Immigrant Employment Council of BC

IECBC

sefc Strengthening Employer Feedback Channels

FORUM DIGEST







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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

sefc Strengthening Employer Feedback Channels

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 Feedback Forum held in Kelowna, bringing together employers and workforce system stakeholders to explore rural recruitment, workforce retention, immigration pathways, inclusive hiring, and cross-sector collaboration. Findings are grounded in survey responses and facilitator insights and should be interpreted as directional signals from engaged participants.

Canada BRITISH COLUMBIA

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FEEDBACK FORUM DIGEST

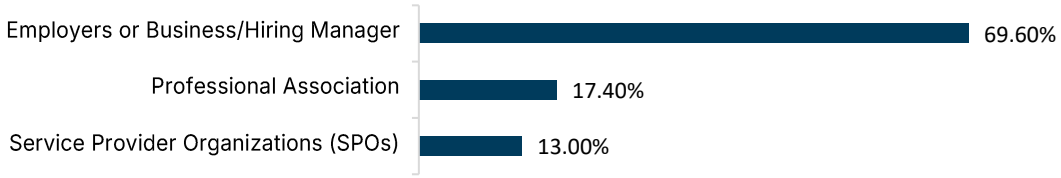
Participation and Response Rates

We extend sincere thanks to everyone who participated in the Kelowna Feedback Forum and shared their insights and perspectives on rural recruitment and workforce strategies.

Total participants: 23

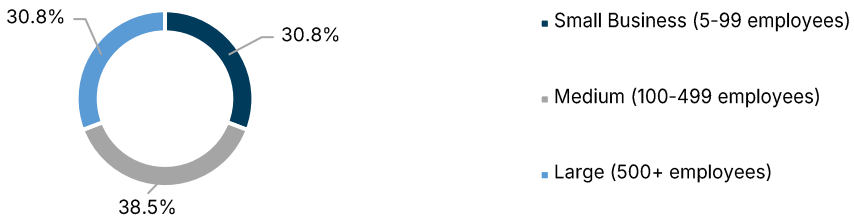
Survey response rates : Pre-forum survey: 56.5% | Post-forum survey: 95.7%

Who Shaped the Conversation

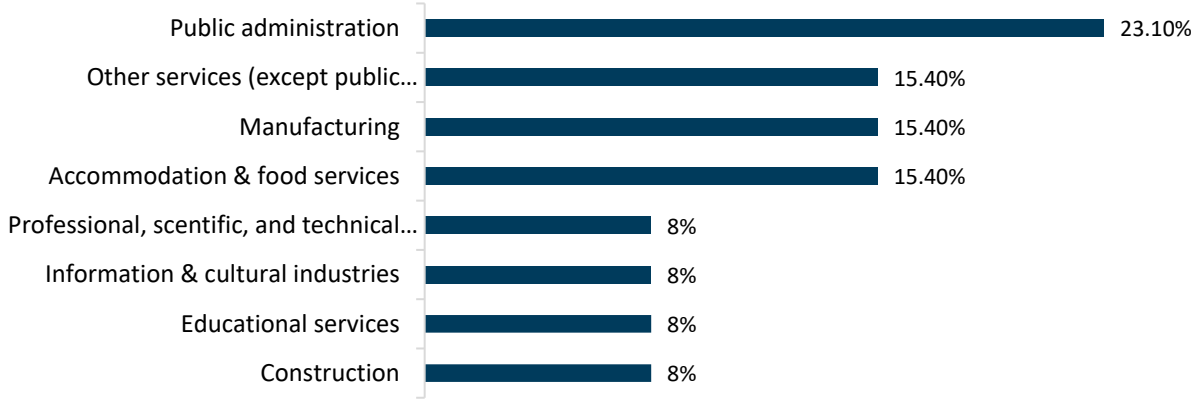


Employer Profile Snapshot

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



Sector Representation



Impact Snapshot: Employer Value Signal

The Kelowna Feedback Forum demonstrated strong engagement and practical relevance.

Perceived Quality

Average experience rating: 4.5 out of 5 | 95.6% rated the session a 4 or higher.

Practical Relevance

Average experience rating: 4.5 out of 5 | 91.3% rated the session a 4 or higher.

Behavioural Intent

- 100% intended to apply the insights learned within their organization
- 100% would recommend participation
- 100% felt like the forum strengthened their connection with organizations addressing workforce issues

These results highlight the value of bringing employers and system actors together to strengthen regional connections and explore practical approaches to recruitment, retention, and workforce integration across Kelowna and the Okanagan region.

Here's what we heard

High Living Costs and Seasonal Employment Challenge Regional Workforce Retention

High housing and living costs, limited transportation, and competition from regions offering better wages or more affordable living conditions make recruitment and retention challenging across the Okanagan.

Seasonal industries, particularly hospitality, tourism, wineries, and agriculture, face fluctuating labour demands and inconsistent employment opportunities, while construction employers depend on continuous work to support apprenticeship requirements. Weather and wildfire disruptions can further affect employment stability in agriculture.

Beyond affordability, reported housing discrimination, anti-immigrant sentiment, and difficulties establishing workplace and community connections can affect newcomers' sense of belonging and willingness to remain in the region. Limited career progression and uncertainty about local employment and living conditions can create additional retention challenges.

Opportunities include employer-supported housing and transportation, employee-sharing arrangements across complementary seasonal industries, and cross-training to provide more consistent employment. Clearer expectations before relocation, stronger career pathways, flexible workplace supports, and efforts to build welcoming workplaces and community connections could further strengthen long-term retention.

Immigration Pathways Can Limit Workforce Stability and Career Mobility

Misalignment between immigration pathways and regional workforce needs creates challenges for employers seeking to retain workers and offer stable employment.

Changing immigration requirements, processing delays, and uncertain application outcomes complicate workforce planning, particularly in seasonal industries such as hospitality and agriculture. Employer-specific

work permits can restrict movement between workplaces or properties, limiting employment continuity during seasonal fluctuations. Immigration requirements may also affect career progression, with some workers declining promotions or changes in occupation out of concern for their permanent residence eligibility. Limited access to reliable immigration advice adds further uncertainty for both employers and workers.

Opportunities include better aligning immigration pathways with regional and sector-specific workforce needs, providing clearer guidance on work permits, LMIAs, and permanent residence, and recognizing workers' employment history and contributions to their communities. Greater mobility across participating employers, where permitted, and improved access to qualified immigration practitioners and trusted referral services could further support workforce stability and retention.

Hiring Practices and Training Gaps Limit Access to Available Talent

A disconnect between available talent and employer needs persists in Kelowna, shaped by hiring practices, credential recognition barriers, and limited training opportunities. While the region has grown into an urban centre, recruitment practices have not always kept pace.

Smaller employers with limited HR capacity often rely on informal hiring and established local networks, which can unintentionally exclude qualified newcomers. Preferences for Canadian experience, rigid screening requirements, and hesitation toward internationally trained or overqualified candidates further restrict access to available skills.

Costly and lengthy credential assessments, limited industry-specific language training, and gaps in apprenticeship supervision create additional barriers, particularly in construction. Short co-op placements and limited hands-on learning opportunities can make it difficult for candidates to gain practical experience, while differences in expectations around job responsibilities and advancement can affect successful workplace integration.

Opportunities include greater recognition of international experience and transferable skills, more flexible hiring criteria, and clearer distinctions between essential qualifications and skills that can be developed on the job.

Expanding industry-specific language and safety training, mentorship, apprenticeship supervision, and longer work-integrated learning opportunities could strengthen workforce pathways. Clearer communication of job expectations during recruitment and onboarding could also help employers and candidates establish a stronger fit.

Employer Capacity Calls for Better Workforce Support

Employers are increasingly taking on immigration, settlement, and training responsibilities beyond their core business operations, adding financial and administrative pressures to already limited capacity.

Hospitality HR staff reported navigating immigration questions alongside their regular duties, while smaller businesses face particular challenges due to limited HR resources and access to specialized support. Fragmented connections between employers, service providers, and training institutions, along with limited awareness of available resources, make it harder to access timely assistance.

Concerns about worker protection, including poor working conditions and fear of reporting complaints, further highlight gaps in support. Smaller employers also have limited opportunities to contribute their perspectives to workforce and immigration policy discussions.

Opportunities include establishing a dedicated employer advisor or point of contact, strengthening partnerships with settlement organizations, industry associations, and training providers, and creating ongoing employer roundtables to share resources and solutions.

Improved onboarding and supervisor training, worker-rights education, trusted referral services, and sustained feedback channels with government could help strengthen employer capacity and regional workforce coordination.

Tensions and Trade-Offs

These structural tensions emerged:

Importance of Tourism and Hospitality ⟷ **Seasonality of Work**

Tourism and hospitality are foundational to Okanagan's economy but fluctuating employment due to seasonality can make it difficult to sustain retention.

Shifting Immigration Requirements ⟷ **Intention to Hire**

Changing immigration requirements, delays, and unclear pathways make it challenging to offer stable, permanent positions.

Hiring Processes ⟷ **Qualified Candidates**

Hiring practices, credential recognition, and reliance on local networks all influences whether an employer might hire a candidate despite potentially excluding newcomers with relevant experience and education.

Trying to Fill Vacancies ⟷ **What is In Control of the Employer**

Employers intend to hire for their vacancies but described the lack of capacity to take on immigration, settlement, and training responsibilities as a major limitation.

Emerging Signals

- **Seasonal recruitment patterns are shifting.** Employers described a shift from relying on seasonal workers from Quebec for temporary summer roles, such as fruit picking, tree planting, and housekeeping, toward greater reliance on international workers. This shift introduces different considerations around immigration requirements, language, and long-term retention.

- **Regional affordability influences workforce retention.** High living costs, limited housing and transportation options, and access to essential services can affect workers' decisions to settle and remain in the Okanagan, reinforcing the importance of community conditions alongside employment opportunities.

- **Immigration status can influence career decisions.** Newcomers may weigh promotions, occupational changes, and other career opportunities against their potential impact on permanent residence eligibility, creating situations where immigration considerations take priority over

professional advancement.

- **Specialized professions can be difficult for newcomers to enter.** While established professionals in fields such as law may experience relatively stable retention, close-knit professional networks can create barriers for internationally trained newcomers seeking entry into these occupations.

- **Job vacancies and unemployment can coexist due to skills mismatches.** Despite available positions, employers reported difficulties filling mid-management, specialized trades, and experienced foreperson roles. Gaps between graduates' experience, career expectations, and employer requirements may help explain why vacancies persist alongside unemployment.

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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