

STRENGTHENING EMPLOYER FEEDBACK CHANNELS

# VISIONARY VOICES



# CATALOGUE

BOLD IDEAS AND INNOVATIONS IN IMMIGRANT WORKFORCE INTEGRATION

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# ABOUT IECC

The National Network of Immigrant Employment Councils (IECC) is a collaborative body dedicated to forging effective partnerships and innovative solutions.

It aims to significantly improve labour market outcomes for immigrants and support a stronger Canadian economy.



# STRENGTHENING EMPLOYER FEEDBACK CHANNELS

As Canada continues to refine its immigration strategy to better align with labour market needs, the Strengthening Employer Feedback Channels Project places employer perspectives at the centre of the conversation.

This national initiative establishes a structured mechanism to collect insights from employers that inform government and organizational strategies on immigration and workforce development.

Led by a network of local immigrant employment councils—including the Immigrant Employment Council of BC (IEC-BC), Calgary Region Immigrant Employment Council (CRIEC), Edmonton Region Immigrant Employment Council (ERIEC), Rural Manitoba Immigrant Employment Council (RMIEC), Saskatoon Open Door Society (SODS), Workforce Collective, Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council (TRIEC), New Brunswick Multicultural Council (NBMC), and Halifax Partnership—the project brings together employers and community leaders through regional forums to discuss how immigration can better support labour market priorities and immigrant workforce inclusion.

## Funded by:



Immigration, Refugees  
and Citizenship Canada

## PROJECT PARTNERS



# VISIONARY VOICES CATALOGUE

The Visionary Voices Catalogue brings together innovative insights from visionary leaders across British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia, contributing to a national dialogue on advancing immigrant workforce integration and inclusive workforce development.

Through bold ideas and strategies, this collection spotlights employers and system actors who are rethinking how immigration can better align with local labour market needs. Their stories show that newcomer inclusion not only addresses workforce gaps but also strengthens businesses, drives innovation, and fuels economic growth.

These voices reflect the importance of cross-sector collaboration in advancing immigrant workforce integration. With representation from the public and private sectors, post-secondary institutions, professional associations, and community-based organizations, the catalogue highlights insights from leaders across hospitality, construction, manufacturing, technology, social care, education, retail, settlement services, and energy. Together, they demonstrate the collective effort needed to build a more inclusive, resilient, and future-ready workforce across Canada.





We are grateful to the visionaries featured in this catalogue for generously sharing their insights, experiences, and bold ideas. Your continued engagement—extending beyond active participation in local feedback forums and amplified through national dialogue—reflects a strong commitment to building more inclusive and responsive workforce systems.

Through your contributions, you are shaping a more collaborative, inclusive, and forward-thinking approach to immigrant workforce integration. Your voices spark action, influence practice, and help build stronger systems across sectors and communities.

# Abdur Ahmad



Talent and EDI Consultant  
University of Saskatchewan

“

I envision workplaces that efficiently integrate international talent with clear expectations and processes.

**MORE IMPORTANTLY, ORGANIZATIONS SHOULD PRIORITIZE PEOPLE DEVELOPMENT, CREATING INCLUSIVE, PSYCHOLOGICALLY SAFE ENVIRONMENTS. THIS IS NOT ABOUT LOWERING STANDARDS BUT BROADENING OUR VIEW OF EXCELLENCE AND VALUING DIVERSE PERSPECTIVES.**

”

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Could you introduce yourself and tell us about your institution and your role within it?

I am Abdur Rehman Ahmad, Talent and EDI Consultant at the University of Saskatchewan. My role focuses on leadership development while driving equity, diversity, inclusion, reconciliation, and anti-racism initiatives across the institution.

**THROUGH STRATEGIC POLICIES AND PROGRAMS, I CREATE EQUITABLE OPPORTUNITIES AND FOSTER INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENTS, ENSURING THAT NEWCOMERS, INDIGENOUS PEOPLES, AND EQUITY-DESERVING GROUPS CAN THRIVE WITHIN OUR COMMUNITY.**

What motivated you to engage in immigrant workforce integration? Are there any personal or professional experiences that inspired your active role?

My experience as a newcomer to Canada since 2012 gave me firsthand insight into the challenges immigrants face. Despite bringing strong qualifications and experience from Pakistan, I had to rebuild my career while navigating systemic barriers like workplace cultural differences, credential recognition, and the complexities of finding a sense of belonging in a new community. These experiences shaped my commitment to building more inclusive pathways for others.

Based on your role or your institution's perspective, what are the top three challenges you face that hinder growth and thriving in your community?

Newcomers often struggle to meet employer expectations due to differences in communication styles rather than language proficiency. Credential recognition also creates unnecessary barriers, as seen when a seasoned computer science professor at our university had to verify basic coding skills despite leading global tech projects. Additionally, implicit hiring biases, such as Canadian experience requirements, have excluded international talent until we redesigned our processes.

**THE CHALLENGE IS NOT JUST FOR NEWCOMERS TO ADAPT BUT FOR ORGANIZATIONS TO RECOGNIZE AND INTEGRATE DIVERSE TALENT.**

What opportunities do you see where immigration and immigrant inclusion efforts could address these challenges?

Settlement agencies are uniquely positioned to bridge these gaps, but a shift in approach is needed. Instead of focusing solely on newcomer preparation, we must invest time and resources in building strong partnerships with employers.

**MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT GOES BEYOND PROMOTING DIVERSITY—IT REQUIRES ACTIVELY WORKING WITH EMPLOYERS TO UNDERSTAND THEIR NEEDS AND CHALLENGES.**

How do you foresee the role of your institution evolving in supporting and integrating immigrant talent within both your organization and the broader community?

With students from over 120 countries, the University of Saskatchewan sees diversity as a key strength. We are driving systemic change through reformed hiring, mandatory bias training for faculty searches, and leadership programs that integrate EDI principles. Beyond diversity metrics, we are closing the gap between faculty diversity and leadership representation to embed inclusion at all levels.

How do you envision businesses collaborating with other system actors like government agencies, academic institutions, public associations, and settlement organizations to foster systemic changes that support immigrant workforce integration?

Settlement agencies play a crucial role in connecting employers, government, and academia through their work with newcomers.

**HOWEVER, LASTING COLLABORATION DEPENDS ON ADEQUATE FUNDING AND RESOURCES TO DEVELOP SUSTAINABLE PARTNERSHIPS THAT TACKLE SYSTEMIC BARRIERS IN HIRING, WORKPLACE CULTURE, AND LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT.**



# Abel Osorio

Founder and CEO  
Nubel

TECH & TALENT INNOVATION

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**I ENVISION A CANADA WHERE IMMIGRATION IS SEEN AS A STRATEGIC ADVANTAGE, NOT A CHALLENGE—ONE THAT DRIVES INNOVATION, STRENGTHENS THE WORKFORCE, AND FUELS ECONOMIC GROWTH.**

To realize this, we must optimize how we integrate talent by building shared infrastructure, streamlining validation processes, and creating integrated talent pools where newcomers and locally trained candidates are evaluated side by side. Evaluation systems must focus on skills and potential, not just credentials. By shifting toward data-driven practices and stronger partnerships across sectors, we can unlock the full potential of immigrant talent. At Nubel, we are working to make that future a reality—one connection at a time.

”

Could you introduce yourself and tell us about your business/organization and your role within it?

I'm Abel Osorio, Founder and CEO of Nubel, a platform built to transform how companies discover and integrate talent. After more than 15 years in tech and talent acquisition, I realized that the traditional hiring model was fundamentally broken—biased, inefficient, and overly reliant on static resumes. At Nubel, we're creating an open talent ecosystem that puts people first—beyond job titles and keywords. We focus on deep data, meaningful connections, and making the hiring process more human, accurate, and scalable.

**I LEAD THE COMPANY'S VISION AND STRATEGY, BUT MORE IMPORTANTLY, I WORK CLOSELY WITH CANDIDATES, RECRUITERS, AND EMPLOYERS TO ENSURE WE'RE ADDRESSING REAL CHALLENGES THAT MATTER IN TODAY'S WORKFORCE.**

What motivated you to engage in immigrant workforce integration? Are there any personal or professional experiences that inspired your active role?

As an immigrant, this work is deeply personal to me. I came to Canada through the Startup Visa Program, and despite building a strong network, gaining extensive experience, and successfully running a U.S.-based tech company, I faced systemic barriers such as bureaucracy, skepticism, and delays, even while creating jobs. For over a decade, I've worked with immigrant developers and engineers and seen talented individuals overlooked simply because of where they came from or how their resumes were structured. That disconnect pushed me to take action. Immigrants bring more than technical skills; they bring resilience, fresh perspectives, and ideas that drive innovation. Ignoring that potential is not just a missed opportunity—it's a disadvantage for all of us.

Based on your role or your company's perspective, what are the top three challenges you face that hinder growth and thriving in your community?

Credential bias and systemic friction continue to exclude highly qualified candidates, particularly those without "Canadian experience" or whose backgrounds do not align with outdated systems like applicant tracking tools. Employers often lack the contextual information needed to assess talent confidently, while many immigrants struggle to present their experience in a way that resonates locally. These challenges are compounded by a fragmented hiring ecosystem, where job boards, recruiters, and institutions operate in isolation. Without coordinated efforts and shared success metrics, advancing more inclusive and effective hiring practices remains difficult.

What opportunities do you see where immigration and immigrant inclusion efforts could address these challenges?

Immigration is not just a social good—it is a business opportunity. By integrating immigrants effectively, we address talent shortages, strengthen retention, and drive innovation. We need systems that prioritize skills and problem-solving abilities over titles or educational backgrounds, and tools that enable better discovery and matching, especially for candidates with non-traditional pathways. Just as important are feedback mechanisms that help newcomers refine how they present their experience and navigate the job market.

**AT NUBEL, WE ARE ADVANCING THIS APPROACH BY OFFERING DEEPER, CONTEXT-RICH PROFILES AND A NETWORK-BASED MODEL THAT GOES BEYOND THE LIMITATIONS OF THE TRADITIONAL RESUME.**

How do you foresee the role of your business evolving in supporting and integrating immigrant talent within both your organization and the broader community?

Nubel is evolving into a trusted infrastructure that strengthens visibility and support for immigrant job seekers. We launched Nubel Job Connect, a community-driven program where participants, particularly immigrants, join expert-moderated groups offering weekly calls, daily check-ins, resume and interview preparation, and full access to Nubel's tools. The program is free, in exchange for participant engagement and feedback. We also partnered with local colleges to co-design real-world projects that allow immigrants to demonstrate their skills beyond traditional CVs. Our broader goal is to build a system that helps immigrants earn trust, gain visibility, and access meaningful opportunities—faster.

How do you envision businesses collaborating with other system actors like government agencies, academic institutions, public associations, and settlement organizations to foster systemic changes that support immigrant workforce integration?

**SYSTEMIC CHANGE CAN'T COME FROM A SINGLE ACTOR. IT REQUIRES SHARED INFRASTRUCTURE AND COLLECTIVE ACCOUNTABILITY.**

Government plays a critical role in simplifying immigration pathways and funding programs that validate skills efficiently. Academic institutions can contribute by co-designing training and retraining initiatives aligned with real-world outcomes. Settlement organizations help bridge gaps and support immigrants as they navigate the complexities of the job market. Businesses, including ours, must move beyond mentorship by opening networks, co-developing solutions, and offering tangible hiring opportunities. Ultimately, real progress depends on working with immigrants, not just for them.

# SASKATOON OPEN DOOR SOCIETY



**Ali Abukar**  
Chief Executive Officer



**Ashraf Mirmontahai**  
Director of Employment Services



**Ahmad Majid**  
Fund Development and  
Communications Manager

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We envision a future where hiring values skills and experience over names or origins, and immigration reflects resilience and adaptability. Employers recognize international credentials without unnecessary barriers, while policies align immigration targets with settlement support. Ongoing dialogue fosters collaboration and responsive solutions.

**IMMIGRANTS DRIVE INNOVATION, AND ORGANIZATIONS LIKE OURS FOCUS ON CAREER ADVANCEMENT, ENSURING THEY REACH THEIR FULL POTENTIAL AND BENEFIT INDIVIDUALS, EMPLOYERS, AND SOCIETY.**

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**SETTLEMENT SERVICES**

Could you introduce yourself and tell us about your organization and your role within it?

We are Ali Abukar, Chief Executive Officer, Ashraf Mirmontahai, Director of Employment Services, and Ahmad Majid, Fund Development and Communications Manager, and we represent the leadership team at the Saskatoon Open Door Society (SODS). Established in 1980 to support Vietnamese refugees, we have grown into one of the largest settlement organizations in the Prairies. We provide resettlement services, employment training, language programs, and entrepreneurship support, offering comprehensive services from early childhood education to career advancement to build lasting career pathways and inclusive communities.

What motivated you to engage in immigrant workforce integration? Are there any personal or professional experiences that inspired your active role?

Our commitment stems from personal experiences. Ali, a former Somali refugee, saw firsthand the need for strong newcomer support while helping refugees in Egypt. Ashraf began as a volunteer with immigrant service providers, relating to newcomers' challenges through her own experiences. She transitioned to government work, contributing to capacity building, and now brings her expertise to the leadership team of SODS. Ahmad, the son of Iraqi immigrants, witnessed his mother's struggles with credential recognition and experienced reverse culture shock in the UAE, which deepened his understanding of integration. These experiences have shaped our goal to address systemic barriers and fully recognize immigrant talent.

Based on your role or your organization's perspective, what are the top three challenges you face that hinder growth and thriving in your community?

Lengthy and costly credential recognition processes prevent newcomers from pursuing careers aligned with their qualifications. Even immigrants with Canadian education face exclusion due to systemic resistance to change, gatekeepers, and perceptions of "cultural fit" in hiring. Networking poses another challenge, particularly in smaller communities like Saskatoon, where professional connections are essential for career advancement but difficult for newcomers to establish.

**LIMITED FUNDING FURTHER CONSTRAINS OUR ABILITY TO EXPAND PROGRAMS AND SCALE TO MEET THE GROWING DEMAND FOR EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING SERVICES.**

What opportunities do you see where immigration and immigrant inclusion efforts could address these challenges?

**EMPLOYERS MUST DRIVE CONVERSATIONS AS CHAMPIONS FOR SYSTEMIC CHANGE AND SERVE AS ROLE MODELS FOR OTHERS.**

At SODS, we actively engage "champion" employers to showcase the benefits of inclusive hiring and workforce integration. We collaborate with regulatory bodies; for example, supporting internationally trained dentists, to modernize credentialing processes. We expand mentorship and training programs to equip newcomers with valuable experience while connecting employers to skilled talent. Our innovative entrepreneurship programs, particularly for immigrant women, empower newcomers to create opportunities through business development and self-employment. We also educate the broader community about the global contributions of immigrants to foster understanding and inclusion, advancing systemic change.

How do you foresee the role of your institution evolving in supporting and integrating immigrant talent within both your organization and the broader community?

We continue to strengthen partnerships with business networks, the Chamber of Commerce, and industry leaders to bridge the gap between newcomers and employers. We collaborate with the Chamber of Commerce to connect immigrant business owners with mainstream business networks, while supporting entrepreneurship, aligning skills development with employer needs, and adapting to technological advancements to equip newcomers for a rapidly evolving labour market.

**AS DIVERSITY EXPANDS ACROSS EVERY SECTOR, OUR WORK BECOMES INCREASINGLY IMPORTANT, MOVING BEYOND BASIC SERVICES TO CAREER ADVANCEMENT AND REDEFINING HOW THE WORKFORCE VALUES INTERNATIONAL TALENT.**

How do you envision businesses collaborating with other system actors like government agencies, academic institutions, public associations, and settlement organizations to foster systemic changes that support immigrant workforce integration?

Businesses must go beyond hiring to actively shape workforce development policies. Strengthening feedback channels, exemplified by the Employer Feedback Forums, fosters collaboration among employers, policymakers, settlement agencies, and education systems. These channels enable evidence-based solutions informed by front-line experiences and address employment and education barriers. Including immigrant voices in leadership further drives systemic change, leveraging global talent to advance Canada's economic growth and foster long-term progress.

A portrait of Angelah Kusero, a Black woman with short, curly hair, wearing glasses and a bright pink blazer over a black top. She is smiling and looking towards the camera. The background is a colorful, abstract graphic with shades of orange, green, and blue.

# ANGELAH KUSERO

Director, Workforce Development & Chief Strategist,  
Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, Manpower

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**I ENVISION IMMIGRATION POLICIES AND BUSINESS PRACTICES ALIGNING TO CREATE A THRIVING, INCLUSIVE ECONOMY WHERE NEWCOMERS FULLY CONTRIBUTE THEIR SKILLS AND EXPERIENCE.**

Employers must actively seek global talent, build diverse workplaces, and provide mentorship that supports career growth. Governments must remove barriers, recognize international credentials, and fund skill-building and career development programs. Businesses, government, and settlement organizations must create clear pathways for immigrants by validating skills and expanding professional networks. Aligning policies with labour market needs will harness immigrant talent, drive innovation, and ensure newcomers don't just find jobs—they thrive, strengthening Canada's competitiveness and resilience.

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Could you introduce yourself and tell us about your organization and your role within it?

I'm Angelah Kusero, Workforce Development Director and Chief Strategist for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) at Manpower. I lead workforce development programs that help unemployed and underemployed Albertans re-enter the job market while driving DEI strategies to create equitable opportunities. We partner with employers to deliver high-impact, industry-driven solutions that align training with labour market needs, ensuring job seekers secure meaningful careers. At our core, we put "People First," connecting individuals with employers who match their skills and goals.

What motivated you to engage in immigrant workforce integration? Are there any personal or professional experiences that inspired your active role?

My experience as an immigrant from Kenya drives my passion for supporting newcomers. As an international student in Halifax, I struggled with the harsh winter, felt isolated, and reeled at the cost of a simple meal, which was equivalent to a month's wage back home. These experiences reinforced how vital it is for immigrants to feel supported. Working on-campus jobs and receiving mentorship helped me navigate the workforce. A career counselor transformed my resume and opened doors to HR and workforce development. Contributing to the Nova Scotia Immigration Strategy in 2006 strengthened my belief in systemic solutions and led to the creation of the Off-Campus Work Permit Program for international students. Now, at Manpower, I break barriers and create pathways for immigrants to thrive.

Based on your role or your organization's perspective, what are the top three challenges you face that hinder growth and thriving in your community?

Bridging the skills gap remains a major challenge as industries like construction, tech, healthcare, and trades struggle to find qualified workers. Rapid technological advancements and an aging workforce make it harder to match talent with evolving industry needs. Many immigrants and marginalized groups face employment barriers due to biases and credential recognition issues, limiting their access to meaningful jobs. Achieving true workplace inclusion is another hurdle, as hiring diverse talent alone is not enough.

**ORGANIZATIONS MUST CREATE ENVIRONMENTS WHERE EMPLOYEES FEEL VALUED AND THEIR INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE IS RECOGNIZED.**

What opportunities do you see where immigration and immigrant inclusion efforts could address these challenges?

Recognizing international experience and credentials creates opportunities to bridge skills gaps, allowing qualified immigrants to contribute more effectively. Mentorship programs, like those at Calgary Region Immigrant Employment Council (CRIEC), help newcomers navigate the job market and expand professional networks while giving employers access to diverse talent. Micro-credentials offer targeted, industry-specific training that equips immigrants with in-demand skills. Expanding funding for reskilling programs would further eliminate financial barriers.

**STRONGER COLLABORATION BETWEEN SETTLEMENT AGENCIES, EMPLOYERS, AND GOVERNMENT BODIES CAN BUILD HOLISTIC SUPPORT SYSTEMS THAT ENSURE IMMIGRANTS HAVE EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES TO SUCCEED.**

How do you foresee the role of your institution evolving in supporting and integrating immigrant talent within both your organization and the broader community?

Manpower will continue expanding its support for immigrant workforce integration by strengthening training programs, advocating for inclusive hiring, and deepening employer partnerships. We will enhance engagement through initiatives like the Dress for Success drive in Red Deer and mentorship programs with CRIEC, while broadening community involvement in the Walk for Reconciliation, food bank drives, and anti-bullying campaigns. Through partnerships with Inn from the Cold, we will help more families secure employment and stability. At a leadership level, we will advance workforce development advocacy through SAIT's Real Futures Campaign. Expanding collaborations with employers, community organizations, and educational institutions will ensure immigrant talent remains vital to economic growth.

How do you envision businesses collaborating with other system actors like government agencies, academic institutions, public associations, and settlement organizations to foster systemic changes that support immigrant workforce integration?

Employers must align training with labour market needs, while universities expand micro-credentialing to help immigrants gain in-demand skills. Government agencies must increase funding for upskilling and streamline credential recognition to unlock immigrant talent. Settlement organizations bridge the gap by providing mentorship, career counseling, and networking opportunities. At Manpower, we will continue working with CRIEC and other partners to connect skilled immigrants with businesses.

**STRENGTHENING THESE PARTNERSHIPS WILL REMOVE EMPLOYMENT BARRIERS, FOSTER RESILIENCE, AND BUILD A DIVERSE, INCLUSIVE LABOUR MARKET.**

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My ideal solution for integration would be the introduction of incentives for businesses to hire newcomers through subsidies or tax breaks. Mirroring the higher education co-op or apprenticeship type programs with a straight pathway to permanent residency would enhance workforce integration and relieve employers' potential retention concerns based on the question of employee permanence. These initiatives would connect immigrants with meaningful work and help organizations address talent gaps, benefiting newcomers, businesses, and Canada's economy.

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# BASIL ONYIA

Manager, People Operations and Development  
Redbrick Technologies, Inc.

TECH

Could you introduce yourself and tell us about your business/organization and your role within it?

My name is Basil Onyia, Manager of People Operations and Development at Redbrick Technologies Inc. We are a tech company creating solutions for digital entrepreneurs, and I focus on fostering scalable and sustainable business practices through innovative people strategies.

What motivated you to engage in immigrant workforce integration? Are there any personal or professional experiences that inspired your active role?

Living with temporary immigration statuses in different countries for 13 years before gaining citizenship shaped my commitment to immigrant workforce integration.

**I MOVED FROM NIGERIA TO THE U.S. BEFORE ARRIVING IN CANADA IN 2019 AS A PERMANENT RESIDENT, BUT IT WASN'T UNTIL I HELD MY CANADIAN PASSPORT FOUR YEARS LATER THAT I COULD FINALLY BREATHE.**

I experienced firsthand how immigration status affects integration and career opportunities and found inspiration through the support of immigrant-serving organizations like the Central Vancouver Island MultiCultural Society. Their impact motivated me to give back, help others navigate this path, and recognize the resilience and dedication newcomers bring.

Based on your role or your company's perspective, what are the top three challenges you face that hinder growth and thriving in your community?

There are three interconnected challenges that significantly impact our business community today. First, attracting and retaining top talent is difficult as the demand for specialized skills outpaces supply. Second, rapid technological advancements widen the skills gap, making it challenging to upskill employees quickly. Lastly, the post-COVID shift to hybrid work has complicated employee engagement and well-being, making it harder to maintain organizational culture while addressing mental health and work-life balance.

What opportunities do you see where immigration and immigrant inclusion efforts could address these challenges?

**IMMIGRANT TALENT IS AN UNTAPPED RESOURCE THAT ADDRESSES SKILLS GAPS AND DRIVES INNOVATION.**

Many newcomers face systemic barriers, including outdated hiring practices, cultural differences in soft skills, and misconceptions about Canadian work experience. Creating inclusive pathways harnesses their potential, fostering engagement, innovation, and global competitiveness.

How do you foresee the role of your business evolving in supporting and integrating immigrant talent within both your organization and the broader community?

Redbrick prioritizes people alongside profit and sustainability. We implement DEI programs shaped by lived experiences to harness diverse perspectives and build strategic partnerships that support communities. Our B Corp certification stands as a testament to our commitment to equity, inclusive hiring, and sustainable business practices. By embracing immigrant talent, we drive innovation, sustainable growth, and industry-wide change.

How do you envision businesses collaborating with other system actors like government agencies, academic institutions, public associations, and settlement organizations to foster systemic changes that support immigrant workforce integration?

**COORDINATED EFFORTS BETWEEN BUSINESSES, GOVERNMENT, ACADEMIA, AND SETTLEMENT ORGANIZATIONS ARE CRUCIAL TO ADDRESSING BARRIERS LIKE HOUSING, SOCIAL SERVICES, AND SKILLED IMMIGRANT RECERTIFICATION.**

Aligning resources, expanding infrastructure, and investing in underdeveloped regions while actively engaging Indigenous communities fosters respect and ensures sustainable development for all stakeholders.



# CAROL LOGAN

Director of Human Resources  
The Prince George Hotel &  
Cambridge Suites Hotel Halifax

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I envision a collaborative system that removes barriers and makes hiring newcomers feel seamless, not stressful. Employers receive the guidance they need to navigate immigration processes, and organizations know how to lead diverse teams with confidence. Education and accountability are built into the system to ensure both employers and newcomers succeed.

**ULTIMATELY, WE ALIGN IMMIGRATION POLICY WITH BUSINESS PRACTICE—NOT JUST TALKING ABOUT DIVERSITY, BUT BUILDING THE STRUCTURES THAT MAKE INCLUSION, OPPORTUNITY, AND LONG-TERM GROWTH A REALITY.**

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Could you introduce yourself and tell us about your business/organization and your role within it?

I'm Carol Logan, Director of Human Resources for The Prince George Hotel and Cambridge Suites Hotel in Halifax, Nova Scotia. I've been with this organization for over 30 years and continue to shape and support our people strategy across both properties. Our team includes nearly 300 employees who deliver hospitality services in accommodations and food and beverage. While ownership and management have evolved over time, our belief in people as the foundation of our success has remained constant.

**IN A HIGH-TOUCH INDUSTRY LIKE OURS, EVEN AS AI AND AUTOMATION PROGRESS, WE CONTINUE TO RELY ON PEOPLE TO DELIVER SERVICE—AND THAT HUMAN CONNECTION REMAINS AT THE HEART OF WHAT WE DO.**

What motivated you to engage in immigrant workforce integration? Are there any personal or professional experiences that inspired your active role?

I've taken an active role in building relationships across our community here in Nova Scotia, partnering with organizations like the Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia (ISANS), local industry associations, community colleges, and universities. These connections have shaped how we do business and helped us access immigrant talent to meet our labour needs. We hire the best person for the job, and that often means newcomers who bring the right values, skills, and attitudes. As our workforce grew more diverse, we adapted by adjusting schedules for language learning and cultural observances, offering language training, and building cultural competency. Inclusion didn't happen overnight, but through collaboration and ongoing learning, it became part of how we work.

Based on your role or your company's perspective, what are the top three challenges you face that hinder growth and thriving in your community?

We continue to manage seasonal fluctuations while working to maintain a stable, year-round business that supports both operational needs and workforce stability. Many still see hospitality roles as temporary or transitional, which makes it harder to attract and retain talent, even though these jobs develop highly transferable skills. We also focus on creating inclusive systems that reflect the needs of a diverse workforce, including varied languages, cultural values, and life stages.

**ON TOP OF THESE CHALLENGES, FREQUENT AND UNPREDICTABLE CHANGES TO IMMIGRATION POLICIES, SUCH AS SHIFTS IN PERMIT TYPES OR ELIGIBILITY, CREATE UNCERTAINTY AND MAKE IT DIFFICULT FOR EMPLOYERS TO PLAN AHEAD, HIRE EFFECTIVELY, AND SUPPORT LONG-TERM RETENTION.**

What opportunities do you see where immigration and immigrant inclusion efforts could address these challenges?

Immigration has played a vital role in meeting our labour needs, particularly through partnerships with organizations like ISANS and the YMCA. These relationships have helped us hire newcomers, including many from the Ukrainian population, while also accessing support for language training and cultural orientation. To make integration more sustainable, we need systems that continue to support both employers and employees beyond the initial hiring stage. For example, during slower periods like January, employers can offer focused language or skills training instead of reducing hours. When we invest in people this way, we build capacity, improve retention, and create more inclusive, resilient workplaces.

How do you foresee the role of your business evolving in supporting and integrating immigrant talent within both your organization and the broader community?

We take pride in the role we've played and continue to look for ways to expand our impact. One of our employees, who came to us through the Ukrainian resettlement initiative, recently transitioned from a housekeeping role into full-time land surveying—her dream profession. We supported her through language and skills development, and now she's thriving. These are the kinds of outcomes we strive to create. Looking ahead, we're working to build stronger cross-sector partnerships with industries like construction and healthcare to help newcomers move into roles that align with their training and experience.

**WE SEE OURSELVES AS PART OF THAT JOURNEY, SUPPORTING INDIVIDUALS AS THEY GROW, CONTRIBUTE, AND BUILD MEANINGFUL CAREERS.**

How do you envision businesses collaborating with other system actors like government agencies, academic institutions, public associations, and settlement organizations to foster systemic changes that support immigrant workforce integration?

**BUSINESSES NEED BETTER ACCESS TO REAL-TIME DATA THAT SHOWS WHERE IMMIGRANTS ARE WORKING, WHAT ROLES THEY HOLD, AND THE BARRIERS THEY FACE.**

This information helps employers and policymakers make informed decisions that reflect on-the-ground realities. We also need clearer systems navigation. Employers shouldn't have to manage complex immigration processes on their own. A centralized hub that supports both employers and newcomers could streamline applications, permits, and onboarding. Most importantly, businesses, government, and community partners must co-create practical solutions. We've seen real impact when partners collaborate to deliver training and support, and we need to build on that model.

# CITLALLI

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**WORKFORCE INTEGRATION GOES BEYOND HIRING—IT REQUIRES CREATING ENVIRONMENTS WHERE IMMIGRANTS CAN FULLY CONTRIBUTE AND THRIVE.**

Employers must rethink hiring practices, invest in upskilling, and actively support career growth. Systemic biases often undervalue skilled immigrants, restricting their career growth and fair compensation. Canada offers tools, like the Job Bank, to connect immigrants with employers, but we have yet to fully tap into their potential to drive meaningful employment outcomes. To support economic growth, we must fully leverage these resources and align policies with labour market needs.

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# RIOS

President, Hispanotech

PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATION

Could you introduce yourself and tell us about your organization and your role within it?

I'm Citlalli Rios, President of Hispanotech, a non-profit organization dedicated to helping immigrant professionals succeed in Canada. While we began as a network for Hispanic professionals in technology, we've grown to support newcomers across various industries. Our flagship mentorship program connects skilled immigrants with industry leaders, providing guidance on networking, job searching, and career integration. Though based in Toronto, we're working to expand nationally to ensure more newcomers have access to the support they need to thrive in the Canadian workforce.

What motivated you to engage in immigrant workforce integration? Are there any personal or professional experiences that inspired your active role?

As an immigrant, I've encountered challenges many newcomers face, from microaggressions to systemic barriers in the job market. Instead of letting these experiences shape my path, I focused on understanding and addressing them. Hispanotech gave me a space to learn and take action. Over six years, I've seen how mentorship, advocacy, and professional development empower newcomers, which continues to motivate me. My transition from Vice President to President reinforced the importance of representation and strong support systems for immigrants and women in leadership.

Based on your role or your organization's perspective, what are the top three challenges you face that hinder growth and thriving in your community?

**RIISING ANTI-IMMIGRANT SENTIMENT IS SHIFTING PUBLIC PERCEPTION, INFLUENCING POLICIES, AND CUTTING FUNDING FOR PROGRAMS THAT HELP NEWCOMERS SUCCEED.**

Without these initiatives, skilled immigrants face even greater barriers, and Canada risks losing valuable talent. The expectation of Canadian experience remains a major hurdle, often disguised as a need for soft skills, undervaluing global expertise and reinforcing hiring biases. Meanwhile, debates over diversity, equity, and inclusion add complexity, with some dismissing immigrant hires as tokenism. These shifting attitudes threaten progress in workforce integration, making it more urgent to address systemic barriers and ensure immigrant talent is recognized and valued.

What opportunities do you see where immigration and immigrant inclusion efforts could address these challenges?

**IMMIGRATION PRESENTS A KEY OPPORTUNITY TO ADDRESS LABOUR SHORTAGES AND ECONOMIC GAPS, BUT ONLY IF WE REMOVE OUTDATED HIRING BIASES AND CREATE PATHWAYS FOR SKILLED NEWCOMERS TO APPLY THEIR EXPERTISE.**

Instead of forcing qualified professionals to start over, we need industry-wide efforts to streamline credential recognition, expand bridging programs, and provide targeted upskilling. Beyond traditional sectors, industries like waste management and logistics face an aging workforce yet remain overlooked as viable career paths for immigrants. Aligning immigration strategies with labour market needs will ensure Canada fully leverages its talent pool, strengthening both workforce sustainability and economic growth.

How do you foresee the role of your institution evolving in supporting and integrating immigrant talent within both your organization and the broader community?

**WE'RE EXPANDING BEYOND NETWORKING AND MENTORSHIP TO SERVE AS A CENTRAL HUB FOR IMMIGRANT PROFESSIONALS.**

Strengthening employer partnerships will help businesses build diverse, inclusive workplaces, while a national resource directory will connect newcomers with services, programs, and job opportunities. We're also scaling our mentorship program across Canada to ensure more immigrants receive career guidance and support. By broadening our reach, we're bridging gaps between talent, employers, and opportunities, making workforce integration more effective.

How do you envision businesses collaborating with other system actors like government agencies, academic institutions, public associations, and settlement organizations to foster systemic changes that support immigrant workforce integration?

We need stronger collaboration between businesses, academia, and policymakers to align workforce development with industry needs.

**EMPLOYERS MUST SHAPE PROGRAMS AND IMPROVE THEIR ONBOARDING TO HELP SKILLED IMMIGRANTS INTEGRATE, WHILE POLICYMAKERS MUST ADAPT FASTER TO DRIVE SUSTAINABLE CHANGE.**

AI's rise risks sidelining skilled immigrants rather than integrating them into evolving industries. Recent caps on international students highlight the need for balanced policies that prevent student exploitation while supporting post-secondary institutions. Strengthening collaboration through employer consultations and advisory groups with government, academia and other stakeholders will help align policies with workforce demands and create more effective pathways for immigrant integration.

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My ideal approach would include streamlined, automated processes to quickly assess and integrate newcomers and match them with regional labour market needs.

**I ENVISION A FUTURE WHERE SUCCESSFUL INTEGRATION STORIES FOSTER AN EVEN MORE INCLUSIVE AND RESILIENT WORKFORCE ACROSS CANADA.**

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# DANNY MIKITKA

Director, People & Culture  
Pagnotta Inc.



**CONSTRUCTION**

Could you introduce yourself and tell us about your business/organization and your role within it?

I am Danny Mikitka, Director of People and Culture at Pagnotta Inc. Our company is a leader in the construction industry, founded in 1967 by Mario Pagnotta, who emigrated from rural Italy and built the business through hard work and dedication. Those same values continue to drive our success today. I manage our workforce mobility and international recruitment strategies, ensuring we have the right skilled people in place for our continued success. That's why international talent matters a great deal to us.

What motivated you to engage in immigrant workforce integration? Are there any personal or professional experiences that inspired your active role?

My direct experiences with the successes and challenges of integrating immigrant workers have led to this work. I've witnessed how systemic barriers can disrupt smooth employee integration into their job and their community, which drives my personal and professional commitment to improving these processes.

Based on your role or your company's perspective, what are the top three challenges you face that hinder growth and thriving in your community?

**WE PRIMARILY FACE CHALLENGES WITH GEOGRAPHIC MOBILITY RESTRICTIONS ON TEMPORARY FOREIGN WORKERS, LENGTHY LABOUR MARKET ASSESSMENTS, AND COMPLEX WORK PERMIT PROCESSES. THESE ISSUES RESTRICT OUR FLEXIBILITY IN DEPLOYING SKILLED LABOUR AND OFTEN DISRUPT OPERATIONS.**

As an example, we have experienced challenges moving employees from one province to another as project and business needs evolved. The employee wanted to transfer, and we could have really used their skills on another project in another province. But with all the hurdles in place to that kind of movement, it is a very difficult thing to do. Work permit restrictions also limit access to education and training, making it harder to retain skilled workers.

What opportunities do you see where immigration and immigrant inclusion efforts could address these challenges?

**AUTOMATION AND AI PRESENT SIGNIFICANT OPPORTUNITIES FOR INNOVATION IN IMMIGRATION PROCESSES.**

We could for instance use automated matching systems and regional opportunity assessments to more efficiently align immigrant skills with labour market needs. Extending open work permits to four years would also make a big difference, giving newcomers the time to fully integrate and contribute effectively to the workforce and their communities.

How do you foresee the role of your business evolving in supporting and integrating immigrant talent within both your organization and the broader community?

I see Pagnotta increasingly engaging in collaborations with government, academia, and public associations to advance our immigrant workforce integration. We will also be continuing to develop industry-specific skills through apprenticeships and mandatory safety training for both global talent and employees born in Canada.

How do you envision businesses collaborating with other system actors like government agencies, academic institutions, public associations, and settlement organizations to foster systemic changes that support immigrant workforce integration?

Effective collaboration among businesses, government agencies, academia, and public associations is crucial.

**TOGETHER, WE CAN ESTABLISH MORE THOUGHTFUL AND FLEXIBLE APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAMS, ENSURE HIGH-STANDARD SAFETY TRAINING, AND DRIVE POLICY REFORMS TO ENHANCE MOBILITY AND SIMPLIFY IMMIGRATION PROCESSES SO THAT BUSINESSES CAN GET THE SKILLED TALENT THEY NEED TO GROW.**



# DEANNA D'ELIA

Chief Operating Officer  
YMCA of Niagara

## COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL SERVICES

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I envision workforce integration where newcomers and ITIs fully contribute their skills in meaningful roles, driving personal and economic success.

**A SINGLE GOVERNMENT-RECOGNIZED LANGUAGE TEST AND A UNIFIED CREDENTIAL ASSESSMENT TOOL SHOULD BE IMPLEMENTED TO SIMPLIFY QUALIFICATION MATCHING AND ADDRESS MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT SKILLS AND EDUCATION.**

Workplace language development, mentorship, and training advance ITIs' careers and help employers build inclusive workplaces, boosting job satisfaction and retention. Employers, governments, and community agencies must align policies with labour market needs and fair wage principles to drive equitable economic growth.

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Could you introduce yourself and tell us about your organization and your role within it?

I am Deanna D'Elia, Chief Operating Officer at the YMCA of Niagara. With over 32 years of experience in the fields of employment and settlement, I am deeply passionate about supporting individuals as they navigate their journeys toward stability, growth, and success. The YMCA of Niagara empowers individuals to grow, lead, and give back, creating a ripple effect that strengthens the Niagara Region.

**WE FOSTER CONNECTION, BELONGING, AND WELL-BEING, DRIVEN BY OUR BELIEF THAT EVERYONE HAS THE POTENTIAL TO THRIVE.**

What motivated you to engage in immigrant workforce integration? Are there any personal or professional experiences that inspired your active role?

My passion for this work comes from the people we serve and the incredible team I work with. We empower internationally trained individuals (ITIs) to set career goals and integrate into the workforce. As our work expands, our increasingly diverse team brings valuable perspectives that deepen our understanding of the challenges employers face. Many employers need assistance to interpret international qualifications. To address this, we develop educational and awareness initiatives that help employers overcome these barriers and foster inclusive workplaces where newcomers and businesses thrive.

Based on your role or your organization's perspective, what are the top three challenges you face that hinder growth and thriving in your community?

**FLUCTUATING FUNDING, SHIFTING GOVERNMENT PRIORITIES, MISINFORMATION ABOUT NEWCOMERS' CONTRIBUTIONS, AND A PERSISTENT LOW-WAGE ECONOMY POSE SIGNIFICANT CHALLENGES.**

Short-term funding cycles undermine efforts to build a skilled workforce, as workforce integration requires sustained, collaborative investment. During the pandemic, employers relied on newcomers and international students to fill labour shortages, creating challenges for returning job seekers and reinforcing misconceptions about their value. The low-wage economy often places skilled newcomers in roles that fail to reflect their expertise, limiting professional development and economic mobility. Addressing these issues requires sustained investment, education, and equitable practices to drive growth and opportunity for all.

What opportunities do you see where immigration and immigrant inclusion efforts could address these challenges?

Immigration provides a direct solution to labour shortages, particularly in industries requiring specialized expertise. Provincial and federal governments must collaborate with employment agencies and business associations to align policies with labour market needs and bring a boots-on-the-ground perspective to business strategies. This includes rethinking application processes and streamlining credential recognition and funding pathways. Additionally, leveraging the entrepreneurial expertise, networks, and cultural knowledge of ITIs elevates local economies to the global stage, driving trade, innovation, and job creation. Highlighting immigrants' contributions—through workforce achievements, entrepreneurship, or community engagement—fosters belonging and unity.

How do you foresee the role of your institution evolving in supporting and integrating immigrant talent within both your organization and the broader community?

**WE ARE BUILDING A NETWORK OF SUPPORT THAT ENSURES EVERYONE IN THE NIAGARA REGION CAN ACCESS MEANINGFUL EMPLOYMENT.**

Through initiatives like Workforce Innovation Network (WIN), which includes "Train the Trainer" models, the Employer Learning, Information, and Networked Knowledge (LINK) project, and the Accelerated Career Exploration (ACE) program, we empower employers to adopt inclusive hiring practices, assess credentials, and help ITIs navigate Ontario's workforce.

How do you envision businesses collaborating with other system actors like government agencies, academic institutions, public associations, and settlement organizations to foster systemic changes that support immigrant workforce integration?

Systemic change requires collaboration between businesses, government agencies, academic institutions, and settlement organizations. The YMCA of Niagara, in partnership with the Niagara Workforce Collective, Niagara Industrial Association, and Niagara Workforce Coalition, has been driving this work. Academia should equitably evaluate international education, align training with industry needs, and advance best practices, while local business associations should contribute industry-specific solutions through mentorship, training, and inclusive hiring.

**WORKFORCE INTEGRATION MUST NOT BE A ONE-OFF EFFORT BUT A CONTINUOUS PROCESS THAT ADAPTS TO THE EVOLVING LABOUR MARKET.**

# DINARA MILLINGTON



Founder and CEO  
17Insight

**ENERGY AND SUSTAINABILITY**

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**A WELL-INTEGRATED WORKFORCE NEEDS ACCESSIBLE INFORMATION, EMPLOYER INCENTIVES, AND STRONG COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT.**

For example, a centralized online hub could provide clear guidance on jobs, credential recognition, business regulations, and financial support. Tax credits or subsidies for businesses hiring skilled immigrants would promote inclusive hiring. Entrepreneurial programs, including incubators and mentorship networks, should ensure immigrant-led startups have equal access to funding. Encouraging local businesses to mentor and support newcomers fosters inclusion and strengthens industry connections. Aligning immigration policies with business needs positions Canada as a global leader in innovation, entrepreneurship, and economic growth, reinforcing our reputation as the top destination for skilled talent.

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Could you introduce yourself and tell us about your business/organization and your role within it?

I'm Dinara Millington, Founder and CEO of 17Insight, a boutique consulting firm specializing in energy sustainability and global energy transformation. With over 20 years of experience in the Canadian energy sector, I bring expertise in techno-economic research, regulatory analysis, energy transition, and sustainability. At 17Insight, we integrate technical knowledge, economic insight, and environmental considerations to help businesses navigate the complexities of the energy industry. Our mission aligns with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, focusing on economic opportunity, environmental stewardship, and social inclusion.

What motivated you to engage in immigrant workforce integration? Are there any personal or professional experiences that inspired your active role?

As an immigrant, I understand the challenges newcomers face in establishing their careers in Canada.

**I SEE SKILLED IMMIGRANTS AS AN UNTAPPED RESOURCE THAT CAN STRENGTHEN THE LABOR MARKET, AND I AM COMMITTED TO CREATING OPPORTUNITIES THAT ALLOW THEM TO CONTRIBUTE MEANINGFULLY.**

Through my work with the Calgary Region Immigrant Employment Council (CRIEC) and the VeriStell Institute, I mentor newcomers, help them build professional networks, and guide them in navigating the job market. These experiences have reinforced my belief that mentorship, upskilling, and inclusive hiring practices are essential to successful workforce integration.

Based on your role or your company's perspective, what are the top three challenges you face that hinder growth and thriving in your community?

Operating a small business in energy sustainability and decarbonization presents unique challenges. Finding and retaining talent with specialized expertise is difficult, especially when larger firms offer higher pay. Securing capital and financial support is another hurdle, as most funding is tied to specific projects rather than overall growth. Resources and supports from governments are often fragmented and hard to navigate, making it harder for small businesses to scale. Global geopolitical uncertainty further complicates planning, creating unpredictable market conditions that affect business stability. While strategic planning is essential, adapting to these realities requires flexibility, innovation, and strong industry partnerships.

What opportunities do you see where immigration and immigrant inclusion efforts could address these challenges?

Expanding mentorship and upskilling programs, like those offered by CRIEC, helps immigrants gain industry-specific credentials and experience, easing their integration into the workforce. Governments and financial institutions should provide tailored support for immigrant entrepreneurs through micro-loans, incubators, and financial literacy training. Organizations like Intrinsic Innovations already support immigrant-led startups with funding and mentorship. Strengthening cross-cultural training and onboarding for both employers and employees improves communication, sets expectations, and fosters inclusive workplaces. These efforts not only empower newcomers but also help businesses access skilled talent, drive innovation, and stay competitive.

How do you foresee the role of your business evolving in supporting and integrating immigrant talent within both your organization and the broader community?

**AT 17INSIGHT, WE ACTIVELY INTEGRATE AND SUPPORT IMMIGRANT TALENT BY PARTNERING WITH CRIEC AND THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY TO MENTOR PROFESSIONAL IMMIGRANTS AND INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS.**

We help newcomers understand Canadian work culture, refine interview skills, and grow their networks. Our flexible hiring values transferable skills and international experience over rigid credentials. We also connect immigrants with entrepreneurs and local businesses through networking events, fostering collaboration and opportunity. These efforts strengthen our workforce and create a more inclusive business environment.

How do you envision businesses collaborating with other system actors like government agencies, academic institutions, public associations, and settlement organizations to foster systemic changes that support immigrant workforce integration?

A more inclusive economy requires stronger collaboration between businesses, government agencies, academic institutions, and settlement organizations.

**BUSINESSES COULD EXPAND THEIR ENGAGEMENT WITH UNIVERSITIES AND COLLEGES TO DEVELOP MORE INCLUSIVE CO-OP PROGRAMS AND FAST-TRACK CREDENTIAL RECOGNITION, HELPING NEWCOMERS INTEGRATE FASTER.**

Expanding funding for language training and employment services strengthens workforce readiness and creates more opportunities for skilled immigrants. Industry associations must push for streamlined licensing and regulatory processes to eliminate barriers. Aligning these efforts enables businesses and policymakers to drive economic growth while building a diverse, skilled workforce.

# GLENDA



**A STRONGER FUTURE FOR IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION STARTS WITH CREATING TRANSITION PROGRAMS THAT HELP NEWCOMERS BUILD SUCCESSFUL CAREERS AND CONNECTIONS FROM THE MOMENT THEY ARRIVE.**

# CATHCART

A coordinated system involving businesses, settlement services, educational institutions, and government bodies would ensure newcomers receive the support, recognition, and opportunities they need to thrive. Strengthening credential recognition would allow immigrants to work in fields aligned with their training and education, helping businesses access a broader pool of global talent. By working together across sectors and beyond the local level, we can create stronger businesses, more welcoming communities, and better opportunities for newcomers to succeed.



Human Resource/Health & Safety Manager  
Neepawa-Gladstone Cooperative Ltd.

**RETAIL AND  
COMMUNITY  
SERVICES**

Could you introduce yourself and tell us about your organization and your role within it?

My name is Glenda Cathcart, and I am the Human Resource and Health & Safety Manager at Neepawa-Gladstone Co-op in Neepawa, Manitoba. I have been with the Co-op for about 10 years, starting in Human Resources, then expanding into Health & Safety, and later taking on payroll management. I lead a team of three, and my role has evolved to focus more strategically on supporting the organization's direction and implementing programs that drive our long-term goals.

What motivated you to engage in immigrant workforce integration? Are there any personal or professional experiences that inspired your active role?

Neepawa is one of the fastest-growing communities in Manitoba, and our organization has grown and adapted alongside it.

**TO STAY CURRENT AND MEET EVOLVING BUSINESS NEEDS, WE SET OUT TO BETTER UNDERSTAND THE SKILLS AND COMPETENCIES IMMIGRANT WORKERS BRING AND HOW WE COULD CREATE A WORKPLACE WHERE THEY FEEL WELCOMED AND VALUED.**

We partnered with Neepawa Settlement Services to develop strategies, resources, and tools that help us attract, hire, train, and retain highly skilled immigrant workers while fostering a supportive and inclusive environment.

Based on your role or your organization's perspective, what are the top three challenges you face that hinder growth and thriving in your community?

As our organization has grown, finding skilled workers for niche roles has been a challenge, especially with many newcomers unaware of the career opportunities, benefits, and community involvement we offer. To address this, we partnered with Neepawa Settlement Services and began hosting information tours every two months, helping job seekers meet team leaders, ask questions, and learn about our workplace. These tours have increased applications and helped us fill roles more quickly. Housing shortages in our fast-growing community remain a barrier for newcomers, and language and cultural differences can sometimes create misunderstandings around workplace safety, expectations, and brand standards.

What opportunities do you see where immigration and immigrant inclusion efforts could address these challenges?

Our information tours have helped bridge cultural understanding, allowing both our organization and immigrants to learn from each other. Expanding initiatives like community workshops could further ease newcomers' adjustment, helping them build connections, clarify expectations, and engage more fully in the community. Immigrants bring diverse perspectives, expand our product offerings, and strengthen our community initiatives, directly supporting our long-term success.

How do you foresee the role of your institution evolving in supporting and integrating immigrant talent within both your organization and the broader community?

**IMMIGRANTS HAVE STRENGTHENED OUR WORKPLACE BY BRINGING UNIQUE TRADITIONS, PERSPECTIVES, AND EXPERIENCES THAT FOSTER A MORE INCLUSIVE AND DYNAMIC ENVIRONMENT.**

Their multilingual skills help us serve a broader customer base, improve communication, and expand our product offerings. Partnering with Neepawa Settlement Services has been instrumental in helping us better communicate what our organization offers and in creating a welcoming experience for newcomers. We also stay connected to initiatives like the Rural Manitoba Immigrant Employment Council to strengthen how we attract, hire, train, and retain skilled immigrant talent. As we continue to grow, our goal is to become an employer of choice for all job seekers, including newcomers.

How do you envision businesses collaborating with other system actors like government agencies, academic institutions, public associations, and settlement organizations to foster systemic changes that support immigrant workforce integration?

Education plays a crucial role in helping organizations build positive, supportive structures that set newcomers up for success. Businesses, governments, academic institutions, and community organizations must work together to promote education across all sectors, helping immigrants transition successfully into the workforce and the broader community. A collective, community-driven approach can engage wider populations, foster collaboration among companies, and contribute to long-term business and community success.

**AS LEADERS, WE MUST BE PROACTIVE IN BUILDING THESE CONNECTIONS AND RECOGNIZE THAT WE ALL HAVE MUCH TO LEARN FROM ONE ANOTHER.**



# HUSSEIN HALLAK

Founder and CEO, Next Decentrum

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**CANADA'S FUTURE DEPENDS ON RECOGNIZING IMMIGRATION AS A STRATEGIC ADVANTAGE.**

By investing in mentorship networks, immigrant incubators, and practical entrepreneurial pathways, we can unlock untapped potential. Immigrants aren't just seeking jobs, they're creators, innovators, and contributors. If we embrace this vision, Canada can become a global model for diversity-driven growth and economic resilience.

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Could you introduce yourself and tell us about your business/organization and your role within it?

I'm Hussein Hallak, a serial entrepreneur with a background in engineering, technology, and the arts. Over three decades, I've founded 22 companies driven by a belief in innovation's power to unlock growth. As CEO of Next Decentrum, I lead digital transformation efforts, helping businesses navigate disruptions like the rise of the internet and AI. We guide companies from ideation to execution, focusing on sustainable growth and global expansion.

What motivated you to engage in immigrant workforce integration? Are there any personal or professional experiences that inspired your active role?

Having lived and worked across multiple countries, I've experienced the challenges immigrants face. When I arrived in Canada, I saw talented individuals struggling to find opportunities. Engineers became drivers; entrepreneurs worked in retail. Navigating the Canadian system was a different experience, and I saw a gap between immigrant skills and the job market.

**ENGAGING IN IMMIGRANT WORKFORCE INTEGRATION ISN'T JUST ABOUT MY BACKGROUND—IT'S ABOUT WHAT'S GOOD FOR CANADA.**

Creating pragmatic pathways for newcomers strengthens businesses, fuels innovation, and benefits everyone. By taking action and shaping conversations, I aim to drive positive change where it matters most.

Based on your role or your company's perspective, what are the top three challenges you face that hinder growth and thriving in your community?

**THE LIMITED FUNDING LANDSCAPE, PARTICULARLY FOR STARTUPS AND SMALL BUSINESSES, CREATES SIGNIFICANT BARRIERS TO INNOVATION AND GROWTH.**

A rigid focus on specialization in education and workforce development further hinders progress, prioritizing immediate industry needs over long-term adaptability in an evolving economy. Canada's systemic risk aversion further stifles creativity and bold decision-making across businesses, society, and policymaking, limiting opportunities to drive innovation and build a resilient, future-ready economy.

What opportunities do you see where immigration and immigrant inclusion efforts could address these challenges?

**IMMIGRANTS BRING RESILIENCE, CREATIVITY, AND DIVERSE EXPERIENCES, BUT WITHOUT THE RIGHT SUPPORT, THEIR POTENTIAL GOES UNDERUTILIZED.**

Just as entrepreneurs benefit from incubators, newcomers need structured programs that provide a clear, pragmatic path to integration. Instead of rigid pathways that match immigrants to predefined roles, we should foster both specialized and generalist skills to help them adapt to an evolving economy. A more agile, forward-thinking approach would empower immigrants and strengthen Canada's position as a leader in innovation and inclusion.

How do you foresee the role of your business evolving in supporting and integrating immigrant talent within both your organization and the broader community?

**AT NEXT DECENTRUM, WE AIM TO BE A BRIDGE, CONNECTING TALENT, MARKETS, AND OPPORTUNITIES GLOBALLY.**

As we expand into new markets, particularly Egypt and Africa, we focus on supporting talent based on skills and potential rather than distinctions or formal qualifications. Our long-term goal is to create avenues for immigrants to build businesses and strengthen connections between Canada and their home countries. It's not just about hiring but about empowering them to make meaningful contributions.

How do you envision businesses collaborating with other system actors like government agencies, academic institutions, public associations, and settlement organizations to foster systemic changes that support immigrant workforce integration?

Businesses must take an active role in shaping immigration policies and workforce programs. By sharing insights, identifying gaps, and advocating for practical solutions, we can drive policies that reflect real-world needs. Government frameworks must become more agile, creating flexible pathways that empower immigrants to contribute meaningfully and build lasting careers. Ultimately, this approach fosters a collective vision for a stronger, more inclusive Canada.

# JO-ANNE MOWRY



**HUMAN RESOURCES AND  
WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT**

Founder and Owner  
Bridge Us Solutions

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**I ENVISION A FUTURE WHERE DIVERSITY IN THE WORKPLACE IS RECOGNIZED AS A COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE, BRINGING FRESH PERSPECTIVES, INNOVATIVE IDEAS, AND ENRICHED GLOBAL CONNECTIONS.**

Achieving this requires stronger newcomer support, greater employer education, and increased SME involvement in local economic development to expand opportunities for immigrants across all regions. When businesses, communities, and governments work together, we create an ecosystem where everyone thrives.

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Could you introduce yourself and tell us about your business/organization and your role within it?

I'm Jo-Anne Mowry, Founder and Owner of Bridge Us Solutions, a company dedicated to bridging the gap between newcomers and employers. Over the years, I've worked as a national trainer, curriculum developer, and HR manager, traveling across Canada to help organizations diversify their hiring practices. My journey in workforce development led me to establish Bridge Solutions to address the persistent gaps in connecting talented newcomers with meaningful employment opportunities.

What motivated you to engage in immigrant workforce integration? Are there any personal or professional experiences that inspired your active role?

My commitment to inclusion comes from both personal and professional experience. Advocating for my sister, who faced barriers due to her intellectual disabilities, taught me to stand up for those often overlooked. That perspective deepened when I experienced life as a newcomer while working in Inuvik. In HR, I saw the untapped potential of immigrant talent and the gaps in employer readiness.

**PARTNERING WITH THE NEW BRUNSWICK MULTICULTURAL COUNCIL REINFORCED THE POWER OF COLLABORATION IN DRIVING REAL CHANGE. I LEAD BY EXAMPLE, HELPING BUSINESSES EMBRACE INCLUSIVE HIRING AND BUILD LASTING IMPACT.**

Based on your role or your company's perspective, what are the top three challenges you face that hinder growth and thriving in your community?

Hiring, retention, and integration remain significant challenges. Hiring is affected by unfocused resumes, employers unfamiliar with effective interview practices or unable to look past Canadian experience or credentials, and candidates who fail to research the companies they apply to. Retention remains an issue when newcomers feel isolated or hesitant to voice concerns due to cultural norms, leading them to seek workplaces with a stronger sense of belonging. Integration struggles persist due to limited employer education, inconsistent onboarding, and the absence of structured support systems like mentorship or buddy programs.

What opportunities do you see where immigration and immigrant inclusion efforts could address these challenges?

**REVERSE JOB FAIRS SUCCESSFULLY BUILD NEWCOMERS' CONFIDENCE AND CONNECT THEM WITH MEANINGFUL OPPORTUNITIES.**

Employers benefit greatly from mandatory cultural competency training, which fosters understanding and inclusion. Structured mentorship and buddy systems significantly enhance retention and integration. Employers can also bridge gaps by improving hiring practices and providing constructive feedback to candidates, especially newcomers. For example, I've personally invited candidates back for second interviews after giving them feedback on areas to improve, helping them return better prepared and more confident.

How do you foresee the role of your business evolving in supporting and integrating immigrant talent within both your organization and the broader community?

My role continues to evolve as I expand Bridge Solutions into new regions, including rural areas where support for newcomers is limited. I'm partnering with newcomer centers, regional organizations, and even immigration lawyers to strengthen support systems. Sharing success stories and testimonials is another focus area—I believe they're crucial to inspiring other businesses to embrace inclusion. Initiatives like panelist breakfasts, where inclusive employers share their experiences, and "How to Be a Good Neighbor" guides for newcomers are some of the tools I'm developing to drive change. By creating spaces for dialogue, education, and connection, I hope to build a stronger infrastructure for workforce integration.

How do you envision businesses collaborating with other system actors like government agencies, academic institutions, public associations, and settlement organizations to foster systemic changes that support immigrant workforce integration?

**COLLABORATION REQUIRES BREAKING DOWN SILOS AND WORKING TOWARD SHARED GOALS.**

Employers should actively connect with chambers of commerce, settlement organizations, and academic institutions to tap into available resources and programs so they can better understand, hire, attract, and retain newcomers. Stronger partnerships with colleges and universities are essential to bridging gaps between education and workforce readiness. Employers also need to educate themselves on incentive programs and resources, which are often underutilized.

**BY FOSTERING JOINT PLANNING AND INFORMATION SHARING, WE CAN CREATE A UNIFIED SYSTEM THAT SUPPORTS BOTH NEWCOMERS AND BUSINESSES EFFECTIVELY.**

# MASA IDELBI

Executive Vice President,  
People & Culture  
Entrust Disability Services

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Employers must fully recognize and leverage immigrant talent to build a thriving, future-ready economy. Inclusive hiring is no longer a nice-to-have—it’s essential to addressing persistent labour shortages, boosting productivity, and driving economic growth. Achieving this requires eliminating bias in recruitment, creating employer-driven bridging programs, and streamlining accreditation for internationally trained professionals. These actions will help build a more equitable and high-performing workforce.

**WHILE CANADA’S  
IMMIGRATION POLICIES ARE  
AMONG THE STRONGEST  
GLOBALLY, THE REAL  
OPPORTUNITY LIES IN  
ALIGNING BUSINESS  
PRACTICES WITH LONG-TERM  
WORKFORCE STRATEGIES—  
MAKING IMMIGRANT  
INCLUSION THE NORM, NOT  
THE EXCEPTION.**

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**SOCIAL CARE AND HUMAN RESOURCES**

Could you introduce yourself and tell us about your business/organization and your role within it?

I am Masa Idelbi, an Independent HR Consultant helping Canadian businesses build engaged, high-performing workforces. I also serve as Executive Vice President of People & Culture at Entrust Disability Services, where I lead strategic initiatives in talent acquisition, workforce development, and organizational growth. With 15 years of progressive HR experience across multiple sectors, I've hired over a thousand professionals and shaped talent strategies that support future-ready, equitable workplaces across Alberta. I'm passionate about recognizing potential beyond bias—a commitment that earned me Canada's Top Recruiter Award for championing inclusive hiring practices. Entrust operates 92 homes and supports over 300 clients, making us the province's largest provider of 24/7 and respite care for individuals with complex developmental needs. As we grow, we aim to expand into Ontario, Saskatchewan, British Columbia, and eventually, across North America.

What motivated you to engage in immigrant workforce integration? Are there any personal or professional experiences that inspired your active role?

I emigrated from Syria to Canada in 2007 as a student and young professional, determined to build a meaningful career and contribute to my community. I've seen too many skilled newcomers struggle to secure relevant employment—not due to a lack of talent, but because of the systemic barriers such as the Canadian work experience requirement, which often conceals underlying bias. Despite ongoing labor shortages, Canada continues to overlook the immense value immigrants bring: resilience, fresh perspectives, transferable skills, and a strong work ethic. Both professionally and personally, I am committed to challenging outdated hiring practices and advocating for a workforce that truly reflects Canada's diversity and potential.

Based on your role or your company's perspective, what are the challenges you face that hinder growth and thriving in your community?

**ATTRACTING AND RETAINING TALENT IN ALBERTA REMAINS A MAJOR CHALLENGE, WITH MANY JOB SEEKERS OPTING FOR HIGHER-PAYING ROLES IN OIL, GAS, OR TECH.**

Frontline care demands a strong commitment to 24/7 residential support—work that can be demanding, undervalued, and less appealing to a broader pool of candidates. Limited funding and unionized pay structures limit our ability to offer competitive wages to frontline roles, making recruitment and retention even more difficult. While we provide meaningful training, growth opportunities, and a strong sense of purpose, compensation remains a limiting factor. To help bridge these gaps, we developed Entrust Academy—our signature leadership development platform designed to elevate talent, build collective accountability, and improve productivity, all while maintaining high-quality care. It integrates value-based leadership, continuous learning, and real-world application to drive meaningful, organization-wide change.

What opportunities do you see where immigration and immigrant inclusion efforts could address these challenges?

Immigrant inclusion is a powerful yet underutilized solution to today's workforce challenges. At Entrust, 93% of our frontline workforce and 89% of our total staff are immigrants or visible minorities, many with international healthcare experience. With mentorship, training, and intentional workplace integration, they fill critical labor gaps and thrive in purpose-driven roles. Unfortunately, many employers overlook this talent due to rigid hiring practices and a lack of structured job analysis. Transferable skills often go unrecognized and qualified candidates are passed over simply for having foreign experience.

**STANDARDIZED RECRUITMENT, EMPLOYER EDUCATION, AND STRONGER COLLABORATION WITH IMMIGRANT-SERVING ORGANIZATIONS ARE ESSENTIAL TO ASSESS TALENT MORE EQUITABLY, UNLOCK POTENTIAL, AND STRENGTHEN OUR ECONOMY.**

How do you foresee the role of your business evolving in supporting and integrating immigrant talent within both your organization and the broader community?

We are strengthening partnerships with post-secondary institutions and employment agencies to improve immigrant workforce integration. We work with organizations such as the Bredin Centre, Edmonton Region Immigrant Employment Council, Edmonton Newcomer Centre, NorQuest College, and the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology to bridge employment gaps and support newcomers in gaining employability skills and securing meaningful jobs. Our vision is to position Entrust as an employer of choice for immigrants entering the social care sector. Through inclusive hiring, targeted mentorship, and culturally responsive onboarding, we're shaping a diverse, resilient workforce that reflects the communities we serve. As we grow, we strive to lead by example and set a new standard for workforce inclusion across the sector and beyond.

How do you envision businesses collaborating with other system actors like government agencies, academic institutions, public associations, and settlement organizations to foster systemic changes that support immigrant workforce integration?

A lack of coordination among settlement agencies, post-secondary institutions, and employers has led to fragmented, inconsistent support for newcomers.

**CANADA NEEDS A NATIONAL WORKFORCE INTEGRATION STRATEGY TO UNITE FEDERAL AND PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENTS, BUSINESSES, SETTLEMENT ORGANIZATIONS, AND EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS UNDER A SHARED MANDATE.**

This would align priorities, streamline employment pathways, and close critical skills gaps. However, cuts to programs such as the Canada-Alberta Job Grant have limited employers' ability to invest in newcomer training—especially in Alberta. Restoring funding, offering targeted tax incentives, and introducing structured bridging programs would empower businesses to take a more active role in immigrant inclusion. These systemic efforts are essential to fully integrate talent and drive long-term economic growth and innovation across Canada.



# MEHMET TULBEK, PhD

President, Saskatchewan Food Industry Development

FOOD AND AGRICULTURE

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Canada has strong programs supporting newcomer integration, helping immigrants adapt to business culture, build networks, and gain industry experience. Expanding these initiatives, enhancing internships and apprenticeships, and strengthening ties between education and industry will create a smoother transition from training to employment.

**A THRIVING ECONOMY DEPENDS ON INTEGRATING GLOBAL TALENT, ATTRACTING INVESTMENT, AND BUILDING AN INCLUSIVE WORKFORCE READY TO MEET THE EVOLVING DEMANDS OF THE AGRI-FOOD SECTOR.**

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Could you introduce yourself and tell us about your organization and your role within it?

I'm Dr. Mehmet Tulbek, President of the Saskatchewan Food Industry Development Centre (The Food Centre), a contract research and manufacturing facility that serves as an incubator for food and beverage companies. We support businesses in research, technology, innovation, processing, manufacturing, food safety, entrepreneurship, and commercialization. Our work spans crops, meat, food ingredients, biotech, fermentation, and agricultural products, providing end-to-end project support to clients ranging from startups and SMEs to Fortune 500 corporations. Our programs include product development, co-manufacturing, food safety, and skills training, including initiatives for female entrepreneurs in agri-food.

What motivated you to engage in immigrant workforce integration? Are there any personal or professional experiences that inspired your active role?

As an immigrant, I understand the challenges and opportunities of building a career in a new country. I've worked across Canada, the U.S. and Turkey, collaborating with a diverse food innovation community. Canada attracts skilled immigrants who bring fresh perspectives, driving creativity in product development.

**FOOD IS A MELTING POT OF GLOBAL TRADITIONS, AND A DIVERSE WORKFORCE FUELS INNOVATION, MEETS CONSUMER NEEDS, AND STRENGTHENS BUSINESS GROWTH.**

Based on your role or your organization's perspective, what are the top three challenges you face that hinder growth and thriving in your community?

**SHIFTS IN GOVERNMENT POLICIES, TRADE TARIFFS, AND INVESTMENT CLIMATES CREATE UNCERTAINTY IN THE FOOD AND AGRICULTURE INDUSTRY, MAKING IT HARDER TO ATTRACT CAPITAL AND NEW BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES.**

The sector has also been facing a growing labour crisis as a large portion of the workforce nears retirement, with too few skilled workers to step in. Many international graduates enter the field with strong academic backgrounds but they lack hands-on experience, as traditional education remains heavily theoretical. This gap in workforce readiness makes it increasingly difficult for companies to find industry-trained professionals who can meet evolving demands.

What opportunities do you see where immigration and immigrant inclusion efforts could address these challenges?

**IMMIGRATION BRINGS MORE THAN SKILLED LABOUR—IT DRIVES INVESTMENT, EXPANDS FACILITIES, AND ADVANCES RESEARCH, STRENGTHENING CANADA'S POSITION IN AGRIFOOD INNOVATION.**

Attracting businesses from the Asia-Pacific, Middle East, and Europe boosts competitiveness, fuels growth, and expands market reach. As AI and automation reshape manufacturing, demand shifts toward technology-driven roles, yet skilled professionals remain essential to managing these systems. Expanding mentorship and internships will help integrate immigrant talent, bridge skill gaps, and support long-term industry growth.

How do you foresee the role of your institution evolving in supporting and integrating immigrant talent within both your organization and the broader community?

The Food Centre welcomes skilled professionals from all backgrounds, including immigrants, Indigenous talent, and Canadian workers, who contribute to quality assurance, product development, and food innovation. With Saskatoon's diverse talent pool, we hire based on skills and provide mentorship, industry exposure, and growth opportunities. Beyond hiring, we support Saskatchewan's agri-food sector by transforming local crops into high-value products and developing industry solutions. As we scale up our facilities and manufacturing capabilities, we remain committed to innovation, industry growth, and creating opportunities for skilled professionals, including newcomers, to thrive.

How do you envision businesses collaborating with other system actors like government agencies, academic institutions, public associations, and settlement organizations to foster systemic changes that support immigrant workforce integration?

Businesses, government agencies, academia, and newcomer organizations must collaborate to strengthen immigrant workforce integration. Intercultural associations, the Saskatoon Open Door Society, and the Pacific Asian Consortium for Employment train and support immigrants, while Protein Industries Canada Supercluster, a government-supported industry collaboration, fosters innovation in agri-food processing. Businesses can engage with these initiatives to access skilled talent, provide mentorship, and build inclusive workplaces. Strengthening these partnerships ensures immigrants secure meaningful employment and drive long-term industry growth.



Vice President, Academic  
Bow Valley College

**POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION**

# MICHAEL CROWE

“

**A STRONG WORKFORCE  
INTEGRATION SYSTEM EMPOWERS  
EMPLOYERS, EQUIPS NEWCOMERS,  
AND STREAMLINES POLICIES, ALL SO  
THAT IMMIGRANTS CAN FULLY  
MAKE USE OF THEIR SKILLS AND  
EXPERIENCE.**

Tax credits and temporary wage subsidies help businesses hire and train skilled immigrants, while sector partnerships and cultural competency training foster inclusive workplaces. Pre-arrival job readiness programs, upskilling, and mentorship prepare newcomers for success. Faster credential recognition, clearer immigration pathways, and real-time labour market data-driven decisions ensure employers can access the talent they need. Strengthening collaboration between businesses, industry associations, and policymakers drives innovation, closes labour gaps, and builds a more inclusive, resilient economy.

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Could you introduce yourself and tell us about your institution and your role within it?

I'm Michael Crowe, Vice President, Academic at Bow Valley College, a two-year community college in Calgary offering programs in health, technology, business, community studies, and digital and entertainment arts. I lead credit and non-credit programming, applied research, and academic initiatives, ensuring our programs equip learners with the skills and knowledge to succeed in the workforce. I work closely with students, faculty, and academic teams to align education with industry needs and workforce demands.

What motivated you to engage in immigrant workforce integration? Are there any personal or professional experiences that inspired your active role?

**BOW VALLEY COLLEGE HAS LONG INVESTED IN WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT, FOCUSING ON UPSKILLING, RESKILLING, AND TRAINING TO ADDRESS TALENT SHORTAGES.**

We have a strong history of supporting newcomers through language development and credential recognition, helping internationally trained professionals secure accreditation and certification. Despite representing a vast talent pool in business, science, technology, and healthcare, many skilled immigrants remain underutilized. Recognizing this gap, we saw both an opportunity and a responsibility to strengthen foreign credential recognition and targeted training to help skilled immigrants transition into their fields more effectively.

Based on your role or your institution's perspective, what are the top three challenges you face that hinder growth and thriving in your community?

**A KEY CHALLENGE IN HIGHER EDUCATION IS PROVING ITS VALUE AS A WORKFORCE INVESTMENT RATHER THAN JUST AN EXPENSE LINE IN THE PROVINCIAL BUDGET.**

Post-secondary institutions drive workforce productivity and economic growth, yet their return on investment is often overlooked. Traditional education models can struggle to keep pace with industry needs, requiring faster, more agile program development and personalized learning pathways that align with employer demands. Meanwhile, changes to immigration policies, particularly post-graduate work permit eligibility, have cut billions in revenue from the sector, threatening institutional sustainability and limiting eventual business access to skilled international talent.

What opportunities do you see where immigration and immigrant inclusion efforts could address these challenges?

We've launched the Foreign Credential Recognition Program to assess and validate the skills of internationally trained professionals, ensuring they transition directly into jobs that recognize their expertise. Instead of starting over, newcomers demonstrate their competencies through real-world assessments aligned with employer needs. When gaps exist, we provide targeted training until they meet industry standards. This model has already succeeded in nursing and can expand to other regulated professions and skilled trades, removing credential barriers and securing meaningful employment for skilled immigrants.

How do you foresee the role of your institution evolving in supporting and integrating immigrant talent within both your organization and the broader community?

Post-secondary institutions play a key role in workforce integration, especially in regulated professions. The healthcare sector's talent crisis, which has strained services and led to emergency room closures, spurred urgent innovation. Our Path to Practice project, supported by Employment and Social Development Canada and the Calgary Region Immigrant Employment Council, helps internationally trained nurses transition into Canada's healthcare system using virtual reality and simulation-based skill assessments. This model can proactively address labour shortages in other industries. Bow Valley College is piloting apprenticeship-style models in software development and digital design, combining industry-led training with real-world placements to better align education with employer needs and accelerate immigrant workforce integration.

How do you envision businesses collaborating with other system actors like government agencies, academic institutions, public associations, and settlement organizations to foster systemic changes that support immigrant workforce integration?

**SYSTEM-WIDE CHANGE REQUIRES BUSINESSES, GOVERNMENT, ACADEMIA, AND PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS TO WORK TOGETHER.**

We have seen success by bringing industry into curriculum development, classroom teaching, and work-integrated learning to align training with employer needs. Programs like Path to Practice demonstrate how structured partnerships can fill talent gaps, but scaling success depends on stronger coordination. By aligning efforts, Canada can fully leverage immigrant talent and build a more inclusive, responsive workforce.



# NILOOFFER BALSARA

Director, Talent and Organizational Effectiveness  
WorkSafeBC

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND  
SAFETY/PUBLIC SECTOR

“

**WE NEED A CENTRALIZED,  
TRANSPARENT SYSTEM THAT  
ALIGNS IMMIGRATION AND  
WORKFORCE NEEDS ACROSS  
CANADA.**

A single platform — provincially aligned but centrally hosted — could provide up-to-date information on immigration pathways, sector-specific talent needs, and geographic priorities. This would help employers access the right skills and offer newcomers clarity on steps and supports. Streamlining the role of agents, institutions, and related organizations would also ensure consistency and accountability.

Purposeful, user-friendly technology can serve as a vital bridge between employers and immigrant talent. Looking ahead, Canada needs to align immigration strategies with the sectors that we aim to grow. Initiatives like the AI Compute Access Fund show how targeted investments can attract global talent and support innovation. By linking immigration policy with economic priorities, we can build a more inclusive, future-focused workforce.

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Could you introduce yourself and tell us about your organization and your role within it?

I am Niloofar Balsara, Director of Talent and Organizational Effectiveness at WorkSafeBC. I've worked in public and private organizations across the UK, Asia-Pacific, and the Americas, with a background in the finance, health care, and insurance sectors. I'm especially passionate about technology's potential to support people, enhance their work, and shape the future. At WorkSafeBC, I lead our end-to-end talent strategy, oversee the employee lifecycle from hire to retire, and drive a future-focused skills framework. In partnership with teams across the organization, we're building infrastructure that helps our people grow and thrive in their careers, aligned with their aspirations and life stages.

What motivated you to engage in immigrant workforce integration? Are there any personal or professional experiences that inspired your active role?

I immigrated to Canada nearly 30 years ago and know, first-hand, the strength of our support systems as well as where newcomers may slip between the cracks. As an immigrant and an employer, I saw the value in contributing from both perspectives. My work in immigrant workforce integration spans nearly 20 years at the provincial and federal levels, and my involvement with IEC-BC began after leading a roundtable that deeply resonated with me. I've had a front-row seat to Canada's shifting talent landscape and persistent skills gaps. I stay committed to this work because I understand the emotional weight of starting over and continue to be inspired by the resilience of newcomers. I wouldn't be here without the leaders who supported me—and I want to pay that forward.

Based on your role or your organization's perspective, what are the top three challenges you face that hinder growth and thriving in your community?

Through national conversations across Canada, I've heard how role clarity between federal and provincial agencies will support consistent processing and decision making. Streamlining and standardizing provincial requirements for licensing and credential recognition will support both immigrants and employers. Our immigration strategies are too broad and we miss the chance to address specific talent gaps that could better support Canada's economic priorities.

What opportunities do you see where immigration and immigrant inclusion efforts could address these challenges?

**WE CAN STRENGTHEN IMMIGRANT WORKFORCE INTEGRATION BY ALIGNING SYSTEMS AND STRATEGIES.**

Clarifying the responsibilities of federal and provincial agencies would streamline processes and reduce barriers. Integrating application systems across provinces would make immigration pathways easier to navigate and help employers source talent more efficiently. Most importantly, shifting to a targeted, skills-based approach allows us to align newcomer expertise with labour market demands — supporting both economic growth and meaningful inclusion.

How do you foresee the role of your institution evolving in supporting and integrating immigrant talent within both your organization and the broader community?

It's clear that Canada — and many other countries with an aging population — will face growing skills gaps across the workforce. Even when people are available, they may not yet have the right skills needed to support our businesses and build the economy.

**I WANT TO EXPLORE WHAT A FUTURE-FOCUSED SKILLS APPROACH COULD LOOK LIKE — ONE INFORMED BY GEOGRAPHIC AND SECTORAL FACTORS.**

With deeper research and understanding, I hope to help shape a common framework that employers and immigrants across Canada can use to better align skills with opportunity.

How do you envision businesses collaborating with other system actors like government agencies, academic institutions, public associations, and settlement organizations to foster systemic changes that support immigrant workforce integration?

At WorkSafeBC, we collaborate with organizations to support immigrant workforce integration and ensure newcomers understand their workplace rights. We partner with consulates and settlement agencies to deliver health and safety sessions for temporary and seasonal workers, and with multicultural societies and service agencies to host workshops and organize resources for new Canadian workers. Our work with the Affiliation of Multicultural Societies and Service Agencies of BC (AMSSA) equips front-line settlement workers to better support the vulnerable communities they serve. We also engage with the South Asian Health Institute, WorkBC, and the BC Federation of Labour's Health and Safety Centre to provide accessible, in-language training.

**THROUGH ONGOING CAMPAIGNS AND MULTILINGUAL MEDIA OUTREACH, WE CONTINUE TO REACH IMMIGRANT AND TEMPORARY FOREIGN WORKER COMMUNITIES ACROSS B.C., ESPECIALLY THOSE WHO MAY OTHERWISE HAVE LIMITED ACCESS TO INFORMATION AND RESOURCES.**

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**ALIGNING IMMIGRATION POLICIES WITH LABOUR MARKET NEEDS ENABLES BUSINESSES TO HIRE AND RETAIN SKILLED NEWCOMERS MORE EFFECTIVELY.**

A facilitative approach to hiring international talent, especially recent graduates, addresses labour shortages and drives economic growth. Expanding programs like the Atlantic Immigration Program strengthens retention and settlement, benefiting both businesses and communities. Employers must connect employees with settlement support, while mentorship programs, intercultural training, and newcomer representatives ensure smoother integration. When businesses, policymakers, and communities collaborate, Canada harnesses global talent, fosters innovation, and builds a more inclusive, sustainable economy.

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**IMMIGRATION AND WORKFORCE  
DEVELOPMENT/PUBLIC SECTOR**



# SUZAN MARIE

Immigration Specialist  
Halifax Regional Municipality

Could you introduce yourself and tell us about your organization and your role within it?

I'm Suzan Marie, a licensed Regulated Canadian Immigration Consultant, founder of Atlantic Hub for Immigration and Citizenship Consultancy in Nova Scotia, and Immigration Specialist at Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM). I have over 15 years of experience in socio-economic development and humanitarian aid, helping newcomers integrate into the workforce. At HRM, I guide employees through permanent residency pathways and support the municipality in attracting and retaining international talent through immigration for hard-to-fill roles.

**AS NOVA SCOTIA'S LARGEST MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT, WE STRENGTHEN OUR WORKFORCE BY EMBEDDING IMMIGRANT RETENTION INTO HIRING STRATEGIES AND FOSTERING A MORE INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY.**

What motivated you to engage in immigrant workforce integration? Are there any personal or professional experiences that inspired your active role?

My passion for immigrant workforce integration comes from both personal experience and my work with newcomers. I was born in Palestine, immigrated to Halifax in 2017, and now proudly call it home. During my time at YMCA Immigrant Services, I worked with the Halifax Immigration Partnership to build inclusive communities, deepening my understanding of the systemic barriers immigrants face. My involvement in the Immigrant Workforce Integration Group reinforced the need for collaborative solutions, particularly in addressing employer concerns about hiring through immigration pathways. By engaging with multiple stakeholders, I see how policy changes, awareness, and targeted support create lasting opportunities for both immigrants and businesses.

Based on your role or your organization's perspective, what are the top three challenges you face that hinder growth and thriving in your community?

Frequent immigration policy changes and process uncertainties put significant pressure on both employers and employees, making workforce planning difficult. While Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) offers tools to support employers, some still lack clear operational guidelines that connects employment practices with evolving immigration policies. This gap creates challenges with compliance, especially for small and mid-sized businesses that cannot afford ongoing support from immigration practitioners. Without this clarity, employers struggle to navigate hiring, stay compliant, and retain international talent, which delays newcomer integration, weakens employer confidence, and makes it harder to keep up with changing regulations.

What opportunities do you see where immigration and immigrant inclusion efforts could address these challenges?

Streamlining immigration processes and eliminating unnecessary barriers help employers access immigrant talent more efficiently. Positioning international talent recruitment as a strategic advantage rather than a regulatory burden allows businesses to address skills shortages and strengthen operations. Simplifying retention pathways reduces delays and administrative costs, enabling employers to focus on workforce stability.

**PROVIDING BUSINESSES WITH BETTER EDUCATION ON IMMIGRATION POLICIES AND BEST PRACTICES BRIDGES KNOWLEDGE GAPS, EMPOWERING THEM TO HIRE WITH CONFIDENCE AND DRIVE LONG-TERM ECONOMIC GROWTH.**

How do you foresee the role of your institution evolving in supporting and integrating immigrant talent within both your organization and the broader community?

We strengthen our role in supporting and integrating immigrant talent within HRM and the broader community. Our diversity and inclusion efforts connect immigrants with the resources they need to transition into permanent employment. By hiring a licensed immigration consultant, we reinforce our commitment to retention and guide employees through employer-supported pathways to permanent residency. HRM integrates inclusivity into its hiring practices and workforce policies and leads by example in building a diverse and welcoming workplace.

How do you envision businesses collaborating with other system actors like government agencies, academic institutions, public associations, and settlement organizations to foster systemic changes that support immigrant workforce integration?

**EMPLOYERS CONTRIBUTE TO IMMIGRATION POLICIES AND WORKFORCE STRATEGIES BY ACTIVELY ENGAGING IN DISCUSSIONS THAT ALIGN WITH LABOUR MARKET DEMANDS.**

Collaboration between businesses, government, and settlement organizations strengthens workforce planning and ensures sustainable employment pathways for newcomers. In Nova Scotia, the provincial government, IRCC, and key stakeholders work together to enhance immigrant integration. Expanding these partnerships will improve access to skilled talent and create a more inclusive labour market. Large municipalities, as governmental bodies, are well positioned to fund initiatives and collaborate with settlement organizations to help immigrants integrate and thrive in both the workforce and their communities, strengthening long-term retention.



# TASHA NATHANSON

Founder & CEO, 7 Leagues Leather

MANUFACTURING

“

**WE NEED FINANCING MODELS THAT PRIORITIZE COMMUNITY IMPACT OVER INVESTOR PROFIT.**

Right now, businesses are built to serve investors first, often at the expense of long-term job creation and sustainability. My vision is an economy where businesses are structured to benefit the communities they operate in—where financing supports innovation, job growth, and inclusivity rather than just quick returns. If we don't shift toward a more equitable system, we risk growing instability. But if we invest in businesses that create broad-based value, we can build a stronger, more inclusive economy for everyone.

”

Could you introduce yourself and tell us about your business and your role within it?

I'm Tasha Nathanson, Founder and CEO of 7 Leagues Leather. We make luxury leather from fish skins, a byproduct of food processing, using natural, plant-based tanning methods. Unlike much of the leather industry, we avoid plastics, chromium, and forever chemicals, creating a clean, sustainable alternative. Our leather is thin, exceptionally durable, and uniquely patterned, giving it strong fashion potential.

**AT OUR CORE, WE DRIVE SHARED PROSPERITY THROUGH INNOVATION, RETHINKING RESOURCE USE AND BUSINESS IMPACT FOR A SUSTAINABLE, EQUITABLE FUTURE.**

What motivated you to engage in immigrant workforce integration? Are there any personal or professional experiences that inspired your active role?

As an immigrant, I've experienced the challenges and opportunities of building a career in a different country. Working abroad—most recently as a gender equality and youth empowerment advisor in the Eastern Caribbean—strengthened my commitment to an inclusive economy. When I launched 7 Leagues Leather, I quickly saw that leather tanning was no longer an active industry in Canada. I needed international expertise to revive it. Securing a work permit for a skilled immigrant researcher took 18 months, revealing both the barriers and the urgency of integrating internationally trained talent.

Based on your role or your company's perspective, what are the top three challenges you face that hinder growth and thriving in your community?

**OUR BIGGEST CHALLENGE, BEYOND THE SKILLS GAP, IS ACCESS TO FINANCING.**

Canada's entrepreneurial system is not designed to support long-term, sustainable businesses—especially those focused on manufacturing and job creation. Loans only become available once revenue flows, leaving early-stage businesses struggling to fund research, development, and expansion. The dominant private equity model pushes businesses to scale fast and sell rather than grow sustainably and create stable jobs. This short-term focus limits businesses like ours that aim to drive lasting economic and social impact.

What opportunities do you see where immigration and immigrant inclusion efforts could address these challenges?

I was inspired by a model used by Persephone Brewing, a community-based brewery that partnered with a disability organization to align their business goals with community needs. They secured some of their financing by guaranteeing jobs for individuals supported by the organization, tapping into funding sources that businesses wouldn't typically access. This model could work for small businesses and immigrant-serving organizations, creating financing structures that promote economic inclusion and long-term sustainability. Canada's low investment in innovation and productivity limits job opportunities for immigrants. Instead of relying on private equity, businesses can build partnerships that drive growth and community impact.

How do you foresee the role of your business evolving in supporting and integrating immigrant talent within both your organization and the broader community?

Our long-term goal is to create jobs and training opportunities with meaningful career pathways. Since leather tanning is no longer taught in Canada, we will train our workforce from the ground up—an ideal opportunity for newcomers to develop specialized skills. We plan to build near fish processing hubs, bringing jobs to coastal communities where employment is scarce.

**MOVING FORWARD, WE ENVISION A GLOBAL NETWORK OF MID-SIZED TANNERIES, CREATING LOCAL JOBS WHILE REDUCING THE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT OF LONG-DISTANCE SHIPPING.**

How do you envision businesses collaborating with other system actors like government agencies, academic institutions, public associations, and settlement organizations to foster systemic changes that support immigrant workforce integration?

**WE NEED TO BREAK DOWN SILOS AND BRING MORE STAKEHOLDERS TO THE TABLE. TOO**

Too often, industries, government programs, and funding bodies operate in isolation, making it harder for businesses to access the support they need. I've experienced this firsthand—one funding program questioned whether we were an ocean-based business because our customers are in fashion, failing to recognize how industries are interconnected. Whether in business, government, or academia, we need systemic solutions that acknowledge these connections rather than viewing issues in isolation. Finding win-win solutions benefits everyone. When immigrants secure jobs, they settle, contribute, and strengthen the economy.

WORKFORCE  
DEVELOPMENT AND  
SYSTEMS CHANGE

# VIVIAN



# KINNAIRD

Chief Executive Officer, Workforce Collective

“

**I ENVISION A SYSTEM WHERE IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION RESPONDS TO LABOUR MARKET NEEDS, NOT BUREAUCRACY, AND WHERE SKILLS AND TALENT, NOT JUST CREDENTIALS, OPEN DOORS TO OPPORTUNITY.**

We need to adopt a skills-first approach, expand bridge training, promote micro-credentials, and recognize certifications that reflect what newcomers can do. Employers should co-design training that includes paid placements and mentorship to meet industry demands. We must also ensure access to childcare, transportation, and culturally responsive employment services so newcomers can fully participate in the workforce. True alignment between business and immigration policy requires a mindset shift—one that sees immigration not just as a response to labour shortages, but as a strategic driver of economic growth, innovation, and social prosperity.

”

Could you introduce yourself and tell us about your organization and your role within it?

I'm Vivian Kinnaird, CEO of Workforce Collective, a non-profit organization based in the Niagara region that's dedicated to building a thriving community powered by a diverse and healthy workforce. We believe workforce challenges can't be solved in isolation, so we bring together employers, workers, policymakers, and community organizations to co-design practical, inclusive, and scalable solutions. We use data and research to identify workforce trends, barriers, and opportunities, helping communities and businesses make informed decisions. In my role, I focus on building partnerships, driving systems change, ensuring impact, and aligning workforce development efforts with the needs of both employers and job seekers.

What motivated you to engage in immigrant workforce integration? Are there any personal or professional experiences that inspired your active role?

Immigrant workforce integration is essential to building a more equitable and prosperous economy. This drives our work to remove systemic barriers like credential recognition, employer bias, and limited professional networks, so newcomers can fully participate in the workforce. We strengthen our efforts by collaborating through the Immigrant Employment Councils of Canada network, which helps us scale our impact and contribute to national dialogue on inclusive hiring and systems change. I also draw deep inspiration from the resilience of newcomers I've worked with—people who bring immense value yet continue to face unnecessary barriers. Their experiences reinforce my commitment to shift policies, practices, and mindsets so every worker, regardless of origin, can reach their full potential.

Based on your role or your organization's perspective, what are the top three challenges you face that hinder growth and thriving in your community?

Businesses and communities thrive when we connect people with opportunities.

**AT PRESENT, KEY BARRIERS INCLUDE WORKFORCE SHORTAGES AND SKILLS MISMATCHES, FRAGMENTED SUPPORT SYSTEMS, AND A NEED FOR GREATER EMPLOYER READINESS TO EMBRACE INCLUSIVE HIRING.**

Many industries struggle to find talent, while skilled immigrants remain underemployed due to credential barriers, employer bias, and outdated hiring practices. Support programs exist but often operate in silos, making it hard for job seekers and employers to navigate them. Many employers want to hire immigrants but lack the tools and support to do so confidently. Misconceptions around language, qualifications, and workplace integration continue to limit opportunities for newcomers and restrict access to talent.

What opportunities do you see where immigration and immigrant inclusion efforts could address these challenges?

We have a real opportunity to build a more inclusive workforce by addressing long-standing barriers to immigrant inclusion. Expanding bridging programs, streamlining regulatory processes, and promoting alternative credentials can reduce underemployment and help fill talent gaps. Employers play a key role by connecting newcomers with industry professionals through mentorship and tailored support. Strengthening cross-sector partnerships through industry-specific programs, employer-led advisory groups, and training collaborations can move us beyond short-term solutions and create lasting change that benefits newcomers, employers, and the broader economy.

How do you foresee the role of your institution evolving in supporting and integrating immigrant talent within both your organization and the broader community?

**WE BELIEVE IMMIGRANT WORKFORCE INTEGRATION GOES BEYOND HIRING. IT REQUIRES TRANSFORMING THE SYSTEMS, POLICIES, AND MINDSETS THAT SHAPE ACCESS TO DECENT WORK OPPORTUNITIES.**

We focus on breaking down structural barriers and supporting businesses in adopting more inclusive practices. As a connector, facilitator, and advocate, we bring together employers, community partners, and policymakers to co-design solutions. We're deepening our work in data-driven insights and storytelling, helping businesses understand not just the "why" but also the "how" of integrating immigrant talent—from identifying hidden biases to creating workplace cultures where newcomers can thrive.

How do you envision businesses collaborating with other system actors like government agencies, academic institutions, public associations, and settlement organizations to foster systemic changes that support immigrant workforce integration?

**WORKFORCE INTEGRATION IS A SHARED RESPONSIBILITY, AND REAL CHANGE HAPPENS WHEN EMPLOYERS, POLICYMAKERS, EDUCATION AND TRAINING INSTITUTIONS, AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS WORK TOGETHER.**

Businesses lead hiring decisions and experience talent shortages firsthand, so their collaboration plays a critical role in driving systemic change. By co-creating solutions with immigrant-serving organizations, post-secondary institutions, and regulatory bodies, employers can redesign hiring practices, fast-track credential recognition, and remove employment barriers. They also support mentorship, sponsorship, and upskilling programs that help newcomers advance. We drive these efforts by facilitating connections, amplifying effective practices, and scaling sustainable solutions.

# LET'S KEEP THE CONVERSATION GOING.

The voices in this catalogue reflect a shared vision—one that sees immigration not only as a response to labour market needs, but as a catalyst for innovation, resilience, and long-term growth.

Across sectors and regions, these leaders are contributing to a collective effort to build a more inclusive and future-ready workforce. Their insights move beyond traditional models and offer fresh perspectives on strengthening immigrant workforce development.

Visit [iecc.network](https://iecc.network) to connect with your local Immigrant Employment Council and learn more about the IECC Network and the Strengthening Employer Feedback Channels (SEFC) Project.



# GET INVOLVED.

Register to take part in regional feedback forums across Canada and gain access to exclusive updates, resources, and opportunities to help shape future initiatives.

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# STRENGTHENING EMPLOYER FEEDBACK CHANNELS

## VISIONARY VOICES CATALOGUE

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EMPLOYMENT  
COUNCIL OF BC **IEC**BC

**CRIEC**  
Connecting Experience with Opportunity

**eriec**  
Edmonton Region Immigrant  
Employment Council

 **Saskatoon  
Open Door  
Society**

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IEC** RURAL  
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COUNCIL

**triec**  
Toronto Region Immigrant  
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Diversity Drives Success

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COLLECTIVE**

 **NEW BRUNSWICK  
MULTICULTURAL  
COUNCIL**  **CONSEIL  
MULTICULTUREL DU  
NOUVEAU-BRUNSWICK**

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[iecc.network](http://iecc.network)