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**Sent:** Thursday, October 4, 2018 12:58 PM  
**To:** Engages-Mobilisation (WD/DEO) <wd.engages-mobilisation.deo@canada.ca>  
**Subject:** Western Canada Growth Strategy - Recommendations

Hello,

Please find attached S.U.C.C.E.S.S.'s recommendations regarding the Western Canada Growth Strategy.

Kind regards,

Amy

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**S.U.C.C.E.S.S.**

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**S.U.C.C.E.S.S.**

## **Western Canada Growth Strategy Recommendations**

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## Western Canada Growth Strategy Recommendations

With an aging population and greater labour market demands, immigration will be a key driver to sustaining economic growth into the future. From January 2017 to July 2018, 183,100 new immigrants and refugees who came to Canada intended to settle in a Western Canadian province. In the first seven months of 2018, 73,185 new immigrants and refugees came to Western Canada, which is 2% higher than the number who arrived during the same period in 2017. More than a third (39%) of new immigrants and refugees destined for Western Canada in the first seven months of 2018 intended to settle in British Columbia, 35% in Alberta, 13% in Saskatchewan, and 12% in Manitoba. With higher immigration targets into the future, the number of new immigrants and refugees to Western Canada is expected to increase.

Immigrants and refugees of all skill levels make important and valuable contributions to the growth and prosperity of Western Canada. However, they experience significant barriers to full economic participation; they continue to experience higher unemployment rates and lower levels of income as compared to those born in Canada and the population overall. The Conference Board of Canada indicates that to benefit from greater immigration levels into the future, the successful economic integration of immigrants is essential.

With Canada increasing its uptake of immigrants and refugees in the coming years, it is essential that Western Canada develop a robust regional growth strategy that maximizes the skills, education, innovation, and potential of immigrants and refugees.

As one of Canada's largest immigrant and refugee-serving agencies, S.U.C.C.E.S.S. submits the following recommendations for consideration in the development of the Western Canada Growth Strategy. These **five recommendations promote the economic participation of under-represented groups, particularly immigrant and refugees:**

- Invest in specialized entrepreneurship programs for immigrants and refugees
- Promote foreign credential recognition and alternative careers
- Support businesses to recruit and integrate immigrants and refugees into their workforces
- Develop and implement an immigrant attraction and retention strategy for Western Canada
- Support early settlement of highly skilled international students to promote future retention

### **Invest in specialized entrepreneurship programs for immigrants and refugees**

The promotion of innovation is a priority, and immigrants and refugees are significant contributors. As business owners and entrepreneurs across Western Canada age and retire, new business owners and entrepreneurs are needed in order to take over existing businesses, start new businesses, and stimulate development and growth. Immigrants and refugees from all immigration categories are entrepreneurial and have the potential to create jobs and generate significant investments in the economy if they are provided with the appropriate specialized supports.

Western Canada has an opportunity to re-invest in entrepreneurship programming for immigrants and refugees, which it has done in the past to impressive results. For example, from 2002 to 2010, S.U.C.C.E.S.S. delivered the *Gateway to Asia* project in partnership with Western Economic Diversification Canada. The Project supported immigrants who were interested in exporting Canadian goods to their country of origin by connecting them with Canadian manufacturers and suppliers and assisting with consulting, legal, and accounting services. It also supported Canadian businesses by connecting them with immigrants who had appropriate knowledge, skills, and connections to overseas markets. The value of export sales to China generated through project members was \$39 million and the value of Asian investment in British Columbia attributed to the project was \$15 million.



In another example, S.U.C.C.E.S.S.'s *Business Immigrant Integration Services (BIIS)*, which was funded by the Government of British Columbia from 2012 to 2015, provided comprehensive, linguistically and culturally-appropriate services to new immigrants and refugees to launch businesses. The project achieved impressive results over three years: 109 businesses started, 612 jobs created, and \$60 million+ generated in investment in British Columbia's economy.

There is a unique opportunity for Western Canada to build on successes and develop and fund innovative entrepreneurship programming to support new immigrants and refugees to develop, launch, and grow their business ventures.

### **Promote foreign credential recognition and alternative careers**

Foreign credential recognition is an on-going barrier that hinders the economic integration of immigrants and refugees. The longer these barriers remain, the more challenging it is for Western Canada to benefit from the high skills and talents of immigrants and refugees. There is a strong need for a more integrated approach to ensure that immigrants and refugees are able to understand, navigate, and successfully pursue the complex foreign credential recognition process. At the same time, there needs to be a strategy in place to support immigrants and refugees who want to pursue alternative careers that can still utilize their skills and talents.

There is an opportunity for Western Canada to take a stronger leadership role in this area. Foreign credential recognition and alternative careers should be taken into consideration in the development of the Western Canada Growth Strategy, particularly to ensure that the region has access to talented and skilled workers to meet labour market growth needs.

### **Support business to recruit and integrate immigrants and refugees into their workforces**

Many businesses in Western Canada recognize the benefits of diverse and inclusive workplaces. They are also experiencing significant labour shortages that are impacting their businesses' growth and, in some cases, long-term survival. However, a 2018 Business Development Bank of Canada (BDC) study indicates that only a small percentage of businesses would recruit immigrants as a strategy to mitigate labour shortages. Recruiting immigrants is one of the least used strategies, regardless of the size of the business. This study is another indicator that there is much more work to be done to educate and support businesses to recruit and integrate immigrants and refugees into their workforce.

To promote the economic participation of immigrants and refugees, businesses need to be supported with tools, resources, and services to recruit and integrate immigrants and refugees. This is particularly true for smaller businesses, which tend to have limited HR capacity. The Western Canada Growth Strategy should take into consideration the needs of Western Canadian businesses and include specific plans to support them to meet their labour growth needs through recruiting immigrants and refugees. Local Immigration Partnerships, Immigrant Employment Councils, and Settlement Service Agencies can play key roles in this area by offering expertise, experience, tools, and resources.

### **Develop and implement an immigrant attraction and retention strategy for Western Canada**

To ensure Western Canada has access to a skilled labour force and sufficient population growth to meet future labour market and economic needs, a multi-year immigrant attraction and retention strategy for Western Canada is needed. The strategy should: be tailored to specific groups including post-secondary international students in Canada and prospective immigrants who are still overseas; highlight positive economic opportunities and the supportive environment in Western Canada for employment and entrepreneurship; and include considerations for family integration, which is essential to promoting long-term retention. Immigrants and refugees are more likely to stay and invest their skills, talent, and capital if they and their families are supported to integrate into the community. This



includes taking into consideration factors such as settlement, housing, education, health and well-being, environment, and family and childcare supports, which are all factors in community integration.

As part of the strategy, pre-arrival settlement services could be leveraged to provide early information about Western Canada to immigrants who are preparing to move to Canada. For example, this includes up-to-date information about Western Canadian provinces including economic, cultural, and social environments, government and school systems, business opportunities, etc. This early information supports immigrants to better understand Western Canada and make informed settlement decisions about where they want to settle in Canada and be better prepared for life in Canada once they arrive. For example, there are opportunities to tap into the expertise of S.U.C.C.E.S.S.'s *Active Engagement & Integration Project*, one of the largest pre-arrival settlement programs with a global reach to clients from almost 150 countries.

### **Support early settlement of highly skilled international students to promote future retention**

There are over 120,000 post-secondary international students in Western Canada. For Western Canada to retain and benefit from the skills of international students, they need to be supported not only with labour market attachment but also with settlement and integration into local communities. These talented individuals are more likely to want to stay and contribute to the growth of Western Canada if they are supported to integrate earlier when they are still students.

The aforementioned immigrant attraction and retention strategy should include specific plans to retain post-secondary international students in Western Canada. In particular, this should include considerations for comprehensive settlement and integration services to increase their sense of belonging and attachment to Western Canada so that they are integrated earlier into the community and want to stay to contribute their skills and talents. At the same time, they should also be supported to navigate immigration pathways to permanent residency, and ultimately, Canadian citizenship.

### **About S.U.C.C.E.S.S.**

Founded in 1973, S.U.C.C.E.S.S. is one of the largest immigrant- and refugee-serving agencies in Canada with 30+ service locations across Metro Vancouver, in Northern BC, as well as overseas in China, South Korea, and Taiwan. S.U.C.C.E.S.S. delivers a comprehensive range of integrated services to more than 61,000 clients annually in the areas of settlement, language, employment and entrepreneurship, family, youth and seniors programming, health education, community development, affordable housing, and seniors care.