



## Literature Review Highlights:

### Effective Employer Engagement in Newcomer Skills Development Programs

Employer engagement has been identified repeatedly as a crucial component of any employment program as employers have the best current knowledge of labour market trends and understand their own needs and goals.

#### What is Employer Engagement?

- Employer engagement has been defined as “any form of contact between any organization and an employer that attempts to effect a change in the knowledge, understanding or behaviour of either, or of a third party, for some purpose related to the wider public benefit.”<sup>1</sup>
- SPOs engage with employers in order to develop and build their network of employers and relationships, to build knowledge of the labour market, and to design and deliver programs that meet the needs of program participants in finding employment.<sup>2</sup>
- Employer engagement can look different across varying programs and target groups. Employers may sit on the SPO’s board of directors; participate in research to help SPOs in understanding employers’ needs and to provide feedback to the program; participate in mock interviews with program participants; provide work placements; or co-design the program curricula.<sup>3</sup>

#### Key Components to Successful Employer Engagement

- **Positive relationship** and **continuous communication** between SPOs and employers, including learning about and understanding employers’ needs and culture<sup>4</sup>
- Creating a **feedback loop** between SPOs and employers, wherein SPOs can ask for feedback about the program or about participants during work placements<sup>5</sup>
- **Specific individuals within SPOs to engage with employers** and other stakeholders, including program administrators, business development managers, job developers and/or employer liaisons<sup>6</sup>

#### Challenges to Successful Employer Engagement

- **Limited resources and capacity** from both SPOs and employers, for example insufficient or inconsistent funding for programs<sup>7</sup>
- **Assumption** amongst SPOs and decision makers **that employers are a homogenous group** with the same needs and requirements from candidates as every other employer<sup>8</sup>
- Employers often **lack the knowledge of what to expect from employment programs** and SPOs<sup>9</sup>
- **Lack of coordination amongst employment programs** across Canada,<sup>10</sup> which leads to multiple SPOs contacting the same employer<sup>11</sup>

## Some Ways to Mitigate the Challenges

- Increasing capacities of SPOs to help them develop specialized knowledge on employer engagement and learn how to build strong working relationships with employers<sup>12</sup>
- Building partnerships between sector councils and immigrant serving agencies to bring together the expertise from both groups to gather information on employers' needs and investment in skills<sup>13</sup>
- Making a business case for employers by developing an effective marketing strategy which includes matching clients' skills and qualifications with employers' open positions<sup>14</sup>

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Many SPOs have developed innovative practices for employer engagement that may not be documented in the literature. Since there is little systematic knowledge of employer engagement practices in newcomer services, the current project is well positioned to collect and enhance the evidence of promising practices, start the systematization of this evidence and provide concrete advice and tools for SPOs and employers to help them build meaningful connections and employment for newcomers.

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<sup>1</sup> Cooper, C., Mackinnon, I., & Garside, P. (2008). *Employer engagement*. London: The Mackinnon Partnership and Sector Skills Development Agency.

<sup>2</sup> Spaulding, S., & Martin-Caughey, A. (2015). *The Goals and dimensions of employer engagement in workforce development programs*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute.

<sup>3</sup> Spaulding & Martin (2015). *The Goals and dimensions of employer engagement*; Spaulding, S., & Blount, D. C. (2018). *Employer engagement by community-based organizations*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute; SSDA (Sector Skills Development Agency). (2007). *Employer engagement action planning guidance*. Wath-upon-Deane: SSDA.

<sup>4</sup> Clymer, C. (2003). *By design: Engaging employers in workforce development organizations*. Philadelphia, PA: Public/Private Ventures; Spaulding & Blount (2018). *Employer engagement by community-based organizations*.

<sup>5</sup> Arthur-Mensah, N. (2020). Bridging the industry-education skills gap for human resource development. *Industrial and Commercial Training*, 52(2), 93-103; Taylor, C. (2011). *Employer engagement in the national fund for workforce solutions*. Boston, MA: Jobs for the Future and the National Fund for Workforce Solutions; Myers, K., Harding, S., & Pasolli, K. (2021). *Skills training that works: Lessons from demand-driven approaches*. IRPP Study 84. Montreal, QC: Institute for Research on Public Policy.

<sup>6</sup> Spaulding & Blount (2018). *Employer engagement by community-based organizations*; SRDC (Social Research and Demonstration Corporation). (2021). *Career pathways for visible minority newcomer women pilot project: Implementation report*. Ottawa, ON.

<sup>7</sup> Social Capital Partners and Deloitte. (2014). *Working together: Implementing a demand-led employment and training system*. Toronto, ON: Social Capital Partners and Deloitte; SRDC.(2021).*Career pathways for visible minority newcomer women*; Rodier, J., et al. (2020). *Evaluation of the Canadian Work Experience pilot projects*. Ottawa, ON: Social Research and Demonstration Corporation.

<sup>8</sup> Payne, J. (2008). Sector skills councils and employer engagement – Delivering the 'employer-led' skills agenda in England. *Journal of Education and Work*, 21(2), 93-113.

<sup>9</sup> Payne, J. (2008). Sector skills councils and employer engagement

<sup>10</sup> Social Capital Partners and Deloitte. (2014). *Working together: Implementing a demand-led employment and training system*; Payne, J. (2008). Sector skills councils and employer engagement, 93-114.

<sup>11</sup> Social Capital Partners and Deloitte. (2014). *Working together: Implementing a demand-led employment and training system*

<sup>12</sup> Rodier, J., et al. (2020). *Evaluation of the Canadian Work Experience pilot projects*.

<sup>13</sup> Holmes, A., & Hjartarson, J. (2014). Moving forward together: An employer perspective on the design of skills training programs in Ontario. Toronto, ON: Ontario Chamber of Commerce and Essential Skills Ontario; Rodier, J., et al. (2020). *Evaluation of the Canadian Work Experience pilot projects*.

<sup>14</sup> Billett, S., & Smith, A. (2003). *Engagement and Commitment: Enhancing Employer Expenditure in Training*. *Journal of Vocational Education & Training* 55(3); Rodier, J., et al. (2020). *Evaluation of the Canadian Work Experience pilot projects*.