

Immigrant Entrepreneurs

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Creating New Opportunities
in Nova Scotia

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The logo for 'isis' features two green circles above the letters 'i' and 's'. The letters 'i', 's', 'i', and 's' are rendered in a bold, teal, sans-serif font.

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Immigrant entrepreneurs are courageous, creative and deeply passionate about their business ventures. Above all, they are extremely flexible and adaptable. “An immigrant is someone who wants a challenge,” says Inkyung Hwang, owner of the International Student Exchange Program. Self-employment is an important source of labour market opportunity for immigrants. Some bring previous entrepreneurial experience to their new life in Canada, others take advantage of transferable skills gained elsewhere to start a new business in our province and some get into business because their initial job search in their field was unsuccessful. Regardless of their motivation to form a business, immigrant entrepreneurs are expanding upon personal successes by contributing to the revitalization and diversification of the local economy.

Through their involvement in the wider community in Halifax, their international contacts and new ways of thinking, they enrich our traditional maritime culture with new stories and business models which contribute to the local economy in a positive way. Despite this, many must overcome significant challenges to fully integrate into Nova Scotian markets. As a community, we are inspired by their courage and creativity as we work towards further attracting and including them in our province. In turn, more immigrant entrepreneurs will also be encouraged to set up shop on our shores.

Why Are Immigrants More Entrepreneurial?

According to the 2006 Census, 20 % of immigrants to Nova Scotia are self-employed, compared with 8% of the Canadian-born population (Statistics Canada).

- “I think if you come here as an immigrant, you have already proven you are more venturesome and more aggressive than the average person. It takes guts to get up and go where you don’t know anybody” *David Grace, founder and former CEO, Nautel*
- Immigrants have fewer options to fall back on. Unlike other Nova Scotians who may rely on their families more during times of unemployment, immigrants are often on their own. In these cases, self-employment is a necessary alternative.
- According to Hou & Wang (2011), immigrants are more motivated by entrepreneurial values such as independence, freedom, flexibility, and control over decision-making.

Those Who Succeed Contribute to the Nova Scotia Economy in a Meaningful Way

Immigrants to Nova Scotia contribute to the economy due to their high levels of education, experience, and knowledge of diverse languages, cultures and market opportunities. In addition to achieving success on their own, many immigrant entrepreneurs make vast contributions to the wider provincial economy, by:

Helping to generate rural development. As factors such as an ageing population and outmigration are negatively affecting rural economies, immigrant entrepreneurs are creating jobs and contributing to the economic growth of smaller areas in Nova Scotia. Some examples include: Grand Pre wines in the Annapolis Valley and Pamit Cards in Sydney, Cape Breton. For more examples, please see our Immigrant Business Directory which profiles hundreds of entrepreneurs and the products and services they contribute to our economy: www.directory-isisns.ca

Hiring Nova Scotians. Many immigrant entrepreneurs look to Nova Scotians to form their employee base, generating many local employment opportunities. Here are just a few examples of this:

1. Kenneth C. Rowe of England founded **IMP Group**, which has a staff of 3,500. These experienced people deliver service, quality and value to customers across diverse sectors such as aerospace, aviation, airline, healthcare, information technology, hospitality, and property development.
2. Maurice Guitton of France founded **Composites Atlantic** in 1998. Employing over 400 people and present on the national and international markets, this Lunenburg-based company has earned a reputation as a leader in the design, testing, certification and manufacture of advanced composites for the aerospace, space, defense, and commercial industries. "I think one of the biggest accomplishments here is that we have good employees," says Maurice. "People are loyal and dedicated, and therefore they like to be part of the growth. This is good for the community and the people of Nova Scotia. We can develop the company and give a new resource to Canada and Nova Scotia."

Other immigrant entrepreneurs providing employment in Nova Scotia include Boris Mirtchev of the Hamachi Group of restaurants and Alex Handyside of ScotiaCare.

Forging Local Partnerships. Many local businesses run by Canadian-born entrepreneurs choose to partner with immigrant entrepreneurs to improve their own businesses. Immigrants help Nova Scotians to:

- a. understand the business traditions and practices of their country which may differ drastically from our practices in Canada
- b. find the right business contacts in international markets
- c. Identify product or services needs in other countries that the Canadian exporter may not be aware of

"In 2004, business immigrant entrepreneurs from all countries invested \$87.8 million in Canada, creating 886 full-time and 646 part-time jobs" (Huang, 2007)

"You can be anything you want in Canada. If I wanted to be the prime minister of Canada, I know I could be." *Pete Lockett, Pete's Frootique*

Profile of Immigrant Success



For Ana Jenkins of Mexico Lindo Restaurant, persistence has been the cornerstone of her success. "Most people give up because of the first obstacle they face, which is never a good idea."

One example of this is Pernille Fischer Boulter of Kisserup International Trade Roots. They help match exporting companies with immigrants who can share their knowledge of their homeland, cultural tips, business etiquette, and networking contacts.

Generating Wealth Locally. Immigrant entrepreneurs also invest in other local businesses, expand their companies to include other venture, and donate to local charities.

Diversifying Local Markets. Halifax grocer Pete Lockett of Pete's Frootique helped to introduce fruits and vegetables which were previously unknown to many Nova Scotians. In addition, restaurants that serve cuisine from over 30 countries have motivated local farmers to grow non-traditional produce to meet some of these produce needs as well as needs in the foreign markets. As Nova Scotians become more and more accustomed to international products, they are more likely to eat at ethnic restaurants and make purchases from immigrant entrepreneurs. In turn, this allows Atlantic Canadians to become even more welcoming to international businesses and immigrants.

Despite these accomplishments, some face significant barriers to success

In comparison to Canadian-born entrepreneurs, immigrants have many obstacles to overcome in order to become successful.

Lack of Established Ethnic Communities. Unlike other metropolitan areas in Canada, immigrants in Atlantic Canada cannot rely on ethnic communities as the main market for their products and services. This forces immigrant entrepreneurs in our region to become successful in the local, mainstream market. Although this means more work at the beginning, those who are successful have a competitive advantage: there is a smaller local market, but they have a bigger share of it (Sharif, 2009).

Cross-Cultural Understanding with Regards to Business. As with other local workplaces, immigrant entrepreneurs in Nova Scotia must face challenges related to cross-cultural communication and understanding. These may include such issues as employee rights, hierarchy and roles and equality of men and women in the workplace.

A Lack of Local Networks. As with Canadian-born entrepreneurs, the role informal networks for immigrants is of utmost importance for their business success. As networks take a lifetime to build, immigrants must re-build their networks very quickly when they settle in a new community.

Understanding the System. For immigrant entrepreneurs with little previous Canadian business experience, many may not know where to find information on financing, business plans, accessing capital, expanding a business and other related topics.

What can the community do to help ease this burden?

When it comes to business, openness to immigrant entrepreneurs and a welcoming community encourage newcomers to stay.

- Get to know local immigrant entrepreneurs – try their services, talk to them about their businesses and help them build their networks by introducing them to other businesses. Mario DeMello, owner of Borderless Solutions, explains that “all Canadians benefit from adopting a welcoming attitude towards immigrants.” After all, “who is better qualified to open doors in other countries than the person who just arrived from that country?”
- If you have business experience you can volunteer to mentor new entrepreneurs through your Regional Development Authority or ISIS

Programs Available at ISIS which Cater to Immigrant Entrepreneurs:

According to research conducted by The Joint Centre of Excellence for Research on Immigration and Settlement (CERIS), immigrant entrepreneurs mentioned that the lack of Canadian market and business experience is a problem (2004). ISIS has demonstrated its leadership in this area by providing programs for immigrant entrepreneurs on these issues since 1992.

1. **Business Counseling:** One-on-one business counseling sessions help immigrants to examine the advantages and disadvantages of starting a business or expanding an existing business. A business counsellor assists clients before, during and after the opening of their business.
 - a. www.isisns.ca/bus-counseling
2. **Seminars & Workshops** ISIS has both online and in-house business workshops and seminars to help immigrants and international students start a business. Volunteer speakers from the community provide information and advice in their areas of expertise such as business law, accounting, marketing, etc. Examples of workshops include: *Entrepreneur Language Clinics*, *Introduction to Business in Nova Scotia* and *Business Skills Development Training*.
 - a. www.isicns.ca/business/workshops-seminars/
3. **Immigrant Business Directory** Featuring 247 immigrant businesses from across the province, this self-identified directory helps to promote and build a diverse business community.
 - a. <http://www.directory-isisns.ca/>
4. **Profiles and Videos of Immigrant Success** In this video series, ISIS Business Development Services offers a look at the great diversity of immigrant businesses and business owners in Halifax and the contribution they are making to the local economy.
 - a. <http://www.isisns.ca/business/success-stories/>

Conclusion

Economist Richard Florida has demonstrated that “tolerance towards immigrants and visible minorities is directly associated with higher regional incomes [in Canada]” (2010). As the presence of immigrant entrepreneurs increases in our region, our overall openness and acceptance to immigrants and visible minorities also improves, allowing for the improved integration and success rates of all immigrant workers to our province.

Data Sources

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Photo: Sander Fizi

Pernille Fischer Boulter

Kisserup International Trade Roots (Denmark)

After years of steady business growth, Boulter is giving back. Last fall she set up the Kisserup Export Immigrant Directory, which helps Nova Scotia businesses leverage the expertise of local immigrants. If a company wants to do business in Oman, for example, Kisserup will match the firm with a Nova Scotia immigrant from Oman who can mentor the company on Oman business practices and culture. “We’re empowering immigrants to leverage their knowledge and build strong networks,” she says. “It’s crucial for the economic prosperity of this province that we understand the importance of attracting and retaining immigrants.

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