

Building Immigrant-Inclusive Career Advancement Processes

Practical steps for HR Professionals



As Canada's workforce becomes more diverse, talent strategies need to adapt. **Immigrants now make up a significant share of the talent pool, and supporting their advancement is essential to attracting, retaining, and maximizing top talent.**

Career advancement, however, doesn't look the same everywhere. In some countries, promotions are manager-driven or based on tenure; in others, employees are expected to "own their development" and seek opportunities. **For those who built their careers elsewhere, these expectations can be unfamiliar — creating gaps between what newcomer employees understand about advancement and what leaders assume they know.**

Steps to take:

1. Review how advancement information is shared
2. Equip managers to talk about career growth with newcomer employees
3. Clarify expectations and terminology
4. Demystify internal hiring
5. Embed inclusion into systems and processes

1. Review how advancement information is shared

Career development processes are often documented but not always well understood, especially by employees new to the Canadian context.

Why this matters:

Clear, transparent communication helps employees navigate the system confidently and reduces reliance on informal networks.

Check for:

- **Clarity in describing** how employees can advance (e.g., experiences required, typical timelines, career pathways and competencies).
- **Consistency across departments** in how development opportunities are shared.
- **Transparency about both formal and informal practices**, such as how visibility opportunities can be accessed.

Practical ideas:

- **Create a simple guide** or intranet page explaining “how advancement works here.”
- Regularly **highlight supports and development opportunities** (mentorships, volunteering with internal committees or as an employee resource group executive) and explain why they matter.
- **Host “Ask HR Anything”** sessions where employees can learn about internal hiring and mobility.

2. Equip managers to talk about career growth with newcomer employees

Managers play a pivotal role in inclusive advancement, but they need support and awareness. Many newcomers may not realize that directly sharing their career goals is expected or that self-advocacy is encouraged.

Why this matters:

Managers bridge policy and practice. Equipping them to effectively talk about growth helps ensure equitable access to development and advancement.

Include in manager training:

- **How to explain what vague terms** like “owning your development” or “taking initiative” mean in your organization.
- How to **normalize career-goal conversations**.
- How to connect team members to **visibility and learning opportunities**.
- How to set realistic timelines and **clarify advancement expectations**.

Tip:

Embed intercultural competence in leadership programs so managers recognize cultural differences in communication, initiative, and self-promotion.

3. Clarify expectations and terminology

Terms like “take initiative” or “own your development” may seem self-explanatory but can be interpreted differently depending on cultural contexts.

Why this matters:

Shared language creates shared understanding. Defining terms prevents confusion and supports consistency across teams.



What HR can do:

- **Define key terms** used in performance and development conversations.
- **Provide examples to increase clarity** (e.g., proposing improvements, seeking feedback, joining cross-team projects).
- **Encourage managers to revisit these** definitions during check-ins and reviews.

Why this matters:

Transparency around internal hiring builds trust, strengthens retention, and supports fair access to opportunities.

Actions to take:

- **Document and share clear steps** for applying internally (eligibility, timelines, selection criteria).
- Encourage hiring managers **to provide feedback to internal applicants.**
- **Review hiring practices through an inclusion lens** — especially intangible factors like “fit”
- Offer HR-led sessions **for employees to ask questions** about internal hiring.

4. Demystify internal hiring

Unwritten rules can make internal mobility feel exclusive to those who already “get” the system.

5. Embed inclusion into systems and processes

Inclusive advancement should be systemic, not situational.

Why this matters:

When inclusion is built into processes, not just individual efforts, progress is consistent and measurable.

Consider:

- Integrating **immigrant-inclusive examples**
- **Auditing promotion and succession data** for patterns that may reveal barriers.
- **Embedding inclusive advancement practices** into HR policies and leadership competencies.
- **Sharing real success stories** that model inclusive career growth.

In Summary

Real impact happens **when inclusion is built into every step**, from how opportunities are communicated to how success is defined.

By making advancement processes clearer, more transparent, and more culturally aware, HR can help every employee see a path forward.



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