Recruitment and retention of New Immigrants and Members of Visible Minorities in the nonprofit sector’s workforce
The HR Council takes action on nonprofit labour force issues.

As a catalyst, the HR Council sparks awareness and action on labour force issues. As a convenor, we bring together people, information and ideas in the spirit of collaborative action. As a research instigator we are building knowledge and improving our understanding of the nonprofit labour force.

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For additional tools and resources related to this work visit the project’s homepage: Increasing Ethnic Diversity in the Nonprofit Sector’s Workforce.
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Executive summary

Compared to other sectors, Canada’s nonprofit sector lags in its ethnic diversity. With the demographic shifts taking place in Canada, along with retiring baby boomers and lower birth rates, the ability to access new sources of talent is essential to the survival of organizations.

New immigrants and members of visible minorities are growing populations in Canada—and are currently under-employed. In addition, the nonprofit sector is expected to create equitable and welcoming workplaces that demonstrate the values of an inclusive society.

The HR Council for the Nonprofit Sector (HR Council) engaged in a research process to examine why nonprofit employers do not access the talents of new immigrants and members of visible minorities. The research identifies and explores the systemic barriers, related opportunities and positive actions necessary to foster ethnic diversity within the sector. Overall, the research confirms that while there are some particular concerns related to the hiring and retaining of skilled immigrants and visible minorities, many others reflect HR issues that are relevant to all employee groups.

The case for ethnic diversity

There are compelling reasons for nonprofits to hire and retain new immigrants and members of visible minorities, including:

- the promotion of the value of diversity
- the provision of better service
- the engagement of new talent to address skills shortages
- the development of innovative, creative and productive staff teams
- increased financial benefits
Promotion of the sector
Nonprofit employers struggle to find ethnically diverse candidates for job openings. Employers believe the sector does not promote itself adequately as a viable career destination for job seekers. The challenge to attract qualified candidates is particularly acute with new immigrants: their expectations and perspectives about Canada’s nonprofit sector can be strongly, and often inaccurately, shaped by their experiences with nonprofit organizations in their country of origin.

Immigrants who have worked in the sector indicate that Canada’s nonprofit sector is:

- relatively well equipped (with good access to information, technology and funds), although the stability of funding remains a concern
- broad in scope and offers the opportunity to make a difference
- organized and structured (especially when compared to nonprofits in other countries)
- focused and accountable (to ensure funds are well managed)

The factors that attract new immigrants and members of visible minorities to the sector are similar to others. These include:

- the chance to get connected with the community, make contacts and develop networks
- positive work environments (a welcoming workplace, supportive colleagues, a multicultural workforce, a flat organizational structure and work-life balance)
- the opportunity to have meaningful work and make a difference

New immigrants also look for:

- an opportunity to gain work experience, build language skills and develop familiarity with the Canadian context

Recruitment and outreach
With limited HR management expertise and support, nonprofit employers tend to rely on informal approaches when identifying candidates. Few utilize proactive outreach or recruitment strategies that deliberately include immigrants and members of visible minorities. Already underutilized in the sector—both in paid work and in volunteer roles—these groups often fall outside informal networks and, as a result, have limited access to job opportunities that arise. Additionally, the nonprofit sector uses a wide range of occupational titles that can be challenging for those trying to understand where their skills and knowledge can be used.

Practices that make a difference for recruitment and outreach include:

- networking with ethnic communities
- partnering with organizations that are connected to ethnic communities
- encouraging application from individuals with international experience
- clearly defined occupations
- removing barriers to volunteer roles

Selection and hiring
Both employers and employees reveal that discriminatory practices remain a reality for immigrants and for members of visible minorities.

Systemic barriers also limit the ethnic diversity in many nonprofit organizations. These include:

- the hiring of ‘over-qualified’ applicants. While hiring highly skilled individuals brings additional benefits to an organization, this practice can create retention risks.
- the person-organization ‘fit’. Employers place great importance on the alignment of a candidate’s values with the organization’s culture and norms, as well as with the values inherent in the work itself (such as feminism, mental health, etc.). Cultural differences can have an impact on this alignment. Most employers are ill-equipped to assess the values ‘fit’ before the hire or after selection.
- barriers to volunteer experience. Although widely recognized as an important entry to paid employment in the sector, there are significant systemic barriers that limit access to volunteer roles.
In addition, there are specific issues that concern employers when hiring new immigrants in particular. These include:

- **language and accent.** Most nonprofits look for language proficiency (English and/or French) at a sufficiently high level to understand the nuances of the language.
- **Canadian experience.** Employers value work experience in a Canadian context, and particularly nonprofit work experience in a specific sphere of activity and/or in the immediate geographical vicinity.
- **recognition of foreign credentials.** Employers find it difficult to assess international educational qualifications, credentials and work experience. There is an underlying assumption that the Canadian school system is superior to those in other countries.

Successful approaches for hiring immigrants and visible minorities must include bias free, inclusive and effective HR processes. Employers can increase diversity by questioning traditional practices (such as requiring Canadian experience) and introducing more inclusive practices (such as focusing on transferable skills).

**Retention and engagement**

Employers indicate the need for a clear commitment to ethnic diversity—and that this has to start with the organization’s leadership. Many report limited ethnic diversity at the senior levels of their organizations.

Employees describe a range of experiences within the workplace. While most feel welcomed and equitably treated, it is clear that various forms of discrimination or exclusion – subtle or not-so-subtle – persist.

An inclusive workplace is the foundation for an ethnically diverse workforce. Without it, other successful practices become ineffective. Elements that are considered important by immigrants and members of visible minorities are similar to what other individuals who work in the sector identify as important. These include:

- freedom to achieve professional goals (turnover risk is heightened when new hires are over-qualified or when there is a misalignment in values).
- compensation and job security. Employees have funding concerns and some new immigrants find salary levels lower in Canada than in their country of origin.
- language and communication present barriers to smooth integration into the workplace. Recent immigrants in particular stress the importance of sensitivity to this issue.

**Differences in needs and readiness**

There is tremendous diversity of both missions and methods in the nonprofit sector; no other sector of the economy is as diverse and multi-faceted. Given this complexity, it is little surprise that the research indicates a wide variety of employer concerns and a range of needs for next steps.

Small employers make up the largest segment of the nonprofit sector and face particular challenges in the creation of an ethnically diverse workforce. Unless they are directly involved in the provision of service to ethnic communities, they seem to be less familiar with resources available to support diverse workplaces. With less experience in hiring immigrants and/or members of visible minorities, they are also less likely to have consistent HR practices or strategies. Small employers in particular perceive greater risks in hiring newcomers—and these perceptions may deter them from engaging in the creation of a culturally diverse workforce.

The research also illustrates interesting regional differences. Historic immigration patterns, visible minority demographics, economic cycles, government labour force policies, and societal values and pressures create very different regional operating contexts for nonprofits.

**Conclusions and recommendations**

Both new immigrants and members of visible minorities offer the sector important advantages. Yet both of these groups are under-represented and underused in the sector.

Members of visible minorities who are Canadian-born, and immigrants with a long experience in Canada, experience hiring and promotion
practices that are not always equitable or inclusive, as well as workplaces that are not fully welcoming. Recent immigrants face added challenges, including more limited access to information about the sector and its job opportunities, employers’ preferences for Canadian education and experience, and the inherent difficulty of integrating into a less familiar workplace culture.

The sector cannot keep doing things the same way regarding our workforce and expect different results. Both attitudes and behaviours still need to change. – Employer

Focused efforts by individual employers and sector stakeholders are needed to make progress in this important area. For employers, it starts with having effective HR policies and practices in place. All employees desire workplaces that are welcoming, enable productivity and are supportive of their goals and aspirations. This environment is easier to achieve when effective HR practices are in place and consistently applied.

Some core recommendations that support ethnic diversity include:

- promotion of the nonprofit sector as a viable and vibrant career destination
- education for employers and stakeholders regarding barriers and best practices relevant to ethnically diverse populations entering and working in the sector
- a clear articulation of the benefits and the strategies for ethnic diversity, specific to organizations’ context, sphere of activity and objectives
- increased ethnic diversity in nonprofit Board membership
- creation of an ethnically diverse pool of volunteers as a potential source of new employees

Overall, the employers, immigrants and members of visible minorities who participated in this research eagerly share their passion for their work and their perspectives on what works, and what could work better, to attract and retain new immigrants and members of visible minorities. Several positive practices and further recommendations are provided within the report.
Chapter highlights

*Increasing Ethnic Diversity in the Nonprofit Sector’s Workforce* is a project undertaken by the HR Council for the Nonprofit Sector (HR Council) to examine issues that prevent employers in the nonprofit sector from accessing the skills and expertise of new immigrants and members of visible minorities.

This report summarizes key findings from the research phase of the project. It informs a broad audience about the challenges and opportunities, and creates a firm foundation for future action that supports a thriving nonprofit sector in Canada.

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Over 1.2 million people work in the nonprofit sector.

Introduction

The nonprofit sector is an important contributor to the Canadian economy and society. The sector employs over 1.2 million people or 7.2% of the country’s paid workforce in about 69,000 organizations in regions across the country. Nonprofits are mostly small organizations (75% have less than 10 employees) and their focus ranges widely—from arts and culture, environmental advocacy and international development, to social services, and sports and recreation activities.

*Increasing Ethnic Diversity in the Nonprofit Sector’s Workforce* is a project taken on by the HR Council that focused on identifying the key issues that prevent employers in the nonprofit sector from accessing the talents of new immigrants and members of visible minorities. The research phase of the project included:

- two complementary literature reviews
- a survey completed by approximately 350 nonprofit employers
• a series of eight dialogue sessions in locations across the country, with a total of 89 nonprofit employers
• a series of telephone interviews with 26 new immigrants and members of visible minorities who work or have worked in paid employment in the nonprofit sector

An Advisory Committee provided valuable insights and direction to the project. Its 11 members were drawn from various segments of the sector and from across Canada. The Committee members reviewed the findings from the research, commented on preliminary reports, and shared their insights and perspectives on next steps.

This report summarizes the findings and implications. Its intent is to inform a broad audience about the challenges and opportunities the sector faces, and create a firm foundation for future action.

Key concepts

• **Nonprofit** refers to the ‘core nonprofit sector’ which excludes organizations in the category ‘professional associations, trade unions and cooperatives’ or quasi-government organizations (such as hospitals, colleges and universities).

• **Members of visible minorities** are defined by the Employment Equity Act to be “persons, other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour.” Examples include: Chinese, South Asian, Black, Filipino, Latin American, Southeast Asian, Arab, West Asian, Korean, Japanese, mixed and other visible minorities.¹

• **Immigrants** are people residing in Canada who were born outside of Canada, excluding temporary foreign workers, Canadian citizens born outside Canada and those with student or working visas.

• **Recent immigrants or newcomers** are anyone who has immigrated to Canada in the last five years; “it is the first five years that are the hardest for immigrants to integrate in the Canadian workforce.”²

New immigrants and members of visible minorities

New immigrants and members of visible minorities are two distinct, but overlapping, groups. According to the 2006 Census, members of visible minorities represented 16.2% of the country’s population. Immigrants, people born outside Canada, represented 19.8% of the population. Almost two-thirds of the visible minority population are immigrants to Canada, and over half of immigrants are members of visible minorities.³

Both new immigrants and members of visible minorities offer the sector important advantages. However, the research reveals that both these groups are under-represented and underutilized pools of talent in the sector.

Members of visible minorities who are Canadian-born experience hiring and promotion practices that are not always equitable or inclusive, and workplaces that are not always fully welcoming. Immigrants (whether they are new to Canada or have longstanding experience in the country), and particularly those who are members of visible minorities, describe similar experiences upon entering the sector’s workforce.

New immigrants have additional challenges, including for example an employers’ preference for Canadian education, the inherent difficulty of integrating into an unfamiliar workplace culture and potentially limited language skills.

This report focuses on similarities between these two groups as they provide important opportunities for future work and greater success in fostering ethnic diversity within the sector. Challenges specific to one group or the other are discussed as appropriate.

² Brahim Boudarbat et Maude Boulet, Immigration au Québec: Politiques et intégration au marché du travail- avril 2010, p.50
³ Statistics Canada, “Visible Minority Groups (15), Immigrant Status and Period of Immigration (9), Age Groups (10) and Sex (3) for the Population of Canada, Provinces, Territories, Census Divisions and Census Subdivisions, 2006 Census - 20% Sample Data,” 2006
Why diversity matters

Chapter highlights

There are several reasons for employers in the nonprofit sector to focus on the hiring and retention of immigrants and members of visible minorities, including:

- the promotion of the value of diversity
- the provision of better client service
- the engagement of new talent to address skills shortages
- the development of innovative, creative and productive staff teams
- and increased financial benefits

For the almost 350 nonprofits that responded to this study's survey, increasing ethnic diversity is an important issue:

- Over half (55%) expect to increase their workforce in the next two years
- Almost two-thirds expect to see an increase in the number of employees who are new immigrants or members of visible minorities
- About 6 in 10 think that hiring newcomers and members of visible minorities is important
- Almost half (49%) have a plan for accomplishing this goal

Many organizations in the nonprofit sector have a mandate that directly reflects our societal commitments and values.

Ethnic diversity in the nonprofit sector

As a country, Canada has a unique approach to managing ethnic diversity. We have a constitutional commitment to diversity in Canadian society – the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The wide scope of the Charter—from official languages to aboriginal rights—reflects our commitment to social diversity. Support legislation (such as the Employment Equity Act, the Canadian Human Rights Act and the Multiculturalism Act) further reinforces this commitment.

Many organizations in the nonprofit sector have a mandate that directly reflects our societal commitments and values. Canadian social service agencies, arts and cultural associations, and sports and recreation organizations are well known for their inclusiveness. Within this context, many nonprofit employers believe that these values demand a commitment to a diverse workforce and an inclusive workplace.

There are also practical factors that foster a commitment to diversity. Whether in the public sector, private sector or nonprofit, Canadian employers recognize that as the demographics of our society change, so too must the demographics of the workforce.

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Tierney, S. (Ed.) Multiculturalism and the Canadian Constitution. UBC Press. 2007
Compared to other sectors of the economy, there are indications that the nonprofit sector lags in its ethnic diversity. According to the 2006 Census, almost one in six Canadians were members of visible minorities, while about one in five were immigrants. Figures 1 and 2 reveal that although the representation was greatest in the largest centres of Toronto, Vancouver and Montreal, most major cities have significant newcomer and visible minority populations.

**Figure 1**

Visible minority population by metropolitan areas

![Visible minority population by metropolitan areas](image)


**Figure 2**

New immigrants population by metropolitan areas

![New immigrants population by metropolitan areas](image)


For definitions of ‘immigrants’ and ‘visible minorities,’ see Key Concepts in the Introduction (p. 6).
However, the HR Council’s 2008 Labour Force Study found that only one in sixteen employees (6%) self identified as members of visible minorities, and only about one in nine indicated they had immigrated to Canada.\(^6\) In another HR Council survey (2011) of 1,251 executive directors, 93% identified themselves as white.\(^7\) Some areas of the sector appear to be more representative of the wider population — for example, the labour force in organizations that work in migration and settlement is more diverse.

The ability to attract and retain an ethnically diverse workforce is an important issue for many organizations in the sector. Over half (55%) of surveyed employers indicate that they expect to increase their workforce within the next two years. Almost two-thirds indicate that they expect an increase in the number of new immigrant or visible minority employees (see Figure 3).

**Figure 3**

![Projected workplace make-up in 2012](image)

**A difference in perspective – important or not?**

Many nonprofit sector employers are already focused on the recruitment and retention of immigrants and members of visible minorities. The majority of employers (about 6 in 10) indicate that hiring newcomers and members of visible minorities is important to them. Large employers are the most convinced, with four-fifths of those with more than 100 employees ranking this issue as ‘Important’ or ‘Very Important.’ Almost half (49%) of all respondents indicate that their organization has a plan to accomplish increased diversity.

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However, not all employers in the sector feel the same way. Close to 40% of employers rank the hiring and retention of immigrants/visible minorities as only ‘Somewhat’ or ‘Not at all important’.

Some employers indicate that their primary concern is to hire the most qualified person, regardless of ethnic background. They prefer a process that focuses on qualifications or competencies, and that is ‘blind’ to other characteristics. Other employers, however, recognize that typical recruitment or selection practices might be well-intentioned but are not bias-free—and pose barriers to new immigrants or members of visible minorities.

**Competencies must prevail. As managers, we should not ask about the importance of cultural diversity...we are more intuitive and need to identify the competencies needed for the position.** – Employer

Although results were not analyzed by particular sector of activity, it appears that organizations that provide direct support to clients (i.e. health and social services, sports and recreation, development and housing, religion, and education) are more likely to recognize the benefits of increased ethnic diversity.

**Reasons for ethnic diversity**

There are several reasons for employers to build ethnically diverse organizations. The ‘case for diversity’ includes the following:

**Promotion of diversity as a core value**

To be inclusive of all members of society is a core value for many nonprofits. Several employers indicate that a diverse workforce demonstrates the organization’s support for social inclusion, justice, equality, etc. An explicit link exists between equitable employment opportunities for recent immigrants and/or members of visible minorities—and positive impacts for the broader society.

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8 This is interesting because immigrants tend to be highly qualified, in several cases overqualified but are notably having challenges getting hired for positions in their field.
There is considerable evidence that the Canadian economy does not make full use of the skills and expertise of new immigrants and members of visible minorities. The Conference Board of Canada concluded in 2004 that “the full elimination of the wage gap between visible minorities and the average for Canada would add about 1% to the level of real GDP in 2016” 9. Similarly, among new immigrant men with university degrees, 21% hold jobs that require lower levels of education (e.g., taxi driver, cashier, truck driver etc); the rate among Canadian men with university degrees is half as high (10%) 10. New immigrants who are also members of visible minorities find it more challenging to find full-time work than those of European descent. Although it was once assumed that immigrants’ labour market outcomes would improve as they settled and developed networks, differences between the foreign-born and the Canadian-born persist — especially among members of visible minorities. Many nonprofits hope to address this issue by ensuring an inclusive workplace.

Some nonprofits indicate that an ethnically diverse workforce helps provide positive role models, (for e.g., successfully employed new immigrants or women from traditional cultures etc.). The demonstration of core values is related to, yet distinct from, an agency’s ability to provide better service to a diverse population (see below). An agency with a core value of empowerment for its clients, for example, should be able to demonstrate this value in action with its employees.

For these reasons and others, many employers within the nonprofit sector feel a special responsibility to ‘lead the way’ and ensure that qualified immigrants and members of visible minorities are fully included in their workplace.

**Provision of better service**

Spheres of activity in Canada’s nonprofit sector range from sports/recreation, development/housing, health, social services and religion to areas such as the environment, international law, advocacy and politics, grant-making, volunteerism, arts/culture and more. In addition, the people served by these organizations are also becoming increasingly diverse. Data from the 2006 Census showed that the proportion of Canada’s population who were born outside the country had reached its highest level in 75 years.

**Clients need to see themselves reflected in the community and services they seek. People feel more comfortable with those who look like them. – Employer**

Employers emphasize that organizations need to be more representative and reflective of their client population. This goes beyond mere political correctness or the simple appearance of integration. Rather, employers outline several specific benefits, including:

- a broader perspective and deeper understanding of the issues and challenges related to the organization’s activities and purpose
- increased client comfort levels, and thus a greater willingness to seek and accept the services provided
- greater opportunities for the organization to act as a relevant role model and build similar skills in the clients served
- improved ability to respond to client needs by working in the language of the client and being familiar with the client’s cultural norms and customs

**Immigrants have cultural and linguistic competencies that are real assets for our organization. – Employer**

However, the desire for staff members who reflect an organization’s clients also creates some challenges:

- Small nonprofits, in particular, do not usually have the depth and breadth of resources to be fully representative of the wide range of clients they serve
- It is often unrealistic, and perhaps inappropriate, to attempt to provide clients with a perfect demographic match

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10 Ferrer, Ana and W. Craig Riddell, 2004, p.35; Green, David A. and Christopher Worswick, 2004
• Nonprofits in some spheres of activity (such as mental health) struggle when trying to serve clients who are not open and inclusive.

Engagement of new talent to address skills shortages

The HR Council’s 2008 Labour Force Study indicated that nearly half of employers who recruited in the year leading up to the survey felt that finding qualified candidates was ‘difficult’ or ‘very difficult.’ The retention of qualified staff also presents problems for many nonprofits, although overall this is not as problematic as recruitment.

Recruitment and retention difficulties are widespread. Organizations in many sectors have difficulty attracting qualified employees as well, and this is likely to get worse given the massive demographic changes at hand. As a large number of ‘Baby Boomers’ approach retirement age, there are fewer young people to replace them. According to Statistics Canada, in 2006, one in six workers were between the ages of 55 and 64 – or on the brink of traditional retirement age. Millions of Baby Boomers will leave the labour force in the years to come. Although some data suggests that Baby Boomers plan to work longer than previous generations, this huge cohort will nonetheless soon leave the workforce. Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC) anticipates that labour demand until 2015 will be driven more by the need to replace retiring workers than by economic growth.

Young Canadian-born workers are not the answer. Canada’s birthrate has been below replacement levels for three decades. The gap between the number of people about to retire and the number of young people about to enter the labour force is substantial. Immigration is considered a solution, and over the next few years, 100% of net labour force growth in Canada is expected to come from immigration.

New immigrants and members of visible minorities are vital sources of talent – but are both underutilized and undervalued. Canada has one of the strongest immigration programs in the world, with roughly a quarter-million newcomers arriving annually. Many of these are also members of visible minorities: about 60% of new immigrants come from Asian countries, as well as Central and South America, the Caribbean and Africa. Recent immigrants tend to be more highly educated than Canadians at large: in 2006, 51% of new immigrants held university degrees, compared to 19% of the Canadian population. Similarly, members of visible minorities in Canada are highly educated – 27.9% have a university certificate or degree as compared to the 16.4% of the non-visible minority population. The new immigrant labour pool, as well as the underutilized population of Canadian-born visible minorities, is a clear solution for employers despite the aging population. Over one-third (36%) of employers indicate that hiring new immigrants and/or members of visible minorities is a way to fill job vacancies or shortages.

It gives us access to skills – many new immigrants have higher levels of education and are very skilled. - Employer

Innovative, creative and productive staff teams

When employers are asked why it is important to hire and retain new immigrants and members of visible minorities, about three-quarters (73%) of survey respondents indicate that these employees “provide fresh perspectives and diverse points of view leading to enhanced innovation and creativity.”

A great benefit is having diverse thoughts and innovation. They bring foreign experience and new ideas to the table – and that supports creativity and innovation. - Employer

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11 Ken Dychtwald et.al., 2006
13 Ikura, 2007
14 http://www4.hrsdc.gc.ca/3ndic1t.4r@-eng.jsp?iid=29
15 Statistics Canada, 2006 Census.
Published research in the field of diversity and inclusion confirms this viewpoint. Well managed heterogeneous teams are more productive, creative and effective than homogeneous groups. Diversity and inclusion can thus have a substantial positive impact on an organization’s operations.

Employers emphasize the benefits of diverse backgrounds and perspectives for the delivery of the organizational mandate. They also highlight the benefit of ‘cognitive diversity’ – that is, diversity of thought, or ‘thinking outside of the box’, as one employer described it. A few others describe a diverse work environment as one that is creative and ‘dynamic.’ One employer mentions the strategic advantage of greater diversity at the Board level, while another points to the broader benefits of a nonprofit sector that is able to leverage multiple perspectives to find solutions to societal challenges.

Increased financial benefits

In the private sector, a compelling benefit of diversity is its impact on the ‘bottom line.’ Nonprofit employers’ financial considerations can act both as barriers and as benefits to increasing ethnic diversity. Employers report that hiring and retaining new immigrants can require additional resources. In a sector where resources are limited, many employers hesitate to invest in finding, hiring and integrating diverse talent. Others, however, recognize that the private sector has made a significant investment in diversity and conclude that failure to connect with this large pool of talent may be more costly in the long run.

I have had so much overhead as a result of applying for an employee’s visa. – Employer

There are three main drivers of financial benefits from increased ethnic diversity. First, enhanced productivity, creativity and innovation, as well as improved client service ultimately yields financial benefits. Second, many immigrants and members of visible minorities bring higher levels or other types of qualifications than those required for their roles—and can provide a significant benefit to organizations that are able to leverage these additional skills. Third, many organizations that depend on donations understand that donors, like clients, are also becoming more diverse. In contrast to a ‘deficit model’, many organizations now recognize the important assets offered by ethnic communities—financial and otherwise. There is growing recognition that donors may be more supportive of organizations that reflect their interests and demonstrate a work environment that is inclusive. As a result, many organizations see the benefit of better reflecting the funder population.

Donors want cultural diversity in the organizations they donate to. There is a growing disconnect between funders of the nonprofit sector, who are increasingly diverse, and the largely traditional Caucasian workforce of the sector. – Employer

Implications

There is a strong case for ethnic diversity in the sector. Employers in other sectors of the Canadian economy are preparing to compete for this talent. For the nonprofit sector to continue to thrive, employers need to engage in this critical issue and develop their capacity to respond.

Based upon the research findings outlined in this section, the following areas warrant further examination:

- **Awareness.** Many nonprofit employers lack awareness of the importance of engaging this underutilized pool of talent. While leaders in many nonprofits understand the ‘case for ethnic diversity,’ few can articulate all the potential benefits or translate this understanding into a compelling case relevant to their particular organization. Decision makers need a detailed perspective if they are to maintain a consistent focus and make progress on this issue.

- **Innovation Capacity.** Diversity breeds innovation only when the work environment is inclusive, and when diverse viewpoints are respected. While the value of multiple perspectives ‘around the table’ is well recognized, good management and collaboration skills are needed to reap their benefits.
Cost-effective Practices. When HR management practices are cost-effective, the net benefits of ethnic diversity can be maximized. The individual organization’s investment (time, effort, funds, etc.) can be reduced by building the sector’s collective capacity to recruit and retain new immigrants and members of visible minorities. For example, employers benefit from sector-wide branding efforts, improved management skills for creating inclusive workplaces, and access to appropriate HR management resources (tools, training programs, etc.).
Chapter highlights

There are opportunities for the nonprofit sector to strengthen its “brand” within recent immigrants and members of visible minorities. While the challenge to attract qualified candidates to the sector is significant, it is even more acute with new immigrants. Their understanding of Canada’s nonprofit sector is strongly, and often inaccurately, shaped by prior experiences with nonprofit organizations in their country of origin.

It appears that the sector has not done a good job in promoting itself. Cultural differences also play a role in the attractiveness of the nonprofit sector as a career choice; in some cultures, working in a nonprofit organization is not highly valued by parents or other influencers. However, many newcomers choose to work in the sector because it is consistent with their desire to ‘make a difference,’ and because they view the professionalism, scope and impact of the nonprofit sector in Canada positively.

The factors that attract new immigrants and members of visible minorities to work in the sector include:

- the chance to connect with the community, make contacts and develop networks
- a positive work environment
- the opportunity to have meaningful work and make a positive impact

Many new immigrants also look for:

- an opportunity to gain work experience, build language skills, and develop familiarity with the Canadian context
The first step in engaging new immigrants and/or members of visible minorities in nonprofit employment is to increase awareness and introduce the sector as an attractive career option. Almost one in five employers indicate that they do not receive applications from or cannot find qualified applicants who are new immigrants and/or members of visible minorities. Employers believe that the nonprofit sector is not perceived as a viable career destination for any job seekers. This perception is stronger in job seekers from other countries/cultures where the nonprofit sector is quite different than in Canada. Employers’ difficulty in attracting qualified applicants can be understood by exploring two related issues: the ‘branding’ of employment in the nonprofit sector (this chapter) and employers’ recruitment and outreach practices (next chapter).

The nonprofit sector as a viable career destination

Employers indicate that the nonprofit sector has not successfully positioned itself as a great place to work and that the corporate sector is perceived as a more attractive career option. Some employers question the practices of employment agencies, suggesting that even nonprofits that offer employment services do not promote the sector as a viable option for job seekers.

There is a perception among immigrants and the society at large that we hire the ‘outcasts’ from other sectors. – Employer

‘Branding’ the sector as a career destination is an issue that relates to all potential applicants and is not limited to immigrants and members of visible minorities. However, there may be specific challenges with respect to recent immigrants or individuals raised in cultural traditions where nonprofits are perceived differently. A lack of familiarity with the Canadian nonprofit sector, coupled with misperceptions based on experience in other countries, makes it difficult to attract immigrants—and children of immigrants—to employment in the sector.

People working in the sector are interested in more than just money... how is that expressed to newcomers? – Employer

International differences in the perception of the sector

Immigrants’ perceptions about the Canadian nonprofit sector can be influenced by their knowledge or opinion about similar sectors in their country of origin. While it is true that parents, extended family and cultural values can have an important impact on career choice of Canadian-born members of visible minorities, this research focuses on the perspectives of new immigrants.

Internationally, the nonprofit sector varies in a number of important dimensions, including the size and nature of its workforce, the focus of activities and the primary sources of funding. The Canadian nonprofit sector is similar to the ‘welfare partnership model’ of civil society development used in the Netherlands, Belgium, France, Germany, Ireland etc. Features of this model include:

- a relatively large nonprofit and voluntary sector workforce
- more extensive paid staff than volunteer staff
- a service orientation to nonprofit and voluntary sector employment, focusing on basic welfare services (education, and social services)
- extensive governmental support for nonprofit and voluntary organization operations

Canada’s sector is a hybrid of the ‘welfare partnership model’ and the Anglo-Saxon model of development used in Australia, United States, and the United Kingdom. The Canadian model retains a stronger volunteer presence than welfare partnership countries; volunteers comprise 2.7 per cent of the economically active population in Canada, above the 2.4 percent average for the ‘welfare partnership’ countries. Canada also benefits from a level of private philanthropic support more in line with the ‘Anglo-Saxon model.’

16 Michael H. Hall, Cathy W. Barr, M. Easwaramoorthy, S. Wojciech Sokolowski, Lester M. Salamon, The Canadian Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector in Comparative Perspective, Imagine Canada, 2005 (p.20)
Many newcomers to Canada are from countries with nonprofit sectors that differ from the ‘welfare partnership model.’ The most recent statistics on Canadian immigration reveal that the top ten source countries of permanent residents are: the Philippines, India, China, U.K., U.S., France, Iran, United Arab Emirates, Morocco, and the Republic of Korea (South Korea). The nonprofit sector in Africa, Latin America, Asian industrialized states, Eastern Europe and other developing countries is substantially different. It is hardly surprising that new immigrants come to Canada with very different perceptions of the nonprofit sector and its activities.

Previous research studies conducted by the Social Planning Council of Peel\textsuperscript{17} and by Community Volunteer Connections in Coquitlam, BC\textsuperscript{18} investigated the perceptions of volunteers who are newcomers to Canada. The results revealed that many of the top source countries of recent immigrants do not have a formal voluntary sector like Canada’s, and do not use the term ‘volunteer’ in the same way. Other perspectives (including suspicions of corruption, breaches of confidentiality and a lack of formal organization) were based on past experiences and affected immigrants’ views of volunteerism.

This research explores how different perspectives affect the sector’s ability to attract immigrant talent. Employees who were new immigrants, in particular, identify the key differences between the nonprofit sector in Canada and their country of origin. These differences are easily grouped into five themes that are essential for ‘branding’ of career opportunities within the sector and include:

- funding levels
- accountability for impact
- scale, structure and professionalism
- concept of volunteerism
- shared value of ‘helping’

**Funding levels**

There are large differences in the levels and sources of funding in different countries. Interviewees frequently note that the government provides much more funding here than in their home country.

Many individuals are attracted by the opportunity to make a difference (see below). As one interviewee notes, “without funds you can’t help people in need. Funding is a critical differentiating factor for many.”

Direct financial funding is only part of the picture. The sector has other valuable resources that are more available than in many other countries, including reliable Internet, information resources provided by public institutions, and so on.

> Right now in my country [Africa] nonprofits are barely growing. A lot of NGOs have a lack of funds; in Canada government, private individuals and organizations donate and give generously to the sector. - Employee

Sources of funding can have an unanticipated negative effect as well. In some countries, there are fewer paid positions in the nonprofit sector and the individuals who hold them can appear to be relatively well-compensated. In Canada, the very breadth of the sector means that many positions are not well paid. One interviewee working in the Canadian sector indicates that his salary here is half what it was in his home country.

**Accountability for impact**

The accountability within the sector surprises some immigrants, although it is generally regarded as a positive characteristic of the nonprofit sector in Canada. While the interviews were limited to those with direct experience in the Canadian nonprofit sector, many new immigrants outside of the sector might still have concerns or misgivings about working in nonprofits if their perspective has been shaped by corruption or misappropriation of funds.

\textsuperscript{17} Advancing Cultural Diversity in Volunteer Management: 905 and 519 Regions in Ontario (2007-2010) Final Report, Social Planning Council of Peel, 2010

\textsuperscript{18} Stacy Ashton, Nancy Baker and Ali Parandeh Building Caring Communities: The Contributions of Immigrant Volunteers: A Qualitative Study into the Experiences of Immigrant Volunteers at Mainstream Agencies. Coquitlam BC: Community Volunteer Connections; Ida E. Berger, Justin A. Azaria, Visible Minority Status and Philanthropy Centre for Voluntary Sector Studies, Faculty of Business, Ryerson University, ASAC, 2004
in their country of origin. (Some interviewees allude to this.) Such perceptions undermine new immigrants’ motivation to volunteer or work with the nonprofit sector in Canada.

An important factor in attracting people to the sector is the opportunity to make a difference (see below). The accountability within the Canadian system is highly linked to this.

Accountability, however, is often accompanied by more rules and regulations than some newcomers expect. One interviewee indicates that instead of being helpful and accommodating, the nonprofit sector has too many rules to validate the credibility of people’s stories and their need for benefits.

Scale, structure and professionalism

Many interviewees highlight that the scope and organization of the sector surpasses what they are accustomed to in their home country. This is particularly true for individuals from Asia, South America and the Caribbean, but less true for those from countries like the U.S.

Funds in Canada are available but restricted. You have to fight for every dollar. There is a high level of accountability and security. – Employee

The sector in Canada is seen as large and well organized. Nonprofit organizations are formally established and professionally run. The professionalism in the sector is noted by interviewees and viewed positively. However, the sector’s requirements for particular qualifications also has some negative effects on job search activities (see below).

My parents as visible minorities were not supportive of the profession and work for the nonprofit sector. They have never worked within the nonprofit sector and do not perceive work in this sector as a stable profession. – Employee

Differences across countries become embedded in cultures, affecting not only the perspectives of recent immigrants, but also the community or family norms of people raised in Canada. One interviewee (who arrived in Canada at the age of seven) indicates that her parents have a negative perception of the sector – and this made career choices more difficult for her.

Volunteerism

Volunteering is an important entry point for those interested in paid employment in the sector. Immigrants comment that there is positive recognition and more widespread involvement in volunteerism in Canada.

Significant differences across countries and cultures have a substantial impact on the likelihood of new immigrants and members of visible minorities using this path to enter the sector [this issue is further explored below].

Voluntarism is better here – In my country – [Eastern Europe] there is really no such word or it has a different interpretation. - Employee

Shared value of ‘helping’

Interviewees comment that there are important similarities between the nonprofit sector in their country of origin and in Canada. It appears that the sector everywhere is driven by peoples’ passion and the desire to make a difference.

In my home country [Asia], like in Canada, to work in the sector you need to be driven by a passion for what you do. – Employee

Factors that attract New Immigrants and Members of Visible Minorities to the nonprofit sector

People are drawn to the nonprofit sector for a number of reasons. These include using sector jobs to hone skills for other career options; the opportunity to make a difference; and a personal commitment to a specific issue. Previous research illustrates that people may be attracted to a particular opportunity based on the organization, occupation or job
content, without necessarily expressing an interest in the ‘nonprofit sector’.19

This research confirms that these factors are similar to what attracts the new immigrant or a member of a visible minority to the sector. For some, a job with a nonprofit is an opportunity that simply arose when looking for something else. In contrast, for most of the interviewees currently working in the sector, a nonprofit job aligned with their employment plans. In some cases, they express a clear preference for the sector and a strong desire to ‘make a difference’; for others, previous work experience or training was well suited to their current role.

The following examines four themes that motivate employees in their attraction to the sector and addresses the ‘what’s in it for me’.

Value motivators

New immigrants and members of visible minorities, like many others, choose to work/volunteer for a cause they believe in;20 including a sense of duty to the community.

Several immigrants were attracted to the sector through their own involvement in settlement and integration programs for newcomers. This positive exposure to the sector was a critical factor in their eventual career choice and has been important for others as well.

Overall, many interviewees are dedicated to work in the nonprofit sector because of an alignment with their interests or values. Of those who were immigrants, several had worked in the nonprofit sector or in government (education, health, and so on) in their country of origin.

My aim was to work with youths. It didn’t matter if it was in a nonprofit organization. - Employee

Social motivators

Previous research suggested that new immigrants often get involved with nonprofits as a way to be part of the community, meet new people and to expand their social network. While these factors are also important in volunteering, they did not seem to be as significant in interviews with paid employees.

Personal/instrumental motivators

Volunteering or nonprofit work also provides people with the opportunity to gain relevant work experience, information about job opportunities, skills development, etc. The opportunity to develop job-related skills can prompt many individuals to volunteer or seek paid work in the nonprofit sector. The development of language skills is often of high interest to new immigrants. Previous research, however, suggested that those motivated primarily by such concerns and not by the cause (value motivators) often move on quickly.21 Only a few of the interviewees in this study indicate that their current job was a ‘survival job.’

I would like to work in my own field...Right now survival is key. I am doing a very basic aspect of my former job [in Asia] and getting minimum wage. - Employee

Volunteering is often facilitated by community agents and solicited by individuals as a means of getting work experience and paid work in the nonprofit sector and/or in other sectors. In the 2004 National Survey of Learning and Work, 45% of recent immigrants reported that they had volunteered in order to improve their job prospects.22

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20 Ida E. Berger, Justin A. Azaria, Visible Minority Status and Philanthropy Centre for Voluntary Sector Studies, Faculty of Business, Ryerson University, ASAC, 2004


22 Reported in Daniel Schugurensky, Bonnie Slade and Yang Luo, Can Volunteer work help me get a job in my field?: On Learning, Immigration and Labour Markets, Ontario Institute of Studies in Education/University of Toronto, 2008 p.g1-10
Through my newcomers’ job training, I realized that I needed to network. I decided to volunteer so that people could get to know the quality of my work...It is easier for me to network this way. – Employee

Immigrants with professional work experience and credentials in their country of origin often come to Canada hoping to work in the same field—but discover that there are significant barriers to entry or difficulties in gaining employment. Similar roles in the nonprofit sector are often seen as more accessible, while still providing the opportunity to apply their skills.

I didn’t get a job for 4 months at the beginning. – Employee

Welcoming work environment
Several interviewees cite a positive work environment as an important factor. For many, early experiences with a nonprofit agency, often as a client, created such a positive impression that it became a powerful influence on later career choices.

I found the immigrant service environment friendly and welcoming. I was attracted and wanted to help. – Employee

Other important features of the work environment include the multicultural nature of the workplace, the flexibility to meet work-life demands, a flat rather than rigidly hierarchical organizational structure, an empowerment (versus bureaucratic) model, and lower stresses level compared other sectors.

Implications
As the competition for employees increases, the nonprofit sector will need to distinguish itself as a career destination or risk losing out on valuable talent. While there have been previous recommendations for sector-wide branding efforts, this research illustrates how this could be particularly helpful in attracting new immigrants and members of visible minorities. Information about career opportunities in the nonprofit sector should highlight messages such as: the sector’s accountability, professionalism and diversity of opportunity. Existing resources can be leveraged, including job workshops, government career/employment publications, and ethnically-focused communications. More specific recommendations include:

- connecting with immigrant-serving agencies, local and/or international employment agencies to promote the nonprofit sector as a viable career choice
- promoting the HR Council’s Career Explorer http://hrcouncil.ca/about-the-sector/exploring-careers-nonprofits.cfm, a resource that provides descriptions of roles, as well as the education and experience required to access paid employment in the sector
- refining recruitment materials to ensure they define how the organization ensures that its work has an impact or makes a difference, and highlighting the aspects of accountability, organization and professionalism that are central to that organization
4 Recruitment and outreach practices

Chapter highlights

Few nonprofits undertake proactive outreach or recruitment efforts that are deliberately inclusive of ethnic diversity. With limited access to information and resources, employers often rely on informal HR approaches.

Additionally, the nonprofit sector has a wide range of occupational titles that are difficult to interpret when determining where skills and knowledge can be used.

As a result, recent immigrants and members of visible minorities are generally underutilized in the sector – in paid work, as well as in volunteer roles.

Practices that can make a difference include:

- networking with ethnic communities or with organizations that have connections with ethnic communities
- targeted outreach and recruitment efforts that are relevant to new immigrants and members of visible minorities
- promotion of the sector as a viable career option
- clear descriptions of occupations
- and the removal of barriers to volunteer roles

Individual nonprofits largely shape their own success in attracting a diverse pool of candidates.

While a positive ‘brand’ for the sector is an important foundation, individual nonprofits largely shape their own success in attracting a diverse pool of candidates. Active outreach efforts and more effective recruitment practices will have a significant impact on an employer’s ability to attract any qualified job seeker, in particular immigrants and members of visible minorities.

Attracting diverse candidates: the barriers

Employers within the sector report difficulty in attracting applications from diverse candidates. One in five employers do not receive applications from these talent pools, and/or are unable to find qualified applicants. Similarly, several employers note that they do not know how to find qualified immigrant/
visible minority candidates. Many employers continue to rely on traditional approaches – advertising through mainstream media and Internet sites and by word-of-mouth. Few report proactive outreach or recruitment efforts that are deliberately inclusive of ethnic diversity.

We remain largely a Caucasian workforce – we are still using very traditional methods of recruiting staff, resulting in the same workforce. – Employer

The research indicates that employers in Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver have greater awareness of recruitment and outreach resources. These urban areas have relatively large immigrant and visible minority populations and a wide array of resources for both employers and job seekers. In addition, the challenges and opportunities of ethnic diversity are highly visible. While there is still a need to build awareness among nonprofits in these cities, the issue appears to of greater concern in smaller centres.

Four barriers to ethnic diversity exist within the sector. One is applicable to both members of visible minorities as well as to recent immigrants; while the others are particular to the recruitment of new immigrants:

Recruitment through informal networks

Employers and employees both agree that a network is an important factor in access to employment in the sector. Many job opportunities are not advertised and recruitment processes are often informal. Small employers are particularly hesitant to commit time and resources to recruitment outreach, and rely on their personal network to find candidates for openings.

The community sector is a small environment. The search for a candidate often happens through rather closed networks. – Employer

Reliance on informal networks and word-of-mouth yields few applicants from new pools of talent – and is also more likely to generate applications from people who are similar to those working in the network. Given that members of visible minorities are already under-represented in the sector, this merely reinforces the status quo and creates a barrier to entry.

New immigrants are even less likely to have professional networks in Canada. Nonprofit employees who are immigrants confirm the successful strategies:

- Many found their first job in the sector by applying to job postings – through the newspaper or the Internet.
- Several interviewees describe how their personal network was instrumental in finding work.
- Two interviewees report that in the absence of an existing network, they made direct contact with a particular organization to ‘sell themselves'; They met with a senior individual in the organization and in both cases this led to subsequent job offers.

Volunteerism as a pathway to employment

Many people enter paid employment in the nonprofit sector after volunteering in some capacity. This is an effective approach for building job-relevant skills and knowledge, gaining familiarity with particular organizations or spheres of nonprofit work, building personal networks, and learning about job opportunities. However, the research reveals that new immigrants face challenges in volunteering as well.

At the beginning of my job search I applied for volunteering positions but they asked for a Canadian reference. I realized that it would be difficult to become a volunteer so I didn’t pursue it. – Employee

Barriers faced by immigrant job seekers include limited language skills, difficult-to-confirm reference checks, employer preferences for Canadian experience, and others, and are discussed in greater depth in subsequent sections. However, the research indicates that these barriers apply both to volunteer positions as well as paid employment.

More subtly, perhaps, the nonprofit sector in Canada is more structured than in many other
countries, with a considerable emphasis on commitment and accountability. When immigrants volunteer as a pathway to skill development and network creation, employers report on misunderstandings about an organization’s expectations of volunteers. Such misunderstandings affect the relationship and make it more difficult for volunteers to successfully access a paid position.

The process of becoming a volunteer was not easy...I approached four agencies and only one asked me to start right away; the other three made me wait. In some cases becoming a volunteer was as difficult as getting a job. I was surprised since I was offering my services for free. This would not be the case back in my country [South America]. - Employee

Although volunteering is not without its own set of challenges, it is nonetheless a successful strategy used by a number of the interviewees. It is an effective method to hone skills, build a professional network, and demonstrate capabilities to the employer.

Limited knowledge of the Canadian nonprofit sector

As a labour market, the nonprofit sector’s is not well understood. It is therefore not surprising that newcomers who have emigrated from countries where the sector is different find it challenging to understand. This makes it difficult to identify relevant employment opportunities within the sector and to tailor résumés and job search strategies appropriately.

I wanted to work and didn’t understand that the job I was applying for was for a nonprofit. I actually thought it was a government position. - Employee

Employers highlight a more specific aspect of this issue for new immigrants who are often not familiar with the philosophies, perspectives and values of Canadian nonprofits (e.g. feminist-oriented organizations). This can make it difficult for them to understand the nature of the job opportunity and the fit with their interests and qualifications.

Variable job titles

Within the nonprofit sector, occupations are not as clearly defined and qualifications are not as highly regulated. This creates challenges but also presents some opportunities.

I never really looked at the nonprofit sector; it was by accident. I didn’t know you could be a professional in the sector. - Employee

When occupations are not clearly defined or well understood, it is more difficult for job seekers to identify appropriate organizations and occupations, and to then articulate the transferable skills that might be relevant to the position. For example, many recent immigrants possess professional accreditation as ‘engineer’ or ‘doctor’ and conduct job searches on the basis of job title. While this challenge applies to anyone who lacks familiarity with the sector, it can be particularly problematic for new immigrants with a limited understanding of the nature and breadth of nonprofit work within Canada.

Additionally, job postings for occupations that are not clearly understood can attract a large number of unqualified applicants. When faced with a time-consuming task of screening many applications, many employers revert to a quick scan of résumés, creating a barrier for immigrants whose qualifications might not be as easily evaluated.

New immigrants whose professional qualifications are not fully transferable from their country of origin can nonetheless seek related roles within their area of expertise. For example, internationally trained doctors can do meaningful work in health-focused nonprofits.

Implications

Organizations that provide direct service to ethnically diverse client groups tend to be successful in attracting qualified applicants from visible minority
groups and recent immigrant populations. This raises the organization’s visibility within the community, increases community members’ familiarity with both the sector and the organization, and creates new broader networks.

Some employers are able to identify resources such as immigrant serving agencies, specialized recruitment firms, and other service providers in their area. However, not all are fully aware of the resources available to them.

I wish I had access to a list of organizations that have regular contact with new immigrants – and who would distribute job postings on my behalf. – Employer

Successful strategies include the following:

• Form partnerships with immigrant serving agencies and business associations that specialize in certain communities (e.g., Office of Black Nova Scotians, etc.) to raise awareness in the community and to target outreach to job seekers.

• Hire from immigrant populations and members of visible minorities – this will encourage others to apply.

• Target outreach and recruitment efforts to reach diverse talent pools – utilize ethnic media, associations and agencies, etc.

• Create job postings that ensure international education and experience will be recognized. This encourages qualified immigrants to apply and signals the organization’s commitment to diversity.

• Distribute information on volunteer/paid work to new immigrants through Canadian consulates and immigrant oriented websites.

• Brand the sector to overcome the common perception of job uncertainty. Highlight the structured, professional nature of the sector.

• Post jobs publicly. Go beyond the use of existing informal networks and word of mouth to provide greater access to a broader pool of diverse applicants.

• Raise awareness within ethnic communities of the opportunities for paid work and/or volunteering:
  > Develop ethnic-specific communications
  > Identify critical opinion leaders within each ethnic group
  > Create ambassadors of diverse employees to help recruit from similar backgrounds
  > Identify critical motivators within each group and highlight these in communications

• Write job descriptions and ads that appeal to potential volunteers/workers, keeping these criteria in mind:
  > Provide the kind of information that helps new immigrants, in particular, understand the job and the context
  > Use simple and accessible language
  > Make use of publications and locations frequented by newcomers and members of diverse ethnic communities
Chapter highlights

Systemic barriers in selection processes limit the ethnic diversity in many nonprofits. Barriers identified include:

- employers’ hesitation to hire ‘over-qualified’ applicants
- cultural differences that affect person-organization ‘fit’
- barriers to volunteerism
- language skills and accent
- the value placed on Canadian experience
- recognition of foreign credentials (education and experience)
- limitations of employer HR practices

Both employers and employees indicate that discriminatory practices and biased approaches remain a reality for immigrants and for members of visible minorities.

Employers can have greater success at hiring diverse candidates when they are willing to question current practices and introduce more inclusive practices.

Discriminatory practices remain a reality among new immigrants and members of visible minorities.

New immigrants and members of visible minorities face several barriers to work in the nonprofit sector. Research on best practices suggests that some of these challenges can be addressed by providing individuals with information and training to reduce or eliminate these issues (e.g., résumé preparation or language skills). Other solutions are more complex as the issues are systemic and involve characteristics of people, organizations, and society that combine to prevent new immigrants or members of visible minorities from accessing employment opportunities.

Systemic and discriminatory bias

Discriminatory practices remain a reality among new immigrants and members of visible minorities in the general Canadian labour force. Immigrants who are also members of a visible minority (especially recent immigrants) are more likely to be negatively affected by systemic and racially discriminatory practices, including stereotyping, and general insensitivity to cultural differences, stronger accents, religious holidays, etc.\(^\text{23}\)\(^\text{24}\)

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23 John Sheilds, Khan Rahi and Antonie Scholtz(1) Visible-Minority Employment Exclusion: The Experience of Young Adults in Toronto, Metropolis, Policy Matters, September 2006 (p.8)
24 Joan Ryan, Immigrant and Visible Minority Women in the Nonprofit Sector as Volunteers and Paid Workers Report, November 2004 p.9
It is common across all sectors of the economy for some new immigrants and members of visible minorities to feel that interview and selection processes are biased. While this bias can be attributed to racism and discrimination, it can also be a function of recruiters’ lack of awareness of the subtle and powerful effects of cultural differences—including communication styles, social interactions due to hierarchy or gender, and religious values or customs.

One thing that shocked me when I came to Canada was the presence of racism...no one ever gave me the true picture. – Employee

Biases have an impact on the hiring and retention of immigrants and of members of visible minorities in the nonprofit sector. These (myths/stereotypes/assumptions/misunderstandings) can affect decision-making throughout the recruitment and hiring process and impact ethnic diversity in the following ways:

- Labour market research indicates that racialized discrimination still exists. Employment outcomes of white or Caucasian immigrants tend to improve more quickly than those of visible minority immigrants, while employment outcomes of Canadian-born visible minorities (controlled for education and other factors) tend to lag behind the national average.

- Employers indicate an unspoken bias to hire from within the nonprofit sector and a strong bias against the corporate sector. There are also hiring preferences for individuals who are known and who already have a successful track record in a specific area of nonprofit activity. Some nonprofit organizations prefer only to hire from their volunteer base, and it is difficult for immigrants and members of visible minorities to access volunteer roles (see above). There are also fears of difference and concerns about how this can affect the workplace. All of these hiring preferences make it more difficult for immigrants or members of visible minorities to enter and advance within the sector.

- Only 8% of employers indicate that “Lack of understanding of culturally sensitive screening practices” is a difficulty in hiring immigrants or members of visible minorities. However, a cautious interpretation is required. Research evidence from other sectors, employer responses and the HR Council’s assessments of HR practices within the sector indicate that this low figure probably reflects a lack of appreciation of the importance of this issue, rather than a high level of skill in bias-free selection processes. Some of the examples of selection processes provided by the employers suggest that employers have relatively little awareness about bias-free selection processes.

My organization has had ‘stops and starts’ with hiring immigrants and have come to a conclusion that organizations must keep their intent at the forefront of their thinking to maintain progress. If they become complacent, unseen biases sneak back in. – Employer

There are additional issues that are specific to barriers facing immigrants, in particular:

- Common selection criteria can introduce unintended biases into the hiring process. One employer describes a hiring process in which 80% of applicants were immigrants. After evaluation (using a standardized selection grid), the five CVs that were retained were all from Canadian-born applicants. This led the employer to a thorough review of the process and an open questioning of the criteria and assumptions.

- Stylistic differences in résumé format and content can lead to the early elimination of qualified individuals. In many countries, CVs are typically ten pages long and provide lengthy descriptions for every past experience, while in Canada concise résumés are considered more appropriate.

- Employers appear hesitant to hire new immigrants in particular. The perception is that hiring a newcomer is riskier and requires considerable investment of time and resources. Poor performance and turnover can have a significant impact on small nonprofits, causing them to be very cautious when they perceive any risk in hiring. These biases can eliminate qualified candidates at various stages in...
the screening and selection process. For example, some applicants are screened out by name – ‘that person sounds like they might be an immigrant.’

- Bias against international qualifications also exists. Employers reveal that education outside Canada is perceived to be of lower quality than a Canadian education.

Recognition of credentials and experience
The assessment and evaluation of qualifications gained outside of Canada pose significant challenges in the hiring of immigrant candidates. Many will not hire skilled immigrants without a clear understanding of how their credentials equate with Canadian standards and these can be difficult to assess. Although various services exist to help Canadian organizations assess the foreign credentials and education of new immigrants, many employers are not aware of them.26

Some employers report difficulties in assessing the quality and validity of international credentials. With no internal capacity for such evaluations, organizations often pay consultants or regulatory bodies for independent assessments. As the costs of this are prohibitive for nonprofit organizations with limited resources, this can work against qualified candidates. In addition, such assessments are very time consuming, it is often easier for the employer to select an alternative candidate.

Previous research has documented the difficulties faced by immigrants in gaining recognition of their training or work experience gained outside of Canada – regardless of profession or sector. The challenge of credential recognition means that despite being highly educated, new immigrants continue to have higher unemployment rates than the overall population.27

In addition to a preference for Canadian work experience (see below), employers also place a higher value on Canadian education. Employers identify two areas of concern: the implicit assumption that Canadian schooling is superior to educational systems in other countries; and international education claims are harder to verify.

Gaining references is a particular challenge. Many organizations require ‘Canadian’ references – and this is particularly difficult for newcomers. Others ask for ‘work-related’ references but have difficulty assessing or confirming references from elsewhere.

There are other more general difficulties with the evaluation of an immigrant candidate’s experience and competencies. When an employer is unfamiliar with the culture of a candidate’s home country, and the candidate has limited familiarity with the Canadian nonprofit work context, it is challenging to achieve a mutual understanding of the relevance and transferability of skills and previous work experience. One employer relates a particularly compelling example of an immigrant who was almost screened out of a selection process because her résumé did not explicitly mention any formal training in feminism and/or women’s issues. However, her work achievements included the launch and coordination of a fish processing operation run by women. Fortunately, the hiring manager had enough knowledge of the economy and culture of the applicant’s country to realize that this was a powerful demonstration of a feminist orientation and skill set in action.

Importance of Canadian experience
The research indicates that employers and interviewees agree on the importance of understanding the Canadian context and having Canadian work experience within the nonprofit sector.

I didn’t find it difficult finding paid work in the sector because I had done lots of volunteer work and had a degree from a Canadian University. – Employee

One interviewee with no Canadian experience volunteered for four different organizations in the hopes of securing a position. She subsequently gained a brief internship position in a government role – and with this experience on her résumé, was able to find employment.

26 See, for example, Barriers to Hiring Skilled Immigrants In North Peel, Report by Brampton Board of Trade, 2007. See Appendix for link to organizations offering standardized assessment of foreign credential.

27 Work/unemployment rate, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada Website: http://www4.hrsdc.gc.ca/3ndic.1t.4r@eng.jsp?iid=16#M_4 (accessed 06 September, 2011)
The necessity of Canadian experience is of greater concern to new immigrants who might have substantial experience outside of Canada, yet little or no experience within the Canadian context. This is however also a problem for Canadian-born job seekers: some research has found that many employers assume that all visible minorities lack Canadian experience (based on the assumption that they are new immigrants or foreign born). 28

Because I had worked in the US in international development, I did not think I would have a problem working for a large nonprofit organization but I realized that lack of Canadian experience was a barrier. - Employee

A Statistics Canada study 29 found that immigrants cite a lack of Canadian experience as the top barrier to meaningful employment. A Quebec study on the hiring and retention of women in community and cultural groups in Montreal found that the lack of language skills and lack of Quebec/Canadian experience were the most frequently mentioned obstacles 30. One in six employers indicate applicants’ lack of Canadian experience as a hiring barrier. Employers often require Canadian experience because of the difficulty in verifying new immigrants’ foreign work experience, education and references. One report 31 argues that a need for ‘Canadian’ experience may mask discrimination. Employers offer another explanation: with a small staff, limited resources and no time to develop people, they require new hires to ‘hit the ground running’— and this can only be done with the benefit of previous work experience in a Canadian context. In fact, several employers express a preference for even more localized or industry/sector experience, such as mental health or child development services, and Quebec-based or Calgary-based, etc. The preference for Canadian experience creates a ‘Catch-22’ situation for new immigrants. It quickly becomes impossible for them to break into the sector if Canadian experience is a requirement. While volunteering might be a route to gain local experience, research participants indicate that obtaining volunteer positions is almost as difficult as gaining paid work experience. In many nonprofits, the process for engaging a volunteer includes a résumé review, a Police Records Check, at least one interview, and multiple reference checks.

A volunteer position can be a good way of getting experience – but it is becoming just as competitive. Canadian experience is being required for volunteer positions and this discourages new immigrants. - Employer

Language, accent and communication

In previous research, 32 employers highlighted their concern with language proficiency – with 87% indicating that their workplace required a “high level of proficiency” in English (or French). It appears to be insufficient for new Canadians to speak the majority language well enough to be understood; they must have a high enough level of proficiency in oral and written skills to grasp the subtle nuances of the language.

Some members of the public don’t want to work with, or be served by, a person with a strong accent – “I want to speak to someone who speaks English”, is a comment I have heard. - Employer

One study found that “language barriers are the single-largest obstacles to employing internationally educated professionals.” 33 In Quebec for example, studies have consistently found that immigrants who speak French in Quebec have a better chance

30 Facteurs favorisant l’embauche et le maintien en emploi des femmes des communautés culturelles et immigrantes dans les groupes de femmes de Montréal, Table des groupes de femmes de Montréal, janvier 2010.
31 Pan-Canadian Sector Council & Immigrant Dialogue: Barriers Affecting the Integration of Non-Regulated Occupation Immigrants into the Canadian Labour Market, Report by The Canadian Coalition of Community-Based Employability Training (CCCBET), 2006.
32 Barriers to Hiring Skilled Immigrants In North Peel, Report by Brampton Board of Trade, 2007
33 Wennekes, Kevin., 2006, p.3
of being employed than those who do not. Employers find bilingual positions pose particular challenges to the hiring of new immigrants, as they are less likely to speak both official languages fluently. Language proficiency takes on special significance in the nonprofit sector when the employee is dealing directly with clients who might be less tolerant of accents or language limitations. In this regard, many employers reveal complaints received from seniors, clients with difficult previous experiences with a particular nationality, and other clients with emotional or physical challenges.

Employers are quick to share success stories. One organization hired a finance professional with a recognized language barrier and then provided her with opportunities to upgrade her language skills through time off. The employer reports that the outcome was entirely positive for both the organization and employee.

Employers also report that resource limitations make it difficult to accommodate employees with limited language skills or provide them with support for language training. Even large organizations in the sector emphasize that they do not have the resources to address language skill gaps and that new hires are expected to be proficient immediately.

The biggest challenge we face is that our program requires that we have someone who can communicate with Canadians across the country. We don’t have the capacity to send people to learn a language. – Employer

Other research has found that both employers and job seekers have different perspectives on the issue of language and accent. While employers consistently rank it as a key barrier, new immigrants express less concern. It may be that newcomers do not see themselves as having communication difficulties or are unaware of the importance of cultural nuances in communication and language skills.

Interviewees report that a limited ability to speak the official language often discourages newcomers from approaching nonprofits to volunteer or seek paid work in the sector. Language barriers can also limit newcomers’ ability to establish networks, identify available job opportunities and successfully navigate the application process.

A résumé we received from a person with five languages and international experience was almost discounted because English was not their first language and the position was communication. – Employer

A related question is to what extent employers value language skills beyond English and/or French. Many employers who provide direct services to a culturally (and linguistically) diverse clientele recognize the advantage of staff members’ additional language skills. The ability to speak to clients in their own language improves the level of service provided and brings added value to the clients. The value of additional language skills is not uniformly appreciated, however. Even when the value of additional language skills is appreciated, it is not explicitly communicated to potential applicants or current staff. In the absence of this, both candidates and employees lack the awareness and the encouragement to highlight their own language aptitudes to the employer. As a result, the individual misses out on career opportunities and the organization does not reap the full benefits of this linguistic diversity.

It is clear that employers must give thorough consideration to the issue of language ability. Language abilities should be viewed as additional skills – with job-related expectations, appropriate support for skill development, and an explicit link to the organization’s goals and objectives.

‘Over-qualified’ applicants

While highly skilled immigrants and members of visible minority groups may be drawn to the nonprofit sector as a point of entry to paid employment in Canada, they may also be perceived as ‘over qualified’ for positions that call for lower levels of
formal education or experience. Employers provide a range of perspectives on this issue:

- Over-qualification is a retention risk and a poor investment of limited resources. Nonprofits may be reluctant to hire overqualified individuals as these people may move on after training to pursue a career in their desired field. Although some turnover is inevitable, some nonprofits find it difficult to justify hiring overqualified immigrants or members of visible minorities.

- Small nonprofit employers indicate feeling threatened by more educated candidates, and express concern that such people will want to take over the manager’s positions. As one employer states, “Would you hire someone more educated than you?”

- Other employers do not view over-qualified candidates as a significant concern and indicate that attracting and then losing highly qualified individuals is a reality of the sector.

- To overcome the risk of being ‘over-qualified’, many highly skilled new immigrants, in particular, ‘dumb down’ their skills and résumés. While this might reduce employers’ concern about over-qualification, it also prevents the employers from recognizing transferable skills for future opportunities within the organization.

- Interestingly, one employer mentions that as the search for qualified candidates becomes more difficult; his organization now considers ‘over-qualified’ candidates for the vacant positions. For example, they now screen, hire and retain internationally trained doctors for entry level positions in health services.

Ironically, the strategy that many interviewees use to gain entry to paid employment in the sector is the pursuit of additional training and qualifications, including:

- professional training
- general education – which can simultaneously improve language skills

I went back to school to improve my English. I wanted to get a job in Canada that will reflect my level of education. So I studied general courses such as psychology and business communication. – Employee

Most pursue specific job search or language skill upgrading, including:

- language (ESL or FLS) classes
- employment programs
- mentoring programs
- job search workshops

Ensuring a fit with cultural norms and values

Almost one quarter (23%) of nonprofit employers cite applicants’ lack of understanding of the Canadian context as a barrier. This is particularly true of immigrants but also of others, including members of visible minorities whose cultural identity, values and upbringing might make it difficult to integrate into the unwritten norms of a particular nonprofit.

How immigrants approach a work environment is different and that isn’t always welcome in nonprofit organizations. – Employer

There are at least two distinct dimensions to this issue within nonprofit organizations. First, there is the question of the person’s fit with the organizational culture and Canadian workplace norms. Second, in many nonprofit organizations, such as service agencies, there is a question of alignment with the values of the work itself (feminism, empowerment, child development practices, mental health, etc.).

In a ‘Skills Without Borders’ project conducted by the Brampton Board of Trade, employers across a range of economic sectors expressed a sense that some new immigrant applicants were not sufficiently attuned to the norms and expectations of Canadian workplaces.36 These employers believe

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36 Barriers to Hiring Skilled Immigrants In North Peel, Report by Brampton Board of Trade, 2007
that it is the immigrants’ responsibility to better understand ‘Canadian culture.’ A high proportion of the nonprofit sector is very service-oriented and workplace norms reflect strong values about confidentiality, space and boundaries, work ethics and cultural compatibility. Understanding these norms is a critical requirement to any individual’s effective work performance within the nonprofit sector.

The lack of Quebec experience is an obstacle. If you don’t know the context, donors and partners then you won’t be able to effectively hit the ground running. – Employer

Within organizations that provide direct service to clientele, important values are often inherent in the work itself. These social and/or societal values relate to issues such as feminism, empowerment, child development practices, attitudes toward people with disabilities, mental health issues, etc. Employers mention several such ‘core values’ that have an important impact on their ability to integrate new immigrants in particular, and indicate that some new immigrants come with strong—and differing—values from those of the organization. Employers emphasize that it is important (although often difficult) during the selection process to assess how well a candidate’s values align with organizational values. Employers recognize that their limited ability to accurately and equitably assess core values prior to hiring, and subsequently communicating and training for core values adds to the challenge.

We have had to dismiss people because of the disciplinary style they take with children. Often these values are ingrained in their culture. – Employer

Limitations in HR practices

Some employers reveal that many of the challenges in hiring skilled immigrants and members of visible minorities are simply more acute examples of problems in hiring any new employee. HR Council research confirms that many small- and medium-sized nonprofits do not have strong HR management practices. Without access to professional HR skills, senior staff are ill prepared to manage these functions. While well-intentioned, and often successful on a case-by-case basis, these organizations often suffer from a lack of consistent application of inclusive recruitment and hiring practices.

Overall, nonprofits have less experience with hiring immigrants and are less likely to have consistent practices or strategies. Without a strong foundation of resources, experience, and/or good practices, small employers in particular perceive greater risks in hiring an individual from a different cultural background. These perceptions deter them from taking actions to increase cultural diversity in their workforce. Better HR practices minimize the barriers, enhance success and reduce much of the perceived risks in increased ethnic diversity.

Implications for successful organizational practices

Employers highlight the importance of eliminating the subtle barriers in selection processes, as well as the value in transitions to paid employment through bridging programs, internships or mentoring. Their perspective is supported by a growing body of expertise, tools and techniques to help Canadian employers to recruit and hire recent immigrants and members of visible minorities. Many of these resources are listed in the final section of this report, Learning More – Helpful Tools and Resources.

Examples of effective and innovative practices used by employers include the following:

- Rather than requiring ‘Canadian work experience,’ use more inclusive language such as asking for ‘relevant’ work experience. The most critical characteristics of the work experience should be identified and explained, helping the employer to evaluate each applicant’s experience by measurable and reasonable criteria, e.g. number of years, related to a specific field or a specific job, involving a particular level of responsibility, etc.

- Job placements and internships, bridge-to-work programs, mentoring and other mechanisms create
important work experience in a Canadian context and provide opportunities for new or underemployed individuals. Such approaches help employers see a candidate in action on the job, without the risk of offering a permanent position. A related practice is to make volunteer opportunities more accessible and more widely known to ethnically diverse populations, increasing familiarity with the Canadian or local nonprofit context and providing opportunities to showcase skills and potential contributions.

- One larger organization with designated HR staff actively monitors recruitment and hiring processes, looks for patterns and intervenes directly with the manager(s) as needed. “If we are seeing a certain hiring manager who shortlists candidates who seem to lack diversity, we proactively seek them and educate them. We actually work with them in the interviews: what kind of reaction would you have if you get this response.”

- More inclusive interviewing practices increase the likelihood of an accurate assessment of skills, competencies and fit – without language barriers ‘getting in the way.’ For example, employers can provide interview questions in advance. Careful use of vocabulary is recommended, including the elimination of words that could have different meanings, (for example, ‘conflict’ can imply ‘war’ to some individuals) and jargon should be avoided.

- Reduce misunderstandings by explaining the process and shaping expectations for those from different countries or cultural backgrounds. Job postings should have culturally inclusive language, and avoid acronyms, abbreviations, ‘insider terms’ and jargon. Criteria should be generic enough to be well understood by people from a range of cultural backgrounds and encourage application. For example, concepts such as ‘lifelong learning’ or Quebec’s ‘éducation populaire,’ are not necessarily familiar terms to new immigrants.

- Remain constantly vigilant about unintended subtle biases. Successful employers periodically review recruitment and hiring practices – the processes as well as the outcomes – to uncover systemic barriers.

- Some employers use innovative techniques to minimize the impact of biases. One conducts interviews with the candidate behind a screen. Another hides the candidates’ names, so that the focus remains on skills and experience. Leading employers ensure that all hiring staff is trained on culturally sensitive practices, and that procedures and tools are bias-free.

- Take a longer term perspective during selection interviews for either volunteer or paid work. Explore all possible ways a candidate could contribute to the organization and be willing to create new opportunities to maximize use of their skills.

- Review the need for Canadian experience. Consider a three-month probation period to give candidates a chance to adjust before evaluation for a permanent position.

As it is more difficult for nonprofit organizations (especially small ones) to invest in effective recruitment and selection practices, a number of supports make it more feasible to increase the diversity of their workforces. These include:

- accessible language training opportunities and support with communication skills
- cultural training to help newcomers adjust to Canadian workplaces
- internship, apprenticeship, and bridging programs that support new hires to acquire, refine and demonstrate the skills required for work
- support and guidance for the development of inclusive and bias-free recruitment processes

I had a little bit of a language barrier in the beginning despite my use of English constantly in my country [Eastern Europe]. I am grateful to my organization because they hired me even though my language wasn’t as good. – Employee
Retention, engagement and advancement in an inclusive workplace

Chapter highlights

The research describes a range of experiences within the workplace. Overall, most employees feel welcomed and equitably treated. However, others indicate that various forms of discrimination or exclusion – subtle or not-so-subtle – exist. Elements identified by immigrants and members of visible minorities are similar to what other individuals who work in the sector identify as important, including:

- effective orientation, early feedback and ongoing guidance
- freedom to explore professional goals
- appropriate compensation and job security

For recent immigrants in particular, language and communication present barriers to smooth integration into the workplace. They stress the importance of colleagues’ and clients’ sensitivity to this issue.

Employers emphasize the importance of a clear commitment to ethnic diversity in the organization’s leadership. There is limited ethnic diversity at the senior levels of most nonprofit organizations.

Only about one in seven nonprofits found it difficult (11%) or very difficult (3.5%) to retain qualified paid staff. However, while most nonprofit employers may not have difficulty holding onto their current employees, these employees (many of them baby boomers) are approaching retirement age and the sector is not well positioned to replace them with new sources of talent (many of whom will be new immigrants and/or members of visible minorities).

There are indications that after hiring, turnover rates for new immigrants and members of visible minorities in the first year of employment are higher than for workers from other groups. Focused attention and investment from employers
are necessary to ensure these workers are fully integrated into nonprofit workplaces so they can achieve their career goals and make the greatest possible contributions to the organizations that employ them.

If the ED/CEO supports hiring and integrating immigrants then supervisors must receive support on how to do this. – Employer

Creating inclusive workplaces

While many believe that diversity evolves as a function of the demographics of the labour force, inclusion cannot be assumed. Many of the organizational benefits of ethnic diversity will only be fully achieved when the work environment is inclusive so that people of all backgrounds can fully contribute.

Workplace research has shown that for workers to develop a sense of belonging to an organization, creating a welcoming environment is critical. Such an environment can be described as a safe place of respect, and the ‘leadership is often cited as open, flexible and humane.’

Inclusive work environments have practices in place to help sustain cohesive work groups; to help managers, staff and colleagues understand and manage cultural differences; and to enable newcomers to Canada to adapt and thrive in their new environment. While many nonprofit employers value a cohesive work team, employers also report on instances where cultural diversity became an impediment to cohesion; they emphasize the importance of helping current staff members to adapt to changes brought about by cultural diversity.

Previous research has also shown that in some agencies, visible minority workers and volunteers face disrespectful behaviour: micro-management, devaluation, constant stress, abusive language, etc. “Individual experiences were narrated about incredible experiences in the workplace such as being told one is ‘lucky’ to have a job when one makes a legitimate complaint about racism, or being called an ‘imbecile’ or being denied the right to celebrate one’s own religious holidays.”

Overall, this research reveals that most feel welcome in their workplace. Comments regarding colleagues and the sector indicate that that both are perceived as open and welcoming toward immigrants and members of visible minorities. However, some respondents indicate that they continue to experience various forms of discrimination or exclusion – subtle or not-so-subtle – within their organization.

I found that people were willing to accept me and welcome me...I was never made to feel any sense of rejection as a result of my accent or difference. – Employee

The research emphasizes that language and communication challenges are significant barriers to the effective integration of immigrants, in particular. Earlier research by the HR Council and by others revealed that many organizations recognize the benefits brought by employees with language skills beyond English and French. However, in organizations where an immigrant’s first language is not considered a benefit, limited fluency in official languages reduces paid workers’ or volunteers’ effectiveness in these agencies. Many respondents mention their hesitation to fully participate in their workplace due to limited fluency in the language of work, limited understanding of the cultural nuances of the language and the challenges associated with marked accents. One small employer highlights the important role of language proficiency in the integration of a newcomer into a small and close-knit team, including participation in social settings during and after work “Small talk can be a great part of the sector.” In addition, fluency in language is important in sharing ideas and participating in discussions in the organization.

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39 Joan Ryan, Immigrant and Visible Minority Women in the Nonprofit Sector as Volunteers and Paid Workers Report, November 2004 (p.12)
During meetings I try to participate but I always feel limited because of the perception of my accented English. - Employee

Another important characteristic of inclusive work environments is flexibility. Employees with different needs increasingly expect their organization to respect and accommodate those needs. In terms of ethnic diversity, these differences relate to practices such as holidays and religious observances. Some employers do not appear to have a full understanding of appropriate accommodations. In discussions on new immigrants’ requests for workplace prayer or days off for non-Christian holy days, one employer stated that “holidays are those that are specified in the labour standards – and that’s all.” Some employers remark that offering such flexibility could be seen as ‘favouritism’ by other staff members. These types of perspectives highlight the benefits of clear practices that are understood and consistently implemented throughout the organization.

Some of the terminologies are difficult to understand due to differences in culture and context of use e.g. when my co-workers are talking during break I can’t understand some of their jokes and discussions. - Employee

Committed leadership

Research on diversity and inclusion consistently points to the importance of leadership in the creation of welcoming workplaces where diverse talent is hired, retained, advanced and engaged. When employers identify time commitments and resource constraints as a barrier to integration of new immigrants and members of visible minorities, it is clear why this executive commitment is so critical – senior leaders make decisions that affect resource and time allocations.

Employers frequently raise the issue of senior level commitment and buy-in to the investment for, and benefits of, ethnic diversity. They indicate that at the most senior levels, starting with the Board of Directors, there is a noticeable lack of ethnic diversity. Most feel that increased diversity within the Board itself would create greater support for diversity and inclusion at all levels of the organization.

When describing difficulties with recruitment and retention, employers attribute some of the challenge to a lack of awareness on the part of Board members or senior executives. For example, as senior leaders are often involved in the hiring process, employers indicate that they have to advocate for an inclusive perspective when screening résumés, assessing work experience and qualifications gained outside of Canada or interviewing candidates.

Employers also indicate the need to form effective policies, processes and practices. The creation and consistent implementation of these requires senior level interest and commitment. As one employer says, a diverse workforce requires “dedicated champions who are willing to push it.”

Career advancement practices

Employees need to feel they are progressing in their career objectives if they are to commit to a long-term employment with an organization. Almost six in ten (59%) employers indicate that “Supporting and encouraging the achievement of professional goals” is a successful strategy for the retention and engagement of recent immigrants and members of visible minority groups. However, several individual employees indicate little, if any, investment in their learning, development and career advancement.

No one receives training or support in this sector. - Employee

In a 2011 HR Council survey of 772 nonprofit employers, approximately 90% offered some type of professional development and training opportunities in the preceding three years. Other research has suggested that there are limited opportunities for new immigrants and members of visible minorities within the sector to participate in learning and development programs or to access career development within their organization. If respondents had access to formalized learning, it seems that it is often completed on their own time.

41 Current State of Skills Development, HR Council, 2011
42 See, for example, Joan Ryan, Immigrant and Visible Minority Women in the Nonprofit Sector as Volunteers and Paid Workers Report, November 2004 p.8
The visible minority experience in the nonprofit sector is very different. 97% of staff working where I am now are Caucasian. There are very few minorities, only as interns or in junior roles, so it is obvious that it is very difficult to move up. There is a lot of turnover, and it seems that in [this type of nonprofit] it is easier for Caucasians to move up. I have had similar experiences in two other organizations. – Employee

Lack of training and development opportunities are of particular concern to new immigrants who often value education and skill development as a pathway to integrating into the Canadian workplace and attaining positions relevant to their expertise and credentials. Employers who do not support learning and development face reduced staff engagement and performance, as well as higher turnover rates.

Employers’ investment in training is an area that warrants more research. The research regarding training practices reveals that strategic leadership, finances and fundraising, and partnership are invested in most, while basic skills and occupation training are less frequent. One explanation for reported limited access to training may be that organizations focus on training and development at senior levels, and less frequently on skill development at lower organizational levels.

The same systemic barriers seen in recruitment and selection processes [see above] continue to have an impact throughout an individual’s career. Even established immigrants (especially those who are also members of visible minorities) face challenges in getting meaningful work and volunteer opportunities. For instance, as their knowledge and leadership is often overlooked, they face challenges progressing to higher managerial or board positions.

In many organizations, immigrants are assigned to immigrant-related projects and/or they hold contract positions...why don’t they have permanent or management/supervisory positions? – Employer

The employers, and several employees, involved in this research emphasize that there is less and less ethnic diversity at higher organizational levels in their workplaces. Factors that contribute this include:

- In many nonprofits, promotions are often awarded based on length of service (although this may not be formally acknowledged). This creates a structural barrier to the career advancement of new immigrants and/or members of visible minorities, as they are more likely to be new hires within the organization.
- Cultural differences in management style are not always well understood or appropriately managed in nonprofits. With the sector’s strong emphasis on values and interpersonal relations, particularly within small organizations, these differences in style can easily become insurmountable barriers to career advancement. While Canadian-born members of visible minorities have greater familiarity with the management style typical in Canadian organizations, cultural values run deep and these differences can create misunderstandings.

I have been working in my current position for 2 years and no one has asked me anything about my career goals, professional development, etc. – Employee

- Most organizations that provide direct service to a diverse clientele recognize the organizational benefit (or ‘business case’) of ethnic diversity among the employees that deal directly with clients. However, these positions are often at an entry level. Research participants report that the business case for ethnic diversity at higher organizational levels is not as well understood.
When there is a goal to provide diversity of services, there may be many entry level positions for visible minorities, but these minorities do not advance to higher level management levels. – Employer

Retention of ‘over-qualified’ staff

Many employers hesitate to hire immigrants or members of visible minorities they view as ‘over-qualified’ and consequently less likely to remain with the organization. There are two issues of concern regarding turnover: ‘under-employment’ and ‘under-payment’.

The gap between the individual’s skill levels and the job requirements can lead to dissatisfaction, lowered engagement, a less productive relationship and ultimately to turnover.

In small and medium-sized nonprofits, the opportunity for career advancement within the organization is limited. In addition, fewer resources pose severe constraints on the amount of professional development or training that can be provided. It is thus unsurprising that skilled employees, whether or not they are new immigrants or members of visible minorities, will look elsewhere for advancement possibilities.

Money is not the greatest motivator. It is about being in a place where there is respect, and where you can make a valuable contribution. Having that feeling of being engaged and part of the greater picture can keep you in a job even though the pay is not on par with other sectors. – Employee

Providing lateral moves, new assignments and job enrichment can make work more rewarding and engaging for the individual. Previous research has concluded that the “majority of immigrants and members of visible minorities feel their soft skills were underutilized by their agencies e.g. management, communication, proposal writing etc.”

Previous research showed that perceptions of underpayment are an issue. The nonprofit sector’s lower salary levels create a retention risk. Employers believe that new hires will leave as soon as they find another position with higher pay. Especially in the small and medium-sized organizations, lower salary levels are very common. New immigrants in this research enjoy their work and the value they bring to both the client and the organization, but feel underpaid for what they do.

Funding uncertainty has an impact on the perception of job security within the sector. While this issue is certainly not unique to new immigrants and members of visible minorities, it does carry special significance for these groups as they are already often disadvantaged within the labour market. When an individual faces subtle barriers to employment, increased uncertainty about job security can encourage a job search elsewhere.

The challenge is never having job security, funding can be cut anytime. Funding problems make it difficult for some nonprofit organizations to pay a salary. – Employee

This research confirms employers’ perspectives that highly skilled employees might leave the organization when a better paying alternative is available. However, many also accept the reality of the salary budgets and suggest that other retention mechanisms exist, including job enrichment, can help counteract this reality.

I think I got luckier than most recent immigrants because I was able to stay in my field. I think my wage and salary is much better than most immigrants. Most specialists and highly educated people cannot find a job that corresponds to their knowledge and skills. – Employee

43 Joan Ryan, Immigrant and Visible Minority Women in the Nonprofit Sector as Volunteers and Paid Workers Report, November 2004. p.8
44 Ibid
Alignment with the organizational culture, values and philosophy

Regional consultation sessions with employers indicate that a “lack of fit with cultural norms and values” is significant barrier to efforts toward increasing ethnic diversity, particularly within service agencies. In many instances, a misalignment in values becomes apparent only after the individual has been hired and is on the job. Given the nature of the work within the nonprofit sector, and the sector’s emphasis on values, any indication of a poor “fit” between the individual and the organization can lead to an uncomfortable situation, and ultimately to turnover.

In this research, employees did not express misalignment of values in the same way that employers did. Although some mention the challenge of understanding cultural differences (such as interpersonal communication styles or adapting to an organization’s way of doing business), no one mentions the impact of different societal values such as feminism, child rearing, etc. It is unclear why there is this difference in perspective. While it is possible that employees feel well aligned with their organization, it could also be that this issue is not openly discussed or explicitly addressed, and that employees are largely unaware of the concern.

Many employers seem ill-equipped to deal with differences in values that might be due to cultural diversity. Several organizations participating in the research suggest that support for building nonprofits’ cultural competency is required. One solution for ensuring values alignment is to create an effective orientation process, with explicit attention to cultural assumptions and values. This orientation is important for all staff, not only recent immigrants and members of visible minorities.

I did not understand the nonprofit world. I didn’t really understand what it means to be mission driven. It was taken for granted that I would figure it out. - Employee

Many employers in the sector lack formal feedback and performance management processes, and are often ‘too busy’ to do an effective job of welcoming and orienting a new employee. In this context, the onus is on the employee to identify and somehow resolve any misalignment of values. This can be very difficult to do.

Value of orientation practices

There is little doubt that a good early orientation, as well as ongoing feedback, mentoring and guidance (see below) is very beneficial. But employees reveal that many employers in the sector – with informal practices and busy staff – often do not take the time to understand the new hire’s needs and effectively orient and welcome him or her.

Even though my education and internship had prepared me for the sector, during the initial phase of my employment it was sink or swim. I started during the busy season. I only had notes from the previous person that held the position to follow. To show you how busy it was I was given a tour of the building after two months. – Employee

Research on best practices for managing people confirms the importance of an effective orientation of new hires, regardless of the sector. These practices are even more critical when the new hire has less familiarity with the context of the position.

Feedback and guidance

Several employees indicate a high level of appreciation for direct feedback and guidance. However, these results and previous research also indicate that in many organizations these good practices are not consistently implemented. Engagement and retention are, consequently, put at risk.

I wish I could get at least a 1 hour per week meeting to receive direct feedback as to how I am doing, or how our team is doing. – Employee

See, for example, Joan Ryan, Immigrant and Visible Minority Women in the Nonprofit Sector as Volunteers and Paid Workers Report, November 2004, p.10
New immigrants and members of visible minorities, like most Canadians, need to know there is an appreciation and recognition of their skills on a regular basis. Whether for paid work or volunteering, valuing their skills means that employers recognize their skills and how to use these skills throughout the work of an organization; e.g. an administrative volunteer with great outreach capability gets invited and encouraged to use skills as an outreach worker.

Gaps in the adoption of best practices

Many best practices for the creation of inclusive work environments can easily be implemented in nonprofits, even with limited resources. Specific examples offered by employers include the establishment of a diversity/inclusion committee, multicultural events, cross-cultural calendars, and mentoring of newcomers, etc. The reasons that these practices are not more widespread among employers in the sector are threefold: employers need knowledge and awareness of the best practices; they must have a commitment to introduce them, and they need access to tools and the capacity to use them effectively.

• Employers will learn about, and commit to using, best practices that others have used successfully. There is currently very limited knowledge sharing within the sector, and few opportunities to share experiences and information on recruitment and retention of new immigrants and members of visible minorities.
• Commitment to introduce best practices rises with a better understanding of the ‘business case’ for ethnic diversity. Leaders in many nonprofits are not fully aware of the potential benefits of having a more diverse workforce.
• Best practices for diversity and inclusion are a component of good human resource management. Many small and medium sized nonprofit employers, in particular, do not have professional HR guidance or support.

Implications for successful practices

The final section of this report, Learning More – Helpful Tools and Resources, provides a list of sources for expertise, tools and techniques that support employers in the retention, advancement and engagement recent immigrants and members of visible minorities. In addition, examples of effective and innovative practices identified through the research process and provided by employers and workers are included below:

• Buddy (mentor) systems that pair new employees with seasoned employees facilitate integration into the workplace. This is a stronger welcome for newcomers and provides a designated person to approach with questions or concerns. The paired ‘buddy’ learns much about the new employee and his/her background – and when the new hire is also a newcomer to Canada or a member of a visible minority, this knowledge enhances the cultural competency, particularly awareness and knowledge, among the existing staff.
• Orientation of new hires that explicitly addresses the values and norms of the organization. Time and attention is needed to explore the values, how they shape the behaviours in the workplace, and where differences might cause misunderstandings or discomfort.
• HR compensation and benefits policies that incorporate additional ‘floater days’ to accommodate different religious holidays and practices.
• A dedicated diversity committee that advises management on diversity and inclusion issues, acts as a sounding board for concerns or suggestions, advocates for an inclusive work environment, initiates/manages tools such as multicultural calendars, cultural events, etc.
• An inventory of employee skills and talents beyond current job requirements. This information helps organizations utilize the talent available and offer different opportunities to its employees.
• Events that create learning experiences, particularly about different cultural traditions and social integration (e.g. pot luck lunches, stone soup Fridays, etc.).
• Creation of a culturally inclusive, respectful and welcoming environment through the development of policies for staff/volunteer relations, flexible work arrangements and hiring staff from different cultures. Inclusion of diversity-related best practices and activities such as: training staff on inclusive behaviours, celebrating cultural diversity within the workplace, creating a diversity committee or network, and educating staff and clients about all aspects of diversity.

• Hiring staff to reflect the diversity of the community served.

• Acknowledgement of paid workers/volunteers' contributions. Clarify expectations and provide regular and effective feedback and guidance. Continual review of pay levels to ensure that skills are being compensated appropriately.

• Provision of opportunities for personal development and growth. Support staff in gaining recognition for their credentials. Encourage staff to create and implement their own development plans. Ensure that support for training is equitable. Build in flexibility about when and how people receive training.

• Support for language training, accent reduction and other communication skills development.

• Development and support of networking opportunities within the organization, the sphere of activity, and beyond.

• Adoption and fostering of a positive view of immigrants as people who contribute skills to help create a better country. Focus on important retention factors such as advancement; ability to participate in a broad range of work activities (special projects, lateral assignments as well as promotions); learning and development; etc.

• Continual improvement of hiring and retention practices. For example, conduct exit interviews, identification of patterns and appropriate follow-up.

• Building diversity at senior levels in the organization, including at the Board level.

Nonprofit employers are keen to retain new immigrants and members of visible minorities that they have hired. Similar to employers in other sectors of the economy, they are conscious of the costs (direct and indirect) of turnover. However, they are also aware of interpersonal aspects of integrating newcomers into the work environment. They express concerns about work group cohesiveness, the potential for social isolation, the frustrated career interests of employees who are over-qualified and under-employed, and the tensions that arise from misalignment of individual and organizational values and norms. They understand the impact that these issues can have on the retention, advancement and full engagement of new immigrants and members of visible minorities, as well as on the rest of the workforce. To move forward with the broader use of best practices for the retention, advancement and engagement of an ethnically diverse workforce, some or all of the following may be required:

• Mechanisms for sharing experiences and knowledge from other organizations. One employer suggests that a form of organizational mentoring could provide access to best practice organizations of similar size and scope.

• Cross-cultural training to help newcomers, current staff and managers understand and adapt to cultural differences.

• Customized mentoring, internship, and related programs that support newcomers in the difficult first months/years of adaptation to a new work environment.

• Help in developing culturally sensitive management practices.
Chapter highlights

Given the scope of the sector, it is not surprising that employers vary considerably in their concerns, needs and readiness for increasing ethnic diversity in their workforce.

Small employers face particular challenges and unless they are directly involved in providing services to ethnic communities, they are less familiar with the relevant resources available to them. They have less experience with hiring immigrants and/or members of visible minorities, are less likely to have consistent HR practices, and are more likely to see risk in hiring newcomers.

The benefits of ethnic diversity are very compelling to those organizations that provide direct services to ethnically diverse clientele. Other organizations’ level of commitment to ethnic diversity ranges widely – from “I do not see any value in it” to “it’s absolutely critical, given the projected demographics of the labour force.”

While there are clear themes across the country, there are also interesting regional differences. Historic immigration patterns, visible minority demographics, economic cycles, government labour force policies, and societal values and pressures created very different regional operating contexts for nonprofits.

The nonprofit sector is predominantly made up of small and mid-sized employers.

There is tremendous diversity of both missions and methods in the nonprofit sector...no other sector of the economy is as diverse and multi-faceted. As such, it does not come as a surprise to conclude from this research that there is a wide variety of concerns expressed by employers and a range of needs and readiness for next steps.

**Employer size makes a difference**

The nonprofit sector is predominantly made up of small and mid-sized employers. These organizations face resource constraints and use HR management practices that are well-intentioned but not always highly effective. The activities
involved in sourcing, recruiting, hiring, retaining and advancing an ethnically diverse workforce are no exception.

Although this research does not fully explore the differences between large and small employers, some indications and trends can be identified:

- Larger employers are more likely to have had experience with hiring from ethnically diverse populations. Many small employers have not had any such experience.
- Larger employers are more likely to have strategies and formal approaches to recruitment and selection of recent immigrants, in particular. Small employers express concern for the interpersonal challenges of integrating culturally diverse employees into the work team. For example, they indicate that limited language skills can diminish opportunities for ‘small talk’ and group discussion.
- Small employers, unless directly involved in providing services to immigrants or racially diverse populations, are less familiar with available resources to support the hiring and integration new immigrants and/or members of visible minorities. Larger employers often have staff members assigned to recruitment or hiring who have more awareness of resources, networks and agencies that could be helpful.

**Sphere of activity makes a difference**

Not surprisingly, employers who provide direct services to immigrant populations and/or to visible minority communities are much more aware of the problems in creating ethnic diversity—as well as possible solutions. While the benefits of ethnic diversity are evident and compelling to these organizations, other organizations’ level of commitment ranges from “I do not see any value in it” to “it’s absolutely critical, given the projected demographics of the labour force.”

However, ‘blind spots’ in the awareness of systemic challenges, subtle biases and best practices still exist. For example, some employers feel that new immigrants should not expect employers to accommodate a full range of religious practices. Employers who are unwilling to be flexible in their management practices are unlikely to attract the best talent from among the skilled immigrant and/or visible minority talent pool. To build a readiness for change it is important that organizations understand the many benefits of ethnic diversity from an employer perspective.

**Geography makes a difference**

There are important regional differences across Canada—and historic immigration patterns, visible minority demographics, economic cycles, government labour force policies, and societal values and pressures create very different operating contexts for nonprofits.

Figures 1 and 2 (on page 8) illustrate the significant disparity in the relative size of the recent immigrant and visible minority populations by metropolitan areas in the 2006 Census. Toronto, for example, is home to 16% of the country’s population, yet has 40% of its recent immigrants. Similarly, Vancouver is home to less than 7% of the country’s population, yet has almost 14% of its recent immigrants. At the other end of the country, Halifax was not a popular destination for immigrants in the years prior to the 2006 Census and as a result it has 1.2% of the country’s population yet only 0.5% of the recent immigrants.

It is evident from the research that nonprofits are very attuned to, and reflective of, the environment in which they operate. While a comprehensive analysis of the socioeconomic context in each region of the country is beyond the scope of this project, it is interesting to consider these observations:

- Under the pressure of labour shortages, Manitoba’s provincial government ran a very successful Provincial Nominee immigration program. As a result, the nonprofits in the Winnipeg dialogue session are very familiar with the skills focus in the business case for ethnic diversity.
- Quebec has a long history in the protection of its identity. Creating workplaces that welcome newcomers and protecting the unique characteristics of the Quebec francophone culture can be a tense process.
- Language and communication skills have special significance in certain areas of the country. Bilingualism, for example, poses its own challenges in Montreal. Heavily accented or limited language
skills are common in places like Vancouver, but stand out in rural Nova Scotia where immigrants are less common.

- Historically, unemployment has been higher in the Atlantic Provinces, and this affects the public’s attitudes toward immigrants. More recently, many sectors of the economy have labour shortages and the demand for skilled labour is high. New immigrants in Halifax now find it easier to obtain employment than they did 10-20 years ago.

- Alberta’s economic boom attracts large number of immigrants. Not surprisingly, a large percentage of them are looking for high salaries in the oil and gas sector. Employers in Calgary comment that few newcomers consider the nonprofit sector as a career destination.

- Vancouver and Toronto both have high percentages of recent immigrants and members of visible minorities. It is not surprising, then, that employers in these areas have a solid understanding of the business case for ethnic diversity. Many focus on building greater understanding and cultural competency throughout their organizations, including the Board level. While new immigrants and members of visible minorities have been welcomed into the nonprofit sector, they have yet to make significant inroads into the most senior levels.

- Although this research focuses on the issues common to both new immigrants and members of visible minorities, they are nonetheless two distinct populations. Employers in Halifax observe that African Canadians have lived in the Nova Scotia region for generations and continue to experience challenges in employment. Members of visible minorities in Montreal and in other centres across the country have similar experiences, despite their Canadian credentials and work experience.

- New immigrants and members of visible minorities are not the only groups to face barriers to paid employment in the nonprofit sector. Aboriginal Canadians also experience difficulties. Employers must take a comprehensive view and develop practices that allow them to include all segments of the talent pool.

The impact of differences

Whether due to employer size, sphere of activity or geographical location, all these differences have an impact on the degree to which certain barriers are a concern, and the degree to which certain solutions will be of interest. These patterns can be helpful in developing and introducing various approaches designed to facilitate the effective growth of ethnic diversity in the nonprofit sector. However, it is important to remember that the research also highlights the incredible range and diversity across organizations. Nonprofit organizations cover the full spectrum in their progress toward greater inclusiveness of a culturally diverse workforce. It would appear that there will be an eager audience for a wide variety of supportive solutions.
Chapter highlights

A focused effort is required by both employers and stakeholders who support nonprofits in order to address this issue. For employers, it begins with the establishment of effective HR policies and practices.

Specific recommendations to further support ethnic diversity include:

- promotion of the sector as a viable and vibrant career destination
- improved education for employers and stakeholders on barriers and best practices relevant to ethnically diverse populations entering and working in the sector
- articulation of the benefits and the strategies for ethnic diversity, specific to each organization’s context, sphere of activity and objectives
- the fostering of ethnic diversity amongst nonprofit Boards
- the nurturing of ethnically diverse volunteers as a potential source of entrants to the future paid workforce

The need for a solid HR foundation to attract, engage and retain employees is a recurring theme throughout the research.

This research highlights the need for the sector to focus greater effort on building an ethnically diverse workforce or risk being left behind as other sectors build competencies in this area. As Canadian workforce is changing rapidly, employers who do not take steps in the near future will find it increasingly difficult to retain the employees needed to do the work.

The need for a solid HR foundation to attract, engage and retain employees is a recurring theme throughout research. A clear commitment from leadership supports the capacity of an organization to build and follow through on effective policies and practices. Each organization’s unique context determines the relevant action appropriate to support activity in this area.
The research suggests action in the following areas:

For employers

- **Understand the issues, barriers and challenges** specific to hiring and retaining immigrants and members of visible minorities. Many additional informative resources are available and several are listed in the Appendix.

- **Review current HR practices** to ensure processes limit personal bias and support the recruitment and retention of new immigrants and members of visible minority groups. Recommendations include:
  > Avoid the use of jargon and acronyms in interviews
  > Shape candidates’ expectations of the interview process in advance
  > Ensure all new hires receive a proper orientation
  > Provide opportunities for personal development and growth
- **Understand how an organization can attract employees to the sector:**
  > Refine recruitment materials to ensure that the impact of the organizations is emphasized; highlight the accountability, organization and professionalism of the organization
  > Indicate recognition for international experiences
  > Ask for relevant work experience rather than Canadian work experience

- **Develop a business case and strategy** for workforce diversity that is specific to the context, sphere of activity and objectives of the organization. A clear articulation of the organization-specific benefits and supporting actions helps create momentum for change.

- **Create diversity at the senior leadership and board level.** View immigrant and visible minority populations as assets rather than deficits and as a responsibility to uphold Canadian values legislation.

- **Seek opportunities to profile the nonprofit sector as a viable and vibrant career destination.**

- **Network with organizations** that offer employment services in your community.

- **Foster a diverse pool of volunteers** as a potential source of entrants into the paid workforce. Identify and eliminate barriers to entry.

- **Seek out the viewpoints of new immigrants and members of visible minorities.** Reach out to prospective and current employees to explore their perspectives on the nonprofit sector, their experiences of the job search process, integration into the workplace. Conduct a ‘stay interview’ to see what keeps them in the organization or an ‘exit interview’ to see why they left. Use this information to develop improved practices.

- **Network with local resources and/or other employers.** Organizations that want to make progress in ethnic diversity must get engaged with people who can help. Organizations with experience to share should create mechanisms to support others – creating local networks or communities of practices, offering to mentor other organizations, sharing tools and resources, etc.

- **Understand and adopt the many tools and resources** that are available. What resources exist in the area (e.g. employment organizations) and what can be accessed online? Several good sources are listed in this report.

For organizations interested in supporting nonprofit employers confront the challenges and reap the benefits of increasing diversity in their workforce, consider the following:

- **Creation of new resources and cost-effective shared services models** such as:
  > sharing an HR professional
  > tools for assessment and management of values/philosophy alignment between a job candidate (or new hire) and the hiring organization
  > strategies for addressing concerns regarding ethnically diverse staff
  > samples of inclusive job descriptions that are more easily understood by people outside the sector (including subtle barriers and how they can be addressed, such as use of acronyms)
  > guidance in identification and evaluation of transferable skills beyond specific job titles; reduced the need for ‘Canadian experience’; tactics to address the challenges of ‘over-qualified’ staff
  > low-cost language training approaches to support potential employees in meeting requirements
  > cross-cultural competency training models, tailored to various segments of the sector
nonprofit mentoring programs to support immigrants and members of visible minorities in understanding and accessing opportunities within the sector

- Support employers in adopting **best practices in HR management**, including:
  - bias-aware recruiting and hiring methods and trained/sensitive hiring staff
  - outreach methods for recruiting; less reliance on personal networks
  - less traditional, more innovative and inclusive selection practices
  - more effective orientation of new hires, followed up with effective and regular feedback, coaching and mentoring

In summary, a comment from one of the dialogue sessions captures it best: “The sector cannot keep doing things the same way regarding our workforce and expect different results. Both attitudes and behaviours still need to change.”
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Work-unemployment rate, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada Website: http://www4.hrsdc.gc.ca/.3ndic.1t.4r@-eng.jsp?iid=16#M_4 (Accessed 06 September, 2011)
Appendix

Other key concepts

Key concepts can be found in the Introduction section (page 6). Other key concepts include:

- **Nonprofit employers**: exist for the purpose of serving the public or mutual benefit other than the pursuit or accumulation of profit for owners, board or shareholders. Any money earned must be retained by the organization, and used for its own expenses. The nonprofit sector is a collection of entities that are organizations; private as opposed to governmental; non-profit distributing; self-governing; voluntary; and of public benefit. The HR Council’s mandate includes most of what the Satellite Account of Nonprofit Institutions and Volunteering refers to as the ‘core nonprofit sector’ except that they do not include organizations in the category ‘professional associations, trade unions and cooperatives’ or quasi-government organizations (such as hospitals, colleges and universities).
- **Recruitment** refers to the process of attracting candidates to fill a job opening within an organization or firm, in this case nonprofit organizations.
- **Selection** or **hiring** is used interchangeably to refer to the process of screening and selecting qualified candidates to fill a job position.
- **Integration** in this context is the process of fitting immigrants and members of visible minorities into the workplace; it involves strengthening the relationship of the individual with their workplace by creating an inclusive environment that allows them to function at their fullest potential.
- **Retention** is the collection of practices that encourage employees to remain with the organization for the maximum period of time or until the completion of the project or contract.

Research methodology

The project involved four complementary streams of research activity.

- Literature reviews and environmental scans
- A survey of nonprofit employers
- A series of dialogue sessions with nonprofit employers
- A series of interviews with new immigrants and members of visible minorities who are currently working, or have previously worked, in paid employment in a nonprofit

Literature reviews and environmental scan

Two literature reviews were critical in identifying issues and information gaps that could be the focus of the employer survey, regional dialogue sessions and a directed series of individual interviews. The research team reviewed scholarly articles, books, websites, conference proceedings, recruitment materials etc., to explore two sets of issues:

- First, to identify key themes related to the issues, challenges and best practices of hiring and retaining a visible minorities and new immigrants in the nonprofit sector
- Second, to understand the experiences and perspectives of new immigrants and members of visible minorities in the Canadian nonprofit sector

Survey of nonprofit employers

Building on the research findings, a brief online employer survey was developed to validate the issues and challenges being faced by employers within the sector and confirm the existence of barriers and challenges in hiring members of visible minorities and new immigrants. The main objective of the survey was to support the design of the dialogue sessions by identifying key issues for further exploration. A secondary benefit of the survey was the opportunity it provided to engage employers in the project, by validating the impact of these issues and providing a basis for dialogue.

The survey was designed to be completed within a 20-minute timeframe and was administered in both official languages. The survey questions addressed the following topics:

- Perceived importance of increasing ethnic diversity within the organization’s workforce
- The organization’s experience in hiring/retaining new immigrants and/or members of visible minorities
- Challenges and systemic barriers that have an impact
- Support the organization has provided to staff members who are recent immigrants and/or members of visible minorities
- Best practices and successes

The survey was conducted online in November, 2010. The survey link was distributed to a full spectrum of nonprofit organizations. The organizations (employers) ranged in size and geographic locations. The email list was drawn from Charity Village and the HR Council; while it is a broad-based sample, it is nonetheless a ‘sample of convenience’ that was not designed to be statistically representative.

The identity of the respondents and organizations were anonymous; however there was opportunity for the respondents to provide profile information about their organization. The survey was open from November 12, 2010 to November 24, 2010. Over this time period, a total of 347 responses were received.

About the survey respondents – organization profile

The composition of sample respondents by region for this survey was highest in Ontario (44%) followed by Alberta (16%) and British Columbia (12%), see Figure 5, for other regions. The ‘Other’ category includes national organizations with multiple offices across the country.

Figure 5

![Province of respondents](image-url)
The largest percentage of respondents (73.25%) work in organizations that are located in major urban centers (see Table 1).

**Table 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Geographical location of employers</th>
<th>Response Ratio (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Major urban centre</td>
<td>73.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smaller urban centre</td>
<td>20.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural/remote area</td>
<td>6.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.00</td>
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</table>

The majority of respondents in the survey said that the primary area of their organization’s activity is in social services (see Table 2). Many of the 22.36% of respondents that listed their activity under ‘Other’ category would have been able to enter them into one of the categories in the table, e.g. early learning and care, newcomers services, services to retired public workers, research and analysis etc.

**Table 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area of Activity</th>
<th>Response Ratio (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sport/Recreation</td>
<td>2.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>2.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International</td>
<td>1.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law, Advocacy and Politics</td>
<td>1.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>8.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Services</td>
<td>39.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philanthropy and Volunteerism</td>
<td>6.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts and Culture</td>
<td>4.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development and Housing</td>
<td>2.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education and Research</td>
<td>8.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>22.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.00</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Over one half of the respondents identified their organizations as either a registered charity (58.1%) or an incorporated nonprofits organization (64%). Just 4.5% of nonprofit respondents said they are an un-incorporated nonprofit organization. While 7.8% chose the ‘Other’ category.

When respondents were asked to provide the range of paid employees in their organizations, 31.26% said that their organizations have up to 9 employees (small employers); 43.76% of these organizations have 10-99 employees (medium employers), while 22.5% of these organizations have 100 plus employees (large employers, see Figure 6).
Employer dialogue sessions

A series of dialogue sessions was held with nonprofit employers in several locations across the country. The HR Council partnered with local nonprofits to host eight (8) dialogues with a broad range of invited guests from nonprofit sector organizations from different communities all across Canada. The theme of these dialogues was “Increasing Ethnic Diversity in the Nonprofit Sectors Workforce.”

In total, eight half-day sessions were held in the Spring of 2011 in Vancouver, Calgary, Winnipeg, Toronto (2 sessions), Montreal (2 sessions), and Halifax. Six (6) sessions were facilitated in English and two (2) facilitated in French. A total of 89 employers, representing both small and large nonprofit organizations, participated in the sessions. The session hosts intentionally invited organizations with a range of experience on the issue of ethnic diversity.

Based on the previous research findings, the dialogue sessions were designed to explore employers’ perspectives on three topic areas:

- The case for diversity, in particular for hiring and retaining new immigrants and members of visible minorities within nonprofits
- Challenges, issues and best practices for hiring and retaining new immigrants and members of visible minorities
- Support and tools needed by nonprofit employers for hiring and retaining new immigrants and members of visible minorities

Sessions were semi-structured with a brief overview of the research findings and a series of questions to prompt discussion and probe the issues. Each session was led by a member of the research team who is also an experienced facilitator. Each session had a confirmed note-taker, identified by the host organization. The note-takers were provided with a guide in advance of the session, and took verbatim notes to the extent possible. Notes were reviewed and revised as necessary by the facilitator, the host organization and the HR Council representative.
Dialogue session questions

The questions that were explored during the dialogue sessions included:

WHY DO IT? Case for hiring and retaining new immigrants and members of visible minorities

1. How important is it for nonprofit organizations to hire and retain new immigrants and/or members of visible minorities? [and why]

WHAT ARE THE DIFFICULTIES? Challenges and issues when hiring and retaining new immigrants and members of visible minorities

2. From your perspective, what are the key issues/barriers to hiring/retaining new immigrants and members of visible minorities, as paid staff in nonprofit organizations?

3. Explore in more detail some of the issues/barriers named
   - Select barriers highlighted by participants, as appropriate. Probe as required:
     > improved education for employers and stakeholders on barriers and best practices relevant to ethnically diverse populations entering and working in the sector
     > articulation of the benefits and the strategies for ethnic diversity, specific to each organization’s context, sphere of activity and objectives
     > the fostering of ethnic diversity amongst nonprofit Boards
     > the nurturing of ethnically diverse volunteers as a potential source of entrants to the future paid workforce

WHAT COULD HELP? Building capacity and opportunities for hiring and retaining new immigrants and members of visible minorities

4. What improvements are needed to hire, integrate and retain new immigrants and members of visible minorities into the workplace? And why would these improvements (or this improved capacity) be important?

5. What resources (tools, websites, organizations, etc.) have been helpful in achieving your goals of hiring and retaining new immigrants and members of visible minorities?

6. Based on your experience, what kind of additional support would be helpful to your organization when hiring and retaining new immigrants and members of visible minorities?
Interviews

The interview process was designed to further explore the perspectives of recent immigrants and members of visible minorities who are currently, or were previously, employed within the nonprofit sector.

Based on information from the literature review and the research with employers, an interview protocol and communication strategy was prepared. A consistent set of semi-structured interview questions was designed to examine the factors influencing the attraction, recruitment and retention of new immigrants and members of visible minorities to the nonprofit sector.

The intent was to have a wide-ranging sample of individuals of varied backgrounds – region, background, occupation and area of nonprofit activity, etc. To this end, the HR Council publicized the research through its list of nonprofit organizations across the country. Individuals from these organizations had the opportunity to participate in an interview by either completing an online registration form or by giving their employer permission to forward their information and contact details to the research team.

The research team contacted the individuals directly to schedule a 30-40 minute phone interview. Full confidentiality and anonymity was assured. Interviews were conducted by seasoned researchers with expertise in diversity and inclusion issues, in particular as these relate to the employment and integration of newcomers to Canada. In total, twenty-six interviews were conducted between September 23 and October

Interview participants:

26 individuals were interviewed

- Six (6) provinces were represented: British Columbia, Ontario, Alberta, Manitoba, Nova Scotia and Quebec
- 25 of the participants were currently employed in the sector while 1 was previously employed in the sector
- 9 were new immigrants (less than 5 years in Canada) who are members of visible minorities
- 6 were new immigrants who are Caucasian
- 10 were visible minorities born outside Canada (more than five years in Canada)
- 1 was a Canadian-born member of a visible minority
- Among those born outside of Canada, there were 16 different countries of origin:
  - 4 countries in Africa and the Middle East
  - 4 countries in Asia
  - 4 countries in South America
  - 3 countries in the Caribbean Region and North America
  - 1 country in Eastern Europe

The individuals’ work experience covered a wide spectrum of nonprofit areas of activity within the HR Council’s coverage, including: health; social services; religion; environment; international; law, advocacy and politics; grant-making and volunteerism; and arts/culture
Interview guide

Questions that were explored during the interviews with paid employees in the sector:

- Can you tell me about your role(s) your current [organization] and at previous organizations?
- Are you originally from Canada?
  - [If not …] What is your country of origin and how long have you been in Canada?
- When you [started working OR arrived in Canada], what were your plans for employment?
  - Why were you attracted to that sector?
- What perceptions did you have about the nonprofit sector as a career/employment of choice?
- What motivated you to volunteer/seek paid work in the nonprofit sector?
- [For immigrants only …] What, if any, are the differences between the nonprofit sector in Canada and the nonprofit sector in your country of origin?
- Let’s talk about your experience of working in the nonprofit sector …
- How did you get paid work in the sector? (Difficulties? Opportunities/successes?)
  - What was your experience of the application and interview process?
  - What steps did you take to qualify to apply to and work in the sector?
- What was the initial phase of your employment like? (Challenges? Positive experiences? Successes?)
- How similar do you think your experiences are to those of other employees? (other visible minorities, recent immigrants, non-immigrants or Caucasian employees)?
- What support have you received/ or currently receiving to help you feel a greater part of the organization and help you perform better at your job?
- What other tools or support would have been/will be helpful with your integration in the sector?
- What other advice would you give to employers who want to have better success with hiring new immigrants and members of visible minorities? (probe: attraction, hiring, integrating, retaining)
- Any other comments or suggestions?
- The information (examples, suggestions, experiences, etc.) you have shared are very helpful. Would you be open to us contacting you again if we need a quick clarification about your comments?
**Learning more: Additional tools and resources**

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<th>Organization/Resource</th>
<th>Comments</th>
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<tr>
<td>Online HR Toolkit – HR Council for the Nonprofit Sector</td>
<td>This is an award-winning Toolkit – it won the 2008 Vision Award for Service Provider Excellence in the Ottawa-Carleton region. The toolkit’s sections provide information, tools and sample policies in a variety of areas – from human resource planning to recruitment and retention and learning and development. Source: <a href="http://www.hrscouncil.ca/hr-toolkit/home.cfm">http://www.hrscouncil.ca/hr-toolkit/home.cfm</a> A good starting point for integrating employees who are members of visible minorities and/or from different cultural backgrounds is available from the HR Council for the Nonprofit Sector. “Diversity at Work” is accessible online at: <a href="http://www.hrvs-rhsbc.ca/hr-toolkit/diversity-cultural.cfm">http://www.hrvs-rhsbc.ca/hr-toolkit/diversity-cultural.cfm</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HR Management Standard – HR Council for the Nonprofit Sector</td>
<td>A companion to the HR Toolkit, the HR Management Standards demonstrates what nonprofits should strive for in the development and implementation of effective HR policies and practices. <a href="http://hrcouncil.ca/resource-centre/hr-standards/home.cfm">http://hrcouncil.ca/resource-centre/hr-standards/home.cfm</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HR Checkup tool – HR Council for the Nonprofit Sector</td>
<td>A self-diagnostic tool to help you evaluate your nonprofit’s current performance in a number of functional HR areas. <a href="http://checkup.hrcouncil.ca/">http://checkup.hrcouncil.ca/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HR Council’s Archived Publications – HR Council for the Nonprofits Sector</td>
<td>A selection of archived publications and research. <a href="http://hrcouncil.ca/about/publications-archive.cfm">http://hrcouncil.ca/about/publications-archive.cfm</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CareerBridge – Career Edge Organization</td>
<td>Provides strategic staffing solutions including on-line access to candidates, payroll administration and HR expertise to help employers recruit, hire and retain Internationally qualified professionals. <a href="http://overview.careeredge.ca/">http://overview.careeredge.ca/</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Job Bank – Service Canada (Pan-Canadian)</td>
<td>Canada’s one-stop job listing website, the Job Bank connects job seekers and employers online, at no charge. <a href="http://www.jobbank.gc.ca/intro_en.aspx">http://www.jobbank.gc.ca/intro_en.aspx</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Immigrant Employment Council of British Columbia</td>
<td>Job match tools – Provides a database of pre-screened new immigrants who are ‘job ready.’ <a href="http://www.tapintotalent.ca/">http://www.tapintotalent.ca/</a></td>
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<td>Hiring Checklist – YMCA Greater Toronto</td>
<td>Provides important items that should be on the checklist of those in charge of hiring practices.</td>
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<td>Organization</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conference Board of Canada</td>
<td>“Business Critical: Maximizing the Talents of Visible Minorities–An Employer’s Guide”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conference Board of Canada</td>
<td>“Tapping the Talents of People with Disabilities”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imagine Canada</td>
<td>“Simple Solutions: A Manual – How NGOs can Eliminate Barriers to Volunteering by People with Disabilities”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employers Roadmap</td>
<td>Provides employers and those in charge of human resources (HR) responsibilities with strategies and tools to engage skilled immigrants more effectively at every stage of the HR lifecycle, from recruitment to integration and retention. <a href="http://www.hireimmigrants.ca/roadmap">www.hireimmigrants.ca/roadmap</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carrefour De Ressources En Interculturel (CRIC)</td>
<td>Provides an intercultural facilitator’s guide designed to encourage inclusive practices within organizations. <a href="http://www.criccentresud.org/index2.html">http://www.criccentresud.org/index2.html</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## IMMIGRANT SERVING AGENCIES AND PROGRAMS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization/Resource</th>
<th>Comments</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>l’Hirondelle</td>
<td>Facilitates the reception and integration of newcomers to Quebec and to demonstrate to people all the benefits of diversity of cultures and experiences. <a href="http://www.hirondelle.qc.ca/accueil.html">http://www.hirondelle.qc.ca/accueil.html</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Maisonnée</td>
<td>Provides various settlement and integration services to newcomers. <a href="http://lamaisonneeinc.org/">http://lamaisonneeinc.org/</a></td>
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## LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks (CCLB)</strong> (Pan-Canadian)</td>
<td>Information on national standards for second-language proficiency for immigrants and prospective immigrants. <a href="http://www.language.ca/">http://www.language.ca/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Multicultural Calendars – Graybridge Malkam</strong> (Pan-Canadian)</td>
<td>Provides a calendar for employers who want to be sensitive of religious and cultural holidays around the world. <a href="http://www.graybridgemalkam.com/en/15.0.asp?m=6">http://www.graybridgemalkam.com/en/15.0.asp?m=6</a></td>
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## FOREIGN CREDENTIAL ASSESSMENT

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<tr>
<td><strong>Canadian Information Centre for International Credentials</strong></td>
<td>Links to member organizations offering standardized assessment of foreign credentials. <a href="http://www.cicic.ca/415/credentialassessment-services.canada">http://www.cicic.ca/415/credentialassessment-services.canada</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Additional resources


Chicha, Marie-Thérèse, Le mirage de l’égalité: les immigrées hautement qualifiées à Montréal, École de relations industrielles Université de Montréal, septembre 2009.


