

# IMMIGRANT/EMPLOYER DIALOGUES

human capital and labour needs roundtable series



summary report

APRIL 2017

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# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Immigrant/Employer Dialogues came together through the efforts of many different people. Foremost, we wanted to thank all the **newcomers and employers** who attended these dialogues. Without their active and insightful participation, the dialogues would not have been as productive and beneficial as they were.

Thank you to the **Surrey Board of Trade**, specifically to Anita Huberman, who was instrumental in the planning process, and to Dr. Greg Thomas, who facilitated the dialogues.

We would also like to thank our key **promotion partners**: Immigrant Employment Council of BC (IEC-BC), BC Construction Association, Douglas College, WorkBC, ISSofBC, Association of International Medical Doctors of BC (AIMD BC), Iranian Engineers of BC Association, DIVERSEcity Community Resources Society, Applied Science Technologists & Technicians of BC (ASTTBC), Progressive Intercultural Services Society (PICS), and Surrey Libraries Library Champions.

Additional thanks to the Surrey LIP **project team**: Olga Shcherbyna (Surrey LIP, Project Coordinator), Aileen Murphy (Senior Social Planner, City of Surrey), Ashleigh Rajala (City of Surrey), Yu-Han (Linda) Chen (Surrey LIP, Project Assistant), and Veronica Reiss (Planning Technician, City of Surrey).

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Many employers in Surrey struggle to fill positions yet many skilled newcomers report difficulty in finding and retaining work. The Surrey LIP and the Surrey Board of Trade hosted a series of sector-specific Immigrant/Employer Dialogues in order to take an innovative approach to discuss these labour market challenges and brainstorm solutions.

**Four sessions** were held—**Construction, Manufacturing, Health Care, and Technology**—with various stakeholders at each table: immigrants and newcomers (30 attended), employers (40 attended), trade representatives, and sector support services (10 attended). Many issues specific to each sector were discussed, but several key themes emerged.

**Employers** generally stated that they are willing—and wanting—to hire and retain newcomers but lack the capacity to do so effectively. Difficulties with **credentials recognition**, and lack of knowledge of **Canadian workplace culture** were two significant reasons why.

**Newcomers** certainly share the frustrations over credentials recognition, as they generally feel a mismatch between the jobs they feel they are qualified for and the jobs available to them. They also expressed difficulty and confusion in navigating **fractured employment landscapes**. Additionally, there is a lack of awareness of employment support services and resources that might help with this navigation. The importance of **Canadian experience** was hotly debated.

**Proposed solutions** include **employer champions** newcomer job market issues, more **bridging programs** to address skill shortages, **connected service delivery**, conducting a **myth-busting campaign** about what “Canadian experience” actually means, sector-specific **job fairs** for newcomers, **online supports**, and improved **networking** opportunities.

An evaluation form was also handed out to all participants. The results were **overwhelmingly positive**. As nearly all respondent indicating that they would want to participate in similar events in the future.

The dialogues were attended by:

**40**

employers

**30**

newcomers

**10**

sector support services

# BACKGROUND

According to the Province of B.C.'s Labour Market Outlook, Surrey will likely have more than 8,000 unfilled positions between now and 2022, yet employers lack the capacity to recruit and train newcomers and a significant portion of newcomers face difficulties entering the labour market.

In March 2017, the Surrey LIP, in partnership with the Surrey Board of Trade organized and hosted a series of innovative sector-based Immigrant/Employer Dialogues to explore the opportunities and challenges of newcomer labour market integration in Surrey.

This series of dialogues was motivated by the LIP's commitment to the fulfillment of its five Strategic Directions, as laid out in Surrey's *Immigrant Integration Strategy*, specifically Strategic Direction 3: **Meaningful Employment**.

This direction envisions a Surrey with a vibrant economy where employers and businesses fully realize the benefits of immigration and where immigrants are economically integrated.

Previous research conducted by the LIP on Surrey's immigrant labour market indicated that, for **newcomers**, the main employment challenges are:

- They are over-optimistic about employment prospects due to their high standing in Canada's immigration point system, but once here, these opportunities are out of reach.
- They lack English language proficiency, especially with regards to workplace-specific language.
- They have difficulties gaining Canadian experience, which is highly valued by employers.
- They are not aware of existing employment programs and services.

- Canadian recruitment and hiring practices are often different from those in their countries of origin.
- They face difficulties in having their foreign credentials recognized.
- Entrepreneurs and the self-employed must work within new and often dramatically different systems.

Although **employers** agree that immigrants have good work ethics and the high potential to succeed, the following challenges were still identified:

- Many employers in Surrey are small- and medium-sized enterprises and lack the human resource capacity to recruit and train immigrants.
- They believe immigrants need to better understand company and business needs and adjust their experience to these local requirements.
- A significant proportion of employers in Surrey are in the industrial and transportation sectors, which are not a good fit for newcomers who have qualified for immigration under a points system that places a high value on education.

While these earlier findings are very important in understanding the larger landscape of newcomer labour market integration, they do not address the issues and opportunities in particular fields.

This need to better understand the landscape in certain industries—and to craft solutions that address these **sector-specific challenges**—was the main impetus for the Immigrant/Employer Dialogues.

# SUMMARY OF SECTOR-SPECIFIC DIALOGUES

Each roundtable included employers and newcomers from four sectors—**construction, manufacturing, health care,** and **technology**—and focused exclusively on challenges and opportunities in that area.

The sessions were attended not only by employers and newcomers, but also industry and employment services representatives, such as the BC Construction Association and from the Applied Science Technologists & Technicians of BC.

The main goals of the sessions were to:

- Identify the opportunities and challenges of the industry.
- Identify industry best practices.
- Brainstorm innovative labour solutions.
- Share success stories.
- Identify industry skill needs.
- Identify industry essential skills.

The following is an overview of the main themes that emerged from each session:

## CONSTRUCTION SECTOR DIALOGUE

One of the most significant challenges for employers in the construction sector is **finding labour**. There is a high turnover rate and lack of dependability within the industry, especially among labourers. This may provide a significant opportunity for newcomers, as employers expressed a strong willingness to hire newcomers, especially if they are reliable and are willing to stay with a company for some time.

Employers agreed that newcomers should be ready to **lower their expectations**. Industry practice is for an employee to generally enter at a lower level, prove oneself, and then move up. Moving up in an organization can happen very quickly, but there is a need to start “at the bottom and pay your dues.”

Newcomers are certainly aware that they may need to begin in an entry level labourer position—and are willing to do so. However, with significant experience and expertise from abroad (often a requirement of coming to Canada), they struggle to be considered for Canadian positions. They are unsure how to appropriately **showcase their skills** to potential employers.

There was also a lively discussion around the need for **better apprenticeship programs** and “on the ground” skills training. Apprenticeship programs in BC are significantly weaker than in other jurisdictions attendees were familiar with, and, while many newcomers had completed some kind of education related to the construction industry, this learning remained almost exclusively classroom-based and lacked a practical component.

Employers expressed a frustration with not being able to connect to job seekers in general, but especially newcomers. For these newcomers, the biggest obstacle to connecting to employers is difficulty in **understanding the system**. They are frustrated by being unable to discover what options are open to them.

Both employers and newcomers emphatically agreed that this gap between employers and newcomers needs to be bridged, but they are either unaware of or not accessing existing resources. Some solutions that were suggested for the sector were a **sector-specific job fair**, collaboration on improving and increasing awareness of these **bridging programs**, and **improved service delivery**. Combining several of these suggestions was the idea for a sector-specific job bank.



## MANUFACTURING SECTOR DIALOGUE

Many of the challenges identified in the manufacturing sector are similar to those discussed at the construction sector roundtable, including newcomers feeling over-qualified for the jobs available, and employers needing them to prove themselves at entry level positions. However, employers also noted that Canadian experience is not as important to them as the willingness to learn and grow with a company.

Both employers and newcomers agreed on issues regarding **essential skills** and **English language** proficiency. As **safety** is paramount for employers, they stated that it is necessary for their employees to be able to read and understand complicated technical data. Employers are willing, however, to expose newcomers to the Canadian work environment, for instance through **apprenticeships** or internships.

Both groups also expressed difficulty in finding each other. The employment field is fractured and non-cooperative. Although employers are looking for employees, newcomers are finding it **difficult to connect with employers** in person. Contributing to this is a significant **disconnect in employment services**, for instance, those offered through settlement organizations or WorkBC. Newcomers are often getting conflicting advice and that they are unsure which sources to trust.

Ultimately, there was agreement around potential solutions moving forward, and these include: improved **skills assessment** and **credential recognition**; Surrey-specific and sector-specific **job banks**; and **connected service delivery** to provide clear and reliable information about recruitment processes. Participants also agreed that more **bridging programs**, such as apprenticeships or internships, would greatly benefit the sector.

## HEALTH CARE SECTOR DIALOGUE

Of the four roundtables, the Health Care sector dialogue was perhaps the most difficult for participants. Newcomers expressed deep frustration at their inability to practice in Canada. They note a **systemic flaw** in the fact that their years of training and experience in another country count for very little in Canada. It is almost impossible to get certification without completing multiple years of further schooling in Canada. This is an unrealistic prospect for newcomers with families to support.

Some newcomers feel they have been deceived by Canadian authorities abroad, who led them to believe that they would be able to continue their medical profession once they arrived in Canada and that as “highly skilled immigrants,” their skill set would be valued and utilized. Compounding this is a distinct **lack of industry champions**: professionals willing to advocate for policy change.

Employers shared many of these frustrations, noting that while they are wanting to hire newcomers, their hands are tied by **regulations**. The health care system in BC is geared almost entirely to hiring recent, in-province graduates. With such a closed, tightly regulated system, Canada **lacks the innovation** seen in comparable countries such as Australia or the USA. For example, Canada does not allow post-doctorate fellowship positions to be filled by graduates from non-Canadian institutions.

It was noted that structural changes to both Canada’s immigration system and BC’s health care education system are needed to address structural problems. There was significant willingness to work together to **champion better policy outcomes**. In the interim, employers noted that some newcomers have been able to find positions in the health care sector peripheral to similar jobs they had held in another country, and have found employers willing to advocate on their behalf.

## TECHNOLOGY SECTOR DIALOGUE

Employers in the technology dialogue emphasized the pressures in their industry to outsource jobs due to high labour costs, **high industry competition**, and bureaucratic hurdles to bringing employees from abroad into Canada. It was also noted that many newcomer job seekers are interested in jobs with larger companies, whereas most of the tech companies in Surrey are small- to medium-sized. This makes **employee retention** difficult.

Newcomers noted the difficulty in having **credentials recognized** and suggested the need for standardization and/or a regulating body. They also noted that navigating the resources available to employment seekers is very challenging due to this lack of coordination. There are multiple competing agencies providing employment services and little clarity in an understanding about how best to apply for jobs.

The technology dialogue also saw a lively discussion about the need (or lack of need) for **“Canadian experience.”** Many skills in demand are the same around the world, which in many ways contributes to out-sourcing pressure. However, employers noted that, while industry-specific Canadian skills may not be necessary, an understanding of Canadian work and business culture is an asset in a new employee. A **myth-busting campaign** was suggested to bring this conversation about “Canadian experience” into a wider conversation.

All participants recognized that there are numerous existing supports and resources (including programs, funding and other opportunities) available to both newcomers and employers. The main recommendation for improving the sector was to implement a **higher degree of coordination and clarity** for employment services providers so that employers and newcomers alike can easily access these opportunities.

# EVALUATION & FEEDBACK

At the end of each session an evaluation form was handed out to all participants. The following is a brief overview of the feedback received from all sectors. (A sector-specific breakdown of responses can be found in Appendix C.)

The evaluation and feedback of the Immigrant/Employer Dialogues was overwhelmingly positive, suggesting a further need for similar events. This applied to all sector dialogues, but was especially true within the construction and manufacturing sector dialogues.

Nearly all participants in all four sessions indicated that they would be interested in participating in future similar events.

- 89% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that the session helped them to become more aware about immigrant challenges.
- 75% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that the session helped them to become more aware about employer challenges.
- 55% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that the session helped them to gain valuable insights into industry best practices.
- 72% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that the session lived up to their expectations.
- 89% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that they would like to be involved in future innovative bridging initiatives.

# APPENDIX A—Invitations

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## INVITATION

### CALL FOR TECHNOLOGY EMPLOYER CHAMPIONS **HUMAN CAPITAL & LABOUR NEEDS FOR THE TECHNOLOGY SECTOR**

Date Wednesday, March 29, 2017

Location Surrey Board of Trade (101-14439 104 Avenue, Surrey)

Time 8:00 - 10:00am

Admission Free - full breakfast will be served

You will be a part of meaningful dialogue with 10 employers and 10 immigrants/refugees on:

1. Opportunities and challenges of the Technology industry
2. Industry best practices
3. Innovative Labour Solutions
4. Success stories – share and inspire
5. Industry Skill needs
6. Industry Essential skills
7. Learn about Employer Resources to Hire Newcomers in Surrey

Free to attend – only the first 10 applicants will be registered.

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If you are an immigrant who is interested in learning more, call 604.592.7059. If you are interested in participating in this event please email to [SocialPlanning@surrey.ca](mailto:SocialPlanning@surrey.ca).

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## INVITATION

### CALL FOR MANUFACTURING EMPLOYER CHAMPIONS **HUMAN CAPITAL & LABOUR NEEDS FOR THE MANUFACTURING SECTOR**

Date Wednesday, March 22, 2017

Location Surrey Board of Trade (101-14439 104 Avenue, Surrey)

Time 8:00 - 10:00am

Admission Free - full breakfast will be served

You will be a part of meaningful dialogue with 10 employers and 10 immigrants/refugees on:

1. Opportunities and challenges of the Manufacturing industry
2. Industry best practices
3. Innovative Labour Solutions
4. Success stories – share and inspire
5. Industry Skill needs
6. Industry Essential skills
7. Learn about Employer Resources to Hire Newcomers in Surrey

Free to attend – only the first 10 applicants will be registered.

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## INVITATION

### CALL FOR IMMIGRANTS/REFUGEES HUMAN CAPITAL & LABOUR NEEDS FOR THE MANUFACTURING SECTOR

Date Wednesday, March 22, 2017

Location Surrey Board of Trade (101-14439 104 Avenue, Surrey)

Time 8:00 - 10:00am

Admission Free - full breakfast will be served

You will be a part of meaningful dialogue with 10 employers and learn about:

1. Opportunities and challenges of the Manufacturing industry
2. Industry best practices
3. Innovative Labour Solutions
4. Success stories – share and inspire
5. Industry Skill needs
6. Industry Essential skills

Free to attend – only the first 10 applicants will be registered.

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## INVITATION

### CALL FOR CONSTRUCTION EMPLOYER CHAMPIONS HUMAN CAPITAL & LABOUR NEEDS FOR THE CONSTRUCTION SECTOR

Date Friday, March 17, 2017

Location Surrey Board of Trade (101-14439 104 Avenue, Surrey)

Time 8:00 - 10:00am

Admission Free - full breakfast will be served

You will be a part of meaningful dialogue with 10 employers and 10 immigrants/refugees on:

1. Opportunities and challenges of the Construction industry
2. Industry best practices
3. Innovative Labour Solutions
4. Success stories – share and inspire
5. Industry Skill needs
6. Industry Essential skills
7. Learn about Employer Resources to Hire Newcomers in Surrey

Free to attend – only the first 10 applicants will be registered.

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## INVITATION

### CALL FOR IMMIGRANTS/REFUGEES HUMAN CAPITAL & LABOUR NEEDS FOR THE CONSTRUCTION SECTOR

Date Friday, March 17, 2017

Location Surrey Board of Trade (101-14439 104 Avenue, Surrey)

Time 8:00 - 10:00am

Admission Free - full breakfast will be served

You will be a part of meaningful dialogue with 10 employers and learn about:

1. Opportunities and challenges of the Construction industry
2. Industry best practices
3. Innovative Labour Solutions
4. Success stories – share and inspire
5. Industry Skill needs
6. Industry Essential skills

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INVITATION

CALL FOR HEALTH CARE EMPLOYER CHAMPIONS  
**HUMAN CAPITAL & LABOUR NEEDS  
FOR THE HEALTH CARE SECTOR**

Date Friday, March 24, 2017

Location Surrey Board of Trade (101-14439 104 Avenue, Surrey)

Time 8:00 - 10:00am

Admission Free - full breakfast will be served

You will be a part of meaningful dialogue with 10 employers and 10 immigrants/refugees on:

1. Opportunities and challenges of the Health Care industry
2. Industry best practices
3. Innovative Labour Solutions
4. Success stories – share and inspire
5. Industry Skill needs
6. Industry Essential skills
7. Learn about Employer Resources to Hire Newcomers in Surrey

Free to attend – only the first 10 applicants will be registered.

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## INVITATION

### CALL FOR IMMIGRANTS/REFUGEES HUMAN CAPITAL & LABOUR NEEDS FOR THE HEALTH CARE SECTOR

Date Friday, March 24, 2017

Location Surrey Board of Trade (101-14439 104 Avenue, Surrey)

Time 8:00 - 10:00am

Admission Free - full breakfast will be served

You will be a part of meaningful dialogue with 10 employers and learn about:

1. Opportunities and challenges of the Health Care industry
2. Industry best practices
3. Innovative Labour Solutions
4. Success stories – share and inspire
5. Industry Skill needs
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## APPENDIX B—Attendance

Session	Employers	Immigrants	Sector Support	Total in Attendance
Construction	13	5	3	21
Manufacturing	9	5	1	15
Health	9	10	2	21
Technology	10	10	4	24
<b>Total</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>10</b>	

## APPENDIX C—*Feedback Responses*

Session helped me to become more aware about immigrant challenges specific to this sector.

Choice	Construction	Manufacturing	Health Care	Technology	Total All
Strongly agree	8	2	6	4	20
Agree	8	8	9	12	37
Somewhat Disagree	0	0	1	4	5
Strongly disagree	0	0	2	0	0
N/A	0	0	0	0	0
Number of Respondents:	16	10	18	20	64

Session helped me to become more aware about employer challenges specific to this sector.

Choice	Construction	Manufacturing	Health Care	Technology	Total All
Strongly agree	8	3	4	2	17
Agree	8	6	9	8	31
Somewhat Disagree	0	0	5	9	14
Strongly disagree	0	0	0	0	0
N/A	0	1	0	1	2
Number of Respondents:	16	10	18	20	64

Session helped me gain valuable insights into industry best practices.

Choice	Construction	Manufacturing	Health Care	Technology	Total All
Strongly agree	3	2	3	2	10
Agree	9	6	4	6	25
Somewhat Disagree	4	2	8	10	24
Strongly disagree	0	0	2	1	3
N/A	0	0	1	1	2
Number of Respondents:	16	10	18	20	64

This session lived up to my expectations.

Choice	Construction	Manufacturing	Health Care	Technology	Total All
Strongly agree	6	4	6	4	20
Partially Agree	9	4	3	10	26
Neutral	1	2	8	6	17
Disagree	0	0	1	0	1
N/A	0	0	0	0	0
Number of Respondents:	16	10	18	20	64

I would like to be involved in future innovative bridging initiatives for this sector.

Choice	Construction	Manufacturing	Health Care	Technology	Total All
Strongly agree	14	6	12	9	41
Partially Agree	2	1	5	7	15
Neutral	0	2	0	3	5
Disagree	0	1	0	0	1
N/A	0	0	1	0	1
Number of Respondents:	16	10	18	19	63