

Table of Contents

The Greater Toronto Area	4
Executive Summary	5
Introduction	6
The Purpose of This Research Study	6
Methodology and Rationale	6
Review of Relevant Literature	6
Bridging Programs	8
Other Relevant Stakeholders Addressing IEP's Successful Integration into the Workforce	9
Findings and Analysis	10
Theme 1 — Skills sets and Knowledge of Front-line Staff	10
Theme 2 — Technical Language and Communication Skills	11
Theme 3 — Providers	12
Theme 4 — Employer Engagement	12
Theme 5 — Employment Agencies and Post-secondary Institutions	13
Theme 6 — Post-Employment Support	14
Theme 7 — Differences Between Sectors	14
Theme 8 — Leadership and Management Support	14
Theme 9 — The Model is Key	15
Theme 10 — Partnerships	16
Theme 11 — Collaboration/Competition	16
Theme 12 — Common Components	16
Lessons Learned and Recommendations	18
Conclusions	18
Endnotes	21
References	22
Appendices	23

The Greater Toronto Area

...is one of Canada's primary destinations for newcomers. International immigrants are the most significant source of migration to the area. In 2012, the GTA expects to welcome close to 85,000 newcomers: that number is predicted to grow to 110,000 by 2015. Newcomers are the source of the majority of new entrants to the labour force. Policies and practices that ease newcomers' labour market integration are crucial to future economic growth and prosperity. Ontario's strong, diversified economy attracts many immigrants.

In 2009, Ontario welcomed 42.4 per cent of all immigrants to Canada and 51.3 per cent of these were classified as economic immigrants. Toronto and surrounding areas became home to 32.8 per cent of these immigrants.¹ The chief source countries for those coming to Toronto were China, India and the Philippines.² Forty-three per cent of this new immigrant population was highly educated; 29.8 per cent had a Bachelor's degree, 11.6 per cent a Master's degree and 2.2 per cent a Doctorate degree.³

Recent data suggests Ontario's labour market has stopped deteriorating.⁴ Anticipated growth in green construction, the financial services sector and the professional, scientific and technical services sector in general as well as in the information, communications technology sector (ICT) will require highly qualified workers to meet market demand.⁵

In order to stay competitive globally, Ontario has recognized the need for economic restructuring, placing more emphasis on education and skills training. The province has strengthened investments in postsecondary education and in employment and training programs to help Ontarians, including newcomers to the province, gain skills, acquire credentials and find work in the knowledge economy. Sector specific bridge training programs are an important element of Ontario's strategy to capitalize on the abilities of highly educated newcomers.

Executive Summary

As labour shortages emerge in specific sectors and/or in relation to skills sets, the need to find successful policies and practices to move new immigrants into the labour force has placed a priority on programs addressing successful integration. Bridge training programs are intended to help qualified internationally trained and/or educated individuals move quickly into the labour market in Canada, attaching them to positions that match their skills, education, qualifications and professional credentials. The intent of this research was to identify best or promising practices used in sector-specific bridging programs to help Internationally Educated Professionals (IEPs) attain commensurate employment.

These programs are primarily funded by government and provided by non-profit employment/training service delivery agencies or academic institutions. They provide training and Canadian workplace experience without duplicating what IEPs learned in their country of origin. Bridging programs vary both by sector and program delivery model.

The research consists of a brief literature review and interviews with staff managing or providing bridging programs. In addition, interviews were conducted with stakeholders such as the Maytree Foundation and the Toronto Regional Immigrant Employment Council. These organizations, while not providing direct services, are important contributors to the work of attaching highly qualified newcomers to appropriate employment.

The best or promising practices found through this research fall into the following categories:

1. Employer engagement — programs that engage or involve employers in all aspects of program delivery are successfully attaching newcomers to commensurate employment.
2. Networking and collaboration — effective networking and high levels of collaboration among and between agencies and other stakeholders improve programs' success.
3. Staff skills and training — staff who are experienced in and knowledgeable about the specific sector the program targets are central to ensuring that bridging program is meeting client needs.
4. Program models — those that have a combination of mentoring, coaching, practicum or internship and employer engagement are the most successful.

ABOUT THE TORONTO WORKFORCE INNOVATION GROUP

The Toronto Workforce Innovation Group conducts research, disseminates information and convenes stakeholders to address workforce development trends, gaps and opportunities in Toronto. Incorporated in 1998 as the Toronto Training Board, the organization changed names in 2009 to better reflect the innovative research and consultations that comprise our work. Among similar organizations in Toronto, our multi-stakeholder approach is unique; we work on issues across many sectors and engage stakeholders from a variety of perspectives. Our research is an ongoing and continuous process which includes our monthly electronic bulletin, *On Topic*.

TWIG researches and analyzes workforce development trends, skills shortages and training opportunities in Toronto and acts as a resource to inform stakeholders (community groups, trainers and educators, labour, employers, governments and media) about Toronto workforce development issues.

Toronto Workforce Innovation Group is governed by a volunteer Board of Directors and is one of 25 Workforce Planning Boards across Ontario funded by the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU). We thank our sponsor, the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities for their support in publishing this report and our community for the generous participation in the research. The report does not reflect the view of the sponsors and is solely the work of the Toronto Workforce Innovation Group.

Introduction

The intent of this research project was to identify promising practices and lessons learned in meeting the needs of IEPs to attain employment that matches their skills, experience and professional credentials. Specific objectives were:

- To better understand what practices are working well in terms of Toronto employment services and their staff in providing sector specific bridging programs that meet the needs of IEPs;
- To identify what skill set is most appropriate for front-line workers in employment services in meeting the needs of IEPs;
- To understand in what manner sector specific bridging programs might provide additional support to highly skilled IEPs who want to find work in Canada.

THE PURPOSE OF THIS RESEARCH STUDY

This study examined Toronto employment services and their staff expertise, preparation and practice in delivering sector specific bridging programs. The intent of the research was to clarify the practices that are working well in terms of meeting the needs of highly skilled IEPs so they attain appropriate employment. The study focuses on information gathered from organizational and staff perspectives, with an emphasis on front-line workers and their abilities to deliver bridging programs. This study complements other research studies that have explored the perspective of employers and IEPs themselves on successful integration into the Canadian workforce.

METHODOLOGY AND RATIONALE

The study took a city-wide approach to identifying best or promising practices related to the staff and services involved in meeting commensurate employment outcomes for Internationally Educated Professionals. Interviews were conducted with staff working in community employment services, community colleges and universities in delivering services targeted specifically at IEPs in Toronto.

The first stage consisted of a review of relevant documentation pertaining to the labour market in Canada and specifically Ontario and the Toronto area relative to economic immigrants. The review examined sector-specific bridging programs in the Toronto area and some of the more relevant research already conducted on programs addressing IEPs' needs and their integration into the Canadian workforce, and provided essential background information to this study.

Thirty-five service providers and related stakeholders for IEP programs and services were consulted in the research process in the second stage. Front-line staff provided the majority of data. Programs and services with varying histories were included as were several original programs currently in post-pilot phases, together with new or proposed programs. The majority of participants spoke knowledgeably about program enhancements, lessons learned and best practices. The sample included representatives from a range of bridging programs tasked with connecting IEPs with commensurate employment in the public and private sectors.

REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

The importance and benefits of integrating IEPs into the workplace is well recognized. Due to labour shortages and changing labour trends, there is some urgency to integrating IEPs successfully and there is an abundance of supportive data and research on successful strategies for their integration. Studies indicate that Canada's immigration policy brings high levels of professional talent to this country. For example, the Conference Board of Canada⁶ noted that the Canadian private sector has

the opportunity to benefit from adding global talent to their teams.

“With strong competition for top talent among Canadian businesses, those organizations that choose to utilize what immigrants have to offer will reap the rewards.”⁷

Colleges Ontario⁸ found that immigrants are a wise investment for the sustainability, stability, and growth of businesses. Participants in the Public Policy Forum⁹ identified some of the advantages of hiring immigrants as language skills, the ability to generate new ideas, and expansion to multicultural markets.

The challenges employers face in integrating new immigrants include communication and language issues, recognition of foreign work experience combined with lack of Canadian experience.¹⁰ These challenges mainly affect small to medium-sized corporations and appear to be higher in Toronto as compared to other parts of Ontario and to other provinces. A 2009 study by Progressive Career Planning Institute (PCPI) on strategies for integrating IEPs in the Canadian labour force found that employers were *“favourable to hiring IEPs but only a minority of firms have put into place tangible, IEP-friendly policies and programs.”*¹¹ Implementing and practising these strategies will allow employers to understand, leverage or benefit from the value that IEPs bring to the Canadian industry.

Toronto Immigrant Employment Data Initiative (TIEDI) at York University assists community agencies whose mandate includes the better integration of immigrants into Toronto’s labour force and publishes a monthly report on various aspects of successful integration.¹² They also publish reports on specific aspects of immigrant access to the labour market such as successful integration, employment outcomes and salaries.

On a yearly basis PCPI conducts research in this area and shares it with relevant stakeholders at the annual IEP conference. The 2009 PCPI study found that mentoring was one of the most desired integration strategies among employers. The 2011 Employers’ and IEPs’ Perspectives was a study initiated by PCPI to identify the practical strategies that IEPs use to integrate successfully into the workplace in the Toronto region. This study outlined strategies and best practices used by employers and successful IEPs to enhance retention. In 2012, the focus was on IEPs’ experiences and stakeholders’ views on workforce integration.

Other research examined key employer and IEP strategies. Exemplary employer strategies include:

1. Training in diversity management for employers and management to increase cultural competency and inclusivity;
2. Providing coaching and support for IEPs by linking them with individuals who have the knowledge and experience to help them understand the workplace;
3. Creating an inclusive work environment that treats all employees equally and promotes cultural understanding;
4. Supporting the career and professional development of IEPs by assisting them to obtain their Canadian professional credentials and licenses;
5. Mentoring in the workplace.

Strategies that have helped IEPs to be successful in the Canadian workplace include:

1. Networking with colleagues in the workplace to gain a better understanding of the Canadian culture and the Canadian workplace;
2. Improving English and communication skills by drawing on all resources available, including co-workers, managers, and online resources;
3. Attending workplace or professional development sessions that support integration and IEP retention.
4. Providing a thorough orientation to IEPs is effective for their success in the workplace.

According to Hire Immigrants Ottawa, a thorough orientation goes beyond providing an overview of policies and procedures and includes “*more specific behaviours than might be appropriate when we all share a similar cultural background.*”¹³

5. Providing English language and/or communication skills training is another strategy that employers may use to decrease the language and communication barriers for IEPs.

BRIDGING PROGRAMS

According to Ontario’s Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration (MCI), current employment and skills training priorities are based on the following assumptions for changing labour market conditions in Ontario:

1. Unemployment is high and could remain a challenge for the next few years as significant structural changes take place in the Ontario economy;
2. An aging population and increasing outflow from the labour force (e.g. retirees from the baby-boom cohort) will result in labour force growth that is increasingly dependent on immigration;
3. Newcomers with international qualifications are facing delays and barriers to speedy credential recognition; and
4. Potential skills shortages will emerge in new areas of the economy (e.g. health technology, green energy).

Bridge training programs are funded to help qualified internationally educated individuals move quickly into the labour market in Ontario. These programs, addressing a variety of industries and professions, assess IEP’s existing skills and competencies as compared to Ontario employer expectations. They provide training and Canadian workplace experience without duplicating what IEPs learned in their own countries. Bridging programs vary both by sector and program delivery. Some programs offer complementary mentoring opportunities with established professionals to help the IEP become certified or registered in his/her field, while others include a job placement or internship opportunity.

Although bridging programs vary, they can provide:

1. An assessment of IEP’s education and skills;
2. Clinical or workplace experience;
3. Skills training or targeted academic training programs;
4. Preparation for a license or certification examination;
5. Language training for the specific profession; and
6. Individual learning plans to identify any added training that might be needed.¹⁴

In the Toronto area, bridging programs are offered by both agencies and academic institutions. This includes academic institutions such as the University of Toronto, York University, Ryerson University, George Brown, Seneca and Humber College. The agencies include ACCES, JVS Toronto, Microskills, Skills for Change, Toronto Region Conservation Authority (TRCA), and CARE for Nurses.

OTHER RELEVANT STAKEHOLDERS ADDRESSING IEP’S SUCCESSFUL INTEGRATION INTO THE WORKFORCE

In the Toronto area, multi-stakeholder organizations such as the Toronto Immigrant Employment Council (TRIEC), the Maytree Foundation, the Consortium of Agencies Serving Immigrant Professionals (CASIP), the Bridging Coalition, Connect and union education centres support practices to integrate skilled immigrants into the Toronto labour market. Global Experience Ontario, a service of the Ontario government, also offers help to internationally trained individuals by providing information on the application and licensing process for the regulated professions. This is a “one-stop” service providing in person and online support.

Regulatory bodies and associations work with and support programs in specific trades and sectors. These bodies are authorized by legislation to oversee and control the educational and training process of those who are licensed to work in the profession. Ontario regulatory bodies include Professional Engineers Ontario (PEO), Ontario Society of Professional Engineers (OSPE), Ontario College of Nurses, and the Ontario College of Pharmacy. IEPs seeking to work in a regulated profession must be registered by the appropriate regulatory body and understand the rules and regulations related to licensing.

Bridging programs are funded to move Internationally Educated Professionals into key sectors and industries such as: business/management, engineering, construction, ICT, healthcare (pharmacy and nursing), education, and community and social services. Several interview participants spoke directly about bridging IEPs into employment in the green economy. Within the identified sectors and industries, multiple program providers and related stakeholders were contacted to ensure different perspectives were represented.

The majority of the sectors and industries targeted by bridging programs are in unregulated professions, meaning that there is no regulatory body or licensing procedure necessary prior to employment. In addition, there was some representation from the regulated professions. Variation in organizational frameworks/structures and experience emerged in relation to:

- Length of program;
- Staff structure;
- Infrastructure around programs;
- Intake/assessment processes;
- Program structure — curriculum (course focus), specific program objectives/outcomes, what program includes;
- Level/format of employer engagement;
- Collaboration/partnership efforts.

Findings and Analysis

THEME 1 — Skills Sets and Knowledge of Front-line Staff

The importance of a specific set of skills for frontline workers employed in bridging programs was clearly articulated throughout the interviews. Soft skills, or interpersonal abilities relating to managing relationships, communicating with individuals with diverse cultural backgrounds and language competencies, establishing productive client connections, are essential. Sensitivity to the IEP experience and the multiple pressures IEPs are under is an important aspect of staff skills. Frontline workers included employment counsellors, job developers and program managers.

Programs that have one point of contacts for clients, with other staff providing ongoing support and follow up were found most effective. Coaching support is ideally “unlimited” and requires having the skills necessary to show a client how to manage their own progress towards employment.

Job Developers

The key competencies in the Job Developing role were marketing, sales and networking abilities. Staff with established industry connections and relationships with related service providers in the community are better able to connect IEPs to the specific sector. Job Developers, similar to Employment Counsellors, require an ability to interact and empathize with clients of diverse cultures and language abilities. The most important competency was the ability to help employers understand the business case for hiring an IEP. Understanding employer needs, managing strong employer connections in combination with the ability to access, understand and utilize labour market information for specific industries is the key to good job development. Job Developers should also be able to help clients use social media as this is an emerging vehicle for employer engagement.

Program Managers

The key competency identified for Program Managers was an in-depth understanding of the objectives of bridging programs and the resources available within and outside of an organization to support those objectives. Employment Counsellor and Job Developer roles are beginning to blur and strategic hiring is important for Program Managers. For example, aspects of ‘coaching’, often related to the role of an Employment Counsellor, are now viewed as important in all phases of client engagement, from initial assessment through retention support. Program Managers require skills similar to those of a Human Resource recruiter, who has to be able to assess the relevant labour market information and screen candidates and staff. Managers are using written assessments, practical exams, role play and job related simulations to ensure qualified candidates. These managers are valued for their interpersonal skills in listening and engaging with clients and staff.

Importance of Sector Specific Knowledge and Experience

Sector specific knowledge and sector specific experience is critical for all staff involved in assisting IEPs. Staff already familiar with the labour market, the specific industry/sector they are working in, and who also have some specific technical fluency are more effective. By understanding the technical knowledge of a sector, staff can “translate” a IEPs education and experiences to fit the expectations and demands of specific Canadian labour markets.

External instructors are often hired by programs because of their specific sector knowledge, skills and connections and are not necessarily full-time employees of an agency providing a bridging program. Respondents generally believed that being an IEP themselves could be an asset to their work, but

not a necessity. Staff who are former IEPs may be better at understanding the IEP experience and the process of achieving commensurate employment.

Staff Training

Staff noted a need for more training on understanding the ‘cultural nuances’ of the IEPs they serve. Several staff referred to this as ‘sensitivity’ training. In some settings, respondents reported that although staff are equipped with these skills, the organizations provide no specific support in this area. Formal program feedback is collected from clients, however, this alone should not be used to justify or permit the lack of formal cultural training.

At one social service agency, management is considering a staff certification process to ensure staff members are adequately trained in this area. This might be something other programs will replicate.

Across bridging programs a noticeable gap on specific IEP focused training was evident. While hiring managers recruit for a specific skill set for frontline staff, and training and development is generally encouraged, IEP specific support for frontline workers is typically weak. IEP training is mostly informal and not a specific measure on performance ratings. Training is often limited to attending conferences, seminars and in house presentations. While most managers and directors encourage attendance at IEP related functions, the opportunity to do so may be constrained by lack of time.

The research revealed that formal staff training and development is most accessible and encouraged for staff in post-secondary institutions. However it is usually focused on ‘growing the professional’ within the college and is part of the general college structure and basic teaching requirements, not about how to better develop staff skills in supporting IEPs. Online resources are increasingly used to provide instructional support in a variety of bridging program settings. More formalized and targeted training and capacity building for staff about working with IEPs and effectively engaging with employers could lead to better program outcomes.

THEME 2 — Technical Language and Communication Skills

Communication

Bridging programs have most success when they include language and communication learning and practice in all course delivery. A lack of proficiency in sector specific language skills, that is, the technical aspects of language, is widespread. Many respondents explain that a lack of language skills has a direct impact on the confidence a client projects to employers. In most cases, IEPs become frustrated when they invest limited resources into language training that is often generic ESL, not making them more marketable. Bridging programs that integrate sector specific technical programming/curriculum achieve high success rates for clients.

For example, in each technical course offered by a college program, students are required to do presentations, sector specific documentation exercises, and participate in debates. Providing ongoing informal feedback on language and communication skills over the duration of a program is one critical aspect of success.

Accessibility

Some bridging programs have developed online pre-training for highly technical programs to address the variation in abilities of IEPs entering advanced training programs. However, language and cultural difference make this learning challenging and difficult to match with employer expectations immediately upon program completion. Making programs available online does mitigate fees and travelling time, making this option more accessible. As program demand continually exceeds capacity and services

are limited for each client, moving more programs online will address the challenge of providing a balance of technical, employment and job development supports with limited resources.

THEME 3 — Providers

There are a range of organizations and institutions offering sector-specific bridging programs. A centralized database with streamlined information for IEPs to use to determine the one best point of initial contact would be a useful addition to the bridging program system. A lack of clear information and a central contact is resulting in IEPs, “shopping around” for programs, often unsure if they are taking the right steps to reach commensurate employment.

Post-secondary institutions are perceived by IEPs as the most legitimate and credible organizations. It is critical that college and university advisory services provide IEP-specific assessment and advisory services. This may involve training advisory staff to refer an IEP to a particular contact or department, or employment service agency. At one university all entry advisory departments are trained to send IEPs interested in a specific sector directly to the bridging program staff.

Global Experience Ontario (GEO), a service of the Ontario government, is a good example of a service that helps internationally trained and educated individuals learn how to qualify for professional practice in Ontario. This one-stop centre offers a range of services for internationally educated individuals. The GEO centre provides information for people who intend to apply to a regulatory body to obtain a license to work in their field. Knowledgeable staff can explain the process for licensing and registration in Ontario.

THEME 4 — Employer Engagement

Engaging employers arose frequently as the key to successful bridging of clients into commensurate employment. Programs that allocate sufficient time and resources to supporting staff efforts to connect with employers and market qualified IEPs have good success rates.

Programs that engage employers at the outset and involve them in the design and delivery of the training report successful employment outcomes for clients. Designing programs that place responsibility for employment with employers are being explored, such as JVS's new Coaching to Careers Program, in which employers assume a central role in coaching clients.

In some cases, staff report that spending time educating employers about the business case for hiring IEPs results in employment and also in employers returning to the program or agency for additional hires is an important investment and program component. Employers prefer not to be contacted by many individual agencies and collaborative partnerships among agencies and job developers, such as the CASIP model, are a useful employer engagement strategy. CASIP markets clients collectively through their website and member agencies and institutions share referrals and postings. Central employer databases do exist but could be expanded and marketed to more agencies.

Skills Shortages, Diversity Hiring

A key factor contributing to successful employer engagement is a demand for skill, especially evident in the banking and IT sectors, in combination with highly specialized programs and/or skill sets, such as in social work and healthcare. Global employers such as international engineering and financial firms, or in companies governed by legislation such as the federal employment equity act that was a catalyst for diversity hiring, have been able to establish key partnerships. Banks or other employers in globalized sectors seem to understand the value of IEPs, as they are using different marketing strategies

to attract IEPs and strengthen diversity. One organization with experience working in the finance and banking sector emphasized that relationships with banks have developed significantly over the last five years. Banks now hold recruitment events specifically targeting IEPs. Mandated Advisory Committees are proving useful for all programs because of the opportunity they provide to have up to date information. Encouraging other sectors to emulate the practices of the banks and hold recruitment events targeting IEPs would increase the rates of IEP integration into the workforce.

Internships, Job Placements, Practicums and Practices

Programs that allow IEPs to engage face-to-face with employers for an extended period of time educate employers on the capabilities of IEPs. Employers who are open to hosting practicums and co-op placements are more likely to hire IEPs and contact program coordinators about future employment/placement opportunities. Placements are useful in all sectors, and perhaps even more so in unregulated professions where employers evaluate IEP credentials subjectively.

Traditional mentoring, speed mentoring, and mock interview events also expose employers to IEPs. Events that are organized collaboratively by program providers, such as that held at the Mars Centre for Innovation for engineering programs, are particularly helpful in concentrating support for IEP employment. Employers that have successfully employed and retained IEPs should be involved in these events. The United Way model engages employers by broadcasting success stories through social media and could easily be duplicated by other organizations in other sectors.

Presenting employers with a variety of options and levels through which they can engage with IEPs is an important practice. While not all employers may be able to provide a placement, or position, employers may be interested in mentorship or acting as guest speakers. Establishing and maintaining any level of relationship with employers is critical to increasing the exposure of employers to IEPs for those who are hiring, or those who may have a suitable future opportunity. Internship opportunities are another important vehicle for both employer engagement and IEP experience in the Canadian workplace.

THEME 5 — Employment Agencies and Post-secondary Institutions

Post-secondary institutions and colleges, perhaps because they have a different funding model, have benefited from the opportunity to use funded pilots as a basis for developing or enhancing mainstream programs. For example, feedback from bridging program Advisory Committees led to new IT courses being offered in all of a college's related programs. Colleges also have the infrastructure to create bridging supports based on labour market needs, using pre-existing programs.

Colleges and universities are able to provide a wider range of supports and resources for IEPs. Clients benefit from technical curriculum, the latest technology and networks/supports from related mainstream departments. IEPs in these settings have full access to the resources of any other college student. In addition to general guidance and career services, IEPs also have support built in specifically to address their challenges.

Programs provided through employment agencies were described as most useful for IEPs who require an 'awareness' or 'overview' of the labour market and sector in which they are seeking employment, rather than specific skills training and/or upgrading.

This awareness is often provided in programs that range from 8 to 12 weeks and include sector language and workplace culture training, as well as employment counselling and job development. In employment agencies, clients may not have access to the range of supports available in the colleges. Although the available supports may vary, stakeholders in both types of programs report exceeding

targets and achieving success in relation to attaching IEPs to commensurate employment soon after program completion.

THEME 6 — Post-Employment Support

A key theme that surfaced from the research was the importance of support for clients and for employers once commensurate employment was achieved. As part of employer engagement, some participants mentioned advising employers of the possibility of continuing to receive support from the organization through the early employment period to solve any language and/or cultural challenges that arose during the early weeks of employment.

Providing support to employers aids client retention. When resources have been allocated to these purposes the feedback has been overwhelmingly positive. In one organization that specializes in training and establishing occupational standards at the industry level, staff will visit the IEPs workplaces and help develop formal training models in response to their needs. In a university setting, one program runs workshops for employers on managing and retaining IEPs. These supports have been identified in employment service agencies as useful, though not always feasible within current funding models. In addition to providing support to employers, maintaining contact with clients would provide more complete data about the employment and retention status of program graduates.

THEME 7 — Differences Between Sectors

Industry-specific challenges arose as another sub-theme. Tourism, ICT and engineering were noted as exceptionally vast sectors consisting of many different professions and job titles. Sector specificity is critical but when the sector is immense and diverse, this creates challenges in curriculum development and targeting specific learning outcomes, thereby compromising the effectiveness of a bridging program.

The theme of regulated and non-regulated sector differences stood out. These variances were primarily due to:

1. Licensing procedures;
2. Complicated processes for IEPs to navigate through and;
3. How cooperative and transparent the regulatory bodies are in working with IEPs, employment agencies and academic institutions.

Overall, in the non-regulated professions, emphasis tended to be on employment. In the regulated sectors, while there was effort to prepare IEPs for employment, the priority, particularly for the IEP, was on exam preparation and licensing. Clearly, there are differences in measurement of success for sector bridging programs, which are often dependent on whether or not they correspond to regulated sector.

THEME 8 — Leadership and Management Support

Programs that have strong senior management support combined with strong leadership report good success in attaching IEPs to the labour force. One participant noted that the success of their bridging programs was based on having a consistent, small group of long-term senior managers who are supportive and work well together. Leadership and vision at the senior level led to the expansion of bridging programs after the organization had invested in feasibility studies and ensured that all relevant stakeholders were engaged from the start.

Other comments from staff in the same organization included: *“management encourages us to always expand our knowledge, make changes for the better and experiment with organizational policies.”* An annual survey done by the same organization found that compensation was linked to supporting quality service delivery to IEPs.

An example from another organization also illustrated the value and impact of positive management. *“Upper management is supportive of our bridging programs and always looks at what is being done and how to improve.”* They talked about the value of having the CEO and HR management as champions for the programs and explained that technical expertise from within the organization is also on hand for training in the bridge programs, another success factor.

In yet another agency, senior management relied on an in-house labour market information team that regularly analyzes the ICT sector across Canada. The team performs a gap analysis, feeding into programming and stakeholder sharing, which ultimately improves the programs

THEME 9 — The Model is Key

What model a college, university or community employment agency is utilizing in their bridging program emerged as central to the program’s success. A number of notable models were identified through the interviews. One relied on the organization’s built-in employer network, available as the organization itself is also an employer. Another model was described as functional and adopted from the military. It was based on funding and not program specific but cut across the organization to ensure standardization in curricula and customer service as well as systems for continuous improvement. It was mentioned that this could be the future model for organizations offering bridging programs.

Two prominent university and college bridging programs defined their bridging delivery models as holistic or comprehensive. These models include technical, communication and employability skills as well as client assessment, employer engagement and post-employment support.

An interviewee from a college stated that the inclusion of strong partners and private sector connections enhanced their service delivery success. The bridging program for tourism bases their success on their Train the Trainer (ToT) model which operates within a training-centred organization that is well connected to the industry, maximizing their ability to connect clients directly to the sector. Although currently not running sessions, their training model was described as working towards sustainability by training settlement agency workers to understand Tourism as a realistic employment sector for IEPs.

Another college interviewee described their Employment Ontario (EO) program model, in which the program supporting IEPs was delivered out of the EO office, as opposed to a specific bridging program. It was known as Re-employment Services for Internationally Trained Professionals (RESIP). *“It dove-tailed with the EO work because it was community based and easy to adapt to programs for IEPs.”* Success in this program was demonstrated by IEPs forming small networks. A number of participants stressed that sector-specific bridging programs serve tailored needs with defined targets, unlike the EO model that is a more generic approach and may not include sector specific employment targets.

Highlighting a promising new model, one college representative explained that they were taking existing mainstream graduate certificate programs with good outcomes and attracting immigrants and using them as a technical core for bridging programs, integrating language skill training and employment search from their three EO centres. Another college is doing the complete opposite, using their bridging programs as a way to develop mainstream programs. The key is that a variety of models serve a diversity of audiences and organizations.

The Consortium of Agencies Serving Immigrant Professionals (CASIP) and the Maytree Foundation are successfully using a collaborative networking model. CASIP is working to collaborate more

effectively with other networks or groups such as Toronto Employment and Social Services (TESS) and the EO networks. Maytree's Assisting Local Leaders with Immigrant Employment Strategies (ALLIES) program is focusing on replicating the networking model across Canada to create job opportunities.

THEME 10 — Partnerships

The issue of partnership resonated in many of the interviews. Partnership refers to a formalized relationship or agreement between agencies. The kinds of partnerships highlighted in interviews ranged from:

1. Job development and industry connections;
2. Partnering for language program expertise; and
3. Partnering for a mentoring component.

The mentoring partnership sponsored by TRIEC is a successful network encompassing 12 agencies and colleges that match mentors with mentees across different sectors in the GTA. It was described as an example of building a strong level of trust and cooperation by collectively approaching to employers.

THEME 11 — Collaboration/Competition

Collaboration was another substantial theme that emerged and was emphasized by almost every participant. It was essential for success in bridging programs, achieving employment targets for IEPs and ensuring they are prepared for workforce integration.

Stakeholders in all sectors suggested that collaboration can be achieved through participation in the Bridging Coalition or in sector specific Advisory Committees. It takes time however, as demonstrated through the effective networking efforts of CASIP, which has required years of trust and relationship building to develop a protocol for sharing referrals with the partners. TRIEC's mentoring program has also proven collaboration can work as employers reported a preference to interact with a representative from a network of agencies than to be continually contacted by many different agencies.

Collaboration is a vital aspect of bridging programs. It allows the receipt of government funding, the provision of the best service to IEPs in their attainment of commensurate employment in any profession and strengthens bridging programs in the long-term. To collaborate effectively may require a change in attitudes, different ways of working, a transformation of funding models and continued long-term effort amongst agencies.

THEME 12 — Common Components

Key components of sector specific bridging programs were considered essential to the success of a bridging program in matching IEPs to commensurate employment. These components were valued by staff and identified in the feedback received from IEPs and employers. They were:

1. Mentoring;
2. Coaching;
3. Practicum, internship or job placement and;
4. Employer engagement.

Mentoring was highlighted in different ways by those interviewed. The mentoring partnership was believed to successfully link IEPs with the employer community across sectors and resulted in a greater understanding of the value of IEPs on the side of employers, leading to employment. Speed mentoring, such as the approach used by ACCES employment, was also seen positively. Connecting job ready clients with employers for 10 minute meetings built confidence for IEPs, served as an effective way of networking, and allowed IEPs to get tips for applying for jobs. Most importantly, it placed the IEP in front of senior level employers. “Success is when the company employee walks away with the IEP’s resume in hand and this opens the door for an interview.”

A number of interviewees from the college bridging programs saw the advantages of the mentoring component. Although it has high administrative labour costs they said it is definitely worth the investment. “Technical skills are easier to learn than street smarts or soft skills” and these are addressed by the mentoring component.

One-on-one coaching efforts by small organizations offering intensive programs were also effective. One bridging program uses electricians who act as mentors, coaches and instructors and this was seen as key to the success of their program.

Job placements, internships or practicums are all means to gaining Canadian work experience for IEPs, one of their greatest obstacles to gaining appropriate employment. A teacher training program for IEPs is successful due to its mandatory internship or practicum component, which helped students find jobs after the program ended.

A social work bridging program valued the practicum component, whether it is informal or volunteer, as it gave the IEP an opportunity to learn how to apply their skills in a Canadian context. Many of these components, such as mentorship, job placements and internships are viewed as serving as a proxy for Canadian experience. An IEP benefits from learning through these more experiential components that allow them to experience the workplace, learn the softer skills of how to communicate in a sector-specific profession and understand the nuances of the Canadian work context.

Lessons Learned and Recommendations

Employer Engagement

Employer engagement is a critical component of attaching IEPs to the labour force in commensurate employment. The best or promising practices in employer engagement include:

1. Involving employers from the beginning of a program in all aspects of program design and delivery.
2. Approaching employers collaboratively rather than as individual agencies.
3. Using an employer database.
4. Organizing events in which employers have an opportunity to meet IEPs and assess their skills and competencies.
5. Integrating mentoring, internships, co-ops, on the job placements and/or practicums into all bridging programs
6. Utilizing multiple levels of employer engagement
7. Continuing to examine best practices, such as mentoring, coaching and placements, internships or practicums, which all help to address the double barriers of engaging employers and fulfilling the requirement of Canadian experience.
8. Offering continued support to employers after an IEP is hired. Programs could consider providing support to employers through job developers. This would support stable employment rates in the long term for program alumni and current clients.

Networking and Collaboration

Close collaboration, sharing information and best practices all improve program outcomes. Service delivery agencies should collaborate and coordinate beyond just information sharing. True cooperation between agencies is a requirement for effective delivery of sector specific bridging programs.

Recommendations

1. Share and learn what models are working well and how they address IEP needs in sector-specific bridging programs.
2. Promote collaboration to prevent or minimize duplication and overlap.

Staff Training

There is often an assumption that staff working in sector-specific bridging programs either have the requisite knowledge or can learn on the job. Continuous training and/or upgrading ought to be available to staff working with IEPs.

Recommendations

1. Deliver comprehensive orientation sessions before programs begin to accurately and clearly outline the intent of a program. This will help staff to manage expectations of IEPs so that they can plan for life in Canada.
2. Sector-specific bridging programs must teach 'soft skills' to IEPs as part of their journey to successful integration into the Canadian workforce.
3. Make sector-specific information available to staff in addition to general labour market information.

Post-Employment Support

Bridging program efforts have mainly focused on the goal of employment for the IEP but often additional support is needed to help with retention in the workplace.

Recommendations

1. Track former clients of the bridging programs who have succeeded in gaining employment and remained employed long-term to understand and share:
 - what the employment experience is for an IEP after they become employed;
 - success stories from IEPs on their road to success or their challenges as part of training.
2. Offer continued support to employers by encouraging an employer to call a job developer if needed. Providing support to employers will help ensure stable, long-term employment or program alumni and current clients.
3. Address issues of sustainability by initiating more discussion and learning on this issue with funders and relevant stakeholders. Possible solutions might involve more consistency between pre-employment (employment agencies) and employment programs (employers).
4. Ask employers to act as corporate sponsors for programs.

Program Information Validity and Accessibility:

There are challenges related to information issues: information for IEPs can be overwhelming or inaccurate when found through sites/portals that are not-user friendly or centralised. Information available to staff relating to referrals and program suggestions for IEPs is vast and varied in accuracy.

Recommendations

1. Create regional portals for IEPs with accurate information and sources regarding bridging programs. When information is streamlined and standardized then all stakeholders have access to the same information.
2. Coordinate efforts to provide program suggestions and track client participation across funding bodies. This approach will work towards resource efficiency and address program competition for all stakeholders.

Labour Market Information

Good, reliable labour market information becomes a first step for IEPs in search of commensurate employment. Programs are most successful when they are an outcome of labour market research and forecasting, and then run by the organization that has the most appropriate infrastructure.

Recommendations

1. Colleges and universities should learn more from labour market research organizations about what sectors have a steady demand for graduates and where there is already a noticeable IEP presence in a program stream. When existing programs are less than a year old, an opportunity exists to “wrap” employment supports around the curriculum.
2. In other settings, if a need is identified, stakeholder consultation should occur so to accurately assess what/where a program would have the best chance of success finding employment matching the skills of the IEPs.

Conclusions

This research study identified patterns, commonalities and differences in promising or best practices in sector-specific bridging programs that help highly qualified immigrants access employment in their professions. These programs are found in the non-profit, college and university sectors and funded by a variety of government agencies, foundations and other funding bodies.

The study has:

1. Explored what skill sets and competencies are most effective for staff to possess to provide appropriate support to IEPs;
2. Revealed where and how bridging programs might provide additional support to IEPs in their job search and;
3. Identified constraints and conducive factors at the organizational level and on the greater systemic level (including government, funding bodies, employers and other relevant stakeholders) that affect highly skilled IEPs in their search for commensurate employment.

The bridging programs in Ontario that are working to connect IEPs with employment in their professions are, for the most part, an important resource. While success is mixed, the majority of these programs are helping highly qualified professionals contribute in a meaningful way to the Canadian economy.

Endnotes

1 CIC, 2009

2 Statistics Canada, 2006

3 CIC, 2009

4 City of Toronto, April 2012, cited in On Topic, Toronto Workforce Innovation Group, April 6, 2012

5 Toronto's Opportunities and Priorities: A Local Labour Market Update, Toronto Workforce Innovation Group, 2011

6 Conference Board of Canada, 2009

7 Ibid pg. 1.

8 Colleges Ontario, 2009

9 Public Policy Forum, 2004

10 ibid

11 PCPI, 2009; pg. 3

12 <http://www.yorku.ca/tiedi/pubreports.html>

13 Hire Immigrants Ottawa, 2008; pg. 20

14 Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration, www.citizenship.gov.on.ca

References

- Citizenship and Immigration Canada (2009) Facts and Figures: Immigration Overview Permanent and Temporary Residents. Retrieved from: <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/resources/statistics/facts2009/index.asp>.
- Colleges Ontario (2009) Enhancing the Role of Colleges in Immigrant Integration to Employment: A Report on Consultations with Employers and Associations.
- Conference Board of Canada (2009), Immigrant Friendly Businesses: Effective practices for attracting, integrating and retaining immigrants in Canadian workplaces.
- Consortium of Agencies Serving Internationally-trained Professionals (CASIP), www.casip.ca
- Frank, Kristyn (2009) The Economic Integration of Recent Immigrants to Canada: A longitudinal Analysis of Dimensions of Employment Success. Waterloo: University of Waterloo. Doctor of Philosophy Thesis
- Hire Immigrants Ottawa (2008) Employer's Guide to Integrating Immigrants into the Workplace.
- Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration www.citizenship.gov.on.ca
- Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities www.tcu.gov.on.ca
- Progress Career Planning Institute (PCPI) (2009) Best Practices: Employers and IEPs speak about Strategies for Integrating Internationally Educated Professionals into the Canadian Labour Force. (Toronto: IEP Conference Research Report)
- Ibid (2010) The Power of Different: The race to bridge the skills gap in the Toronto Region (Toronto: IEP Conference Research Report).
- Ibid (2011) Winning Strategies for IEP's Success in the Workplace: Employers' and IEPs' Perspectives (Toronto: IEP Conference Research Report).
- Ibid (PCPI) (2012) Progress: IEPs' Experience Matters (Toronto: IEP Conference Research Report).
- Public Policy Forum (2004) Bringing Employers into the Immigration Debate: Survey and Conference. <http://hrpartnership.ca/images/HR%20Documents/BringingEmployersIntoImmigrationDebate.pdf>.
- Statistics Canada (2006) Immigration in Canada: A Portrait of the Foreign-born Population, 2006 Census: Portraits of major metropolitan centres. Retrieved from: <http://www12.statcan.ca/census-recensement/2006/as-sa/97-557/p24-eng.cfm>.
- Statistics Canada (2008) Canadian Demographics at a Glance.
- Toronto Immigrant Employment Data Initiative (TIEDI) (2008- ongoing) Research Reports
- Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council (TRIEC) <http://triec.ca/>.
- Toronto Workforce Innovation Group, 2012. Routes to Employment. <http://routestoemployment.ca>.
- Ibid Toronto's Opportunities and Priorities, 2010 and 2011
- World Food Programme, Monitoring and Evaluation guidelines-Office of Evaluation (http://documents.wfp.org/stellent/groups/public/documents/ko/mekb_module_7.pdf).

Appendices

Interview Questions:

1. What are the top (3) key competencies staff should possess to be able to EFFECTIVELY assist high-level IEPs in their job search? (may need to give some examples such as resume work, interview preparation, understanding of labour market, etc. — focus is on Employment Counsellor) (i.e. All skills relating to networking, the resources they use, how they access and analyze labour market information) (the characteristics associated with the role of an employment counsellor, though often staff assume roles of both EC and JDs)?
2. What are the top (3) competencies staff should possess to be able to EFFECTIVELY connect a high-level IEP with commensurate employment? (this question focuses on Job Developers) (the characteristics associated with the role of a job developer)?
Probe for their use of resources: LMI and networks (informal, formal)
3. What are the MOST challenging aspects/barriers (at least 3) of serving IEPs towards commensurate employment? (might need to clarify commensurate experience at this point-proportionate, corresponding, equal, matching...)
4. Where have you been successful when serving IEPs towards commensurate employment? Be as specific as possible and provide examples and reasons why.
5. What are the skill sets you look for when recruiting? (a) manager (b) employment counsellor (c) Job Developer?
6. How does your organization develop its staffs' competencies to understand and access the labour market for mid to high level professionals and apply it effectively? Ask them to be as specific as possible and to give examples.
7. How could your organization (or organizations in general depending on who is asked) enhance its/their staff capacities to effectively match IEPs with commensurate employment?
8. Based on knowledge, observation or experience, is there any advice you would give to others who are only recently engaged in connecting IEPs with commensurate employment?
9. What would you consider 'promising practices' in how service providers (can be both organizations and/or frontline staff) are serving or could be serving IEPs in attaining commensurate employment? Ask them to be as specific as possible and to explain why.
Probe: can you reflect on what other organizations are doing that appears to be "working"?
10. What would you consider 'promising practices' in how sector specific bridging programs are serving IEPs in attaining commensurate employment? Ask them to be as specific as possible and to explain why.
11. How could the employment support services community (including government, funding bodies, employers and other relevant stakeholders) better facilitate or support bringing about commensurate employment for IEPs?