

Immigrant Talent Integration *Project*



Final Project Report Executive Summary March 2008

Prepared by
Olga Scherbina, Diversity Clues
Patrick Coady, Success Development Group Inc.

Prepared for
BC Human Resources Management Association



This project is funded by the Government of Canada's International Qualifications Unit of the Ministry of Advanced Education and Labour Market Development.

The opinions and interpretations in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the Government of Canada and the Ministry of Advanced Education and Labour Market Development.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background: The Need for the Project

Over the next decade, Canadian organizations are going to have to turn increasingly to immigrants to address their labour needs. According to Statistics Canada, by 2012, 100% of the *net labour force growth*ⁱ will come from immigration.¹ This challenge is not unique to Canada which must compete with other industrialized nations for internationally trained professionals.²

Another challenge for Canada is to both attract and retain immigrant talent. A recent Statistics Canada survey found that one in six young male immigrants to Canada leaves the country within the first year of his arrival.³ These facts suggest that, as a nation, we need to learn to more effectively integrate immigrant professionals into the workforce.

Immigrants face many challenges trying to find employment in Canada.⁴ Chief amongst these are difficulties in acquiring Canadian experience, lack of access to profession-specific language skills training, unrecognized credentials and experience as well as a lack of educational resources that help introduce immigrants to the *Canadian workplace culture*ⁱⁱ. Additionally, companies may have difficulty assessing immigrant skill levels and/or may not have the tools and knowledge necessary to hire internationally trained professionals.⁵

While the funding for programs to address previously identified barriers may not be adequate, there are, nevertheless, a number of initiatives underway which address immigrant initial integration into the workforce.⁶ Lacking amongst these, however, are initiatives and tools specifically designed to aid companies in the hiring of internationally trained professionals. As a result, the Immigrant Talent Integration Project (ITI) was created. The executive summary encapsulates insights into the project goals, activities, research findings and recommendations found in the final report the contents of which should assist the British Columbia Human Resources Management Associationⁱⁱⁱ (BC HRMA) to move forward on the subject.

ⁱ "Labour Force Growth is determined by growth in the native-born population, net of immigration, and the labor force participation rate, which is the percentage of the working-age population (16+) working or looking for work." [Economist's View, November 02, 2007. <http://economistsview.typepad.com/economistsview/2007/11/labor-force-par.html>]

ⁱⁱ "Workplace culture describes the rules for behaviour in a group or organization. [This might include]... different manners, processes, and ways of working." [Workplace Culture in Nova Scotia Guide, <http://workinginnovascotia.ca/resource-guide/workplace-culture-nova-scotia>.]

ⁱⁱⁱ BC HRMA is the largest HR association in Western Canada and offers professional learning and networking opportunities including workshops, symposia, events, and an annual conference & showcase

The Immigrant Talent Integration Project (ITI) and its Goals

The project is a partnership between the International Qualifications Unit (IQU) of the Ministry of Advanced Education and Labour Market Development, and the BC HRMA, and was funded by the Ministry of Advanced Education and Labour Market Development of BC, through the Government of Canada's Foreign Credential Recognition Program.

The BC HRMA, with 4,000 HR specialist members, was selected to partner to work on the ITI project. These HR professionals provide an important link between corporations and the employment of educated immigrants. In order to increase the level of immigrant integration into the BC workforce, it is imperative to address the concerns and challenges that HR professionals may have in this regard, as well as to provide them with the tools necessary to solve the problems that such integration may entail. Importantly, the BC HRMA possesses the underlying experience, professionalism and motivation to enable the successful implementation of the ITI project.

The ITI project was created to achieve the following goals:

- To develop a 2-year comprehensive training / awareness raising strategy which will increase the capacity of the provincial human resources sector to utilize immigrants' skills
- To undertake a BC HRMA membership survey and distribute its results to the membership as a means of better informing its members about the benefits of hiring skilled immigrant professionals and promoting the utilization of their talents
- To actively involve provincial HR professionals in learning activities, examine the challenges facing immigrant economic integration, and develop potential solutions to those challenges
- To encourage BC HRMA members to share information concerning those practices that facilitate the utilization of immigrant skills and knowledge in the workplace.
- To increase the number of partnerships between BC HRMA members and the Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) sector with a view to facilitating greater cooperation and understanding concerning the subject of immigrant skilled labour integration.

Two part-time project consultants were hired to implement the proposed activities for Phase I which lasted for 7 months and ended on March 31, 2008.

Project Methodology & Activities

Five key strategies or approaches were employed in order to achieve the goals of the project:

1. Recruitment of champions to advise on the project

Project champions were recruited from business/HR community members who actively participated in either the ITI Roundtable or were on the Advisory Board. The ITI Roundtable's role was to bring together HR professionals who were concerned about the potential shortages of workers in their company/industry and who see the immigrant talent pool as a potential solution to their labour shortages. The Roundtable was composed of a diverse group of both senior and junior HR specialists and recruiters who met on a regular basis, exchanged ideas, learned about promising practices and heard speakers on a range of relevant topics. The Advisory Board's goal was to support and guide the project consultants in their work. The Board was composed of the CEO of BC HRMA, other BC HRMA senior staff, IQU representatives, 2 project consultants, a BCITP Net representative^{iv}, 2 settlement sector representatives, 2 academics and several employers.

2. Preparation of Environmental Scans and a Survey of BC HRMA members

- The environmental scan of 'BC HRMA Services and Programs' involved a review of BC HRMA workshops, conferences, communication and other related materials and online resources. The results allowed BC HRMA to have a better understanding of its baseline professional development concerning the subject of immigrant integration.
- The environmental scan of 'Promising Immigrant Integration Practices in Five Professional Organizations' involved a review of relevant practices and programs at the Brampton Board of Trade, The Human Resources Professionals Association of Ontario (HRPAO), the BC Business Council, the College of Physicians and Surgeons of BC, and Engineers Canada. Recommendations were made to BC HRMA that could potentially increase that organization's leadership role in this field.
- The environmental scan of 'BC's Relevant Non-Profit Training Programs, Online Resources and Potential Partnerships' involved a review of local employment programs such as 'Skills Connect', 'Career Bridge', mentoring programs, diversity fairs, the '5Step Solution' website and others. Recommendations were made concerning potential partnerships between NGOs and BC HRMA members.
- A survey of the BC HRMA membership, which went out to over 4,000 members, involved an inquiry into company HR recruitment practices related to the immigrant workforce, as well as diversity training and the future of BC HRMA professional development activities.

^{iv} BCITP Net stands for British Columbia Internationally Trained Professionals Network. It is a partnership of internationally trained professionals from around the province, working cooperatively, to improve access to meaningful employment for all immigrant professionals in BC. <http://www.bctip.net>

3. Information Sharing amongst BC HRMA members in 6 geographical regions across BC

HR professionals throughout the province were actively involved in learning activities concerning the challenges and successes of immigrant economic integration (ITI Roundtable) and, through increased knowledge amongst BC HRMA members, about best practices to support immigrant recruitment/selection/promotion (articles).

4. Partnership Development between BC HRMA and Settlement Sector NGOs

Representatives of non profit organizations presented lectures to ITI roundtable participants. Consequently, these BC HRMA members expressed interest in being involved in several government funded programs and have taken initial steps in that direction. Similarly, the environmental scan of potential partners for the BC HRMA was distributed amongst the ITI Roundtable members.

5. Development of a Provincial HR sector-specific Action Plan

A two-year awareness raising strategy was developed to effect systematic change at the BC HRMA regarding immigrant integration into the labour force. This included feedback/suggestions from BC HRMA members (survey), industry leaders (champions), and active supporters (ITI Roundtable) to improve immigrant recruitment strategies. This strategy is designed to increase the capacity of the provincial human resources sector to utilize immigrant skills.

Project Findings

The project outreach, roundtable, scans and survey provided an opportunity for HR practitioners to communicate their concerns, preferences and needs. Recommendations were collected from the Advisory Board, ITI Roundtable, and senior staff & active volunteers at the BC HRMA. The results pointed out gaps in HR professionals' knowledge and the lack of HR tools to integrate immigrants. Some of the major findings include:

- **Lack of cultural-sensitivity resources for HR professionals**

It was revealed that very few of the BC HRMA membership provide cultural sensitivity training to their staff, have materials to assist them in integrating culturally diverse employees, or use accessible and immigrant friendly resources to advertise their new job openings. The ITI project survey results also indicated that HR practitioners evaluate immigrants and Canadian born applicants differently for the same job. It is important to note that the ITI project survey findings also align with the 2007 HRPAO Corporate Diversity Assessment results.⁷ These showed that nearly three out of four employers failed to assign staff to manage their diversity strategies and many employers were not following through on their diversity policies with actions that would ensure their success. Additionally, the Conference Board of Canada⁸ states that "*Canadian organizations say*

they value diversity but have not yet fully committed their policies, practices and resources to driving diversity to the core of their operations". The report also states that, *"Many organizations have policies and programs to support diversity, but there is room for improvement in the strategies used to identify, retain and develop a diverse workforce."*

- **Inadequate communication skills and a lack of "Canadian workplace" experience represent the strongest barriers facing Immigrants**

The ITI Survey revealed that HR practitioners recognize many contributions that immigrants make in the workforce. These include unique technical skills, additional language capabilities and impressive international experience. However, the majority of project participants (both ITI Roundtable members and survey participants) agreed that lack of effective English communication/accent and interpersonal skills are the major barriers to hiring immigrants. Cross-cultural communication issues were generally recognized to represent some of the strongest barriers that immigrants encounter. These findings agree with the results from many other recent studies. For example, in a survey conducted by the Brampton Board of Trade ⁹ *"...employers expressed fear in hiring immigrants because of confusion around religious rights and cultural practices and indicated concern about how others in the workplace might react to someone perceived to be getting special treatment."*

- **Limited professional development opportunities for HR professionals in BC regarding diversity and immigrant integration**

Through the environmental scans, it was revealed that organizations in BC, such as the BC Business Council and the College of Physicians and Surgeons of BC have been leaders both in becoming advocates for internationally trained professionals and providing their members with diverse professional development opportunities on the subject of immigrant integration. Similarly, HRPAO, a BC HRMA sister organization in Ontario, has been active in enhancing professional development opportunities for its members. For example, in the past year it has delivered four full-day workshops on immigrant integration/diversity, conducted a diversity survey, and partnered with a number of Ontario-based NGOs and g-Force ^v to deliver a Diversity Forum/Career Fair which was attended by over 500 HR professionals and over 1,500 job seekers. Additionally, in order to comply with Bill 124, the Ontario "Regulator Oversight Bill", HRPAO has already initiated A Task Force on Foreign Credential Recognition.

- **Strategic role of multistakeholder champions**

The project Advisory Board was instrumental in providing key contacts for the Roundtable, feedback on the various scans and the survey, as well as important direction on the next steps to be taken on the project. Similarly, the ITI roundtable members provided

^v g-Force – Montreal-based Diversity Consulting company

important insights into the challenges that HR practitioners face and the resources required to overcome these challenges.

Project Recommendations/ Next Steps

The integration of immigrant professionals into the professional and technical workforce of British Columbia is as much an economic concern as it is a social one. According to Mwariga, a fulfilling job is the major contributing factor to achieving successful immigrant settlement.¹⁰ Innovation and productivity are key drivers in today's economy. BC is seen as lagging behind other provinces and needing to increase the productivity of its current labour force and better utilize its talents.¹¹

BC is currently experiencing, and may continue to experience, a major shortage of skilled workers.¹² Employers cite staff turnover, loss of graduates to more lucrative offers in other parts of the world, baby boomer retirement, and a lack of professional development opportunities as significant factors. Hiring internationally trained professionals may be an effective solution to alleviating the problem.

The successful integration of immigrant professionals, therefore, would clearly be of benefit to the province, not only economically but also socially. To achieve these goals, the development of HR professionals must be expanded or amplified to include the specific challenges of an immigrant work force.

As a result, the following steps are recommended for adoption in Phase II of the project:

1. That BC HRMA becomes a provincial leader in the area of immigrant integration and continue to raise awareness of the benefits of hiring immigrants. This includes making resources available to HR practitioners through a targeted communication strategy, which encompasses a Phase II project press conference, as well as an 'Immigrant Workforce Integration Symposium' with attendance by HR practitioners in the spring-fall 2009.
2. That the Ministry of Advanced Education and Labour Market Development and BC HRMA be partners in facilitating sustainable development of the ITI Roundtable. As a result, the participating members would become active advocates for systematic change in immigrant hiring practices amongst HR practitioners in BC. Additionally, the ITI Roundtable members and their respective organizations could then pioneer partnerships with local settlement agencies which would ideally result in an increased number of immigrants being hired, retained and promoted in the companies that HRMA members represent. The desired goal would be to make the Roundtable self-sustainable after the completion of the project and/or provide it with the ability to secure private corporate sponsorship as other Roundtables have done.

3. That BC HRMA produce an Immigrant Talent Integration Guide for Canadian born HR practitioners as an educational tool with regard to the hiring/workplace cultural differences in North America compared with major immigration source countries. As a result, HR practitioners would become more aware of cultural differences in job search and interviewing processes between Canadian-born job seekers and immigrants. This guide would incorporate a review of the existing literature on the subject of cultural differences in hiring/workplace practices as well as feedback from HR practitioners. To aid in completing the guide by the spring of 2008, 4 two-hour focus groups would be conducted with ethnic HR practitioners from Chinese, Indo-Canadian, Philippine, and Latin American communities in addition to Canadian-born HR practitioners. It is proposed that an external publishing company be hired to develop the format for and publish the guide. The guide would be distributed to BC HRMA members and released at the 2009 Immigrant Talent Integration Symposium and/or at the 2009 HRMA conference as well as being made available in electronic format on the BC HRMA website.

4. That a project logo and a web page be developed by the summer of 2009 to promote the ITI Project. The web page would contain information for HR practitioners on the hiring of skilled immigrants. This would include contracting a web design company to assist in the development of the ITI project logo and the ITI project web page. The project web page would be integrated with BC HRMA's current website. It would also act as a portal to other related resources. A promotional campaign that would involve mainstream media ads, press releases, and networking with other immigrant serving agencies is also recommended.

5. Finally, it is recommended that a follow-up survey be undertaken to evaluate the impact of the project against the base line survey established in Phase I. The follow up survey would be sent to BC HRMA members in the fall of 2009. The results collected, analyzed and summarized would be incorporated into the final project report.

"Immigrants bring much needed scarce skills and resources...different perspectives...and genuine interest to excel and to perform well... They reflect the communities and customers in our marketplaces"

ITI Project Survey respondents on benefits immigrants bring to employers

Endnotes

¹ Statistics Canada, The Daily, Monday, September 10, 2007. Study: Canada's immigrant labour market. "The Canadian Immigrant Labour Market in 2006: First Results from Canada's Labour Force Survey", <http://www.statcan.ca/bsolc/english/bsolc?catno=71-606-XWE2007001>

² Mahroum, S. 2001. "Europe and the Immigration of Highly Skilled Labour", International Migration, 39: 27+. <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/pub/facts2005/overview/1.html>

³ Statistics Canada, The Daily, Wednesday, March 1, 2006. Study: Immigrants who leave Canada. Research paper "Return and Onward Migration Among Working Age Men". <http://www.statcan.ca/bsolc/english/bsolc?catno=11F0019MIE2006273>

⁴ Reitz, J. G. 2001. "Immigrant Success in the Knowledge Economy: Institutional Change and the Immigrant Experience in Canada, 1970-1995". *Journal of Social Issues*, 57: 579-613

⁵ Immigrant Talent Integration Project BC HRMA Member Survey Summary Report - Key Findings Prepared by Olga Scherbina and Patrick Coady, February 2008, Page 4

⁶ Centre for Community Based Research. NOVEMBER 30, 2006. "A NATIONAL REVIEW OF ACCESS TO PROFESSIONS AND TRADES (APT) PROCESSES FOR IMMIGRANTS FINAL REPORT" <http://www.capacitycanada.ca/>

⁷ Balthazard, C. & A. Mongodin. 2007 "Corporate Diversity Assessment 2007", HRPAAO & g-Force. <http://www.hrthoughtleader.com/NR/rdonlyres/B84B6BA5-2ED6-419B-8ABF-819634732D84/4901/DiversitySurveyReportv8.pdf>

⁸ The Conference Board of Canada. December 2006. "Report on Diversity: Priorities, Practices and Performance in Canadian Organizations"

⁹ Brampton Board of Trades. 2007. "Employer Resource Guide", 2007. Skills Without the Borders project.

¹⁰ Mwariga, M.S. 2002. "Towards a Framework for Local Responsibility: Taking Action to End the Current Limbo in Immigrant Settlement in Canada". Toronto: Maytree Foundation

¹¹ Stats Canada, The Daily, Wednesday, May 14, 2008. "Hours worked and labour productivity in the provinces and territories". <http://www.statcan.ca/Daily/English/080514/d080514a.htm>

¹² Boei, W. Thursday, March 15, 2007. "Labour Shortage Critical in British Columbia - Foreign Workers Needed". The Vancouver Sun