

IMMIGRATION, SKILLS SHORTAGES AND THE NORTH SHORE

What workers are needed and where will they come from? The results of an employer survey help answer some questions while raising others.

Canada and, especially, British Columbia have always relied on immigration to stock a labour market that grows much faster than natural population increases can supply.

There is no reason to expect that situation to change. B.C.'s population is aging and the number of new entrants to the labour market is decreasing. Of 221 countries, Canada is ranked as having the 186th lowest birth rate—lower than China, the U.S., Australia or the U.K.

Meanwhile, labour needs in B.C. appear to have entered an era of steady, moderately robust growth. During the 10-year period that began in 2012, more than one million job openings were projected by the provincial government's 2022 Labour Market Outlook, almost two-thirds of those in Metro Vancouver. And who will fill those job openings? It is estimated that one-third will be filled by immigrants.

The facts and figures are certainly real, but how do they square with the experience of North Shore employers? Are they finding it difficult to fill the positions that are necessary for economic growth? And if they are, what role do immigrants play? To help answer some of these questions, in early 2015, the North Shore Immigrant Inclusion Partnership surveyed 115 North Shore-based employers.

To see the results turn the page. ➔

QUESTIONS IN SEARCH OF ANSWERS



Is there a skills shortage on the North Shore?



What is the outlook for the future — is it better or worse?



What methods of recruitment are proving successful?



What is the role of immigrants and immigration?



What solutions would employers most like to see?

THE EMPLOYERS AND HOW THEY SEE IT

The 115 employer responses were dispersed across all three North Shore municipalities and reflected a wide variety of business or organization size, all situated within five major employment sectors: construction, retail trade, healthcare and social services, professional, scientific and technical services, and educational services.



Is There A Current Skills Shortage?

Almost half of the employers surveyed say “yes.”

- **41%** reported a moderate or severe shortage of skilled workers.
- **One-third** said skill shortages were not an issue.
- Results were very similar for private and public sector employers.



Looking Forward, Where Might Shortages Occur?

Across all sectors, agree the employers, but the construction industry is most concerned.

- Of the 46 employers reporting a moderate or severe skills shortage, **74%** anticipated probable or very probable shortages in the future.
- Among 30 employers reporting minor skills shortages, **44%** anticipated shortages.
- Among 37 employers reporting no skills shortage, only **16%** anticipated shortages.
- The construction industry is most worried. Fully **90%** of respondents anticipate probable or very probable shortages.
- Other sectors with significant numbers anticipating probable or very probable shortages included professional and scientific services (**57%**), education (**50%**), and retail trade and healthcare and social assistance (**33%**).
- Small businesses (**37%**) were less likely to anticipate a skills shortage than medium or large businesses (both **59%**). Government organizations foresee few problems.



Where Are Shortages Concentrated?

The situation is most severe in the construction industry, with retail trades not far behind.

- **50%** of construction industry employers reported a severe shortage, compared to none in the education sector.
- Moderate or severe shortages were reported by **44%** in retail trade, **20%** in healthcare and social assistance, **14%** in the professional, scientific and technical services sector, and **13%** in education.
- Smaller employers were slightly more likely than medium or large employers to report a shortage.
- The occupations most difficult to recruit for were reported as skilled trades (**26%**), lower-skilled trades (**25%**), administrative support (**23%**), project management (**21%**) and information technology (**18%**).
- Employers reporting moderate or severe problems identified the same occupations but in correspondingly larger proportions.



Recruitment: Who's Doing What?

Technology marches on, but employers still rely most on time-honoured techniques.

- By far the most common recruitment technique identified was a referral from colleagues, employees or friends, at **78%**.
- Approximately **half** of employers used websites to recruit workers.
- Social media is also a common practice used by the employers surveyed, at **37%**.
- Immigrant targeted methods are rarely employed, whether government-funded employment services (**11%**), immigrant serving agencies (**9%**), recruitment abroad (**5%**), or federal immigration programs (**5%**).
- As expected methods varied significantly according to business size, with smaller employers much more likely to rely on referrals and less likely to employ other means.



What Are The Barriers to Hiring Immigrants?

Language and soft skills are a worry, and programs that would help immigrants break into the workplace are mostly lacking.

- About **40%** of employers reported concerns that immigrant applicants will not have the language skills and soft skills (e.g. communication skills) to do the job. Responses varied little regardless of type of company, size of company and level of current and anticipated skills shortage. The proportion was almost **50%** among employers that hired at least one immigrant within the past five years.
- **25%** reported no barriers to recruiting and hiring immigrants.
- Almost **half** of those surveyed do not support programs such as practicums that would make it possible for immigrants to experience Canadian workplace culture.



Where Do Immigrants Fit In

Employers are hiring them, but are they looking for them?

- **62%** of employers surveyed have hired at least one immigrant within the past five years.
- Those experiencing or anticipating a skills shortage varied little from those that are not.
- In four of the sectors, between **20** and **30%** of companies have not hired an immigrant in the past five years — but in scientific, professional and technical services, the proportion rose to **43%**.
- Over **two-thirds** of employers surveyed reported hiring recent immigrants through the same process as other staff.
- Referrals from existing staff who are recent immigrants was reported by **40%**.
- **38%** hired recent immigrants who approached them directly.
- Only **20%** advertised in a newspaper, magazine or website targeted at an immigrant or ethnic community.
- Less than **10%** reported hiring recent immigrants through an immigrant targeted program or service: a community or non-profit organization (**8%**), an immigrant serving agency (**4%**) or government program/employment consultant (**2%**).
- Results varied little when filtered for companies with a record of hiring immigrants.

To see employers' ideas for solutions turn the page. →

IMMIGRANTS AND THE NORTH SHORE

Proportionate to population, Canada is home to more immigrants than any other country except Australia. Among cities, Metro Vancouver's proportion of **40%** is second to only Toronto's. The three North Shore communities are well above the national average and close to the regional average at **34.5%**. Overall, immigrants are represented in the labour force in about the same proportion as the Canadian-born population, and recent immigrants are much more likely to be employed than either.



What Can be Done? What Should Be Done?

Employers were asked for their opinions on how immigrants could best be incorporated into North Shore labour markets. In descending order these were the actions most frequently identified.



Ensure that ads, job fairs, referrals and other marketing methods are targeted at the appropriate talent pool.



Partner with settlement services and government programs to access new immigrants.



Provide more or better employment services for new immigrants to understand Canadian workplace culture and to prepare job application packages.



Provide more or better education and training for employers to understand benefits of hiring immigrants and how to connect with new immigrants.



Provide more or better language training and services for new immigrants.



Provide more mentoring programs or job shadowing programs to connect newcomers with employers.



Provide screening support for employers.



Provide assistance with foreign credential assessment and recognition.



Simplify immigration and work permit process.



Help newcomers connect with unions or regulated occupations.

About the North Shore Immigration Inclusion Partnership

The NSIIP is a coalition of some two dozen community agencies and institutions focused on improving the settlement outcomes of new immigrants on the North Shore. It is part of a national initiative called

Local Immigration Partnerships (LIPs), led by Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC), which aims to foster local engagement of organizations that offer services to new immigrants, to support

community-level research and planning, and to improve the coordination of services that help immigrants settle and integrate.

In November 2014, the NSIIP began a Community Research and Consultation process, which includes four components: Community Service Provider Consultation, Employer Consultations

and Online Survey, Immigrant Focus Groups and Community Leader Consultations. The research and consultation work emerging from this process, including the results from the Employer Survey, will be used to inform the development of a Local Immigration Strategic Plan for the North Shore and guide the work of the NSIIP from 2016-2021.