

Project Insights Report

North Forge Global Entrepreneurship Initiative



PARTNERS

North Forge Technology Across Canada Exchange



LOCATIONS



INVESTMENT

\$253,000



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CONTRIBUTORS

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Executive Summary

The North Forge Global Entrepreneurship Initiative, launched by North Forge Technology Exchange in Manitoba, Canada, initially aimed to support women entrepreneurs arriving through Canada's Start-up Visa Program. This project identified a notable lack of resources available to these newcomers, particularly in navigating the Canadian business environment, understanding regulatory frameworks and securing financial support. As the initiative evolved, it broadened its scope to encompass all highly skilled immigrants, tackling wider issues related to economic integration and the challenges posed by strict licensing requirements and the undervaluation of international credentials.

To address these challenges, the initiative leveraged virtual platforms to deliver entrepreneurial education with the Future Skills Centre and various immigration consultants. The educational package featured 24 on-demand webinars and monthly roundtable discussions. Additionally, participants received "The Booklet," a guide distributed in Canada and internationally, which condensed the online course content, making it accessible to those with limited internet access. Responding to feedback, the initiative also rolled out the GEI-Tech Edition, which focused on the technological facets of business.

The project's insights are informative for shaping policies and practices in immigration, entrepreneurship and economic development. Its ability to adapt its target audience and utilize digital platforms for education and networking underscores the benefits of flexible and responsive policy frameworks. Moreover, the potential of digital tools to foster the integration and economic empowerment of immigrants is evident. The initiative's commitment to continuous feedback and adaptation provides a model for enhancing support systems for immigrants and potentially other vulnerable groups in Canada and beyond.

KEY INSIGHTS

- 1 The North Forge Global Entrepreneurship Initiative exceeded its participant target, engaging 379 participants in Canada and 508 outside Canada, surpassing the initial goal of 550 participants.
- 2 The development and distribution of “The Booklet”—a 70-page resource that condensed online course content—made the material accessible to those with limited internet access. This booklet reached 100 newcomers in Canada and 250 individuals in Pakistan and Dubai.
- 3 Privacy concerns presented challenges in reaching the niche audience of Start-up Visa newcomers; these were addressed by broadening the target audience to include a wider range of newcomers, which enhanced engagement and effectiveness.

The Issue

North Forge Technology Exchange initiated a project to support women entrepreneurs entering Canada through the Start-up Visa Program, as it recognized a significant gap in the resources available to these newcomers. The primary challenge these entrepreneurs faced was navigating the complex Canadian business landscape; these entrepreneurs need to understand local market dynamics, regulatory environments, and how to access financial resources. This issue was compounded by the entrepreneurs' need for a robust support network that could facilitate their integration and business success in a new country.

As the project progressed, it became evident that the challenges were not exclusive to women but also affected male Start-up Visa applicants. These individuals often struggled with similar issues, such as adapting to new business cultures and building local networks. The initial focus on women was broadened to include a wider range of highly qualified immigrants, particularly those facing licensing barriers and employment difficulties due to a lack of Canadian experience. This shift in understanding highlighted the broader issue of economic integration for skilled immigrants, regardless of gender, and underscored the need for tailored entrepreneurial support.

Previously, efforts to assist these groups were fragmented and often did not address the specific barriers faced by immigrants in the tech industry, such as stringent licensing requirements and the undervaluation of international experience. The lack of targeted support programs led to underemployment and underutilization of skills among highly qualified newcomers, impacting Canada's ability to fully benefit from global talent. North Forge's project aimed to fill this gap by providing specialized resources and networking opportunities to empower these individuals to leverage their skills through entrepreneurship, thereby allowing them to contribute more effectively to the Canadian economy.



What We Investigated

The North Forge Global Entrepreneurship Initiative aimed to address several key questions to enhance support for newcomers, particularly those involved in the Start-up Visa Program and highly qualified newcomers facing licensing barriers.

The primary research questions were as follows:

- How can virtual platforms effectively deliver comprehensive entrepreneurial education to newcomers in Canada?
- What are the specific challenges faced by women and highly qualified newcomers in the Canadian business landscape, and how can these be addressed through targeted support?

Additionally, the project sought to determine the effectiveness of various learning formats and accessibility options in engaging a diverse audience.

The initiative was a collaborative effort involving key stakeholders such as North Forge Technology Exchange, Future Skills Centre, and various immigration consultants and Start-up Visa incubators nationwide. This broad partnership was crucial in meeting the diverse needs of newcomers.

Central to the project was the creation and implementation of a robust online curriculum tailored to the needs of newcomers. This included 24 on-demand webinars and monthly roundtable discussions aimed at equipping participants with the tools and knowledge required to thrive in the Canadian business ecosystem. To enhance learning accessibility, the initiative also explored various accommodations, such as adding captions to webinars and distributing content via USB drives for those with limited internet access.

The methodology employed involved the continuous creation and refinement of online educational content guided by ongoing participant feedback. This iterative process ensured the curriculum remained relevant and responsive. Additionally, an in-person event in Manitoba facilitated direct interactions between newcomers and potential business partners, further aiding their integration into the Canadian entrepreneurial landscape.

By the project's conclusion in September 2023, it had successfully developed and delivered educational content online and in person. The project integrated continuous participant feedback. This comprehensive approach ensured that the initiative met its objectives, empowering newcomers through entrepreneurship and effectively addressing their needs.

What We're Learning

North Forge's Global Entrepreneurship Initiative attracted 379 participants within Canada and 508 internationally. In doing so, it exceeded its participation goal of 550. This initiative was designed to assist highly qualified newcomers who face licensing barriers and those considering immigrating to Canada to establish their businesses.

A notable accomplishment of the initiative was the creation and distribution of "The Booklet," a 70-page resource that simplified the content of an online course, designed for those with limited internet access. This booklet reached 100 newcomers in Canada and 250 individuals in Pakistan and Dubai, supporting diverse groups in learning and entrepreneurship.

The project also launched the GEI-Tech Edition, a specialized course tailored to the technological needs of business, covering topics like website development and digital marketing. This course was developed in response to participant feedback requesting more advanced materials, and it marked an expansion of North Forge's educational offerings to meet the demands of tech-oriented entrepreneurs.

The initiative faced several challenges, including difficulties in reaching the niche audience of Start-up Visa newcomers due to privacy concerns. This issue prompted a strategic pivot to target a broader category of newcomers, thereby enhancing engagement with various niche groups more effectively.

Collaboration hurdles with immigration centres and lawyers initially impeded outreach efforts. These were eventually resolved through new partnerships with entities such as the Steinbach Economic Development Corporation and the Centre for Newcomer Integration at RRC Polytech. These alliances broadened the reach of the Global Entrepreneurship Initiative and provided newcomers with essential resources and support.

The project also undertook extensive knowledge mobilization activities, including events, meetings and webinars, to promote the Global Entrepreneurship Initiative and its courses. These efforts successfully raised awareness about the initiative and attracted a diverse group of participants.

In summary, the North Forge Global Entrepreneurship Initiative successfully supported newcomers and potential immigrants by providing education and resources and forming strategic partnerships. Despite facing initial setbacks, the project adapted and broadened its approach to effectively meet the needs of its participants, showcasing the value of adaptability and responsiveness in project execution.

★ Why It Matters

The project initially focused on immigrants with Start-up Visas but later expanded to include other highly skilled newcomers encountering licensing hurdles. This shift underscores the need for policies that can adapt to the diverse challenges faced by various immigrant groups, ensuring that support mechanisms remain relevant and effective.

Emphasizing the use of digital platforms, the project highlighted the role of technological accessibility in modern settlement services. The successful deployment of online learning and networking tools not only facilitated the integration and economic empowerment of immigrants but also set a precedent that could influence other sectors. This model demonstrates how digital inclusivity can extend the reach and impact of educational and support initiatives.

The project's commitment to continuous feedback and adaptation was a key factor in its success, illustrating the benefits of iterative processes in program development. By consistently aligning services with the evolving needs of users, the project maintained high levels of efficacy and satisfaction. This practice serves as a valuable strategy for policymakers. It emphasizes the importance of integrating regular assessment and feedback mechanisms to keep public programs responsive to changing needs.

By broadening its focus beyond those on Start-up Visas to include a wider array of newcomers, the project also shed light on the need for policy and program flexibility. This expansion suggests that designing adaptable policies could lead to more inclusive and effective support for diverse immigrant populations, potentially influencing funding allocation and program design to better address the varied challenges faced by all groups.

Furthermore, the project's success in building strong partnerships across different sectors illustrates the effectiveness of collaborative approaches in addressing complex issues. These multi-stakeholder collaborations enhance the scope and impact of initiatives, leveraging varied strengths and resources for more comprehensive solutions.



State of Skills: What Works for Newcomer Integration

Training delivered to newcomers on Canadian workplace culture was crucial for supporting the job search and integration of newcomers.

[Read Thematic Report](#)

In conclusion, the project not only tackled specific challenges faced by newcomers but also served as a model for future policy and practice. By showcasing the benefits of adaptable, digitally inclusive and collaboratively designed programs, it provides key insights for improving support systems for immigrants and other vulnerable groups in Canada and beyond.

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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