

Strengthening Employer Feedback Channels

FORUM DIGESTS



ABOUT IMMIGRANT EMPLOYMENT COUNCIL OF BC

The Immigrant Employment Council of BC (IEC-BC) is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to empowering BC employers with the solutions, tools, and resources needed to effectively attract, hire, and retain skilled immigrant talent. We understand that the successful integration of skilled newcomers into BC's labour force is essential to both their success and the province's long-term economic performance. By collaborating with employers, government, and other partner stakeholders, we ensure that BC employers can effectively integrate global talent.

ABOUT THIS PROJECT

As Canada refines its immigration approach to better align with labour market needs, the Immigrant Employment Councils of Canada (IECC) launched the Strengthening Employer Feedback Channels (SEFC) initiative to ensure employer perspectives inform system design and policy alignment.

SEFC convenes structured forums across regions to understand how immigration, settlement, and workforce systems function in practice. These forums surface barriers, identify opportunities, and generate actionable insights to improve how employers attract, hire, and retain internationally trained talent.

This digest reflects insights from a Nanaimo-based follow-up session focused on employer readiness, inclusive hiring, and workforce integration in a community context. Findings are grounded in survey responses and facilitator insights and should be interpreted as directional signals from engaged participants.

Canada



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FEEDBACK FORUM DIGEST



Participation and Response Rates

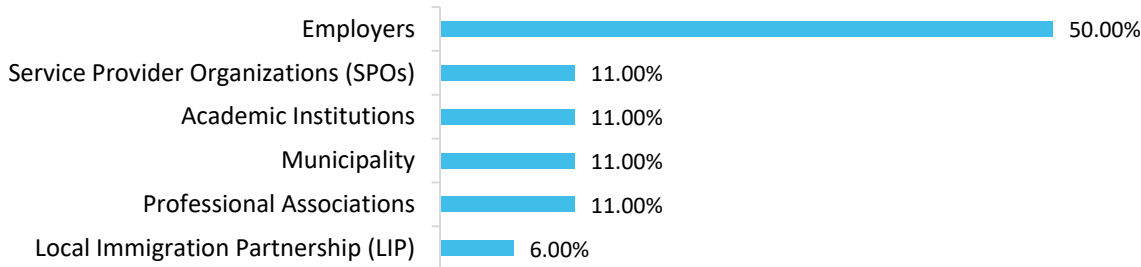
We extend sincere thanks to everyone who participated in the Nanaimo SEFC follow-up session, and to InterCultural Association of Greater Victoria (ICA) for their partnership in convening this session.

Total participants: 18

Survey response rates : Pre-forum survey: 67% | post-forum survey: 44%



Who Shaped the Conversation

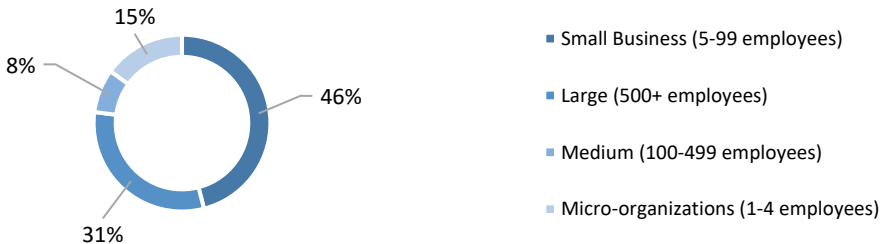


This forum brought together a balanced mix of employers and system actors, including education, municipal representatives, and professional associations.

While employer participation was strong, the presence of multiple system partners enabled a broader discussion of how hiring challenges intersect with policy, infrastructure, and community-level realities.

Employer Profile Snapshot

Based on pre-forum survey responses, participating employers represent a mix of organizational sizes:



This distribution suggests strong representation from small employers, alongside participation from larger public and institutional organizations.

Why this matters: Organizational size influences onboarding capacity, hiring processes, and access to internal resources. Smaller employers may rely on more informal approaches, while larger organizations often operate within more structured systems.

Given the sample size, these findings should be interpreted as indicative rather than representative.

Sector Representation

Based on pre-forum survey responses, employers represented a diverse range of sectors.

Public administration accounted for the largest share of respondents, followed by construction, health care and social assistance, and other service-based sectors. Additional representation included education, arts and recreation, professional and technical services, and corporate management.

No single sector dominated participation, reflecting the broad relevance of hiring, onboarding, and workforce integration challenges across industries.

Why this matters: The diversity of sectors suggests that the barriers identified are not industry-specific. Similar challenges are emerging across public, private, and service-based environments, particularly in relation to communication, onboarding, and system navigation.

Given the sample size, these findings should be interpreted as indicative rather than representative.



Impact Snapshot: Employer Value Signal

The Nanaimo forum demonstrated strong engagement and practical relevance.

Survey results indicate strong perceived value among participants, with particular emphasis on shared understanding, cross-sector connection, and identifying actionable next steps.

Experience and Relevance

Ratings were consistently high, with most respondents rating both experience and relevance at 4 or 5 out of 5.

Participants indicated that the session was highly relevant to their work, particularly in relation to hiring challenges, system navigation, and onboarding practices.

Learning and Application

- **100%** of respondents reported **learning something new** and indicated that they intend to apply what they learned in their work.
- **100%** also indicated that they would **recommend the session** to others.
- Participants identified several elements of the session as particularly valuable.
- **100%** highlighted **exploring potential solutions** or next steps as a key benefit.

- **63%** valued hearing from other employers or sector stakeholders, making **new cross-sector connections**, and identifying shared labour market challenges.
- **50%** identified **improved understanding of immigration and settlement systems**, as well as learning about tools, programs, or policy supports.
- **25%** highlighted learning about **inclusive hiring or retention practices**.

Confidence and Understanding

Participants reported improved understanding of workforce integration challenges, particularly related to immigration processes and community-level constraints.

- **75%** of respondents reported at least some **increase in confidence in supporting internationally trained talent**, including **38%** who reported a clear increase and **38%** who reported a partial increase.
- **25%** reported **no change in confidence**.

Participants also identified clear barriers to taking further action.

- **88%** indicated that **stronger partnerships or collaborators** would support their ability to act.
- **38%** highlighted the **need for tools** or templates, training or capacity-building, and policy guidance.
- **25%** identified **funding or resources as a key need**.
- In addition, **88%** of respondents indicated that the **session highlighted policy or system gaps** that need to be addressed.

Participants pointed to challenges related to immigration policy changes, language training gaps, and a disconnect between newcomer expectations and employer realities.

Overall, the session functioned as a strong sensemaking and learning space. At the same time, findings indicate a clear need to strengthen implementation supports, particularly through partnerships, practical tools, and system alignment.

Workforce Pressures Identified

Participants identified persistent hiring challenges across multiple areas:

- Digital, IT, and data-related roles
- Skilled trades and technical occupations
- Health and life sciences
- Leadership and supervisory roles
- Finance and administrative roles
- Human skills such as communication, teamwork, and problem-solving

These pressures are compounded by system and community-level constraints that limit access to available talent.



Here's what we heard

Language and communication remain central barriers in hiring and onboarding

Participants described onboarding as uneven across organizations, and even within the same organization depending on the manager. Employers continue to face challenges assessing candidates when language proficiency varies, particularly during interviews and early onboarding.

At the same time, newcomers often struggle with Canadian workplace communication norms, including how to present their experience, participate in interviews, and navigate workplace expectations.

Why this matters: Over-reliance on language fluency as a proxy for competence can exclude qualified candidates and limit access to talent.

Immigration Policy Instability as a Workforce Barrier

Immigration policy instability is a significant barrier to workforce integration and retention. Frequent policy changes, processing delays, and expiring work permits create uncertainty for both workers and employers, disrupting hiring decisions and long-term planning. Restrictions on work hours under certain permits and the risk of individuals losing status while awaiting decisions further compound these challenges. This unpredictability limits employers' ability to invest in training and retain internationally trained talent, despite ongoing labour shortages. Greater predictability and alignment between immigration processes and labour market needs would strengthen workforce outcomes.

Why this matters: Ongoing immigration uncertainty disrupts hiring, limits employer investment in training, and undermines the ability to retain talent and maintain workforce stability.

Community infrastructure is a workforce issue

Housing affordability, limited transit, and safety concerns significantly affect workforce participation and retention.

Shift-based roles are particularly impacted, with construction and skilled trades facing disproportionate challenges due to worksites located outside city centres and limited public transit access, restricting reliable and safe transportation options.

Why this matters: Workforce integration depends not only on employment systems but also on community infrastructure.

Employer readiness gaps persist despite strong intent

Many employers are motivated to adopt inclusive hiring practices but lack structured processes, tools, and internal capacity.

Challenges include inconsistent screening practices, over-reliance on informal methods, and limited structured onboarding.

Why this matters: Intent alone is not sufficient. Employers need practical tools and support, such as peer-to-peer business mentorship, to effectively implement inclusive practices.

Workforce gaps persist across key sectors

Employers continue to report shortages in digital, trades, health, and leadership roles.

These gaps align with broader labour market trends and highlight the importance of internationally trained talent as part of workforce solutions.

Why this matters: Addressing these gaps requires aligning hiring practices, training, and system supports with real workforce needs.

Psychosocial well-being and social conditions shape workforce retention

Significant psychosocial pressures affect newcomers’ participation in both the workforce and community. Anxiety related to immigration uncertainty, financial strain, and family responsibilities is a persistent stressor, often compounded by social isolation and limited support networks. Domestic stress, safety concerns, and a lack of accessible community spaces for connection further impact well-being. Experiences of discrimination and harassment also contribute to diminished well-being, with some individuals reporting that they do not feel safe seeking assistance. These interconnected challenges can undermine employment stability and long-term integration outcomes.

Why this matters: Workforce retention depends on more than employment conditions. Psychosocial well-being, safety, and access to social support systems play a critical role in sustaining participation and long-term integration.

Employers value dialogue but need practical tools

Participants appreciated the opportunity to share experiences and learn from others.

However, there is a clear demand for more actionable resources, including templates, training, and guidance.

Why this matters: Future forums must enable implementation, not just discussion.

Tensions and Trade-Offs

These structural tensions emerged:



Employers value strong communication, but over-emphasizing language proficiency can exclude qualified candidates.



Employers need predictable systems, but ongoing policy changes make it difficult to plan and retain talent.



Employers are motivated to adopt inclusive practices, but limited time, resources, and internal systems restrict their ability to act.



Employers are expected to support workforce integration, but factors such as housing, transit, and safety sit outside their control.



Participants value discussion and shared learning, but expect more practical tools and solutions to take action.

Emerging Signals

- Growing expectation for employers to support immigration navigation processes
- Increased interest in inclusive onboarding practices and psychological safety
- Concern about misalignment between newcomer expectations and labour market realities
- Stronger demand for sector-specific approaches to workforce integration
- Recognition that community-level integration supports long-term workforce sustainability

Recommended Actions

1. Strengthen inclusive hiring and onboarding tools

Employers need practical tools to move from intent to implementation. Shared resources such as structured interview guides, onboarding frameworks, and communication supports can improve consistency and outcomes.

2. Improve immigration system navigation for employers

Clearer pathways, guidance, and access to reliable information would help employers better understand and navigate immigration processes.

3. Strengthen employer and service provider partnerships

Employers identified partnerships as the most critical enabler for action. Structured collaboration models can support onboarding, communication, and retention through shared responsibility.

4. Address community-level barriers through coordinated approaches

Workforce integration strategies should include housing, transit, and safety considerations, recognizing their impact on employment outcomes.

5. Shift future forums toward implementation and co-design

Participants expressed a clear need for practical outputs. Future sessions should include structured opportunities to co-design tools and pilot solutions.

Conclusion and final reflection

This forum reinforced a key insight. Workforce integration is not only an employment issue. It is a system and community issue.

Employers are willing to engage and adopt inclusive practices, but their ability to act is shaped by system clarity, community infrastructure, and internal capacity.

Strengthening coordination across these areas will be critical to improving workforce outcomes and supporting long-term integration of internationally trained talent.

If you're interested in participating in our Feedback Forums, register now to receive exclusive invites, updates, and access to valuable resources. **Join the conversation in shaping our future initiatives!**

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