## KEY FINDINGS

### Theme 1: Experience with Government Programs/Initiatives

BC tech employers were asked about their knowledge and awareness of several government programs and initiatives to help source international talent. Specifically, we asked focus group participants and interviewees about the following programs:

#### FEDERAL SKILLED WORKER PROGRAM-EXPRESS ENTRY

One employer discussed using the Federal Skilled Worker Program when trying to bring in an "express worker for purposes of very specialized services in our company." While the process appeared to work out, the experience with the employee was not good: "We spent a year training that individual only to have him return back to their country of origin." Another employer from the one-on-one interviews who had used the Express Entry program felt that the program was effective, but he recommended that the government reduce the amount of "burdensome paperwork" and time that needs to be spent filling out a quarterly survey.

#### BC'S PROVINCIAL NOMINEE PROGRAM

The majority of employers were familiar with BC's Provincial Nominee Program, and those who used it said it got easier to navigate the more they used it. Still, others were impatient with the amount of time it took to process applicants.

Another employer took issue with the program's requirement to prove that equivalent Canadian talent is not available to fill the tech role, which made the process very difficult. And by the time the employer finally had all the paperwork approved to secure the position, after all that effort, the candidate ultimately left the organization [finding another job].

**TEMPORARY FOREIGN WORKER PROGRAM**

Interviewees were also well acquainted with the Temporary Foreign Worker Program, and one employer stated that 55 percent of their current staff were temporary foreign workers. Another BC tech employer used the program to source talent from specific European countries. Although the program was generally viewed in a positive light, at least one employer found it difficult to keep up with its constant changes.

**POST-GRADUATE WORK PERMITS**

Post-Graduate Work Permits were an avenue taken by several employers to hire recent graduates in the short-term, which can help qualified candidates obtain permanent residency in the long-term. Several employers favored work permits because they are relatively straightforward to obtain.

There were some concerns regarding *access* to Post Graduate Work Permits, and, in particular, access for private education institutions. According to one focus group participant, regulations changed a year ago to only allow access to public institutions: "I've used it. It was probably 35%of my business and the government cut it off completely to us a year ago because we're a private college and they just wanted the public colleges to be able to get the permits."

**GLOBAL SKILLS VISA PROGRAM**

While almost all focus group members and interviewees were at least familiar with the government programs and initiatives used to source international talent, there was less knowledge or awareness of Canada's Global Skills Visa Program.[1] This was probably due to the fact that the program was just launched in June 2017.

An employer who had just used the Global Skills Visa Program prior to being interviewed felt that it was a "pretty solid" strategy once you get past the learning curve. And although it took longer than the anticipated two to three weeks to hire the foreign candidate, the process was still faster than any other program, according to the interviewee.

**CO-OP PROGRAMS**

A couple of companies also relied heavily on Co-op programs to hire new tech talent out of schools, which integrate academic study with on-the-job experience. As one employer described:

> "Before we bring people in, if they're new immigrants, we go through a contracting period with them to assess [their skills]. We hire a lot of co-ops. If they're successful in their co-op and they understand our environments and can contribute positively, then, we'll hire them on full-time. We do a lot of things beforehand to ensure we're assessing [skills]."

However, there was some scepticism in regard to motivations to integrate recent graduates into the local marketplace. BC universities "would much rather have a graduate go to Tesla, than to stay local. For them, that's a much bigger tick in the box. It is how they're rewarded, and so if you can provide a different reward..."

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1  The Canadian government's global skills visa program launched a 24-month pilot project in June 2017 designed to allow high-growth firms to bring in international talent within two weeks, rather than up to a year, which is how long it usually takes. Canada's Global Skills Strategy also recruits professionals from around the world to train Canadian workers and works with employers planning job-creating investments in Canada. The Strategy provides businesses in Canada with a faster way to bring in global talent in order to scale up and grow—creating better jobs for more Canadians.

**NAVIGATING THE SYSTEM**

Although employers seemed to appreciate the many different avenues to immigration offered by the Canadian government, some felt the many different programs (and regular changes or revisions to these programs) could be a bit overwhelming to navigate at times.

**OTHER ISSUES/CONCERNS**

Some of the key issues mentioned in regard to the various government immigration programs were that although they are helpful in sourcing international talent, "they don't allow us to bring in enough people [job candidates]" and "we can't bring them in fast enough" to meet their volume and growth. One employer mentioned that "we use all the programs [mentioned above], but it's still not enough." The "growth of the tech industry [in BC] is much faster than government processes."

Employers also described a gap between supply and demand from an educational perspective: "Canadian schools are not preparing enough graduates" for jobs in BC's tech industry. From this employer's standpoint, highly qualified candidates "are not being pumped out of the school system at a fast enough pace." That is to say, there are simply not enough graduates from the university system with degrees in tech to fill the available positions in BC.

## Theme 2: Aligning Immigrant Talent and Employer Needs

While focus group participants (tech industry employers) generally felt that both hard and soft skills were important when hiring international tech talent, a lot more emphasis was placed on the importance of soft skills.

One of the largest 'mismatches' between newcomer skills and the expectations of employers was related to soft skills, particularly related to *communication*.

"We've done a lot of hiring of immigrants, and have a lot of immigrants on staff, especially in our Vancouver operation," described one employer. "I think that it's the soft skills that are our biggest challenge." Another employer elaborated on these communication issues: "All of our technicians are here in town [Victoria]. If somebody calls [our company] and… they hear what they perceive is a foreign accent, their assumption is that they're talking to a call center overseas."

One employer reiterated the notion that soft skills are in shorter supply, but also drew upon a recurring theme discussed in both the focus groups and the individual interviews related to culture or more specifically, the *"Canadian Experience"* including cultural differences that exist between Canada and other countries.

An anecdote was recalled by one female employer, who described her recent experience while interviewing a candidate from overseas alongside her male business partner. Although the female interviewer was clearly positioned as the lead in the interview process, the male candidate insisted on only addressing the male interviewer, who he felt more comfortable with because of a similar last name and gender (perceived).

Although not all focus group participants agreed, an observation was made across the three focus groups and five interviews that the larger the company, the greater the emphasis that is placed

on soft skill development. For smaller tech organizations or start-ups, greater importance is placed on the development of hard or technical skills.

Another issue brought up by employers was related to unemployment and underemployment, and the way in which the Canadian government recognizes the educational degrees and certifications of international talent.

> …the biggest frustration that I see is the ones that have been here for a while. They've been here for two or three years and they're still not employed in the field that they were trained in. We hear that around the table all the time. We have surgeons that were in [country name] for 25 years. They can't find work. They were brought in under the understanding that when they got here they'd be able to get employed, but of course they find that their skillsets don't match.

In a way, this phenomenon might be described as the elusive Canadian Dream. Immigrants come here with high expectations of a better life full of opportunities, opportunities which may in fact not exist or are at least more difficult to obtain than originally thought.

Another mismatch reported in the interviews was related to the resumes/CV's of immigrants, which are often formatted in a different way from those submitted by Canadian job seekers. Too often employers will reject a potentially great candidate from the pool because their resume/CV has an unfamiliar layout or does not present the desired information.

## Theme 3: Push and Pull Factors

### PUSH FACTORS

Without question, the biggest push factor mentioned by virtually all focus group members and individual interviewees was related to housing in BC, or what can more aptly be described as the "housing crisis." The average house in Vancouver now costs over $1,000,000, and as one employer put it: "we need to tell people the goods straight away."

As one employer described, when "a new immigrant comes [to Vancouver] and they want to rent, forget about buying, they are hard pressed and need to go live in the suburbs, with long commute times. So that's almost the immediate pushback." For some newcomers who are hired, "it's a one and a half, two-hour commute each way, so they're spending four hours a day commuting."

Another push factor identified up by employers related to the sheer size of the employer base in BC, which although large and growing still does not match the opportunities that can be found elsewhere in other Canadian provinces and abroad. "Every time I try to bring in employees from Toronto," said one interviewee, "they are always aware of the number of employers in Vancouver, which is less than in Toronto. If they have children and families, they will think twice [before moving to BC] – it can be a limiting factor."

When asked if they had seen any kind of a push from the United States with the recent travel ban, one focus group member responded: "we've absolutely seen people who, in their immigrant process, had applied to multiple countries, and either had waved off of going to the States recently, in that they were now looking through the immigrant process in Canada."

**PULL FACTORS**

Some of the most obvious pull factors that bring immigrants to "beautiful British Columbia" as mentioned were: "the weather, the climate, location, geography and proximity to the San Francisco Bay area." Vancouver is often cited as one of "the most livable cities in the world." You have lots of green spaces, snow-capped mountains and the ocean all in your backyard. "It's the quality of life message that we promote" to potential candidates living abroad. They went on to add: "We've spent a lot of time, effort, and money on the message…it almost always [comes] down to lifestyle."

"The Canadian Experience" was also alluded to during the discussion on push and pull factors. "The [biggest] pull for newcomers to Canada [is] the idea that they would come into a completely different place for a short period of time, so if they didn't like it, well, it was only a year. They rented a room, they learned to ski, they learned the lifestyle, and they had that *Canadian experience* on their resume. That was so precious for them…"

Although the BC tech industry is often characterized as a homogeneous entity, there is still a degree of competition between different BC regions in attracting international tech talent. This was especially apparent in Victoria:

> If you're immigrating to BC, Vancouver has such a large cultural community base, and once somebody brings their family, or comes over and puts their feet in Vancouver, it's really hard to convince them to come and move to Victoria when we have… small pockets of community, but not the same sort of support you could get in Vancouver.

However, employers in Victoria were quick to point out some of the more attractive features of their community relative to Vancouver: "There was just that story in the [newspaper] about Victoria coming second after St. John, Newfoundland, for being friendly, and open, and welcoming to newcomers, and other people in the community helping them adjust."

Also, a big sell for some of the larger companies or multi-nationals was in their name and reputation: "It's easy for us to recruit [immigrant tech talent]. A lot of people want to work with us, so it's not a hard sell."

## Theme 4: Best Practices for the Tech Sector

Tech employers had identified and were using several "best practices" available to them when hiring newcomers entering the BC tech workforce. The most widely adopted practice among tech employers, as identified in the focus groups and interviews, was related to mentorship and/or buddy programs. Smaller companies tended to use less formalized, more "homegrown" programs while larger companies tended to adopt more formal mentorship models.

**FORMAL MENTORSHIP PROGRAMS**

Representatives from a couple of different tech companies mentioned using IEC-BC's *MentorConnect* program. One employer felt that the two-month mentorship program had

a very easy process and was a great way to get their employees to network and find resources in the community.

Another tech employer from Vancouver also described how they have a two-part program for all employees during the onboarding process. They have "office specific mentors that connect every single employee." They also have a more technical, formal buddy program. "Every single person that comes into our company, doesn't matter what your level is, you are connected with a buddy. They help you get oriented on the team specific technical knowledge, questions, and things like that."

### INFORMAL MENTORSHIP/BUDDY PROGRAMS

There were also several examples of internal mentorship models or buddy programs used by employers, especially those from small to medium size enterprises. For instance, an employer in Victoria described how their company has mentorship for all new employees: "...some of it is official, and then the rest of it is pretty organic."

### NETWORKING ACTIVITIES

Several companies organized networking activities for their employees to increase morale and provide opportunities for staff to connect on an interpersonal level. Some groups organized karaoke nights, while others just went out to lunches or happy hours. "There's toastmaster's, there's all kinds of activities that are facilitated. They're not culture specific." Another employer added: "We have everything from playing volleyball and bowling, to baseball, etc. [We do] a lot of team building [with employees], lunch and learns... We're a tech company, so we have the foosball table [at the office]...we've got everything."

### FLEX HOURS/WORK AT HOME MODELS

Employers also discussed best practices in terms of structuring the workday to create a work-life balance for employees and their families. "One of the main reasons they want to work with us, especially women in STEM [Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics]," said one employer, "is because of the work life balance [we offer]." This includes the expectation from many job seekers in the tech sector that they will be able to work from home or virtually.

### RESOURCE CHALLENGES

A key challenge for employers implementing mentorship programs or other best practices is related to time, or lack thereof. "An employer from Surrey described how their company's buddy system had not worked very well, "because sometimes the person that is the buddy does not have the time to invest in this person just because they're so busy with work."

Representatives from larger tech organizations (1,000+ employees) in BC mentioned that it is not always cost-effective to offer newcomers additional supports and services to increase retention. The motto was "if you can't offer it to everybody, then you can't offer it at all." One employer from a large tech organization stated that these supports would be welcome if the "government is offering to pay for them, at no (or little) cost to employers."

## Theme 5: Settlement Services and Supports

### RELOCATION ASSISTANCE

Several BC tech companies offered new employees a 'robust' relocation package to move to BC and work for their company, one even providing company apartments. Another company had a support desk to assist new employees with housing, travel and relocation support. However, there was a preference to hire someone from Canada for many companies (if their credentials were equivalent), in large part due to the increased costs of relocation and other associated costs for someone living overseas.

### ENGLISH LANGUAGE TRAINING

Some employers provide funds for new employees to take English classes, usually in the evening. "We'll pay for the courses. They do it on their own time." According to focus group participants, there are many programs that exist in the community to help newcomers learn English, but as one focus group member put it: "I would go as far as to say I'm not very impressed with any of them.

In Victoria, an employer had positive comments regarding an English language program at their local college: "I also use the Camosun Program. There's an English program in there that's government funded, and that, I think, was far, far more valuable for the people I've dealt with."

The most visible community-based organizations mentioned during the focus group discussions were S.U.C.C.E.S.S. and MOSAIC. Other settlement service organizations, as identified by focus group participants, included DIVERSE*city*, ISS*of*BC (Immigrant Services Society of BC) and WorkBC, a government agency that helps newcomers find employment in British Columbia.

Focus group participants in Victoria were asked if they had run into issues where they had an immigrant employee who was basically not working out because their family wasn't happy. Perhaps they say, "I love my job, but my husband or my wife or my kids, they really are just not doing well here. So, we've got to leave." One employer responded by describing how they try to involve the family members of new employees in social gatherings and activities because if someone is not happy at home, this will likely transfer to the office environment.

# SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations embedded in this summary are intended for government policy-makers, employers, and the BC tech industry, in general.

## Theme 1: Experience with Government Programs/Initiatives

Some employers felt overwhelmed with all the different immigration programs and government initiatives that can be used to bring international talent to Canada and to British Columbia. Several employers felt they just didn't have the time to "navigate the system" and learn all the ins and outs of each immigration track, especially when they seem to change on a regular basis.

To help employers navigate the system **we recommend that the Canadian government develop an easy-to-use primer and interactive website detailing all current immigration programs and initiatives that employers can use to source international talent**. Similar to a decision-tree graphic, the employer can follow "if-then statements" to arrive at the immigration program that is best suited for the foreign candidate(s). A video learning tool with training modules could also be used to provide employers with instructions on how to use the interactive website to find the most efficient pathway to immigration.

Another issue brought up by employers in relation to government programs and initiatives was the excessive and burdensome amount of paperwork that needs to be filled out on a regular basis. A lot of this information is redundant, according to some employers, and the amount of paperwork could easily be reduced. **Hence it is recommended that the Canadian government find ways of reducing the current amount of paperwork employers must fill out when sourcing international talent, especially with regard to surveys collecting information that has already been gathered from the employer in the past.**

Employers also discussed the use of co-op programs, which integrate academic study with on-the-job experience. According to focus group participants in Victoria, co-ops provide a good mechanism for students to gain important work skills, while offering employers an arena to evaluate these skillsets. The 2016 TechTalentBC report also recommends increasing **"investment to significantly expand co-op and experiential learning opportunities in both post-secondary and K-12, with an emphasis on developing students' interpersonal, communication, and team working skills."**

The main issue with co-ops, according to the consultations, is that they only focus on active students. Once they graduate, there is a "cliff effect" where the universities lose track of their students' progress and experiences out of school. Many of these students would be great candidates to work in BC's tech sector, and employers would love to have access to them, but the universities have no incentive (or funding) to keep track of them after they graduate. **It was recommended that the federal government focus on building incentives for universities to work with their students after graduation to help them find jobs in BC's tech industry.** Too often these students are leaving the province and seeking out tech jobs in other labour markets. Universities need to work closely with recent graduates to help them integrate into BC's tech sector through

local employment opportunities and/or entrepreneurship. This will reduce the amount of "brain drain" in the province, or the phenomenon that occurs when talented young tech workers leave to find work in other labour markets, which impedes economic growth opportunities in the province of BC.

There were still a lot of employers who had never heard of the Global Skills Visa Program before – well over half of all interviewees and focus group members who participated in the consultations. Therefore, **it is recommended that the federal government do more to advertise the new Global Skills Visa Program and promote awareness of its benefits to employers**. An awareness campaign could also be used to dispel myths or certain preconceptions of the program that may prevent some employers from accessing it (i.e., that it only applies to candidates who make X number of dollars per year, that Labour Market Impact Assessments are required in all situations, etc.).

## Theme 2: Aligning Immigrant Talent and Employer Needs

There was a general sense during the discussions that in order to curtail the anticipated shortfalls of tech talent in BC by the year 2021, more had to be done to connect the tech talent that was already in the province (or soon to arrive) with tech employers who can't fill tech roles fast enough.

One way to connect employers with new tech talent in BC is to increase employers' awareness of skilled workers and their qualifications. **It was recommended during the consultations that the Canadian government provide tech employers with access to a database of newcomers' skills and qualifications**. The government collects this information at the time of applying to come to Canada. For example, Express Entry applicants are asked to create their profile on the government of Canada's Job Bank as a way of accessing employment opportunities and job offers.

**BC tech employers strongly recommend that newcomers to Canada be taught about Canadian workplace culture and employer needs.** Without this insider knowledge of how Canadian businesses operate, immigrants are unlikely to land their dream job in their field. This experience cannot be taught in a classroom, but it can only truly be gained by working directly for a Canadian business for a set period of time (usually at least a year) and learning all the day-to-day nuances of working in Canada. The Catch-22 scenario here is that one cannot easily gain this experience without first being employed by a Canadian company.

Another way newcomers can gain the Canadian experience before even arriving in the country is through pre-arrival services and/or best practices such as IEC-BC's FAST program. FAST helps skilled immigrants become better prepared for work in Canada, and it connects employers with internationally trained workers. FAST gives skilled immigrants a head start in the Canadian labour market, all before actually moving to Canada.  The results of the FAST assessment also present employers with a trusted snapshot of the abilities the prospective candidate brings to the table.

Teaching this "Canadian experience" to newcomers also relates to a recommendation found in the 2016 TechTalentBC report, which calls for increased **"investment in pre- and post-arrival**

**skills development programs for international talent to provide mentorship and training in management, leadership, business development, communication, and other interpersonal skills."**

## Theme 3: Push and Pull Factors

Employers felt that international tech talent should be made aware of the realities of living in BC before arriving. Many immigrants are drawn to work in British Columbia because of its natural beauty, moderate temperatures, its many green spaces and wide acceptance of diversity and multiculturalism. But they should be made aware of some of the harsh realities in the province and not simply be sold a "bill of goods" to lure them to live and work in BC; they should know upfront about the housing "crisis" (especially in Vancouver), long commute times to work, and the high cost of living in general. Therefore, **we recommend that when employers are developing their recruitment strategies or "pitches" to attract international talent, they portray both the push and pull factors to potential candidates.** While it may be tempting to only highlight the positive aspects of working and living in BC, this strategy may hurt retention in the long-term if newcomers cannot stay in the province due to issues with housing or other economic concerns.

## Theme 4: Best Practices for the Tech Sector

HR departments were responsible for developing and implementing a lot of the identified best practices for employers when hiring or onboarding newcomer tech talent. While most of these programs and practices were informal in nature (smaller tech companies), some were external to the organization and more formalized (larger tech companies).

Mentorship was seen as an effective way of teaching newcomers the "Canadian experience" and helping to integrate them into the BC tech work force, but they would often have to be hired on by a company before gaining such experience. Most companies participating in the focus groups and interviewees had adopted either informal or formal mentorship and/or buddy programs for their employees, and these initiatives were seen as "best practices" with positive outcomes. However, these programs only worked if there was a significant time investment from both the mentor and mentee, as well as buy-in from the company and its management. **Therefore, it is recommended that tech companies invest more time and resources into developing formal mentorship opportunities for newcomers to BC's tech industry, with formal mechanism for tracking successes and barriers in the mentoring relationship.**

Although mentorship programs, language training and other initiatives to teach immigrants the culture of Canadian business operations may be timely and/or costly to implement, they may actually improve the company's bottom line. **We therefore recommend that tech companies compare the costs of these various interventions for newcomers to the costs of losing skilled workers and having to hire new ones (or not being able to fill vacancies at all).** With small investments upfront in best practices that are sustainable, employers may be able to offset some of the long-term costs tied to the impending shortfall of tech talent in BC.

## Theme 5: Settlement Services and Supports

There are several community-based organizations providing settlement and integration services to newcomers and their families in BC (e.g., housing, employment and other social services) such as S.U.C.C.E.S.S., MOSAIC and DIVERSE*city*. Yet not all employers were aware of these resources in the community or had never accessed them. **We therefore recommend that the community and settlement sector do more to promote awareness of their services and resources for newcomers and employers hiring new tech talent to BC.** A centralized resource list could be compiled, published on-line and in brochure format, and updated on a regular basis so that employers and newcomers alike would know where to go to find the appropriate resources to meet their needs.

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