

Project Insights Report

Career Advancement for Immigrant Professionals



PARTNERS

Toronto Region
Immigrant Employment
Council (TRIEC)



LOCATIONS

Ontario



INVESTMENT

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Executive Summary

The Career Advancement for Immigrant Professionals (CAIP) program, initiated in Toronto, aimed to address the significant underemployment of skilled immigrant professionals in the Greater Toronto Area and beyond. This underemployment is not only limiting individual career progression and earnings potential but is also significantly impacting the broader economy.

The CAIP program, including its second iteration (CAIP 2.0) and third iteration (CAIP for SMEs), sought to address the barriers and gaps immigrants often face in advancing their careers by working with immigrant employees, managers and their organizations to bring about change at multiple levels.

To enhance the sustainability of the program and its outcomes, the CAIP 2.0 program also included a train-the-trainer component, which prepared participants to independently deliver the program.

One hundred percent of participants reported taking new actions based on what they learned during the program. Within three months of completing the CAIP program, newcomer participants accessed new professional development opportunities and managers reported feeling more prepared to support their newcomer team members. For the purposes of this report the terms newcomer and immigrant are used interchangeably and refer to immigrants who have arrived more recently and may still be integrating into the labour market.

The project's significance lies in its comprehensive approach to fostering systemic change within organizations, helping immigrant professionals to enhance their career advancement skills and knowledge, and equipping managers with skills to support diverse teams. This increased immigrant participants' ability to navigate career advancement and to access advancement opportunities. These efforts are crucial for policymakers and practitioners focusing on workforce integration and diversity, equity and inclusion strategies. The insights from CAIP highlight the importance of engaging multiple organizational levels to foster inclusive practices, demonstrating a robust model that can be replicated across sectors to better utilize the skills of immigrant professionals in the Canadian economy.

KEY INSIGHTS

- 1 Within a year of the original CAIP program, participants who were newcomer team members had advanced in their careers.
- 2 Managers who participated in the CAIP 2.0 program reported feeling more prepared to support their newcomer team members.
- 3 Newcomer team members working with small and midsize enterprises (SMEs) reported better understanding of the expectations related to career advancement at their organizations, and managers working with SMEs reported more open communication with team members about their career progression.

The Issue

Canada has had a long-standing challenge with the underemployment of immigrant professionals. Despite possessing high levels of education and relevant experience, many skilled immigrants find themselves in jobs that do not match their qualifications or fully utilize their skills. Moreover, these individuals have challenges navigating internal workplace practices regarding development opportunities and programs, as well as informal workplace practices around advancement. Barriers to immigrant career advancement not only affect the individual but also impact firm productivity and the broader economy. [Research](#) indicates that addressing the wage and employment gaps between immigrants and Canadian-born workers could add approximately \$50 billion to Canada's GDP.

Historically, the response to underemployment has primarily focused on transitioning immigrants from unemployment to employment, often overlooking issues related to career progression and the quality of employment relative to the immigrants' qualifications. Indeed, programs have typically concentrated on initial employment rather than career advancement, leaving many skilled immigrants in jobs that fall well below their skills and qualifications. These efforts have generally not been successful in facilitating the transition of underemployed immigrants into roles that align with their skills and experience levels.

The lack of effective programs addressing these specific needs underscores the importance of testing new and innovative strategies that can bridge this gap more effectively.



What We Investigated

In this project, the Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council (TRIEC) worked with employer partners and skilled immigrant professionals to answer several critical questions:

- How can underemployed skilled immigrants be supported in advancing their careers to match their qualifications and experience?
- What strategies can be employed to help employers recognize and utilize the full potential of immigrant talent within their organizations?
- How can effective strategies for training and adopting better HR practices be scaled up to become sustainable.

The CAIP program aimed to support medium and large-sized employers across various sectors in creating inclusive workplace environments that foster career advancement for skilled immigrants. The project also sought to improve career progression outcomes and strengthen talent management practices within participating organizations.

This comprehensive approach was tested through a series of interventions, including workshops and learning sessions aimed at both the managers and the immigrant employees, which afforded the opportunity to increase skills and knowledge as well as to network.

The target demographic for this project was skilled immigrant professionals who identified as underemployed within their respective sectors or who held junior roles and recognized the need for additional support in navigating advancement, alongside managers who directly influence career advancement opportunities within their organizations. The project also included interventions with HR and senior leaders to influence organizational-level change.

The project utilized a multi-phase approach. Initially, the project team conducted needs assessments with employers to identify skill gaps and areas for improvement in talent management practices. Through the first two iterations (CAIP and CAIP 2.0), the program was customized for specific organizations and delivered to employees. Skilled immigrant team members attended workshops to enhance their knowledge and skills for navigating advancement within their organizations. Concurrently, managers participated in training sessions to improve their inclusive leadership skills, ensuring they could effectively support their diverse teams in navigating career advancement.

In its third iteration, the CAIP program was modified for SMEs and condensed to four sessions in order to become less time intensive and more accessible. From June to September 2024, TRIEC delivered this version of CAIP to two medium-sized employers.

Through virtual sessions, newcomers increased their skills and knowledge to advance their careers in Canada. Managers learned how to support newcomer team members through, for example, intercultural competence and formal and informal hiring processes.

Throughout each iteration of the project, the CAIP team also tested interventions with HR leaders and senior leaders with participating organizations. The team conducted initial interviews, produced a final report on the gaps identified in each organization around immigrant career advancement and recommendations to address them, and facilitated discussion with leaders around committing to inclusion change.

What We're Learning

The original CAIP program reported a 100% satisfaction rate, with all participants noting increased knowledge and actionable insights. Many of the newcomer professionals who participated benefitted directly, achieving promotions, wage increases and opportunities to take on new roles.

CAIP 2.0 achieved the same high satisfaction rates as the original CAIP program and also saw immediate professional development opportunities for newcomers. For example, within three months of the program ending, participating newcomer professionals were offered new professional development opportunities, such as high-profile projects and new assignments. With the introduction of the train-the-trainer component, all employers expressed intentions to continue the CAIP program independently by 2024, demonstrating a commitment to sustainability.

The satisfaction rates for CAIP for SMEs were equivalent to those of CAIP 2.0. Most of the newcomer participants increased their knowledge (94%), and managers increased their preparedness to support newcomer team members after the program. Additionally, all newcomer responses to the survey indicated that newcomers' confidence in navigating their career advancement had increased within three months after completing the program.

The program successfully promoted career advancement

Immigrant participants identified significant differences in career advancement processes in their current workplaces compared to their previous experiences, both abroad and in Canada. The program shed light on the expectations of immigrant participants' current organizations, enabled them to position themselves more effectively within their current organizations and equipped them to navigate and advance within their workplaces more effectively.

Managers gained important insights

Managers learned the importance of transparent career-goal conversations, which were previously either overlooked or undervalued. They also reported realizing how cultural differences can impact these conversations and how critical it is to ask questions and to not assume indifference if team members are not direct in sharing their goals. These realizations, along with insights around how advancement practices can differ greatly around the world, helped managers to better understand and support immigrant employees, fostering a more inclusive environment and productive workplace.

Organizations implemented changes and will sustain the program independently

Within one year of completion, four out of five employer partners from the first two phases of the project implemented organizational changes based on the learnings and recommendations. Because employers expressed interest in continuing the program post-support, CAIP coordinators introduced the train-the-trainer component to equip participating organizations participants with the knowledge to deliver future sessions independently, enhancing the program's sustainability.

All indicators show that the program was relevant for SMEs

SME participants' satisfaction, participation in the program, and learning outcomes indicate that they increased their knowledge and took action after the program. This confirms that the CAIP for SMEs program was relevant to SMEs in the Greater Toronto Area.

★ Why It Matters

The insights gained from this initiative underscore the critical role of targeted professional development and systemic organizational changes in supporting career advancement for immigrant professionals. These findings are pivotal for policymakers, employers and practitioners focused on workforce integration and diversity, equity and inclusion strategies.

One of the key lessons is the effectiveness of engaging multiple levels of an organization to foster inclusive practices. This approach not only benefits the targeted immigrant employees but also enhances the intercultural competence of their managers and senior leaders. Employees are more likely to succeed if the system and supports are more inclusive and the onus is not only on the individual. Such comprehensive engagement can serve as a model for other sectors seeking to improve their outcomes with a diverse workforce.



**State of Skills:
What Works for Newcomer
Integration**

The project also emphasized the value of strategic partnerships in scaling impact. By collaborating with organizations who have a commitment to creating more inclusive and effective workplaces, the initiative was able to extend its reach and enhance its credibility within the corporate community and with SMEs.

The initiative's focus on creating pathways for career advancement for immigrants addresses a significant gap in many workforce development strategies, which often concentrate solely on initial employment. A broader approach that encompasses career progression is essential for fully utilizing the skills of immigrant professionals and for skills matching.

Industry-specific, employer-driven initiatives have been successful in accelerating and enhancing the employment prospects of newcomers. The collaborative approach of engaging with employers directly improved the relevance of the training and curriculum delivered and facilitated connections between employers and newcomers post-training.

[Read Thematic Report](#)

► What's Next

TRIEC continues to offer [the CAIP program](#), and the organization is currently considering how to adjust and customize the content for other groups, e.g., immigrant women, international students and smaller firms.

Have questions about our work? Do you need access to a report in English or French? Please contact communications@fsc-ccf.ca.

How to Cite This Report

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