

Recent Immigrant Talent & COVID Economic Recovery On the North Shore

A New North Shore survey points to how recent immigrant talent can help address workforce shortages during COVID-19 recovery efforts.

We are entering an important period of economic recovery and re-building following the COVID-19 pandemic. However, this period of stabilization and new growth will not benefit all workers equally; research¹ shows that recent immigrants will experience disproportionately larger challenges in seeking labour market attachment. At the same time, there are growing opportunities for employers to build bridges and mutually beneficial relationships with skilled immigrant talent.

These circumstances present a significant opportunity for employers to build new strategies and promising practices for integrating recent immigrants into their workforces. In late 2021, the North Shore Immigrant Inclusion Partnership (NSIIP) conducted a survey with more than 40 North Shore employers to identify opportunities to do just that. We gathered data to map and understand:

- Are North Shore employers facing labour and skills shortages?
- How are employers recruiting new workers and building their talent pool?
- Is tapping recent immigrant talent an intentional part of employers' recruitment strategies? Why or why not?

The Employers and How They See It

The participating employers represent the City of North Vancouver, District of North Vancouver, Squamish Nation lands, and the District of West Vancouver. They include for-profit, government, and not-for-profit employers, ranging in size from <5 to 500+ employees. They operate in sectors including government, education, social services, construction, arts and culture, recreation, immigration and settlement, hospitality, law enforcement, events planning, and more.

Are North Shore employers facing workforce, skills and staffing shortages?

- **The answer is yes:** employers are facing significant shortages, both as a direct result of COVID-19, and more generally:
 - ▶ **47%** of employers surveyed say their workforce has decreased in size as a direct result of COVID-19
 - ▶ In addition to the impact of COVID-19 on workforce size, **67%** report experiencing an ongoing skills/staffing shortage
- These impacts are felt equally among for-profit, government, and not-for-profit employers on the North Shore.

¹ Ivanova, Iglia. (2021). Inequality, employment and COVID-19: Priorities for fostering an inclusive recovery in BC. Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. https://policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/BC%20Office/2021/07/ccpa-bc_inequality-Employment-COVID_summary.pdf; OECD. (2020). What is the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on immigrants and their children? <https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/what-is-the-impact-of-the-covid-19-pandemic-on-immigrants-and-their-children-e7cbb7de/>

- For employers, COVID-19 has had a unique impact on employee mental health, business bottom lines, and the viability of in-person staff positions. The pandemic also prompted some workers to retire, change jobs, or pursue further education, creating more sector vacancies and skills shortages.
- **These shortages pose a serious challenge for employers:** more than **80%** of employers surveyed believe the labour shortages they are experiencing pose a problem for their business.

What are North Shore employers' strategies for responding to the labour shortage?

- **Employers are going to hire more workers:** of the employers surveyed that report currently experiencing a labour shortage, **89%** indicate that they are actively seeking to hire new employees:
 - ▶ **56%** will hire new part-time employees
 - ▶ **52%** will hire new full-time employees
 - ▶ **37%** will hire new temporary contract staff
- **30%** say they are planning to recall/re-hire laid-off employees through a combination with hiring new full-time, part-time, or contract employees and staff.

Where are the greatest recruiting challenges faced by North Shore employers?

Employers report the most difficulty in hiring **office and/or administrative professionals** and recruiting for **construction and skilled trades** workers.

Closely following are management professionals, community and/or social service workers, and retail and/or hospitality workers.

Hiring for part-time, casual or split-shift work is also identified as very challenging.

What strategies are North Shore employers using to recruit new employees?

Traditional hiring methods remain dominant: the most commonly reported strategies used by North Shore employer respondents are *referrals from colleagues, employees and friends (word of mouth)*; and *external hiring websites (e.g. Indeed)*—both reported by **70%** of respondents. Closely following are *posts on company websites (65%)* and *social media (e.g. LinkedIn, Facebook) (68%)*.

The least common strategies are *collaboration with a community or non-profit organization*; *paid advertisements in local newspapers or magazines*; and *government-funded employment services (e.g. WorkBC Employment Services Centre)*.

KEY FINDING

COVID-19 has exacerbated labour and skills shortages for North Shore employers. Many employers will be applying tried-and-true recruitment & hiring methods in order to attract new workers and support business recovery.

Where does recent immigrant talent fit in to the COVID economic recovery equation on the North Shore?

Many employers hire recent immigrants—and report the benefits of doing so.

- **62%** of employers report having experience employing recent immigrants
- In for-profit and government organizations, more employers have experience employing recent immigrants than not; however, not-for-profit organizations report more limited experience employing recent immigrants.

- **69%** of employers agree that their organization has benefitted from recent immigrants' skills and experiences, and that their organization's workplace culture has been enriched by recent immigrant employees.
- Employers estimate that an average of **19%** of their workforce is comprised of recent immigrants.

But are employers actively looking for recent immigrants to fill job vacancies?

- **Usually not:** most (**64%**) employers with some experience employing recent immigrants do not proactively seek them out when filling job vacancies.
- The minority of employers that do proactively seek out recent immigrants to fill job vacancies, overwhelmingly (**86%**) indicate they use the same strategies as recruiting non-immigrant employees.

Yet, 89% of respondents agree that they are open to hiring recent immigrants. What are the barriers?

- **Most employers are unsure about whether recent immigrants have the required skills to meet organization needs:** only **18%** of respondents strongly agree that there are recent immigrants in the North Shore with skills directly applicable to their organization.

- ▶ The most common skills of concern for employers are English language skills, soft skills (e.g. communication skills), and specific Canadian credentials and qualifications (e.g. those needed for skilled trades)

- **Most respondents agree: they aren't sure how to find, attract and retain recent immigrant talent: 54%** feel they lack information on how to access the recent immigrant talent pool. And while **89%** of employers are open to hiring recent immigrant talent, only **64%** report having policies and procedures in place to support the hiring and retention of those workers.

KEY FINDING

Despite recognizing the need to hire workers, many North Shore employers face barriers to hiring immigrant talent as a key strategy for supporting business success. Uncertainty remains about the availability of recent immigrants with the appropriate skills, and how to effectively attract, hire and retain this talent pool.

ABOUT NSIIP

North Shore Immigrant Inclusion Partnership is a coalition of community agencies and institutions focused on improving the settlement outcomes of new immigrants to the North Shore. NSIIP's mission is to work collaboratively with organizations and residents across North and West Vancouver to foster inclusive, equitable communities and ensure all immigrants have opportunities to fully participate in economic, social, and civic aspects of community life.



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