

Onboarding Newcomers

A TOOLKIT FOR BC EMPLOYERS



IEC-BC IMMIGRANT
EMPLOYMENT
COUNCIL OF BC

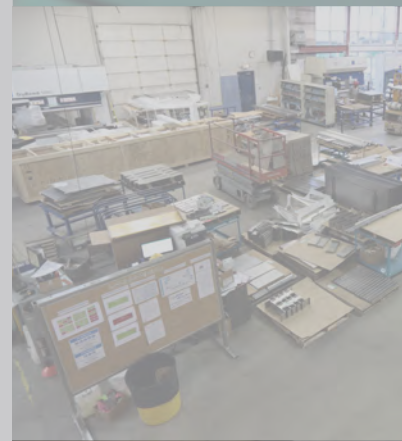
Connecting Employers to Immigrant Talent

ABOUT IEC-BC

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

Contents

1. INTRODUCTION: WHY ANOTHER TOOLKIT?	2
2. A BUSINESS CASE FOR DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION	4
2.1. RESEARCH	
2.2. FOUNDATIONS FOR SUCCESS	
3. EMPLOYER BRANDING	6
4. SOURCING TALENT	9
5. UNCONSCIOUS BIAS	11
6. COMPETENCY ASSESSMENT VS CREDENTIAL RECOGNITION	13
7. CREATING COMMUNITY	16
7.1. BUDDY SYSTEM	
7.2. FAMILY AND SPOUSAL SUPPORT	
8. SUPPORTING DIVERSITY IN LANGUAGE	21
9. REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION	23
APPENDIX 1: RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCES CALENDAR	24
ENDNOTES	26



Introduction

why another Toolkit?

There are now more people aged 65 and older in Canada than there are children.¹ With baby boomers rapidly aging out of the workforce and below-replacement birth rates, employers now have to be creative and intentional when looking for the right talent.

Newcomers to Canada represent one such talent pool. Without immigration, in BC alone, over 240,000 jobs could go unfilled through 2027.² With their skills, expertise, and connections to communities around the world, immigrants bring unique perspectives, and they are often able to understand unmet needs in underleveraged markets.

Yet when it comes to immigrants, there is often a perceived “mystery” – of hiring someone with foreign qualifications, someone whose first language might be other than English, and someone who might not be fully aware of Canadian workplace culture.

This Toolkit helps employers “demystify” immigrant hiring and outlines easy, proactive human resource strategies to hire and retain immigrant talent. It illustrates how purposeful initiatives can support any employer to be more diverse and inclusive.

As you review the tips and recommendations in this Toolkit, you will notice one thing in particular. For the most part, the practices necessary to attract and retain immigrant talent are not substantively different from what you would do to attract and retain any talent. It is equally about helping your existing staff grow with new talent as it is about helping the new employee adjust to the team and the environment. It is about helping your organization benefit from fresh new perspectives that complement the strengths of your current team.

While there could be some nuanced differences designed to help individuals who are new to Canada, in the end, it is simply well thought out and, where necessary, flexible ‘people practices’ that make all the difference.

This Toolkit has been made possible thanks to the insights shared by Christian Codrington, Director, Human Resources, Industry Training Authority who generously shared his time and expertise in the conceptualization and writing of this resource

“Having immigrants in your workforce is an absolute necessity to be successful in business today and in the coming years.”
—MANDY MANN, STORMTECH



2 A business case for diversity and inclusion

2.1 RESEARCH

There is a growing body of evidence linking the diversity that results from immigration to gains in innovation, productivity and market opportunity. Immigrants contribute as workers of all skill levels, entrepreneurs, innovators, taxpayers and investors.

In human capital terms, global talent is attractive to business. Companies with diverse teams regularly out-perform and out-innovate others, and they make better decisions. Most of the practices and actions that an employer can take to attract, hire and retain immigrant talent are simply good business practices.

2.2 FOUNDATIONS FOR SUCCESS

It is often said that the first step in any organization's efforts to increase diversity is support from its senior leadership. No matter what the size of your organization, success or failure is most often dependent on a number of critical elements:

1. **State your commitment to diversity and inclusion.** Ensure such commitments are clearly thought out and stated in places like your corporate website, online and paper application forms, etc. Mission Statements and Company Values can be a place where these commitments reside. Making such statements is an important step in holding yourself accountable. It can also be a great source of pride for existing employees to see that their organization actually lives by stated commitments.

2. **Plan.** For many companies, there is generally a lack of planning for future recruitment needs. We often recruit for newly added and recently vacated positions. This reactive approach can undermine efforts to increase the diversity of your team. To advance inclusive hiring practices, there is a need for greater coherence between company goals, recruitment tactics and purposeful action.
3. **Departmental support.** For diversity efforts to be successful, mandates from the senior leadership must be carried out by middle management. We found, for example, that the most successful organizations were those that had committed people in line management and/or human resources to actively champion efforts.

DELIVERING THROUGH DIVERSITY

- A 2018 report by McKinsey & Company found that more diverse companies are better able to attract top talent; to improve their customer orientation, employee satisfaction, and decision making; and to secure their license to operate. McKinsey's research also showed that ethnically-diverse companies were 35% more likely to outperform their peers.
- A 2017 report by the Centre for International Governance Innovation and the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation identified a direct correlation between ethnocultural diversity and the bottom line: just 1% increase in diversity leads to an average increase of 2.4% in revenue.
- A 2013 Deloitte Australia research showed that inclusive teams outperformed their peers by 80% in team-based assessments.

4. Look out for unintended organizational barriers. Organizations have performance standards, targets, and key performance indicators that help direct efforts and focus outcomes. Many tie remuneration and financial rewards, like individual and team bonuses, to achievement of those marks. Whether it is something as simple as having to change the duration and format of a job interview or having to explain a procedure more than once, good diversity efforts may require flexibility in organizational systems. Time and time again, organizations we spoke with emphasized that the ROI on making exceptions to standards outweighed the effort.

Any further recommendation described in this Toolkit will have a greater chance of yielding desired results if these four critical steps are continually examined.

MORE ON DIVERSITY DIVIDENDS:

The Diversity Dividend: Canada's Global Advantage Report is based on an in-depth analysis of 7,900 workplaces in 14 industrial sectors. The report provides a series of recommendations on how to unlock talent and promote inclusive hiring. www.cigionline.org

Waiter, Is That Inclusion in My Soup? A New Recipe to Improve Business Performance.
By Deloitte Australia and Victorian Equal Opportunity. 2013. www2.deloitte.com

Delivering through Diversity – New in 2018. McKinsey&Company. www.mckinsey.com

3 Employer branding

Organizations often think the first step in attracting talent is a well thought job description, attractive job posting or picking the right job site. However, without proper and ongoing employer branding these efforts can become an unproductive expenditure of resources. Job seekers may have never worked for certain brand-named employers, yet they still hold very strong opinions about what it would be like to work for any of those companies.

Companies such as Sodexo Canada Ltd., the City of Vancouver, and Island Health are among Canada's Best Diversity Employers (see www.Canadastop100.com). These and many other employers take purposeful efforts to increase and promote diversity within their organizations. Their leaders feel that such efforts enhance employee engagement, build their brand externally and improve their ability to acquire new talent.³

To attract immigrant (or any) talent, it is crucial that you are known for your Employer Value Proposition (EVP) – the value that employees gain in return for working at your organization. That proposition must extend beyond pay, benefits and days off. It is important that leadership regularly ask themselves, “What do past, current and prospective employees see when they consider employment at our company? How does our brand stack up against others who are trying to attract the same talent?”



What elements make a strong employment brand?

According to online recruiting agency, Recruiting.com, you can easily assess your EVP:

1. Start with a self-assessment by asking yourself, *“Why do people join our company? Do different segments value different things about our EVP?”*
2. Go to your company website, preferably your careers section, if you have one. Cover your company logo and look at the images on the pages and read through the text. *“What message are you portraying to prospective immigrant talent?”*
3. Survey your employees (anonymously). *“What do your employees tell their friends and prospective candidates about working for your company?”*
4. When interviewing candidates, be sure to ask them why they applied for your position, and is it consistent with what you want? Are you hearing information consistent with your EVP?

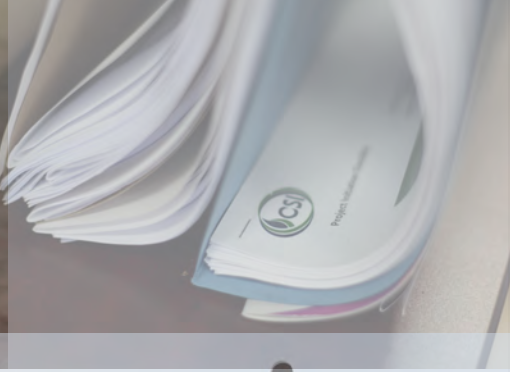
IMPROVE YOUR EMPLOYER BRAND

According to human resources consultants Hewitt Associates, there are five steps to developing a strong employer brand:

- i understand your organization;
- ii create a ‘compelling brand promise/ employer value proposition’ for employees that mirrors the brand promise for customers;
- iii develop standards to measure the fulfilment of the brand promise;
- iv ‘ruthlessly align’ all people practices to support and reinforce the brand promise, and
- v execute and measure.

To attract immigrant (or any) talent, it is crucial that you are known for your Employer Value Proposition (EVP).

“We can't always find Canadians who have the knowledge and experience that we need, so we have to tap into the global talent pool.”
—RENÉE COWLING, COMBUSTION SOLUTIONS



4 Sourcing talent

You have a vacancy or a newly created position. While it is tempting to post your job and see who applies, your organization is best served by ensuring its brand is welcoming and inviting to the talent you seek to attract; that both leadership and line level support for inclusion and diversity are in place; that you are actively championing diversity efforts; and that you are constantly looking for and overcoming unintended organizational barriers to successfully integrate your new talent.

Once you have established these foundational pieces, you are in a better position to begin partnering with immigrant serving organizations, multicultural professional associations, or post-secondary institutions.

Larger employers often use Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) to support their diversity efforts. These can be simply informal groups of their own employees at any level that connect colleagues, or more formal, company-sponsored groups with a specific mandate to advance diversity strategies. In the end, it is employees helping other employees.

BC JOBCONNECT: CONNECTING EMPLOYERS TO NEWCOMERS

- An easy-to-use web-based tool for employers looking to hire.
- An opportunity to access an untapped talent pool.
- A way to build a diverse and inclusive workplace.

How does it work?

Registered employers identify candidates of interest based on profile information and supporting documents uploaded by newcomer job seekers.

What are the benefits?

- Constantly updated pool of candidates
- Free service
- Flexible, multi-parameter searches
- Ongoing support from IEC-BC staff

REGISTER NOW AT WWW.BCJOBCONNECT.CA

While it is tempting to post your job and see who applies, any organization is best served by ensuring its brand is welcoming and inviting to the groups it seeks to attract.

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4 SOURCING TALENT *continued*

Management-driven efforts can include hosting a career fair – for example, with immigrant serving organizations – or engaging in community outreach efforts that directly support underrepresented groups. These types of initiatives can lead to increased interest within an immigrant

or particular ethnic community. Employee referrals are another common sourcing channel, but if your organization is not currently diverse, then it is not likely that the current base of employees will be connected to a diverse group of potential applicants.

MORE ON SOURCING TALENT:

The Government of Canada has an online *Employer's Road Map to Hiring and Retaining Internationally Trained Workers*. www.canada.ca

The Affiliation of Multicultural Societies and Service Agencies of BC (AMSSA) provides an extensive list of relevant organizations and groups serving newcomers in various communities across BC. Some of these groups offer job posting services. www.amssa.org

The Economic Development Society of BC (SDECB) represents the interests of the economic sector of the Francophone community and offers various supports and resources for employers. www.sdecb.com



5 Unconscious bias

Today's management literature is full of references to the role bias, both conscious and unconscious, can play in our decision making. It is said that biases are simply our way to organize our experiences, thoughts and beliefs. Social psychologists call this phenomenon "social categorization," whereby we routinely and rapidly sort people into groups. This process can overlook our rational and logical thinking brain. At times, it can guide us into actions that could be seen as harsh or, even worse, run afoul of Human Rights laws.

Biases can lead to missed workplace opportunities. While employers may be actively working for inclusive workplaces, they might be unconsciously undermining those very initiatives.

In their quest for 'cultural fit' organizations may find themselves with a similar employee complement at the expense of the richness and diversity of thought that often accompanies inclusion of different backgrounds and cultures. With diversity comes an organizational culture that grows with multicultural perspective.

DAVID SUZUKI FOUNDATION

DSF has developed an internal job posting checklist to ensure that barriers to attracting diverse applicants are removed.

As well, the Foundation regularly invites a wide pool of staff members to participate on the recruitment panel and screen resumes.

DSF has also partnered with MOSAIC, one of BC's largest settlement organizations, to develop an inter-cultural competency course to challenge ingrained perceptions.

While employers may be actively working for inclusive workplaces, they might be unconsciously undermining those very initiatives.

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5 UNCONSCIOUS BIAS *continued*

During IEC-BC's 2016 Employer Forum: *Unlock Bias, Leverage Global Talent*, speakers and delegates shared the importance of challenging our hidden biases to open our minds, as well as our organizational processes/systems. It was clear that leaders who were prepared to challenge one another during the interview process, hire for talent, budget to teach language skills, or find ways to assess for skills outside the traditional interview, were attracting and keeping talent that they otherwise would have overlooked. There are many resources available to organizations seeking to identify and address their own internal biases.

Here are a few practical suggestions, identified by IEC-BC's Forum participants:

- **Acknowledge unconscious biases.** While people are often hard-wired to prefer similar individuals, employers can build competencies around mitigating the impact of workplace biases.
- **Think, learn, and act differently.** Consciously seek out individuals with different backgrounds, look for opportunities to immerse yourself in different environments, and take deliberate actions to disrupt your “normal” processes.
- **“Walk toward” your bias** (and encourage others to do so, too). While we can't change other people's attitudes, we can work in our own organizations to create inclusive workplaces and minimize the barriers that immigrants face.
- **Do not be complicit or compliant.** Flag barriers to inclusion that exist within professional associations and regulating bodies in order to facilitate change.



MORE ON ADDRESSING BIASES:

Microsoft Corp offers a free, online e-Lesson intended to deepen your understanding of unconscious biases, how they influence behavior and impact all of us. www.mslearning.microsoft.com

Google offers a free online course on Unconscious Bias @ Work, introducing the concept of unconscious bias and its impact. rework.withgoogle.com

Another free tool available to employers is the **Implicit Association Test**, which offers a way to probe unconscious biases. www.implicit.harvard.edu

Tools such as these can serve as a useful starting point to identify where awareness training could help existing staff in overcoming biases, either unconscious or otherwise.

6 Competency assessment vs credential recognition

Many new Canadians are arriving with high levels of education and experience that Canadian employers either choose to overlook or have difficulty understanding. This challenge exists for employers in both regulated and non-regulated occupations.

Organizations can lose potentially good talent in the screening and interview process. As businesses continue to jockey to find good people, the cost of losing out on strong potentials is becoming more expensive. Think about professional sports teams overlooking good draft picks or those who trade away a struggling player only to see that player thrive with a different team. By relying heavily on paper (resume) screening, especially on the basis of familiar qualifications, education, or even names, you may get through your selection process more efficiently at the risk of losing good talent.

In 2012, Diane Dechief and Philip Oreopoulos conducted a study among employers in three large Canadian cities. They discovered that applicants with English-sounding names were 35% more likely to receive call-backs than candidates with Indian or Chinese names. They determined that businesses feared hiring unqualified applicants and did not want to risk wasting time on such applicants, and that pressure to avoid bad hires exacerbated these effects.

It is unfortunate that someone's name can carry assumptions about their ability to succeed in a job.⁴ Whether such actions are the consequence of 'unconscious biases' or purposeful actions, the result is a loss of potential talent without thorough assessment.

FAST BC

This is Canada's only pre-arrival project offering free, online, occupation-specific assessment of competencies and skills, as well as gap training to immigrants.

- Immigrants get a realistic picture of how their skills and competencies compare with Canadian requirements.
- They get customized learning plans and resources specific to their individual needs as identified through the competency assessment.
- FAST takes immigrants through online lessons and videos on various aspects of Canadian workplace and communication.
- Based upon the results of the competency assessment, newcomers are presented with alternative career options that make use of the skills they possess.
- Upon completion of FAST, program participants get Portfolio Reports showcasing their knowledge, skills and the online training they have completed, which can be presented to licensing bodies and employers.

FIND OUT MORE AT WWW.FASTBC.ORG



6 COMPETENCY ASSESSMENT VS CREDENTIAL RECOGNITION *continued*

An effective selection process should get more challenging as candidates move through it. It should ensure you are not losing out on good candidates before they have an opportunity to demonstrate their skills. While it may take a larger time investment, finding ways to assess the potential of as many applicants as possible could yield unanticipated results.

One such option would have candidates complete an online test for aptitudes in relevant job skills. Some organizations also have candidates go through an on-the-job type of assessment where peers play a significant part in the process. Applicants get an opportunity to demonstrate their competencies in a work-related assignment. These examples demonstrate how organizations are taking that extra step to ensure they are properly assessing the potential of talent and not overly relying on the quick paper-screen process.

One major financial institution skipped the interview process altogether and simply gave each candidate an opportunity to do a portion of the job. At the end of the on-the-job assessment, the potential co-workers met to evaluate the proficiency of each candidate against predetermined standards, including the ease of interaction with themselves and clients.

INGRAM MICRO

In 2016, Ingram Micro welcomed newcomers, who had arrived in Canada as refugees, to its Richmond, BC, location.

The company decided to modify the hiring process:

- During the interview process, rather than ask for credentials, the hiring team asked questions about the candidates' technical background.
- Because candidates were new to the country, the obligatory criminal-record checks and reference checks were waived until contracts were extended or permanent roles were offered.

Ingram Micro saw the value of offering newcomers their first job in Canada, and these successful practices have since been replicated by the company's Ontario office.

MORE ON ASSESSMENT:

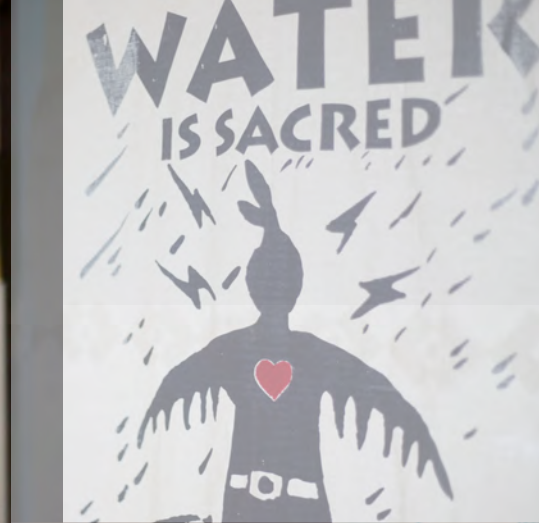
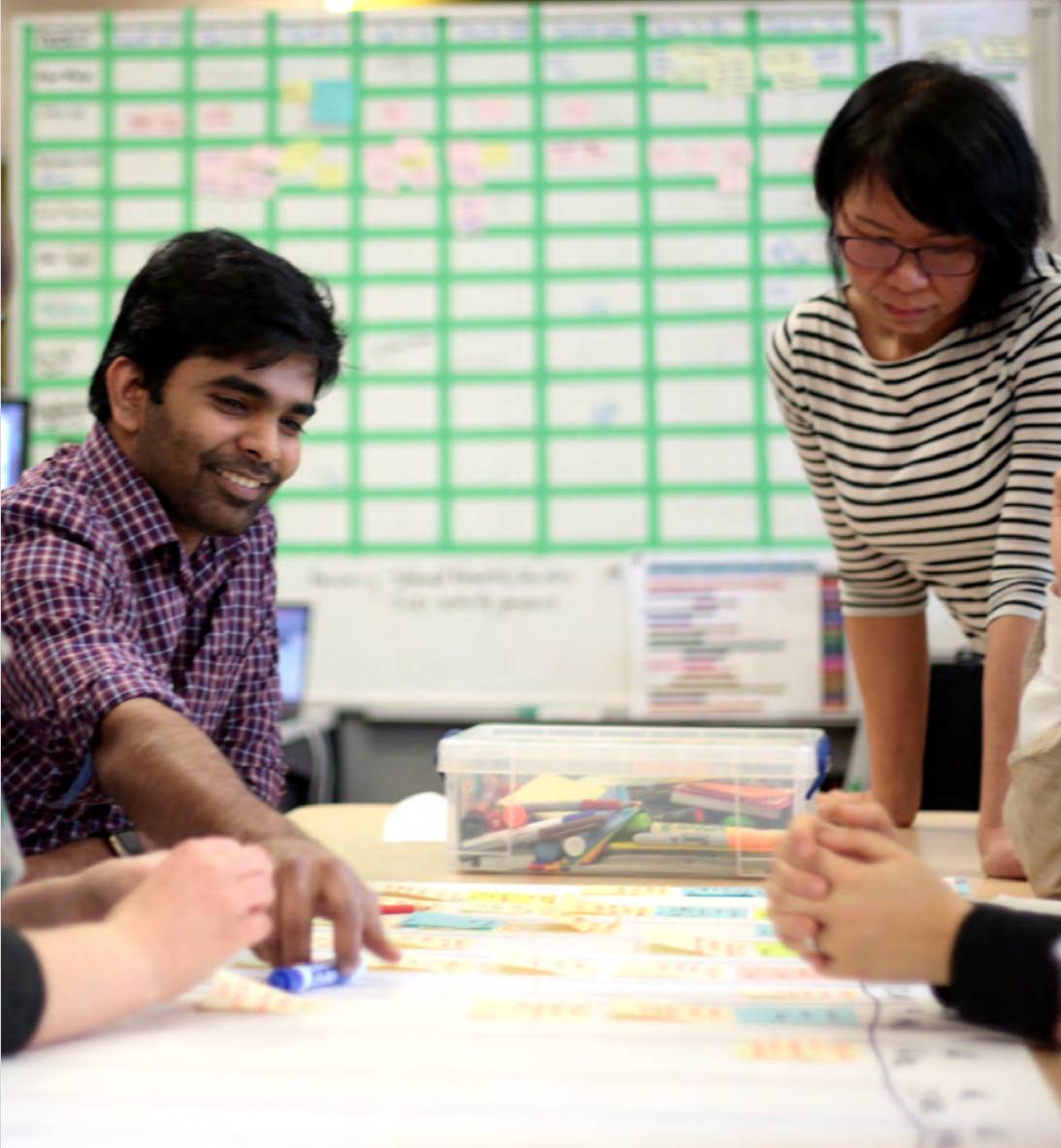
The Canadian Information Centre for International Credentials (cicic.ca) provides information and referral services to both individuals and organizations on the recognition of academic and occupational credentials. Similar services are offered by the **International Credential Evaluation Service (ICES)** at the British Columbia Institute of Technology (BCIT). www.bcit.ca/ices

Groups such as **Employtest**, market a variety of tests that allow for cost-effective and efficient assessment of candidate's competencies across a number of areas. www.employtest.com

IEC-BC has compiled a host of resources designed to help employers assess immigrants' experience and qualification. You can refer to the Tip Sheet *Assessing International Experience* on our website. www.iecbc.ca

“As the skills get more and more specialized, you never know where your next successful candidate will be from.”

—CYNDY LUO, DAVID SUZUKI FOUNDATION



Our Values
David Suzuki Foundation

Solution-Seeking
We actively engage in the work of finding innovative solutions to build the healthy, just and prosperous communities we envision.

Collaborative
We nurture authentic, respectful relationships with a diversity of partners, with Canadians across the country and with each other to broaden our reach and achieve stronger outcomes.



7 Creating community

Organizations are communities. It can be challenging for individuals new to any community, work or otherwise, to know the unofficial and acceptable behaviours and norms of that community, the right people to speak to in the organization to get things done, or even the places to go nearby for a good lunch.

The initiatives discussed below are designed to help welcome and integrate new staff into your community. Most importantly, they aim to increase the likelihood of their success and reduce the time to full productivity and contribution.

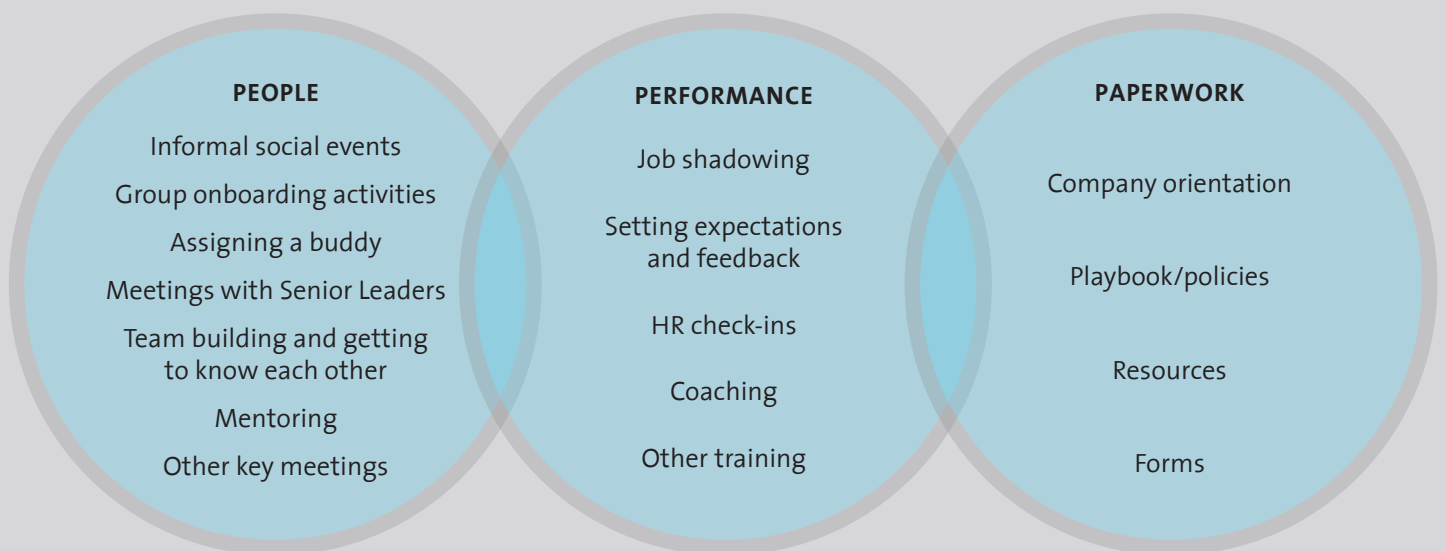
The first 90 days of employment are critical to the success of any new employee. They are equally critical for employers, helping them realize the value of their new investment.

In a study presented by the Human Capital Institute and the Society for Human Resource Management, 76% of HR practitioners said onboarding had been underutilized. They reported that 20% of new hires left in the first 45 days (SHRM, 2017).

They recommend thinking about a new employee orientation in three distinct categories:

- Who are the key **people** that any new employee must meet, what will those meetings look and when should they occur?
- What is required to support any new employee in the **performance** of their new role?
- Lastly, what **paperwork** and processes must be reviewed, completed and explained?

Below are examples of each of the **three Ps** of an effective onboarding program:



7.1 BUDDY SYSTEM

What is a “buddy”? A buddy is someone who partners with a new employee during his/her first 2–3 months of employment. While primarily responsible for offering advice and guidance regarding the day-to-day aspects of work within your organization, the buddy may also offer encouragement and knowledge resources, as they help introduce the new employee to your culture.

By assigning a buddy to new employees, you create a known and reliable resource for any new hire for things that may seem trivial to continually ask one’s supervisor about but are critical to feeling comfortable and being productive. This provides new employees with a reliable, motivated, single point of contact for their basic questions regarding their work with you. The concept of a buddy helps establish orientation as a process, rather than a single learning event.

MENTORCONNECT

Many organizations also have internal mentorship programs, offering new hires ways to integrate, and enabling mentors to grow professionally.

Mentoring, however, does not have to be internal. Consider mentoring outside of your workforce. For example, you can introduce your employees to IEC-BC’s MentorConnect Program and provide them with an excellent opportunity to increase cross-cultural competency, learn industry best practices in other countries and expand professional networks.

LEARN MORE ABOUT MENTORCONNECT
AT WWW.IECBC.CA

Key characteristics of a buddy include:

- **Communicator:** A buddy should encourage open communication. He/she should provide relevant information and encourage a process of continued, self-directed learning.
- **Role Model:** The buddy should be a model employee exemplifying company values.
- **Motivated:** The buddy should have a positive outlook on his/her work and use that perspective to help build self-confidence and loyalty in the new employee. The buddy leads by example.
- **Strong Performer:** The buddy can help guide the new employee in many situations based on his/her experience and knowledge obtained in the work environment.

When selecting a buddy, some critical basics should be kept in mind. Buddies should be proficient in their roles, able to devote time to new employees, and proud to be part of your organization. They are well respected by others and are patient. In addition, it is important to select individuals who are culturally sensitive, and, ideally, able to speak another language. Ideally, a buddy should not be in a supervisory capacity to the new employee.

For smaller companies, their size might prevent them from assigning a formal ‘buddy’. Instead, the office manager or receptionist, as part of their duties, can have the responsibility to regularly check in with newcomers and ensure the less formal parts of company culture have been reviewed.

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7 CREATING COMMUNITY *continued*

7.2 FAMILY AND SPOUSAL SUPPORT

In today's global economy, having a workforce that is fluent in the ways of the world isn't a luxury, it is a competitive necessity. No wonder nearly 80% of midsize and large companies currently send professionals abroad – and 45% plan to increase the number they have on assignment.⁵

Bringing immigrant talent into your business can reap many of the same benefits as sending your talent abroad to develop their skill set, without nearly the same levels of risk and financial burden. By looking at some of the practices that firms use to help their international talent thrive while abroad, local companies can gain lessons that may help integrate immigrant talent within BC.

Consider the challenges faced by a new Canadian and their family as they settle into their new homeland. As an employer, you have chosen to make an investment in your new hire, banking on your belief that they will provide a return to your company. There are, however, many things swirling around in the personal life of your new hire that could negatively impact the likelihood of a positive return for you.

Employees may need different levels of support. Here is just one example. Six months after providing its standard new-hire orientation, one company discovered that one of its new employees did not know how to access her benefits. The employee, who was new to Canada, was unfamiliar with extended health and dental plans, and was not sure how to use the health-benefits booklet. What she needed was simply a more detailed explanation of how benefits work in a Canadian workplace.

CREATING A WELCOMING WORKPLACE

Many companies provide lunch & learns intended to help their staff get a better understanding of their company, benefits, and even life in Canada. They include:

- financial literacy
- understanding payroll deductions
- understanding how to access and make effective use of the company benefits as well as non-wage benefits like RRSPs
- safety and first-aid in the workplace

Many new Canadians do not have a strong network of people to help, either at work or at home. For an employer, challenges that their employees experience at home can often manifest themselves in the workplace in behaviours ranging from decreased attention to detail, or declines in productivity, fatigue, or irritability with co-workers and customers.

A buddy system mentioned above can be used to help immerse all new employees. But many employers, often in smaller communities, evolve the buddy approach one step further. These

companies take measures to help increase the circle of friends and supports to the family of new immigrant talent. They work to immerse spouses and children into the community just as actively as they immerse the employee within the work family. For example, they provide an opportunity for an existing staff member to volunteer to host the new family for a dinner. Time is volunteered but the company picks up the expenses. Creating a stronger sense of belonging for the employee and his/her family members can improve performance at work.

MORE ON CREATING COMMUNITY:

IEC-BC's Diversity at Work Toolkit www.iecbc.ca

Immigrant-Friendly Businesses: Effective Practices for Attracting, Integrating, and Retaining Immigrants in Canadian Workplaces www.iecbc.ca

Video: How to Effectively Create a Welcoming Workplace and Successfully Integrate New Employees
www.iecbc.ca



“We want to grow, and in this changing market we have to actively go out looking for people, including immigrants.”

—ROZ EYRE, WESGAR



8 Supporting diversity in language

In a study conducted by ALLIES Canada (2015), a total of 95% of the employers interviewed reported that language and communication skills represent a barrier for newcomers seeking employment; this compares to just 27% of newcomers thinking their English language was a barrier for them.⁶ This study illustrates a gap between the perceptions of employers and those of potential job seekers. It also shows that newcomers often simply are not getting an opportunity to demonstrate their talents.

In our research we have identified employers who changed the emphasis previously placed on English language proficiency when they saw the knowledge, skills and abilities demonstrated in other areas.

In some cases, employers have hired newcomers in technical roles where they could accommodate varied levels of English. They found alternatives, such as teaming their new hires with existing employees who spoke the same language, developing in-house English language training or hiring translators. They noted that immigrants' language skills improved dramatically on the job – even in a matter of weeks.

Some industry associations provide creative and cost-effective solutions to build English-language capacity of their staff. In 2016, the BC Alliance for Manufacturing realized that a number of their members had staff with just elementary English proficiency. Together with these employers, the Alliance developed *Communications for Manufacturing Safety and Productivity (CMSP)* – a course specifically designed to develop language skills in the workplace, with particular attention to improving comprehension and communication skills in an industrial setting. The learning program has been customized for each industry and specific work-site, and it has been highly successful in reducing accidents and improving shop-floor productivity. The course has become an ongoing and important offering of the Alliance and is now tailored to meet any employer's need, across any industry. By working through their association, these firms created a solution that worked for their needs and minimized the cost that any one employer would have borne.

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8 SUPPORTING DIVERSITY IN LANGUAGE *continued*

A FEW MORE PROMISING PRACTICES

- **AMPCO MANUFACTURERS** assigned a dedicated manager to edit process documentation that was produced by their foreign-born colleagues. Soon the staff whose work was previously being reviewed by others, had developed their English proficiency to such a level that they were now editing and approving company process documentation.
- **DYNAMIC WINDOWS AND DOORS** has successfully onboarded newcomers with beginner language skills, investing in on-the-job English training and designing training modules with more visual aids to reinforce learning.
- **INGRAM MICRO** created technical documents in English and newcomer languages, “cheat sheets” that the new hires found very valuable. The company also identified an employee, who had worked as an English teacher in Syria and Saudi Arabia, and trained him as a trainer.
- **WESGAR** has created work-pods with several employees speaking the same language, and the more fluent member of the pod providing translation, where necessary.



MORE ON LANGUAGE SUPPORT:

Here’s an interesting paper from Athabasca University in AB: *Options to Limit the English-language Barriers Faced by Newcomers to Canada, in Order to Find Meaningful Employment.*

dtpr.lib.athabascau.ca



9 Reasonable accommodation

As Canadians, we are fortunate to live in a society that values the importance of protecting our human rights. Employers may face requests from any of their employees, immigrant or not, to accommodate special requests in order to allow that employee equal ability and access to work.

Many of our current statutory holidays are based on Christian religious practices that do not take into account the growing cultural diversity of today's workforce. Any employee may seek accommodation based on religious grounds. Those requests can be something as simple as flexibility around scheduling time off for prayer or other religious requirements. Other requests could involve prohibition from handling certain food products or wearing certain clothing.

Whatever the request, it is crucial to remember that it is a request, and as an employer, the first step is to ask questions. You must balance requests against your operational and safety requirements, and engage in an exploration of possible solutions.

When in receipt of an accommodation request, managers should:

Acquire necessary information: Ask for details – for example, about requests for religious observances or prayer. You should work with the employee to obtain all relevant information in a timely way, drawing on outside experts as necessary. Employees must be clear when explaining why they need an accommodation.

Consider possible options: It is often operationally less disruptive to consider making minor changes to an employee's current job. Examples could include changing shift schedules or allowing more frequent breaks. Employers are not required to create a new position to meet a duty to accommodate.

Include relevant parties: If you operate in a certified environment, be sure to include your union representatives and keep your employee informed on the status of the request.

Timeliness: Lastly, ensure you complete your process in a timely manner. A timely response sends a very strong message to your entire team that you value all employees and are open and flexible. Conversely, delays could be interpreted as reluctance to support them.⁷

Rather than viewing requests as a duty, many employers view such requests as opportunities to:

- increase the cultural awareness of their business;
- help the organization to integrate with the communities they serve; and,
- demonstrate their commitment to their corporate values.

Please refer to the Religious Observances Calendar from **Appendix 1** to get insights on possible holiday requests of your staff.

APPENDIX 1: RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCES CALENDAR

APRIL 2018–MARCH 2019

Month	Day	Holiday	Religion	General Practices for Holiday	Accommodations
April 2018	1	Easter	Christianity	Some people observe Easter Sunday by attending church, while others spend time with their families and friends.	Statutory holiday in Canada.
	6	Holy Friday	Orthodox Christianity	Holy Friday is the Orthodox Christian equivalent of Good Friday, and much of the meaning is the same.	Practising Orthodox Christians could request this day off.
	8	Pascha – Easter	Orthodox Christianity	Pascha is the Orthodox Christian equivalent of Easter, and much of the meaning is the same.	Practising Orthodox Christians could request this day off.
	14	Baisakhi (Vaisakhi)	Sikhism	There are often parades, dancing, and singing throughout the day.	Some employees could request a day off.
	29	Visakha Puja – Buddha Day	Buddhism	Buddhists often decorate their homes and visit their local temples. Observers are encouraged to avoid eating meat on this date.	Provide food accommodation as requested.
May 2018	16–June 15	Ramadan	Islam	Fasting is required during the entire month of Ramadan. Muslims refrain from food and beverages during the daylight hours.	Be sensitive to the fact that employees celebrating Ramadan will be fasting during the day.
June 2018	15–17	Eid al Fitr – Ramadan ends	Islam	Muslims often pray, exchange gifts, give money to children, feast, and celebrate with friends and family.	Employees could ask for a day off.
September 2018	3	Krishna Janmashtami	Hinduism	During this festival, practising Hindus might forgo sleep in order to sing bhajans, traditional Hindu songs.	Be sensitive to the fact that some employees could be operating on very little sleep.
	10–11	Rosh Hashannah	Judaism	This period is widely observed and involves prayer in synagogue and festive meals.	If planning an event, provide food accommodation as requested.
	19	Yom Kippur	Judaism	During Yom Kippur, practising Jews fast from before sundown until after sunset.	Be sensitive to the fact that some employees could be fasting during the day.

Month	Day	Holiday	Religion	General Practices for Holiday	Accommodations
November 2018	7	Diwali	Hinduism, Jainism, Sikhism	Lighting oil lamps and candles, setting off fireworks, and prayer.	Hindu employees might request a vacation day.
	12	Birth of Baha'u'llah	Baha'i Faith	This holiday celebrates the birthday of Bahá'u'lláh, one of the Baha'I Faith's most important figures.	Baha'i employees might request to have this day off.
December 2018	3–10	Hanukkah	Judaism	On each of the eight nights of Hanukkah, Jewish families light an additional candle of the menorah candelabrum until all eight candles are lit. Jews celebrate with food and song, as well as by exchanging gifts for eight days.	Provide food accommodation as requested.
	25	Christmas	Christianity	Many celebrate this holiday by giving gifts, attending church services, decorating Christmas trees, and visiting family.	Statutory holiday in Canada.
January 2019	1	Gantan-sai (New Year's)	Shintoism	Practitioners pray for inner renewal, prosperity, and health, visit shrines, as well as friends and family.	Some employees could request this day off.
	7	Christmas	Eastern Orthodox Christianity	Practising Orthodox Christians celebrate this holiday by attending church services, holding celebratory meals, and visiting family.	Some employees could request a day off.
February 2019	5	Lunar New Year	Buddhism, Confucianism, Daoism	Families gather together for festive meals and exchange of gifts.	Some employees could request this day off.
March 2019	20	Purim	Judaism	Many Jews hold carnival-like celebrations.	Purim is not subject to the restrictions on work that affect some other holidays.
	21	Nowruz	Shia Islam	The holiday is frequently referred to as the Persian New Year. It signifies a time of spiritual renewal and physical rejuvenation.	Some employees could request a day off.

Find more dates here: <https://www.timeanddate.com/holidays/canada/>

ENDNOTES

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