

# Onboarding Newcomers

A Toolkit for  
Nova Scotian  
Employers



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## About ISANS

ISANS helps immigrants build a future in Nova Scotia. Immigrants choose Nova Scotia for its opportunities and its welcoming maritime spirit to prosper and grow as new Canadians. From newcomer to lifetime Nova Scotian, ISANS charts a path so all can belong and grow.

ISANS is the leading immigrant settlement service agency in Atlantic Canada, serving 9,000+ clients annually in 104 communities across Nova Scotia, through a diversity of services—language, settlement, community integration and employment—both in person and online.

Through our staff, we bring varied languages, different experiences and unique perspectives that inform our client-centered programming. We empower our clients and staff to undertake a collaborative effort to learn and grow together—both personally and professionally—through partnership, professionalism and accountability.

As the front door for many of Nova Scotia's immigrants, we seek to create a community where all can belong and grow, to build a stronger Nova Scotia and Canada for all.

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## Introduction: Why Another Toolkit?

There are now more people aged 65 and older in Canada than there are children.<sup>1</sup> With baby boomers rapidly aging out of the workforce and below-replacement birth rates, employers now have to be creative and intentional when looking for the right talent.

Newcomers to Canada represent one such talent pool. With their skills, expertise, and connections to communities around the world, immigrants bring unique perspectives, and they are often able to understand unmet needs in under-leveraged markets.

Yet when it comes to immigrants, there is often a perceived 'mystery' of hiring someone with foreign qualifications, someone whose first language might be other than English, and someone who might not be fully aware of Canadian workplace culture.

This toolkit helps employers demystify immigrant hiring and outlines easy, proactive human resource strategies to hire and retain immigrant talent.

It illustrates how purposeful initiatives can support any employer to be more diverse and inclusive.

As you review the tips and recommendations in this toolkit, you will notice that for the most part, the practices necessary to attract and retain immigrant talent are not substantively different from what you would do to attract and retain any talent. It is equally about helping your existing staff grow with new a coworker as it is about helping the new employee adjust to the team and the environment. It is about helping your organization benefit from fresh new perspectives that complement the strengths of your current team. It is well thought out and flexible people practices that make all the difference.



## A Business Case for Diversity and Inclusion

### 2.1. Research

There is a growing body of evidence linking the diversity that results from immigration to gains in innovation, productivity and market opportunity. Immigrants contribute as workers of all skill levels, entrepreneurs, innovators, taxpayers and investors.

In human capital terms, global talent is attractive to business. Companies with diverse teams regularly out-perform and out-innovate others, and they make better decisions. Most of the practices and actions that an employer can take to attract, hire and retain immigrant talent are simply good business practices.

#### Delivering Through Diversity

- A 2018 report by **McKinsey & Company** found that more diverse companies are better able to attract top talent; to improve their customer orientation, employee satisfaction, and decision making; and to secure their license to operate. McKinsey's research also showed that ethnically-diverse companies were 35% more likely to outperform their peers.
- A 2017 report by the **Centre for International Governance Innovation and the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation** identified a direct correlation between ethno-cultural diversity and the bottom line: just 1% increase in diversity leads to an average of 2.4% increase in revenue.
- A 2013 **Deloitte Australia report** showed that inclusive teams outperformed their peers by 80% in team-based assessments.



## 2.2. Foundations for Success

The first steps in any organization's efforts to increased diversity is support from its executive leadership. No matter what the size of your organization, success or failure is most often dependent on a number of critical elements:

**1. State your commitment to diversity and inclusion:** Ensure such commitments are clearly thought out and stated in places like your corporate website, online and paper application forms, etc. Mission statements and company values can be a place where these commitments reside. Making such statements is an important step in holding yourself accountable. It can also be a great source of pride for existing employees to see that their organization actually lives by stated commitments.

**2. Plan:** For many companies, planning for future recruitment needs is not a priority. We recruit for newly added and recently vacated positions, but this reactive approach can also pose a problem in the efforts to increase diversity in your team. Simply relying on "being located in a multicultural city" is not sufficient. To advance inclusive hiring practices, there is a

need for greater coherence between company goals, recruitment tactics, and purposeful action.

**3. Departmental support:** For diversity efforts to be successful, mandates from executive leadership must be carried out by middle management. Some of the most successful organizations are those that have committed people in management and/or human resources actively championing these efforts.

**4. Look out for unintended organizational barriers:** Organizations have performance standards, targets, and key performance indicators that help direct efforts and focus outcomes. Many tie remuneration and financial rewards, like individual and team bonuses, to achievement of those marks. Whether it is something as simple as changing the duration and format of a job interview, or explaining a procedure more than once, good diversity practices may require more flexibility in organizational systems. Time and time again, organizations have emphasized that the benefits of making exceptions to standards outweigh the efforts.





Smaller companies may not have departments to take care of human resources or marketing, yet the success of their businesses require they still carry out these support functions. No matter what the size of your organization, you will reap benefits by stating and living by values, planning for your recruitment needs, ensuring managers and supervisors are invested,

and regularly evaluating the ROI on organizational practices to ensure they are not creating unintended barriers.

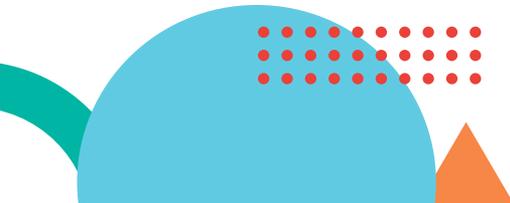
Any further recommendations described in this toolkit will have a greater chance of yielding desired results if these four critical steps are continually examined.

### More on Diversity Dividends

**Diversity Dividend: Canada's Global Advantage Report** is based on an in-depth analysis of 7,900 workplaces in 14 industrial sectors. The report provides a series of recommendations on how to unlock talent and promote inclusive hiring. You can access it here: [https://www.cigionline.org/sites/default/files/documents/DiversitySpecial%20Report%20WEB\\_0.pdf](https://www.cigionline.org/sites/default/files/documents/DiversitySpecial%20Report%20WEB_0.pdf)

**Waiter, is that Inclusion in My Soup? A New Recipe to Improve Business Performance.** By Deloitte Australia and Victorian Equal Opportunity, 2013, can be downloaded here: <https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/au/Documents/human-capital/deloitte-au-hc-diversity-inclusion-soup-0513.pdf>

**Delivering through Diversity, New in 2018.** McKinsey & Company, [https://www.mckinsey.com/~media/McKinsey/Business%20Functions/Organization/Our%20Insights/Delivering%20through%20diversity/Delivering-through-diversity\\_full-report.ashx](https://www.mckinsey.com/~media/McKinsey/Business%20Functions/Organization/Our%20Insights/Delivering%20through%20diversity/Delivering-through-diversity_full-report.ashx)



## Employer Branding

Organizations often think the first step in attracting talent is a well thought-out job description, attractive job posting, or picking the right job site. However, without proper and ongoing employer branding these efforts can become an unproductive expenditure of resources. In today's marketplace, when companies compete for talent, they are up against brand names that have both a real and perceived reputation. Job seekers may have never worked for certain well-known employers, yet they still hold very strong opinions about what it would be like to work for any of those companies.

Capital Health was recently named one of Canada's Best Diversity Employers. This year's list of winners includes 45 employers from across Canada taken from a field of 300. These employers take purposeful efforts to increase and promote diversity within their organizations. Their leaders know that doing so will enhance employee engagement, build their brand externally, and improve their ability to acquire new talent.<sup>2</sup>

To attract (immigrant) talent, it is crucial that you are known for your Employer Value Proposition (EVP)—the value that employees gain in return for working at your organization. That proposition must extend beyond pay, benefits, and days off. It is important that leadership regularly ask themselves, "What do past, current, and prospective employees see when they consider employment at our company? How does our brand stack up against others who are trying to attract the same talent?"

### 3.1. What elements make a strong employment brand?

According to online recruiting agency Recruiting.com you can easily assess your Employer Value Proposition (EVP):

1. **Start with a Self-Assessment by asking yourself,** "Why do people join our company? Do different segments value different things about our EVP?"
2. **Go to your company website,** preferably your careers section, if you have one. Cover your company logo and look at the images on the pages and read through the text. "What message are you portraying to prospective immigrant talent?"



**3. Survey your employees (anonymously).** “What do your employees tell their friends and prospective candidates about working for your company?”

**4. When interviewing candidates, be sure to ask them why** they applied to your position, and is it consistent with what you want? Are you hearing information consistent with your EVP?



### Improve Your Employer Brand

According to human resources consultants Hewitt Associates, there are five steps to developing a strong employer brand:

1. Understand your organization
2. Create a ‘compelling brand promise/employment value proposition’ for employees that mirrors the brand promise for customers
3. Develop standards to measure the fulfilment of the brand promise
4. ‘Ruthlessly align’ all people practices to support and reinforce the brand promise
5. Execute and measure



## Sourcing Talent

You have a vacancy or a newly created position. While it is tempting to post your job and see who applies, the organization should first ensure:

- its brand is welcoming and inviting to the groups you seek to attract
- both leadership and management level support for inclusion and diversity should be in place
- plan for, and stage, your recruitment efforts
- continuously examine and address unintended organizational barriers to successfully integrate new talent

Once you have established these critical pieces, you are in a more attractive position to begin partnering with immigrant-serving organizations, multicultural professional associations, or post-secondary institutions.

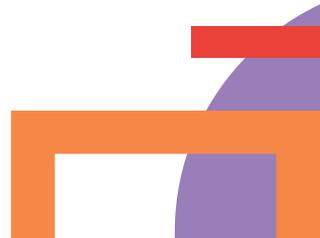
Larger employers often use community resources to support their diversity efforts. These can be informal groups of their own employees at any level to connect colleagues, or more formal, company-sponsored groups with a specific mandate to advance diversity

strategies. In the end, it is employees helping other employees.

Management-driven efforts can include hosting career fairs with immigrant-serving organizations, or engaging in philanthropic and other community outreach efforts that directly support underrepresented groups. These types of initiatives can lead to increased interest within an immigrant or particular ethnic community. Employee referrals are another common source, however, if your organization is not currently diverse, then it is not likely that the current base of employees will be connected to a diverse group of potential applicants.

ISANS helps you to meet your human resource needs by connecting you to potential employees in a number of ways.

- SkillsMatch online recruitment tool provides you with access to qualified, pre-screened ISANS clients
- If you have multiple job openings we provide On-site Recruitment and Information Sessions (ORIS) opportunities on-site at ISANS





- The Professional Practice, Trades Practical Assessment, and Engineers Work-based Competency Assessment programs allow you to assess the skills and qualifications of a potential employee in an on-the-job situation
- English in the Workplace helps immigrant employees with on-the-job language training
- Atlantic Immigration Pilot (AIP) is a creative approach to address employers' labour market challenges. Employers in Nova Scotia can use the program to hire foreign workers. Employers looking to fill labour gaps through AIP must first get designated, and then get their positions endorsed by the Province. Once the employer's positions are endorsed, candidate(s) identified by the employer can apply for permanent residency directly to Immigration, Refugees & Citizenship Canada.

ISANS supports employers interested in AIP with:

- Information through monthly webinars (register at ISANS): [www.isans.ca/employer-support/atlantic-immigration-pilot-project-aipp/](http://www.isans.ca/employer-support/atlantic-immigration-pilot-project-aipp/)
- Initial settlement partner contact in Halifax
- Needs assessment and settlement plan for employee candidate(s) and their families: <https://aipp.isans.ca>
- Support through a variety of services including:
  - Workplace Culture workshops
  - Language training (e.g. English in the Workplace)
  - Connection to AIP eligible clients who are already in the province

These and other ISANS Employer Support Services are also available outside AIP.

For more information, visit: [www.isans.ca/employer-support](http://www.isans.ca/employer-support)





#### 4.1. More on Sourcing Talent

The Government of Canada has an online employer's Road Map to hire and retain internationally trained workers. More at: <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/publications-manuals/employer-roadmap-hiring-retaining-internationally-trained-workers.html>

ISANS has programs and services to help you diversify your workforce and recruit and retain international

talent. More on the ISANS website under Diversify Your Workforce: [www.isans.ca/employer-support](http://www.isans.ca/employer-support)

ISANS' SkillsMatch online recruitment tool allows employers across Nova Scotia to post jobs and search for pre-screened, job-ready clients with the skills they are seeking. More at [www.isans.ca/skillsmatch](http://www.isans.ca/skillsmatch)

#### Why Register on SkillsMatch?

Labour Market issues and limited HR capacity have been identified as a key priority and the number one challenge to business growth in Nova Scotia.

SkillsMatch will help give you a competitive advantage by providing direct access to a pool of skilled immigrant professionals.

#### Benefits:

- Time efficient
- Confidential
- Free of cost to the employer
- Access to qualified, pre-screened international talent
- Flexibility to post jobs and view immigrant talent at your convenience
- Access to additional resources

For more information on SkillsMatch email [SkillsMatch@isans.ca](mailto:SkillsMatch@isans.ca)

## Unconscious Bias

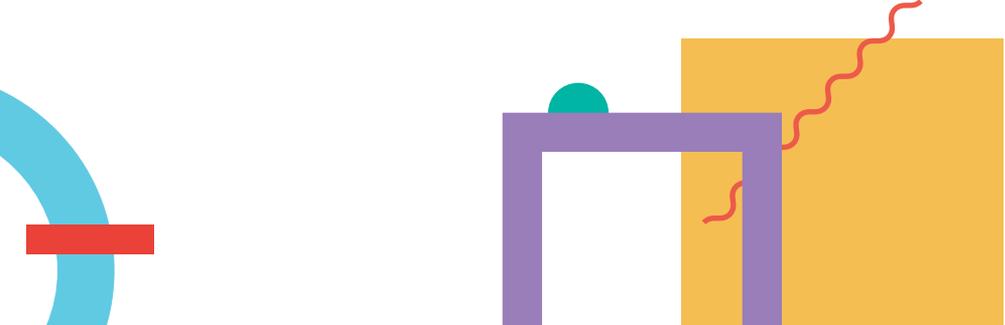
Today's management literature is full of references to the role bias, both conscious and unconscious, can play in our decision making. It is said that biases are our way to organize our experiences, thoughts and beliefs. Social psychologists call this phenomenon "social categorization," whereby we routinely and rapidly sort people into groups. This process can overlook our rational and logical thinking brain, and, at times, it can guide us into actions that could be seen as harsh or, even worse, run afoul of Human Rights laws.

Biases can lead to missed workplace opportunities. While employers may be actively working for inclusive workplaces, they might be unconsciously undermining those very initiatives.

In their quest for a good "cultural fit", organizations may find themselves with a similar employee, at the expense of the richness and diversity that often accompanies the inclusion of people with different backgrounds and cultures. With diversity comes



an rich organizational culture that grows with multicultural perspectives. If leaders are prepared to embrace change and challenge the ways they conduct interviews, hire for talent, budget to teach language skills, and find ways to assess for skills outside the traditional interview, then there is increased opportunity to attract and keep talent that they otherwise would have overlooked. There are resources to help organizations to address the issue of bias and offers tools and tips on how to deal with our own bias. ISANS' Workplace Culture Program helps you to:

- better understand the benefits of hiring international talent
  - understand the importance of the immigrant experience in the workplace
  - learn methods to improve intercultural competence and retain immigrant employees
- 



Below are 10 Strategies to create a welcoming workplace for immigrants.

implement ongoing on-site cultural competency training

### **Inform and Support**

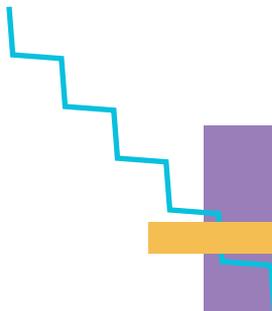
1. Create an orientation process that includes resources on integration and advancement
2. Promote and provide opportunities for professional development
3. Develop and implement a mentorship program or connect with ISANS mentorship program
4. Provide opportunities to demonstrate leadership capabilities

### **Improve workplace culture**

5. Get a cross-cultural workplace assessment from ISANS and

### **Improve Human Resource practices**

6. Require bias-free recruitment training for human resources, staff, recruiters, and hiring managers
7. Conduct bias-free job performance, planning, and review consultations with employees
8. Update application process with a focus on diversity and inclusion and provide information and training on Canadian application and interview practices
9. Recognize and value international experience
10. Require diverse hiring panels





## More on Addressing Biases

- ISANS Workplace Culture Program: [www.isans.ca/workplace-culture](http://www.isans.ca/workplace-culture)
- Microsoft offers a free, online e-Lesson intended to deepen your understanding of unconscious biases, how they influence behaviour and impact all of us. To find the courses, go to: <https://www.mslearning.microsoft.com/course/72169/launch>
- Google offers a free online course on Unconscious Bias @ Work, introducing the concept of unconscious bias and its impact. To access the course, go to: <https://rework.withgoogle.com/guides/unbiasing-raise-awareness/steps/watch-unconscious-bias-at-work/>
- Another free tool available to employers is the Implicit Association Test, which offers a way to probe unconscious biases. It takes only 10 minutes to complete online, and it is available through Harvard University's Project Implicit at: <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/>
- Tools such as these can serve as a useful starting point to identify where awareness training could help existing staff in overcoming biases, either unconscious or otherwise.



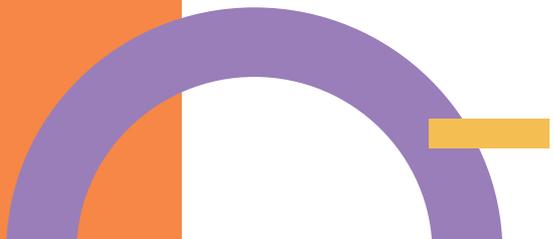
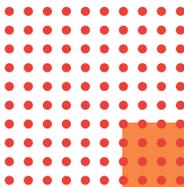
## Competency Assessment vs. Credential Recognition

Recognizing and understanding educational levels, institutions, credentials, and credentialing bodies can be daunting. Many new Canadians arrive with high levels of education and experience that Canadian employers either choose to overlook or have difficulty understanding. This challenge exists for employers in both regulated and non-regulated occupations.

Organizations potentially lose this good talent in the screening and interview process. As businesses continue to jockey to find good people, the cost of losing out on potential employees is becoming more expensive. Think about professional sports teams overlooking good draft picks or those who trade away a struggling player only to see that player thrive with a different team. By relying heavily

on resume screening, especially on the basis of qualifications, education, or even unfamiliar names, you may get through your selection process more efficiently at the risk of losing good talent.

In 2012, Diane Dechief and Philip Oreopoulos conducted a study among employers in three large Canadian cities. They discovered that applicants with English-sounding names were 35% more likely to receive call-backs than candidates with Indian or Chinese names. They determined that businesses feared hiring unqualified applicants and did not want to risk wasting time on such applicants, and that pressure to avoid bad hires exacerbated these effects.<sup>3</sup>



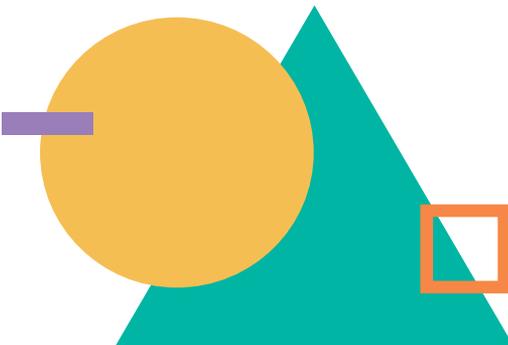


## Multi-Stakeholder Work Groups

Multi-Stakeholder Work Groups address challenges faced by skilled immigrants in regulated occupations by bringing together all key partners at profession-specific tables. In addition to ensuring fair licensure processes and removing unnecessary barriers, workforce integration is also an important focus. Employers are key stakeholders in these profession-based groups and there are numerous examples of realistic, collaborative solutions being developed with their input and involvement.

In the engineering profession, a work-based assessment program was conceived by the work group. It provides opportunities for internationally educated engineers to be placed with local employers. It has been successful for many years with high employment outcomes.

- A similar program for architects is currently in development
  - Community pharmacists who sit at the pharmacy Multi-Stakeholder Work Group table have identified skills gaps and developed workshops to prepare internationally trained pharmacists for their required internships. A number are currently working on a collaborative processes to identify internship opportunities more efficiently.
  - Observership programs offering invaluable exposure to Canadian workplaces for immigrant professionals have been developed by the work groups in the fields of law, medicine and dentistry.
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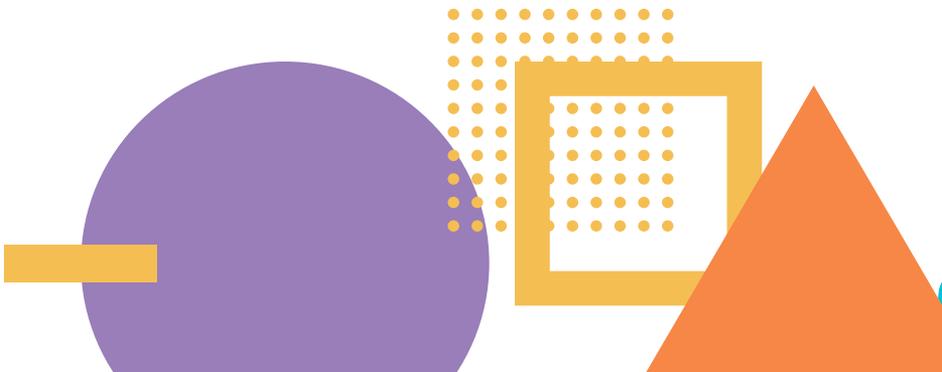
It is unfortunate that someone's name can create assumptions about their ability to succeed in a job.<sup>4</sup> Whether such actions are the consequence of unconscious biases or purposeful actions, the result is a loss of potential talent without thorough assessment.

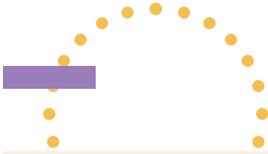
To learn more about ISANS Competency Assessment programs and Credential Recognition Pathways go to [www.isans.ca/find-employment/professionals/](http://www.isans.ca/find-employment/professionals/).

An effective selection process should get more challenging as candidates move through it. It should ensure you are not losing out on good candidates before they have an opportunity to demonstrate their skills. While it may take a larger time investment, finding ways to assess the potential of as many applicants as possible could yield unanticipated results.

One such option would have candidates complete an online test for aptitudes in relevant job skills. Some organizations also have candidates go through an on-the-job type of assessment where peers play a significant part in the process. Applicants get an opportunity to demonstrate their competencies in a work-related assignment. These examples demonstrate how organizations are taking that extra step to ensure they are properly assessing the potential of talent and not overly relying on the quick paper-screen process.

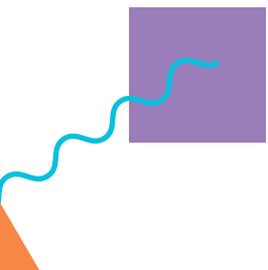
One major financial institution skipped the interview process altogether and simply gave each candidate an opportunity to do a portion of the job. At the end of the on-the-job assessment, the potential co-workers met to evaluate the proficiency of each candidate against predetermined standards, including the ease of interaction with themselves and clients.





### More on Assessment

- The Canadian Information Centre for International Credentials ([cicic.ca](http://cicic.ca)) provides information and referral services to both individuals and organizations on the recognition of academic and occupational credentials. Similar services are offered by the International Credential Evaluation Service (ICES) at the British Columbia Institute of Technology (BCIT). <https://www.bcit.ca/ices/>
- If you are looking to hire an internationally educated professional or trades person, ISANS can help to understand the pathway required for them to practice in their field. For more information check out: [www.isans.ca/find-employment/professionals/](http://www.isans.ca/find-employment/professionals/)



## Creating Community

Organizations are communities. It can be challenging for individuals new to any community, work or otherwise, to know the unofficial or acceptable behaviours and norms of that community, the right people to speak to in the organization to get things done, or even the places to go nearby for a good lunch.

The initiatives discussed below are designed to help welcome and integrate new staff into your community. Most importantly, they aim to increase the likelihood of their success and reduce the time to full productivity and contribution.

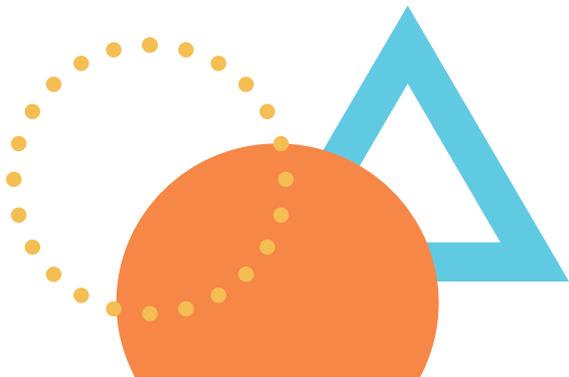
The first 90 days of employment are critical to the success of any new employee. They are equally critical for employers, to help them realize the value of their new investment.

In a study presented by the Human Capital Institute (HCI) and the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), 76% of HR practitioners said onboarding had been underutilized. They reported that 20% of new hires left in the first 45 days (SHRM, 2017).

They recommend thinking about new employee orientation in three distinct categories:

- Who are the key **People** that any new employee must meet, how will those meetings look and when should they occur?
- What is required to support any new employee in the **Performance** of their new role?
- Lastly, what **Paperwork** and processes must be reviewed, completed and explained?

This chart contains examples of each of the **three Ps** of an effective onboarding program.





People	Performance	Paperwork
Informal social events	Job shadowing	Company orientation
Group onboarding activities	Setting expectations and feedback	Playbook/policies
Buddy intro	HR check-ins	Resources
Meetings with Senior Leaders	Coaching	Forms
Team building and getting to know each other	Other training	–
Mentoring	Mentoring	Evaluations
Professional Practice Program	On the job assessment	Evaluations
Workplace Culture Program	Understanding of cross-culture	Development of organizational cultural plan

## 7.1. Buddy System

What is a “buddy”? A buddy is someone who partners with a new employee during their first 2–3 months of employment. While primarily responsible for offering advice and guidance regarding the day-to-day aspects of work within your organization, the buddy may also offer encouragement and knowledge resources, as they help introduce the new employee to your culture.

By assigning a buddy to new employees, you create a known and reliable resource for a new hire. A buddy can be a resource for things that may seem trivial but are critical to help a new employee feel comfortable and productive. New employees have a single point-of-contact for their basic questions regarding their work with you. The concept of a buddy helps establish orientation as a process, rather than a single learning event.





## Key Characteristics of a Buddy

**Good Communicator:** A buddy should encourage open communication. They should provide relevant information and encourage a process of continued, self-directed learning.

**Role Model:** A buddy should be a model employee exemplifying the company values.

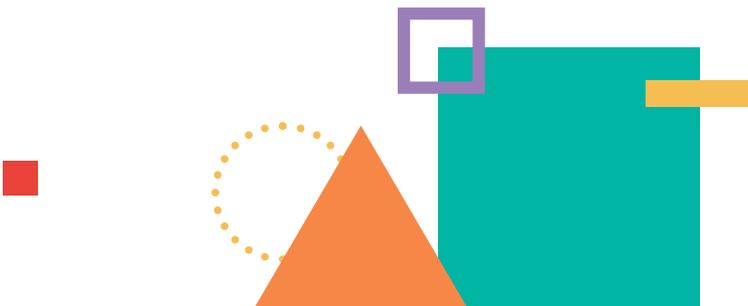
**Motivator:** A buddy should have a positive outlook on their work and use that perspective to help build self-confidence and loyalty in the new employee. A buddy leads by example.

**Strong Performer:** A buddy can help guide the new employee in many situations based on their experience and knowledge obtained in the work environment.

When selecting a buddy, some critical basics should be kept in mind. Buddies should be proficient in their roles, able to devote time to new employees, and proud to be part of your organization. They are well respected by others and are patient. In addition, it is important to select individuals, who are culturally sensitive, and ideally, able to speak another language. It is important that they be well regarded and accepted by current employees. Preferably, a buddy should not be in a supervisory capacity to the new employee.

For smaller companies, their size might prevent them from assigning a formal buddy. Instead, the office manager or receptionist, as part of their duties, can have the responsibility to regularly check in with newcomers and ensure the less formal parts of company culture have been reviewed.

Many organizations also have internal mentorship programs that offer newcomers new ways to integrate, and enable mentors to grow professionally.



## 7.2. ISANS Professional Mentorship Program

Mentoring does not have to be internal, you can consider mentoring outside of your workforce. ISANS Professional Mentorship Program matches practicing professionals and skilled immigrants in the same occupation. It provides a valuable learning opportunity for both participants. As a mentor, you can provide informal advice, connections, moral support, and entry into professional networks that can enable a skilled immigrant to break into the job market at a level comparable with their training and education. Professional Mentorship provides you and your employees an opportunity to increase cross-cultural competency, learn industry best practices in other countries, and expand professional networks.

For more on ISANS' Professional Mentorship Program visit: [www.isans.ca/volunteer-roles](http://www.isans.ca/volunteer-roles)

## 7.3. Family and Spousal Support

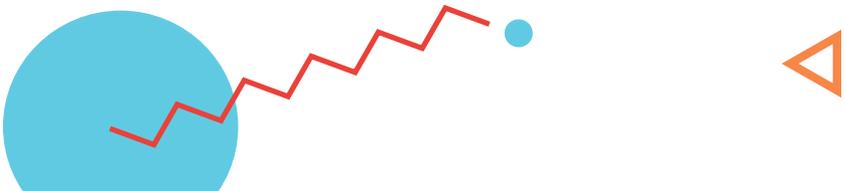
In today's global economy, having a workforce that is fluent in the ways of the world isn't a luxury, it is a competitive necessity. No wonder nearly 80% of mid-size and large companies currently send professionals

abroad—and 45% plan to increase the number they have on assignment<sup>5</sup>.

Bringing immigrant talent into your business can reap many of the same benefits as sending your talent abroad to develop their skill set, without the levels of risk and financial burden. By looking at some of the practices that firms use to help their international talent to thrive abroad, local companies can gain insight that may help to integrate immigrant talent within Nova Scotia.

Consider the challenges faced by a new Canadian and their family as they settle into their new home. As an employer, you have chosen to make an investment in your new hire, banking on your belief that they will provide a positive return to your company. There are however, many things swirling around in the personal life of the new employee that could negatively impact the likelihood of a positive return for you.

Employees may need different levels of support. Here is just one example. Six months after providing its standard new-hire orientation, one company discovered that one of its new employees did not know how to



access her benefits. The employee, a newcomer to Canada, was unfamiliar with extended health and dental plans, and was not sure how to use the health-benefits booklet. What she needed was simply a more detailed explanation of how benefits work in a Canadian workplace.

Many new Canadians do not have a strong network of people to help, either at work or at home. For an employer, challenges that their employees experience at home can often manifest themselves in the workplace in behaviours ranging from decreased attention to detail, or declines in productivity, fatigue, or irritability with co-workers and customers.

The buddy system can be used to help immerse all new employees. Many employers, often in smaller communities, evolve the buddy approach one step further. These companies take measures to help increase the circle of friends and supports to the family of new immigrant talent. They work to immerse spouses and children into the community just as actively as they immerse the employee within the work family. The goal is to make the company feel smaller, to help it to be more welcoming. For example, they provide an opportunity for an existing staff member to volunteer to host the new family for a dinner. Time is volunteered but the company picks up the expenses. Fewer pressures at home will certainly contribute to clarity of focus at work.





## Creating a Welcoming Workplace

Many companies provide lunch and learn opportunities, to help their staff get a better understanding of the company, its benefits, and even life in Canada. Topics can include:

- Financial literacy
  - Understanding payroll deductions
  - Understanding how to access and make effective use of the company benefits as well as non-wage benefits like RRSPs
  - Safety and first-aid in the workplace
- 

## More on Creating Community

ISANS Workplace Culture Program offers monthly webinars on making your businesses more immigrant friendly and welcoming. Register at: [www.isans.ca/live-stream-registration](http://www.isans.ca/live-stream-registration)

Diversity at Work toolkit: <https://iecbc.ca/diversity-at-work-toolkit/>

Other resources you can access, from our partnership with IEC-BC include videos:

- Immigrant-Friendly Businesses: Effective Practices for Attracting, Integrating, and Retaining Immigrants in Canadian Workplaces: <https://iecbc.ca/immigrant-friendly-businesses-effective-practices-for-attracting-integrating-and-retaining-immigrants-in-canadian-workplaces/>
  - Video: How to Effectively Create a Welcoming Workplace and Successfully Integrate New Employees: <https://iecbc.ca/how-to-effectively-create-a-welcoming-workplace-and-successfully-integrate-new-employees/>
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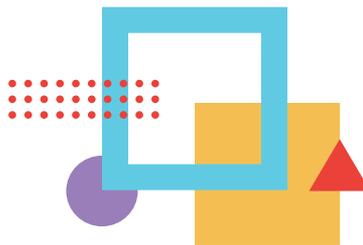
## Supporting Diversity In Language

We operate in an environment where English is, for the most part, the primary language of communication. There are many community and government resources designed to help immigrants obtain basic language skills, but in many cases the wait list is long. It has also been noted by a number of those interviewed that many language courses, including websites, are offered in English or French, and not the primary language of those seeking support.

In a 2015 study conducted by Assisting Local Leaders with Immigrant Employment Strategies (ALLIES) Canada, a total of 95% of employers interviewed reported that language and communication skills represented a barrier for newcomers seeking employment; this compared to just 27% of newcomers thinking their English language was a barrier for them.<sup>6</sup> This major perceptual difference between employers and job seekers, combined with the challenges many face getting immediate training, opens an opportunity for forward looking employers to hire capable newcomers

whose skills are being mistakenly undervalued by others. In some cases, employers have hired newcomers in technical roles where they could accommodate varied levels of English. They found alternatives, such as teaming their new hires with existing employees who spoke the same language, developing in-house English language training or hiring interpreters. They noted that immigrants' language skills improved dramatically on the job – even in a matter of weeks.

Some organizations have worked through their respective industry associations to find creative and cost-effective solutions to build English-language capacity of their staff. Employers in Nova Scotia have continuously supported newcomers by collaborating with ISANS to offer language support through English in the Workplace. For over 20 years, employers have realized the benefits of offering their staff on-the-job, workplace specific language training. They have endorsed the program by permitting instructors to work with their staff, at their place of work,





during work hours over a 12-week period, which has led to increased communication skills and confidence. As a result, employers have seen higher retention levels and more competent and experienced staff.

ISANS has developed many sector and profession-specific language curricula. Employers have played a vital role to ensure the authenticity and relevance of these sector-specific courses. Their input throughout various stages of the curriculum development process has contributed to the success of the programs.

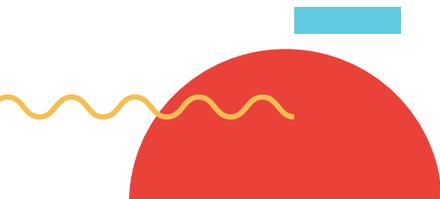
One employer, invited the curriculum developer to participate in a 3-day orientation seminar for new hires and provided a complete copy of their

orientation package. This training and information helped verify the course content was relevant and applicable both to the industry and the needs of newcomer professional drivers.

Two other employers assisted in the development of the inclusive language section for Communication for Healthcare Professionals. The expertise of both parties was used to ensure the language taught in the course was respectful of patients who may be Indigenous persons and/or members of 2SLGBTQIA+ communities. This inclusive language section has expanded beyond the reach of this course and has been applied as a best practice throughout other higher-level language courses.

### More on Language Support

This interesting paper from Athabasca University in AB explores options to limit the English-language barriers faced by newcomers to Canada, in order to find meaningful employment. Read more here: <http://dtpr.lib.athabascau.ca/action/download.php?filename=mais/700/Andrea%20Lekic%20MAIS%20700%20Final%20Paper%20for%20Athabasca%20University.pdf>



## Reasonable Accommodation



As Canadians, we are fortunate to live in a society that values the importance of protecting our human rights.

Employers may face requests from any of their employees, immigrant or not, to accommodate special requests in order to allow that employee equal ability and access to work.

Many of our current statutory holidays are based on Christian religious practices that do not take into account the growing cultural diversity of today's workforce. Any employee may seek accommodation based on religious grounds. Those requests can be something as simple as flexibility around scheduling and time off for religious practices. Other requests could involve prohibition from handling certain food products or request to wear certain clothing.

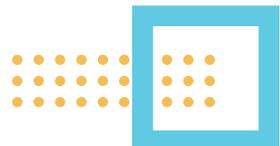
Whatever the request, it is crucial to remember that it is a request, and as an employer, the first step is to ask questions. You must balance requests against your operational and safety requirements, and engage in an exploration of possible solutions.

When in receipt of an accommodation request, managers should:

**Acquire the necessary information:**

Seek to obtain reliable information about the issue, and ask details—for example, about requests for religious observances or prayer. You should obtain all information in writing. You should work with the employee to obtain the relevant information in a timely way, drawing on outside experts as necessary. Employees must be clear when explaining why they need an accommodation and not simply claim cultural practice, but they do not have to prove anything.

**Consider possible options:** Your first option for consideration should be accommodating the employee in their existing position. On occasion, you may have to consider changing shift schedules or allowing an employee more frequent breaks. Employers are not required to create and fund a new position to meet a duty to accommodate.



**Include relevant parties:** If you operate in a certified environment, be sure to include your union representatives and keep your employee informed on the status of the request.

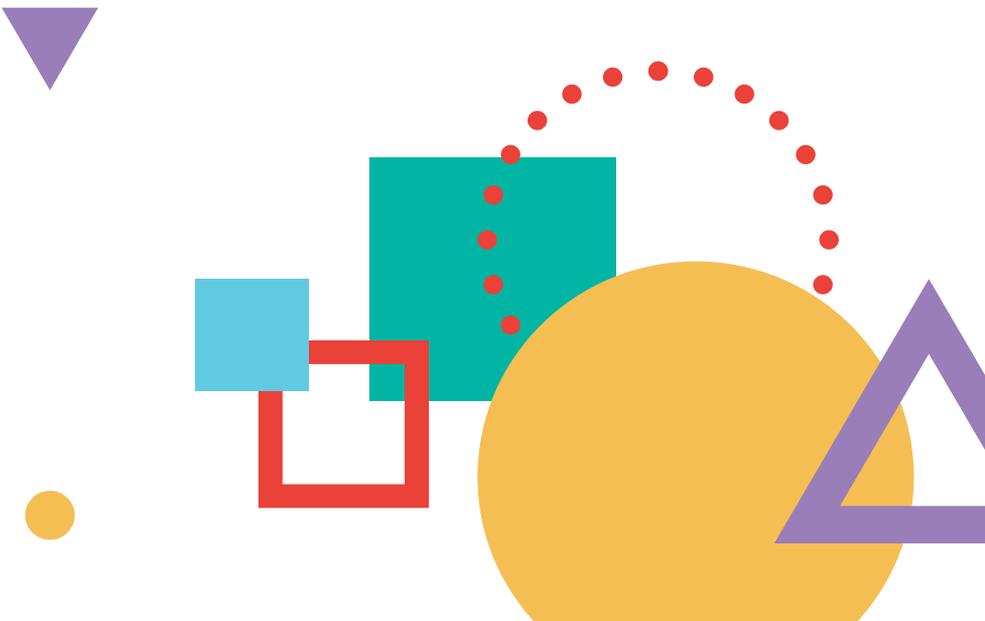
**Timeliness:** Lastly, ensure you complete your process in a timely manner. You may be liable for failing to meet the duty to accommodate if there is delay or inaction on the part of management.<sup>7</sup>

Rather than viewing requests as a duty, many employers understand that we live in a wonderful mosaic where people of all faiths and cultures come together to form the fabric of Canada. Immigrants as well as Canadian-born

citizens are encouraged to sustain their cultural roots. Employers often view such requests as opportunities to:

- increase the cultural awareness of their business
- help the organization to integrate with the communities they serve
- demonstrate their commitment to their corporate values

Please refer to the Religious Observances chart from **Appendix 1** to get insights on possible holiday requests of your staff.



## Religious Observances Calendar (April 2018 – March 2019)

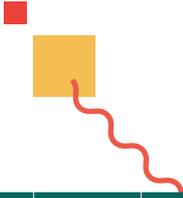
Month	Day	Holiday	Religion
April		Easter	Christian
April		Good Friday	Christian
		Holy Friday	Orthodox Christian
		Pascha – Easter	Orthodox Christian
		Baisakhi (Vaisakhi)	Sikh
		Visakha Puja – Buddha Day	Buddhist
		Ramadan	Islam



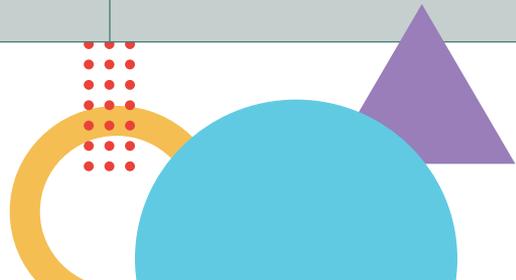


	General Practices for Holiday	Accommodations
	Some people observe Easter Sunday by attending church, while others spend time with their families and friends.	Statutory holiday in Canada
	Some people observe Good Friday by attending church, while others spend time with their families and friends.	Statutory holiday in Canada
	Holy Friday is the Orthodox Christian equivalent of Good Friday, and much of the meaning is the same.	Practicing Orthodox Christians could request this day off.
	Pascha is the Orthodox Christian equivalent of Easter, and much of the meaning is the same.	Practicing Orthodox Christians could request this day off.
	There are often parades, dancing, and singing throughout the day.	Some employees could request a day off.
	Buddhists often decorate their homes and visit their local temples. Observers are encouraged to avoid eating meat on this date.	Provide food accommodation as requested.
	Fasting is required during the entire month of Ramadan. Muslims refrain from food and beverages during the daylight hours.	Be sensitive to the fact that employees celebrating Ramadan will be fasting during the day.

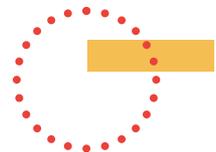




Month	Day	Holiday	Religion
		Eid al Fitr–Ramadan ends	Islam
		Krishna Janmashtami	Hindu
		Rosh Hashanah	Jewish
		Yom Kippur	Jewish
		Diwali	Sikh–Jain–Hindu
		Birth of Baha'u'llah	Baha'i
December		Hanukkah	Jewish



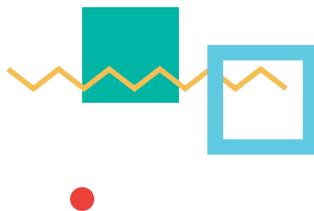
	General Practices for Holiday	Accommodations
	Muslims often pray, exchange gifts, give money to children, feast, and celebrate with friends and family.	Employees could ask for a day off.
	During this festival, practicing Hindus might forgo sleep in order to sing bhajans, traditional Hindu songs.	Be sensitive to the fact that some employees could be operating on very little sleep.
	This period is widely observed and involves prayer in synagogue and festive meals.	If planning an event, provide food accommodation as requested.
	During Yom Kippur, practising Jews fast from before sundown until after sunset.	Be sensitive to the fact that some employees could be fasting during the day.
	Lighting oil lamps and candles, setting off fireworks, and prayer.	Hindu employees might request a vacation day.
	This holiday celebrates the birthday of Bahá'u'lláh, one of the Baha'I faith's most important figures.	Baha'i employees might request to have this day off.
	On each of the eight nights of Hanukkah, Jewish families light an additional candle of the menorah candelabrum until all eight candles are lit. Jews celebrate with food and song, as well as by exchanging gifts for eight days.	Provide food accommodation as requested.





Month	Day	Holiday	Religion
December	25	Christmas	Christian
January		Gantan-sai (New Year's)	Shinto
		Christmas	Eastern Orthodox Christian
February		Chinese New Year	Confucian, Daoist, Buddhist
February		Family Heritage Day	Non - religious
		Purim	Jewish

Find more dates here:  
<https://www.timeanddate.com/holidays/canada/>



	General Practices for Holiday	Accommodations
	Many celebrate this holiday by giving gifts, attending church services, decorating Christmas trees, and visiting family.	Statutory holiday in Canada
	Practitioners pray for inner renewal, prosperity, and health, visit shrines, as well as friends and family.	Some employees could request this day off.
	Practising Orthodox Christians celebrate this holiday by attending church services, holding celebratory meals, and visiting family.	Some employees could request a day off.
	Families gather together for festive meals and exchange of gifts.	Some employees could request this day off.
		Nova Scotia Holiday
	Many Jews hold carnival-like celebrations.	Purim is not subject to the restrictions on work that affect some other holidays.



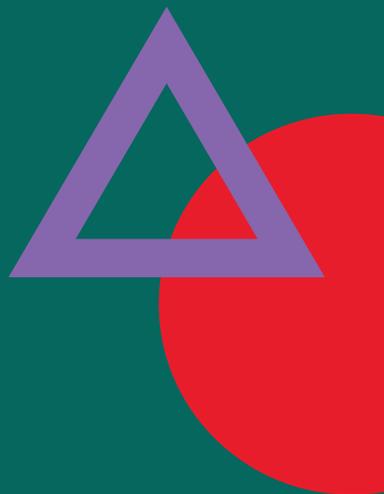
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Montreal and Vancouver. Dechief D., Oreopoulos P., February 2012. University of Toronto.
  4. Ibid
  5. ALLIES Canada. (2015). Perceptions of employment barriers and solutions. ALLIES Canada. Retrieved: [http://alliescanada.ca/wpcontent/uploads/2015/05/Malatest\\_report\\_with\\_appendices.pdf](http://alliescanada.ca/wpcontent/uploads/2015/05/Malatest_report_with_appendices.pdf).
  6. One Nova Scotia Report: <https://onens.ca/img/now-or-never.pdf>
  7. Diversify Your Workforce, ISANS Employer Support Services: [www.isans.ca/employer-support/](http://www.isans.ca/employer-support/)
- Nova Scotia Office of Immigration (NSOI) Employer Support: <https://novascotiaimmigration.com/help-for-employers/> -
- Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) Hiring and Managing Employees (IRCC): <https://www.canada.ca/en/services/business/hire.html>







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