



BACKGROUNDER

Increasing the Capacity of Professional Immigrant Networks

In keeping with TRIEC's core mission to create solutions to better integrate skilled immigrants into the labour market, TRIEC launched the Professional Immigrant Networks (PINs) initiative in 2009. The goal is to work collaboratively with immigrant networks to increase their capacity, so they can achieve more success in connecting their skilled immigrant members to meaningful employment.

What is a Professional Immigrant Network (PIN)?

TRIEC defines professional immigrant networks as: organized, volunteer-run groups created by and for internationally-educated and experienced professionals who seek to:

- create a forum to contribute to and enrich their respective communities;
- cultivate social capital;
- find meaningful employment, primarily in their areas of professional practice;
- sharpen their skills-set, and;
- keep abreast with current trends and changes in their respective sectors.

Background

As a pilot in 2007/08, TRIEC offered support to one professional immigrant network, the Communications, Advertising and Marketing Professionals (CAMP). As a result of this initial experience and subsequent conversations with other networks, it became evident to TRIEC that the most effective way to maximize the potential of these networks was to build and support a "network of networks." Through this network of networks, these organizations can increase their individual and collective capacity to assist their members in integrating quickly into the labour market in the right jobs.

Various stakeholders, such as employers, government, professional associations and service providers, expressed the need to develop ways to more systematically connect to professional immigrant networks to channel information, to recruit for employment and membership, to expand markets and to offer services and supports.

What have we done?

- Conducted an environmental scan and found 70 active networks in Ontario, with a collective reach of more than 30,000 new, established and prospective immigrants from both sector and ethno-specific groups. (2009)
- Convened 20 PINs leaders at a Network Leaders Roundtable. Discussed opportunities for building a learning network for leaders to share promising practices and develop a collective strategy to make their networks work even better. (Oct 2009)
- Launched an online directory of over 50 networks in collaboration with the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI). Networks included in the directory on www.settlement.org/immigrantnetworks all have an online presence. (Nov 2009)
- Hosted the first Learning Exchange conference for professional immigrant networks. Leaders from 20 networks shared practical information on best practices and gave TRIEC a mandate to work with them to build an effective network of networks to strengthen their capacity to serve their members. (Feb 2010)
- Convened, in partnership with JVS, a group of network leaders to develop a joint funding proposal to implement a network-based group mentoring initiative. A proposal was submitted by JVS with five PINs. (May 2010)

Goal: To work collaboratively with immigrant networks to increase their capacity, so they can achieve more success in connecting their skilled immigrant members to meaningful employment.

Objective 1: Strengthen the individual and collective organizational capacity of the networks

Proposed activities:

- Create learning exchange forums and tools to develop expertise in areas such as mentoring, funding and fundraising, leveraging the web, marketing and outreach, media skills
- Develop a robust online platform for the networks to:
 - Exchange and share information, tools, practices and skills among networks
 - Flow information from government, employers, service providers, and regulators to the networks

Objective 2: Create effective working relationships between the networks and employers, professional associations, service providers, government, and other relevant stakeholders.

Proposed activities:

- Link employers to relevant networks to promote targeted recruitment initiatives
- Link service providers providing targeted bridging programs with networks in the sectors they are serving
- Identify partnerships opportunities between networks and other stakeholders

Objective 3: Create a network of professional immigrant network leaders and support their development as effective leaders.

Proposed activities:

- Build a leadership channel that can provide advice and direction on the development of the network of networks
- Refer network leaders to leadership development opportunities
- Inform network leaders of opportunities for participation in consultations on immigrant employment integration to strengthen the voice of immigrant professional leaders
- Encourage government and other stakeholders to draw on network leaders for input on policy and program development

What we know about professional immigrant networks*

- 70+ networks operating in the Greater Toronto Area
- 30,000+ immigrants connected to these networks
- Over 90% have formal structures with a board or an executive committee
- 42% are incorporated, non-profit organizations
- 100% deliver organized activities for their members
- Over 75% of the groups are ethno-specific
- Over 75% of the groups are sector-specific
- Immigrant networks in the legal and IT sectors are the most recent start-ups
- 16,000+ immigrants connected to engineering networks

* Some key statistics TRIEC gathered from the environmental scan in 2009

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