



2010 ALLIES Learning Exchange

**Putting Ideas
into Action**



ALLIES Learning Exchange Report



THE J.W. McCONNELL
FAMILY FOUNDATION
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Introduction

Immigrants are a key resource for building and strengthening Canada, particularly in light of our aging population, our declining birth rate and the global competition for talent. By 2011, Canada will rely 100% on immigrants for our net labour market growth; and, by 2031, our net population growth will be derived entirely from immigration.

Canada brings in roughly 250,000 immigrants per year, many of whom are skilled immigrants. Skilled immigrants often face obstacles in finding employment in their field of expertise. Currently only four out of ten skilled immigrants are able to find employment that is relevant to their education and experience.

Skilled immigrants may face the following barriers when trying to enter the labour force:

- Lack of recognition of international education, training, and experience;
- Insufficient information about employment opportunities and requirements;
- Lack of professional networks;
- Lack of occupation-specific terminology in English or French;
- Lack of targeted training programs to bridge gaps in qualifications; and
- Difficulty obtaining Canadian work experience.

Research has shown that employers may have the following reasons for not hiring skilled immigrants:

- Lack of familiarity with international credentials and experience;
- Preference or requirement of Canadian work experience;
- Concerns about language proficiency and lack of awareness about Canadian technical terminology and idioms;
- Concerns about lack of understanding of Canadian culture and business norms; and
- Lack of access to skilled immigrant talent pools and local immigrant communities.

By identifying future skill requirements and planning for the new face of work, employers will be better able to source, screen, select, and invest in the skilled immigrants who will make up the labour shortfall.

A Competitive Workforce

Current conditions make it imperative for employers to consider hiring skilled immigrants:

1. The Canadian-born workforce is shrinking and the demand for labour is growing.
2. Skilled immigrants can help Canadian companies do business with the world.
3. Skilled immigrants bring international expertise.
4. The local market is changing and becoming more diverse.

Labour market growth depends on skilled immigrants. They bring high levels of education - in 2006, 58% of recent male immigrants and 49% of recent female immigrants had at least a bachelor's degree, compared to a Canadian average of 23% with a university degree. Skilled immigrants can contribute international skills, experience, and languages to the benefit of an organization, and aid with its global

goals. They may prove to be valuable resources for understanding product and service needs in ethno-specific markets. Skilled immigrants may provide a competitive advantage by improving networks and relationships, by speaking a variety of languages and by adding diverse perspectives, experiences and skills sets to the workforce.

Prosperous Cities

Most of the debate on immigration focuses on national policies and programs, therefore discussions of solutions tend to focus on national levels. However, the lived reality of immigration is uniquely urban and local. A total of 94% of immigrants arriving in the 1990s went to urban centres in Canada, with 73% settling in Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver.

These cities are now recognized to be the drivers of our national economy and prosperity.

How well these urban centres do will depend in part on how well they manage to integrate immigrants into the economic, cultural and social fabric of society. If they succeed, the result will be a vibrant local economy and a cosmopolitan community. If they fail, the result may be poverty, segregation and exclusion.

A Strong Canada

Historically, immigrants have performed well in the Canadian labour market. Those arriving in the 1970s and 1980s caught up with their Canadian counterparts within ten years.

Immigrants arriving since the 1990s have not fared as well. Although they are the most highly educated immigrants to date – over 40 per cent of the yearly 250,000 immigrants have a university education – after ten years immigrant men who arrived in 1990 were earning only 79.8 per cent of the average for Canadian men, and immigrant women were earning 87.3 per cent of the average for Canadian women. Research also shows that four out of ten new immigrants are forced to make a downwardly mobile shift in their career once they arrive in Canada.

The Conference Board of Canada has estimated that our country's failure to recognize immigrants' learning and learning credentials costs the economy \$3.4 billion to \$5 billion in lost earnings every year.

A study by RBC Financial Group offers additional figures: If immigrants had the same likelihood of employment at the same average income as people born in Canada, then personal income would be about \$13 billion higher and there would be almost 400,000 extra workers.

Immigrants are a key resource for building and strengthening Canada.

ALLIES

ALLIES (Assisting Local Leaders with Immigrant Employment Strategies) is a project jointly funded by Maytree and The J.W. McConnell Family Foundation. ALLIES provides funding, technical expertise and networks to Canadian cities so that they can successfully adapt and implement local ideas for skilled immigrants to find suitable employment. ALLIES provides resources to immigrant employment councils and networks to bring together local stakeholders and to develop their own practical solutions to help

skilled immigrants find suitable employment. These multi-stakeholder groups are typically comprised of employers, community organizations, occupational regulatory bodies, post-secondary institutions, assessment service providers, labour, immigrant professional associations and all three levels of government.

To increase their ability to effect change at the local level and break down the barriers to hiring skilled immigrants, ALLIES offers:

- Web-based “how-to guides” on effective programs such as mentoring, internships, and public awareness campaigns;
- Coaches who will guide and mentor communities in the development of these programs;
- Grants to support the creation of local immigrant employment councils; and
- The website hireimmigrants.ca which provides employers with interactive tools and resources to support the recruitment, integration and retention of skilled immigrants.

To complement these activities, ALLIES hosts conferences to share ideas, strategies and experiences about successful immigrant employment approaches.

Putting Ideas Into Action: Learning Exchange Proceedings

Over 175 participants from more than ten city regions across Canada met at the 2010 ALLIES Learning Exchange on May 6 and 7, 2010 in Halifax to learn about issues and strategies to promote the employment of skilled immigrants. Attendees included representatives from businesses, civic leaders, universities and colleges, immigrant agencies and all levels of government in participating communities such as Halifax, Moncton, Montreal, Ottawa, Toronto, London, Kitchener-Waterloo, Saskatoon, Calgary, Edmonton and Vancouver.

This section provides an overview of the speeches and sessions from the two days of the Learning Exchange, with a specific focus on ideas and commitments to a national action plan.

Stephen Huddart, COO, J.W. McConnell Family Foundation, welcomed participants on Thursday, May 6 and provided a brief history of ALLIES. Ratna Omidvar, President, Maytree, spoke of city regions across the country now moving beyond the experimentation phase with integrating skilled immigrants into the labour force at their level and towards action.

Gordon Nixon, President and CEO, Royal Bank of Canada & Chair, Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council (TRIEC), reminded the audience that there is an immediate need for a coordinated strategy because if we want to increase our standard of living we need to do two things: attract skilled immigrants and leverage the capacity of the current workforce. There is a government case for diversity as well as a business case and we all have something to gain from immigrant talent.

Opening Plenary: Finding Talent

Navpreet Singh, Training and Workshop Development, Employment Initiatives, TRIEC introduced and screened the video entitled *Finding Talent* (<http://www.hireimmigrants.ca/tools/4/1>). This video follows the journey of Tarek in his search for a job and Henry in his search for talent.

Sugith Varughese, script writer of *Finding Talent*, then moderated a panel discussion with the following panellists who gave their reaction to the video and some words of advice to the audience on recruiting top talent:

Mel Cappe, President, Institute for Research on Public Policy and Former Head Privy Council
Karen Hiltz, HR Manager, Christie Digital Systems
Jacqui McGillivray, Vice President Human Resources and Brand & Marketing, (Global) Wealth Management, RBC
Jacques Pelletier, Vice President, Human Resources, Lilydale

Ideas that work:

- Embed diversity in all that you do and keep senior executives accountable.
- Use the human capital argument when presenting business reasons for hiring newcomers - a diverse workforce leads to higher quality.
- Review all your hiring practices from a “newcomer-to-Canada” perspective.

- To attract top talent keep connected to a wide network that you can call on when you need to hire.

Ideas for action:

- Discover the candidate through conversation, not just through a structured interview. Take the time.
- Hire the brightest and best, regardless of origins.
- Deal with managers' risk aversion. Celebrate success.

ALLIES SME Strategy – Ideas That Work

In this discussion moderated by Noel Hulsman, Custom Content Manager, Globe and Mail, small business owners and representatives talked about challenges and opportunities for small- and medium-sized enterprises, for skilled immigrants and for communities.

The panellists were:

Darlene Gering, President & CEO, Burnaby Board of Trade

Paul Kent, President and CEO, Greater Halifax Partnership

Marie-Claire Nadeau, Vice President, Strategic Development, FormaPlus

Pradeep Sood, Founder XactScribe Inc and Chair, Ontario Chamber of Commerce

Ideas that work:

- Multimedia advertising campaigns on hiring newcomers.
- Ready access to supports for workers with personal and family issues that may prevent job retention.
- Partnerships that connect skilled immigrants with SMEs.

Ideas for action:

- Address risk. Present a clearly worded business case.
- Provide a forum for employers to talk to each other about their hiring successes.
- Coordinate internal peer support for new staff.

Lunch Keynote – The Changing Face of the Canadian Workplace

With Canada's baby-boom generation beginning to reach retirement age, more than a third of the workforce will retire during the next 20 years. Canadian employers will face difficulties finding skilled workers as the labour force shrinks. In addition, a lack of proper training and recognition programs to help integrate new immigrants reduces the country's ability to efficiently and effectively manage its talent pool. Don Drummond, Senior Vice President and Chief Economist, TD Bank Financial Group discussed the trends and challenges facing the Canadian economy. Mr. Drummond is one of Canada's leading economic thinkers and the author of the recently released report *The Changing Canadian Workplace*.

Highlights from the speech include the following:

- While there are dire predictions about skilled labour shortages, there are many ways to address them – for example through wages, part-time options, and other creative approaches.

- The first five years are difficult for newcomers.
- Education determines income distribution but not in the immigrant population.
- The language barrier remains the number one issue and is a bigger hurdle than we are training people to meet.

Watch and download the [PowerPoint presentation](#) on Slideshare.

Mentoring Town Hall – Relationships Matter

What a difference one good relationship can make. That is why mentoring programs are operating in several communities across the country as an effective solution to the unemployment and under-employment of skilled newcomers. In this interactive session participants heard from employers, mentors and practitioners on the state of mentoring across the country.

Monique Bateman, Senior Vice President, Human Resources, TD Canada Trust stated that true corporate commitment to social responsibility begins with participation in programs that have made a positive difference in the community. She referred to the successes stemming from corporate involvement in mentoring for skilled immigrants. Mentoring is a cost-effective way to overcome some of the barriers to employment faced by skilled immigrants.

Facilitator Karen Link, Director, Critical LINK Management Group moderated a discussion by panellists and contributions from the audience. Panellists were:

Angela Agostino, Director, Human Resources, Pitney Bowes Canada

Emilie Coyle, Volunteer Mentorship Program Coordinator, Immigrant Settlement & Integration Services (ISIS)

Cheryl Ogle, Program Assistant, Staffing, Workforce Transition & Employment Equity, Human Resources Division, City of Toronto

Peter Paul, Project Leader, ALLIES

Ideas that work include:

- Promote mentoring as making good business sense.
- Use “champions” to serve as examples for others within an organization.
- Appeal to people’s personal connection with immigration to promote the program.
- A coordinated model helps the program scale up and makes it easier for employers to participate.
- Early quick wins help build a sustained mentoring culture in a city.
- Sharing successful outcomes for mentors and mentees will bring new partners to the table.
- Use current mentors to reach new mentors.

[Watch a video](#) produced by TRIEC where mentors, mentees and corporate partners share why mentoring matters.

Marketplace

Participants visited various displays and booths to learn more about innovative immigrant employment products, tools and strategies that are being implemented across the country.

- Alliance of Sector Councils HR Workshops
- Career Bridge
- CIIP (Canadian Immigration Integration Project)
- DiverseCity: Beyond Labour Market Inclusion
- Dream Manager
- Foreign Credentials Referral Office
- hireimmigrants.ca Roadmap
- Immigrant Employment Loan Program
- Mentoring Technology
- Skills International
- Talent Net
- Touring ALLIES Toolkits
- Tracking Employer Needs and Preferences

[Read the Marketplace booklet](#)

Keynote Address – Ingredients for Success: Making Your Immigrant Employment Council Work for Your Community

All good recipes improve with innovation, adaptation and time. However, the essential ingredients remain constant. The same can be said for local immigrant employment councils. Alan Broadbent, Chair, Maytree welcomed participants on day two with his presentation of key ingredients in building successful collaborations that accelerate the employment of skilled immigrants. He prefaced his remarks by acknowledging the importance of local conditions and local players as well as the benefits of looking elsewhere to find ideas that work.

Ingredients for success are:

1. Shared deficits: Programs in the past started from the premise that it is the immigrants who have deficits that need to be remediated. The current view is that deficits are shared and that employers can improve their human resource practices.
2. Singular focus: Maintain a singular focus. You can't do everything despite pressures to expand your mandate.
3. Real employers: Without actual employers at the table you will not succeed. Recruit a prominent chair who can recruit other business leaders. Involve employers, including government, as participants.
4. Leverage leaders: Focus on leaders themselves more than the organizations they represent.
5. Task orientation: Move directly towards realistic targets, measurable achievements and early wins.
6. Local labour market needs: The key tasks for any program must reflect actual local labour market demand and gaps. Include people representing these groups at your table.

7. Outcomes: Do not become distracted by the process and let it take over. Know how you will demonstrate success.
8. Forgiveness vs. permission: The saying of the bold is that it is better to seek forgiveness than ask permission.

It is important to provide leadership and management so that you can start with actionable projects and the readiness to follow through.

[Read the Speech](#)

Immigrants and the Economic Recovery: What Are the Policy Implications?

Naomi Alboim is one of Canada's leading policy experts on immigration issues. She presented an analysis of the impact of the recent recession on immigrants and highlighted relevant policy implications for our economic recovery. Ms Alboim is a Maytree Associate and Fellow and Adjunct Professor, School of Policy, Queen's University.

Key findings indicate that recent immigrants and young immigrants were hardest hit by the recession, but the impact varies depending on sector, geographic location, length of time in Canada, gender and other factors. Established immigrants fared relatively well and immigrants here between five and ten years were comparable to Canadian born.

Many immigrants negatively affected by the recession are not eligible for the language training, employment insurance and income assistance that would help them to recover.

Ideas that work:

- Being proactive and having a pool of immigrants ready for the upcoming labour shortage even though there may not be as many jobs available now.
- A national policy framework on economic objectives.
- A focus on second generation youth.

Ideas for action: Data

- Conduct more in-depth analysis on the impact of the recession on immigrants.
- Analyse data by province, city, sector, length of time in Canada, gender, and education level in order to target programs to needs.
- Do investigations on the ground with immigrant agencies to see the real-life impact of recession on immigrants.

Ideas for action: Access to programs and services

- Determine eligibility for federal settlement and language programs by need, not citizenship status.
- Expand the definition of "underemployment" for program eligibility to include the mismatch between qualifications and employment.
- Expand bridge training programs, internships and mentoring programs with employer supports.

Ideas for action: Income and supports

- Provide income support/training allowances to immigrants for language training, bridge training and other training opportunities.
- Provide child care and transportation support/allowances to immigrants participating in language training, bridge training, and other training opportunities.
- Continue EI and social assistance benefits while immigrants are participating in language training, bridge training and other training opportunities.
- Expand loan program for immigrants to access training.

Watch and download the [PowerPoint Presentation](#) on Slideshare

Workshops

The Nuts and Bolts of Developing a Successful Bridging Program

Bridging programs are designed specifically for immigrants to transition more quickly into the Canadian labour market by providing training that addresses specific needs and facilitates the recognition of foreign credentials. They provide training and Canadian workplace experience without duplicating what newcomers have already learned. These programs are developed together by employers, colleges and universities, occupational regulatory bodies, and community organizations. Alberta and Ontario have been leaders delivering effective bridging programs. Two leading experts in the field provided details on how to establish and fund such programs.

Anna De Luca, Dean, Language Training and Adult Literacy, NorQuest College

Suzanne Gordon, Manager, Labour Market Integration Unit, Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration

Watch and download Anna DeLuca's [PowerPoint presentation](#) on SlideShare.

Watch and download Suzanne Gordon's [PowerPoint presentation](#) on SlideShare.

Getting the Right Message Across in a Web 2.0 World

To get the right message through the right channels to the right target you need to communicate day-to-day information, "big news" about major changes in your organization and you need to actively listen for opportunities and threats. It's not as easy as it sounds, and just when you think you have it all under control, the world goes social/2.0, overloads and confuses you all over again. The best communications start with solid strategy, perfect planning and audience awareness. Suzanne and Marco demystified communications planning and helped participants take the next steps in using social media in their work.

Marco Campana, former Online Capacity Development Coordinator, Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI)

Suzanne Hawkes, Senior Consultant, Convergence

[Read the presentation](#)

[Download a social media strategy map](#)

[Download additional resources](#)

How to Build Media Relationships...that Stick!

Meaningful partnerships are the foundation for success and developing one with the media may be one of the greatest investments you make! Media partners can be one of the most effective channels to communicate your ideas and share information with a wide audience. They add credibility to your

organization's message and position you as the expert. It is equally important to understand the mandate and priorities of a media outlet and how your organization can help the media meet their goals. It must be a win-win for both parties! This session featured practical tips and strategies on how to develop such relationships and leverage them to the advantage of the participants' organizations.

Kim Clark, Toronto Partnership Manager, CBC

Jennifer Gillivan, Director, Partnerships & Communications, CBC

Emily Mills, Media Relations and Communications Specialist, Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council (TRIEC)

[Download key questions when developing media relationships](#)

[Download 10 tips on how to build media relationships](#)

Widening the Talent Pool

What are some of the current challenges and issues that employers are facing when recruiting and selecting qualified skilled immigrants? Following an initial discussion to explore these issues, Navpreet turned to promising practices of leading-edge organizations, in particular what they are doing to support change and promote cultural competency in their recruitment processes. She introduced TRIEC's *How-to HR Workshops* with a walkthrough of the curriculum and the video *Finding Talent*.

Navpreet Singh, Manager, Training and Workshop Development, Employer Initiatives, Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council

JoAnne Trotter, Professor, Human Resources Program, Seneca College and former Human Resource Business Partner at Cadbury Adams

Watch and download the [PowerPoint presentation](#) on SlideShare.

Making Change Happen: Building a Policy Agenda

It is often acknowledged that the creation of sound public policy could provide the most enduring solutions to the current challenges of Canadian communities. However going about making these changes can be difficult to navigate. In this session, Naomi engaged participants on how to develop, influence and monitor public policy on skilled immigrants in the labour market. She explored how governments make public policy decisions and how ALLIES community leaders can participate more effectively in the public policy process.

Naomi Alboim, Maytree Associate & Adjunct Professor, School of Policy Studies, Queen's University

Watch and download the [PowerPoint presentation](#) on SlideShare.

Learning from What Works: The Art and Science of Evaluation

The practice of evaluation has evolved over the past decade. As new theories and practices take hold in program evaluation, it is not necessarily clear how they apply to evaluating the impact of programs on individuals and communities. This session reviewed current thinking and practice in the field and provided some examples of good evaluation practice in addressing the impact of programs on individuals and communities. Participants were encouraged to share their own experiences as well as examples of evaluation challenges and opportunities within their work. Sheherazade and Janice provided participants with the tools and resources to develop a basic framework for evaluation in their organizations.

Janice Astbury, Senior Program Officer, J.W. McConnell Family Foundation
Sheherazade Hirji, Hirji + White Consulting

Watch and download the [PowerPoint presentation](#) on SlideShare.

Friend Raising – Raising Funds, Finding Friends

The only certainty in fundraising today is that funding is, by its very nature, uncertain. At a time when many charities have been affected by investment losses, government cutbacks, and a difficult economy, finding ways to keep your organization secure is more important than ever. Organizations often begin their campaigns with “an ask.” Rather, they should fully engage a prospect before requesting their support. How do we all stake our claim and get noticed – not only to secure funding but to maintain on-going support and relationships? This session helped participants learn how to maximize gifts through the art of friend raising.

Elizabeth Mclsaac, Executive Director, Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council (TRIEC)
Susan Mclsaac, Chief Development Officer, United Way of Greater Toronto

From the Frontlines of Employer Engagement

Employers are key stakeholders that need to be engaged effectively if we are to improve immigrant integration into the Canadian labour market. While many initiatives and programs are aimed at getting immigrants job-ready, more needs to be done to help employers become immigrant-ready. Participants heard about how TRIEC and Hire Immigrants Ottawa engage employers in their work, including their successes and challenges. The workshop covered how Fraser Milner Casgrain effected positive change within the firm and in the legal industry in partnership with TRIEC. Participants walked away with strategies and tips to help their organizations develop employer relationships.

Kelly McGahey, Senior Manager, Stakeholder Relations, Hire Immigrants Ottawa
Michael Schafler, Partner, Fraser Milner Casgrain LLP
Racquel Sevilla, Manager, Corporate & Stakeholder Relations (Toronto Region), Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council

Watch and download Kelly McGahey’s [PowerPoint presentation](#) on SlideShare.

Watch and download Michael Schafler’s [PowerPoint presentation](#) on SlideShare.

Watch and download Racquel Sevilla’s [PowerPoint presentation](#) on SlideShare.

The Future of Multiculturalism in Canada

Polls repeatedly show that Canadians view multiculturalism as one of the country’s defining characteristics. However, multiculturalism remains a very controversial issue. Enthusiasts view it as a model for the world. Conversely, critics see it as being responsible for a variety of social problems, including segregation, political radicalization, and ethnic polarization. Dr. Will Kymlicka, Canada Research Chair in Political Philosophy, Queen’s University reviewed the most recent evidence on how multiculturalism is working in Canada, and explored some of the newly emerging challenges to the Canadian model of diversity.

How it's working

Recent cross-national studies show that Canada is doing better than other Western democracies in terms of political integration (political participation rates, levels of trust in public institutions), economic integration (educational and labour market outcomes), and social integration (levels of prejudice, support for diversity). These comparatively better outcomes are partly due to the fact that Canada seeks skilled immigrants who already come with high levels of social capital, but recent studies confirm that multiculturalism plays a constructive role in integration after they arrive. For example, multiculturalism has been shown to facilitate political participation, to reduce opposition to immigration, to facilitate inter-personal trust across ethnic lines, and to create a more inclusive sense of national identity and pride.

Newly emerging challenges

Despite this important evidence on how multiculturalism is working, the public debate in Canada in recent years has been dominated by the spectre of backlash and retreat from multiculturalism. Specific issues include:

- Bringing religion into multiculturalism.
- The relationship between multiculturalism and the other two main dimensions of ethnocultural diversity in Canada – namely, French Canada and Aboriginal peoples.
- Racism and discrimination.
- Economic conditions – the growing evidence that the economic performance of recent immigrants is declining.

[Read the Backgrounder](#)

Closing Remarks

Ratna Omidvar, President, Maytree concluded the conference by saying that “Canada is a work in progress.” There are now immigrant employment councils in eight cities. CRE Montreal is now a partner with ALLIES and great strides have been made in the last two years.

The level of collaboration is growing and there are in fact many good ideas that are being implemented across the country with the goal of integrating skilled immigrants into the labour force at their professional level.

Commitments to further action

ALLIES 2010 Learning Exchange – Shared Vision

ALLIES and its network of communities recognize that the full and complete participation of skilled immigrants into the labour market benefits our country, our cities and our communities. Our locally led, collaborative efforts seek to promote the talent of skilled immigrants and remove the barriers they face as they seek employment commensurate with their education and experience.

The three guiding principles underlining our work are:

1. The economy is strengthened by the contributions of skilled immigrants.
2. Engaging employers is necessary for labour market interventions to be successful.
3. Immigration programs and policy should consider long-term economic and social objectives because immigration is not a short-term or temporary phenomenon.

We undertake to:

- Work proactively with local and national employers to build their capacity to hire skilled immigrants.
- Build public awareness and support for positive change.
- Share learnings and programmes, and expand proven and successful local interventions.
- Explore new solutions/innovations in collaboration with other stakeholders.
- Identify and propose policy options to address the systemic barriers facing skilled immigrants seeking to enter the labour market.
- Work in partnership with all levels of government and other stakeholders to implement the range of policies, programs and initiatives that further the integration of skilled immigrants into the labour market.

Integrating skilled immigrants into the local labour market ensures a stronger and more inclusive Canada with vibrant and prosperous communities.