

Dear Prime Minister,

On behalf of the board and staff of Maytree, congratulations on your re-election as Prime Minister. We extend our best wishes to you and your government.

Maytree is a private charitable foundation that promotes equity and prosperity through leadership building.

As you know, a well-managed immigration system is the cornerstone of an effective economic policy. Immigration fills gaps in the labour market, increases trade, generates investment and strengthens our population. If our country slips into a recession, Canada will need a robust immigration system that can withstand new challenges and guide us toward prosperity.

In your first term, you negotiated a historic deal with the Ontario government which enhanced funding for settlement services for newcomers, and you put long-simmering issues like the application backlog on the political agenda. You created the Foreign Credential Referral Office and experimented with efforts to provide information about Canada to skilled immigrants prior to their arrival. Your government also took a number of steps to meet the pressing short-term labour market needs of employers.

It was important to address these immediate concerns. In your second term, Maytree encourages you to turn your attention to Canada's long-term economic needs. We encourage you to:

If our country slips into a recession, Canada will need a robust immigration system that can withstand new challenges and guide us toward prosperity.

- modernize the Skilled Worker Program and keep it as the cornerstone of our skills recruitment strategy;
- invest in initiatives that provide opportunities for immigrants to access the labour market directly; and
- evaluate and adjust the newer experiments in immigration such as Provincial Nominee Programs, the Canadian Experience Class and the Temporary Foreign Worker Program to ensure that we reap both short-term and long-term benefits.

Modernize the Skilled Worker Class

Canada's immigration policies must ensure that our country is the residence of choice for skilled immigrants from around the world. Our economy thrives on it and our reputation on the world stage as a leader in diversity depends on it.

The Skilled Worker Program is the cornerstone of Canada's immigration system because it is the only program that allows the federal government to choose future citizens based on their potential to contribute to economic growth. The principal applicants of this class are selected on the basis of their skills and experience. They are chosen for their ability to successfully integrate into Canada's knowledge-based economy over the long-term, and their commitment to make Canada their permanent home.

Alarming, several reports point to a recent decline in the earnings of Skilled Workers relative to that of Canadian-born, and relative to previous cohorts of immigrants. A troubling number are unemployed, underemployed or living in poverty. Clearly, existing policies are precluding us from capitalizing on the talents we are recruiting from abroad.

We must improve the selection criteria in the Skilled Worker Class. At present, many Skilled Workers are arriving without the language skills to perform in their occupation of choice and they have few opportunities to be in touch with employers prior to arrival in Canada. And they are older than skilled immigrants arriving to our competitor countries like Australia. Many don't have family in Canada, leaving them without the social connections that ease settlement. High levels of education earned abroad are an important requirement, while international work experience has proven to be less important in the Canadian labour market.

We must change the selection criteria to allow us to attract younger workers and to give additional points to those who are going to work in high-demand occupations.

Since language knowledge is one of the most important indicators of labour market success in Canada, we must require mandatory language tests for Principal Applicants coming from non-English or non-French speaking countries.

Many Skilled Workers are arriving without the language skills to perform in their occupation of choice and they have few opportunities to be in touch with employers prior to arrival in Canada. And they are older than skilled immigrants arriving to our competitor countries.

And finally, additional points should be given to those immigrants who already have family members in Canada (including brothers and sisters). This will increase the likelihood that they remain in the country and have the supports and contacts they need to find employment.

We also require new systems to fast-track the road to employment. A searchable database of future Permanent Residents will allow employers to view the resumes of future immigrants (with the permission of the applicant). Once a job offer is made, the worker can quickly move through the application process. While this database could initially be designed for the principal applicants of the Skilled Worker Class, it could eventually be expanded to other potential immigrants and underemployed Permanent Residents already in Canada. Searching this list should be a pre-requisite for an employer seeking permission to recruit a temporary worker to ensure that those who intend to make Canada their permanent home are given priority over temporary workers.

The Skilled Worker Class should continue to be the cornerstone of the economic stream of our immigration program. This represents our best strategy to ensure long-term economic success. The number of Permanent Residents arriving under the Skilled Worker Class should not be reduced to

accommodate those arriving through Provincial Nominee Programs, the Canadian Experience Class, or as temporary workers.

Continue to invest in efforts that promote workplace integration

Changes to our selection criteria will undoubtedly improve the economic outcomes of skilled immigrant principal applicants. But they do not address some of the challenges faced by other immigrants destined for the labour market.

We propose the following three strategies:

Internships: Because immigrants' international work experience is unknown or unfamiliar, employers often demand Canadian work experience. Internships can provide immigrants with their first job in Canada, and can give employers an opportunity to test a newcomer's skills. Although internship programs are not widely available across Canada, 75-80% of interns who participate in programs like Career Bridge find full-time employment in their chosen careers.

Mentoring: While many immigrants to Canada have the education, experience and language skills needed to excel in the workforce, they lack social networks in their industry or occupation. For many, this means that they are not aware of job opportunities, and don't know how to find them. Mentoring is an effective way to address this particular challenge. Almost 80% of immigrants who participate in the Mentoring Partnership, an initiative of the Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council, find employment within three months of completing their mentoring relationship. Of these, 85% are working in their field.

Loans: Bridge training is short-term or part-time training which helps a newcomer adapt his or her work experience to the Canadian context. These types of programs, particularly those with workplace components, are very effective in addressing the underemployment of skilled immigrants, including those in regulated occupations. A recent evaluation of a loan program run by Maytree and Alterna found that of borrowers whose employment outcome is known, 73% found jobs in their target occupations. Over a 7-year period, only 6% of borrowers defaulted. Many of these individuals would not have qualified for loans through public lending instruments such as Canada Student Loans.

We recommend the creation of a national internship and mentoring program as well as a small loans program for bridge training.

Evaluate and Adjust the Experiments

Canada is a recognized leader in immigration policy, and over the past few years we have seen a flurry of experimentation and innovation. The Provincial Nominee Programs, the Temporary Foreign Worker Program, and most recently, the Canadian Experience Class, are significant examples. It is through these programs that we encourage settlement outside of Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver and experiment with new ways of selecting skilled immigrants.

These initiatives show incredible promise but they have been expanded in recent years without the benefit of a formal evaluation, and without a national policy framework in place. We must now build the mechanisms to capture and build on what works and what does not from these experiments.

Provincial Nominee Programs

Every province in Canada has developed a Provincial Nominee Program (PNP) which allows them to select immigrants who meet regional labour market needs. If nominated, immigrants can receive expedited permanent residence without meeting federal requirements under the point system. Each province determines its own criteria and selection process.

While PNPs serve an important purpose in a country as large and diverse as Canada, the number of people arriving through PNPs is growing without the benefit of common standards. This creates a situation where potential immigrants arriving to Canada are confronted

People around the world are more mobile than ever before. Highly skilled migrants can – and do – move from London to Paris to Dubai in search of opportunities, generating wealth, promoting trade and creating jobs.

with 10 provincial and one federal program – each with unique selection criteria, fees, application processes and timelines. This is confusing to both immigrants and visa officers.

The federal government should work with the provinces to develop common standards and evaluation criteria for Provincial Nominee Programs. The goal would be to establish baseline eligibility criteria, procedures and fees. This would ensure that all immigrants are treated fairly, without robbing the provinces of using creative ideas to attract immigrants to their jurisdictions. It would also facilitate immigration processing by visa posts.

Temporary Foreign Workers

People around the world are more mobile than ever before. Highly skilled migrants can – and do – move from London to Paris to Dubai in search of opportunities, generating wealth, promoting trade and creating jobs.

In your first term you made a number of changes to the Temporary Foreign Worker Program to encourage these high flyers to choose Canada. We need to attract such individuals, because we can reap short-term benefits for our economy through their skills and connections. In the long-term, we can encourage them to apply for permanent residence under the Canadian Experience Class (CEC).

You have also created a pilot program which allows employers to fill low-skilled or unskilled jobs with temporary foreign workers. Here we must ask you to proceed with caution.

While temporary foreign workers have the right to the same protections as other Canadians under provincial employment legislation, workers filling low or unskilled jobs may be vulnerable to abuse because of language barriers, lack of knowledge about their rights, ineligibility for settlement services, precarious immigration status in Canada which is dependent on their employer, and inadequate enforcement of employment legislation. Most low-skilled workers are not allowed to bring their families with them, thus creating further isolation. They are also not eligible for

proceeding to permanent residency status under the CEC, unlike highly skilled temporary foreign workers.

There is little guarantee that workers filling unskilled and low-skilled jobs will return home when their work permit expires. These workers will likely stay in Canada, working in the informal economy, limiting their opportunities to advance and compromising their integration into wider society. This is the experience of Europe with their low-skilled guest worker programs of the 60s and 70s. We need to prevent a situation where there are large numbers of undocumented workers and second-class residents living in Canada with no hope for permanent residency or citizenship.

We recommend that Canada extend access to services to temporary workers. If we continue to recruit foreign workers to fill low- or unskilled jobs as we are doing now through this pilot program, we should provide them with access to permanent resident status through the Canadian Experience Class.

There is little guarantee that workers filling unskilled and low-skilled jobs will return home when their work permit expires. These workers will likely stay in Canada, working in the informal economy, limiting their opportunities to advance and compromising their integration into wider society.

Canadian Experience Class

In 2008 your government created the Canadian Experience Class (CEC) which allows some temporary workers and foreign students to apply for permanent residence after two years in Canada. This policy makes good sense in terms of welcoming an excellent pool of immigrants.

It is particularly exciting as an opportunity to welcome young people who have been educated in Canada, and therefore would not have trouble getting their credentials recognized by Canadian employers. This program could increase the profile of Canadian universities and colleges on the world stage, and enhance the revenue-generating capacity of our public institutions.

But the CEC could also overwhelm our post-secondary education system. If would-be immigrants begin to see education in Canada as an easy route to permanent residency they may choose to apply to our universities and colleges rather than through our Skilled Worker Program. In Australia, where a similar policy has been implemented, the demand for post-secondary education by foreign students increased substantially.

Many of our post-secondary institutions are already at capacity and are likely not prepared to deal with increased enrolments. There is currently no guarantee the increased demand would not adversely affect Canadian and Permanent Resident students who wish to pursue post-secondary education.

We recommend you explore the implications of the student component of the CEC and monitor its implementation closely. Work with provinces, universities and colleges to ensure that access to, and the quality and affordability of our Canadian post secondary education is enhanced and not negatively impacted. If implemented well, the CEC could be a win-win for all.

Maytree will work with you

We see this collection of recommendations as the basis of a coherent and effective immigration policy. Given the importance of immigration to our economic well-being, we urge you to champion and implement these ideas.

Immigration is as surely a reflection of our values as Canadians, as our commitments to public health care and education. The ways in which we select and settle newcomers to Canada tell the world a great deal about what we think of ourselves and how we treat others. It is a true test of our national character.

While this letter has been focused on the economic benefits of immigration, an effective immigration program is one that balances Canada's economic, social and humanitarian goals. The numerical balance between the economic streams and the family and refugee streams should be maintained, as should our commitment to long-term integration and the acquisition of citizenship.

Immigration is as surely a reflection of our values as Canadians as our commitments to public health care and education. The ways in which we select and settle newcomers to Canada tell the world a great deal about what we think of ourselves and how we treat others. It is a true test of our national character.

We welcome the opportunity to work with you during your second term as Prime Minister to demonstrate to the world our country's commitment to a fair and prosperous society. We look forward to working with you to build a stronger Canada.

Sincerely,



Alan Broadbent, C.M.
Chairman



Ratna Omidvar
President

Summary of Recommendations

- Ensure that the Skilled Worker Class continues to be the cornerstone of the economic stream of our immigration program.
- Create a bias for success in the selection of Skilled Workers by reducing the number of points given for work experience, and giving more points to younger people, those with family connections, and those in in-demand occupations. Create mandatory language tests for applicants.
- Create a database of future Permanent Residents which would be searchable by employers.
- Invest in initiatives that lead directly to suitable employment for immigrants including a national internship and mentoring program as well as a small loans program for bridge training.
- Work with the provinces to develop common standards and evaluation criteria for Provincial Nominee Programs without robbing them of the flexibility to use creative ideas to attract immigrants to their jurisdictions.
- Extend access to services to temporary workers. If the pilot to recruit foreign workers to fill low- or unskilled jobs continues, provide these workers with access to permanent resident status through the Canadian Experience Class.
- Explore the implications of the student component of the CEC and monitor its implementation closely.
- Maintain the balance between the economic, family and refugee streams because an effective immigration program is one that balances Canada's economic, social and humanitarian goals.

About Maytree

Maytree invests in leaders to build a Canada that can benefit from the skills, experience and energy of all its people.

Our policy insights promote equity and prosperity.

Our programs and grants create diversity in the workplace, in the boardroom and in public office, changing the face of leadership in our country.

Maytree.

For Leaders. For Change.



For Leaders. For Change.

170 Bloor St. W. Suite 804
Toronto, ON M5S 1T9
www.maytree.com

You are receiving this letter because you are interested in good immigration policy for Canada.
