

# Workforce Diversity: Immigration Forum

## Summary

---

### Meeting Date and Location:

January 11, 2019

Vancouver Island Technology Park, Victoria, BC

### In attendance:

Lynn Brown - Schneider Electric, Victoria

Ruth Eden – Destination Victoria

Denny Warner – Saanich Peninsula Chamber of Commerce

Elizabeth May – MP, Saanich-Gulf Islands

Soji Oyenuga – VMAC, Nanaimo

Alan Kaufman – WorkSafeBC

Bill Collins – Questar Tangent, Saanich

Bill Vante – BC Ministry of Jobs, Trade and Technology

Kyle Preston – ITA, Apprenticeship Advisor, Victoria

Shelly Carlson – Seastar Chemicals, Sidney

Thomas Ahn – Mad Ventures, Esquimalt

John Juricic – Harbour Digital Media, Facilitator

Barry Carbol – Schmidt & Carbol Consulting, Facilitator

### Discussion Summary:

#### 1. Forum Goals

The forum on immigration issues impacting the development of the workforce in lower Vancouver Island communities was established to a mechanism to:

- ▶ Address critical labour market and HR planning issues affecting Vancouver island industries and communities; and
- ▶ Provide a process through which HR planning approaches and best practices can be shared among Vancouver Island company, organization, and community representatives

#### 2. Participant Introductions

Forum participants were asked to provide a brief introduction for their company/organization and to outline a key workforce development/employment issue that they are facing. Issues raised by participants included:

- ▶ Difficulty in finding people to fill positions (applies across Western Canada);

- ▶ Challenges of small businesses finding staff (one impact is that local businesses are reducing hours they are open since they can't find enough staff);
- ▶ Barriers to hiring immigrants include:
  - Difficulty new immigrants have in acquiring credentials so that they can work in occupations for which they have education and training;
  - Transfer of foreign credentials to both professional and trades occupations;
- ▶ Finding individuals with entry level skills (simply not enough people available in the local labour pool);
- ▶ Local tourism and hospitality industries have difficulty in finding employees. Job vacancies remain open for 'months at a time'. When people are found they do not stay so retention is also an issue;
- ▶ Language and cultural (including business culture) issues present barriers for immigrants as they try to settle into the local community;
- ▶ Frustration on the part of businesses concerning the complexity of the Canadian immigration system is a barrier to hiring immigrant workers;
- ▶ Challenge of when to employ HR professionals to address recruitment activities for small/medium businesses;
- ▶ Engineers of all types are in short supply. Attracting professionals to the Island is a challenge;
- ▶ Family unification programs could be part of the solution. Increased immigration could help employers fill job vacancies.

### **3. Presentation #1 – Brian Vatne, Director of Immigration Policy, BC Ministry of Jobs, Trade and Technology**

Brian Vatne provided a presentation which outlined the current state of immigration to Canada and British Columbia. During his presentation, Brian referred to recent BC and Canadian statistics related to:

- ▶ Labour force growth through immigration;
- ▶ BC's labour market outlook (see <https://www.workbc.ca/Labour-Market-Industry/Labour-Market-Outlook.aspx> and [https://www.workbc.ca/getmedia/1dce90f9-f2f9-4eca-b9e5-c19de9598f32/BC\\_Labour\\_Market\\_Outlook\\_2018\\_English.pdf.aspx](https://www.workbc.ca/getmedia/1dce90f9-f2f9-4eca-b9e5-c19de9598f32/BC_Labour_Market_Outlook_2018_English.pdf.aspx));
- ▶ Economic benefits of immigration; and
- ▶ Canada's immigration system and the provincial nominee program.

Throughout the presentation, forum participants raised questions and made comments. Some of these comments/questions were:

- ▶ Could a Chamber of Commerce be an employer proxy for the provincial nominee program? Not right now but this could be something to consider. Such an approach would be similar to a standing offer approach where a set of skills are described and potential qualified immigrants apply through a single window rather than having to seek an offer of employment from one employer.

- ▶ Student immigrants seem to be an attractive category for recruitment by employers. They are the largest group of immigrants. Current issues relate to post-grad pathways to immigration which are difficult.
- ▶ Other issues raised during the discussion included:
  - The use of temporary foreign workers to address worker shortages;
  - Integration of refugees and asylum seekers (many of whom are well trained and have some resources to help them during their transition to life in Canada);
  - Employer education re: employment and the immigration system and diversity in the workforce.

Brian's PowerPoint presentation will be provided to forum participants.

#### 4. Presentation #2: Bill Collins, Questar Tangent & VIEA

Bill Collins provided a presentation entitled *Capturing Talent on Vancouver Island*. This presentation provided an overview of research Bill was involved in with the Vancouver Island Economic Alliance (VIEA). The impetus for the research related to finding ways to attract foreign direct investment to Vancouver Island as a way of building capacity for VI companies and businesses and at the same time building a competitive workforce on the Island. Some of the highlights of the presentation included:

- ▶ The importance of retaining BC and Island educated foreign students;
- ▶ Immigration is a key to meeting productivity goals;
- ▶ Another key to workforce development on the Island is the involvement of First Nations communities;
- ▶ Access to high skill jobs is critical to the success of immigrants. To enable this, immigrants (and non-immigrants from that matter) require access to affordable housing and child care;
- ▶ Social cohesion is essential to the development of a vibrant workforce in the region;
- ▶ International students need to become aware of what is available in the broader community by way of employment and a social network beyond the educational institutions they attend;
- ▶ Students indicated that they are looking at 'whole life' issues not just 'work life' issues; Students want to be integrated into the community;
- ▶ There is an opportunity cost related to not dealing with immigration effectively;
- ▶ As employers, we all need to do more 'listening'.

An expanded version of Bill's presentation can be found at: <http://viea.ca/economic-resources-initiatives/initiatives/capturing-talent/>.

#### 5. Next Steps

The presentations and discussions suggested a number of possible courses of action that could be undertaken in relation to immigration and the VI workforce. These included:

- ▶ Establishment of venues/mechanisms for increased dialogue among chambers of commerce, the tourism sector, and educational institutions concerning attracting foreign students to work on the Island beyond their education and training experience;

- ▶ Organizing industry tours targeted at foreign students in local secondary and post-secondary institutions and at educators. These tours would help to build understanding of the types of employer and employment opportunities that are available on the Island and also build community;
- ▶ Establish a mechanisms for employers to meet with post-secondary institutions with a view to establishing 'preferred employer' relationships and the sponsorship of foreign students by companies;
- ▶ Establish showcases for foreign students to show employers what they can do and the skills that they have.