

Increasing Cultural Diversity in Canadian Nonprofits

Report 2

This report is the second in a three-part series about incorporating the skills of new immigrants and members of visible minorities into nonprofit organizations. The first report addressed the context that makes this process important. This report addresses challenges and best practices related to recruitment. The third and final report addresses the retention of new immigrants and members of visible minorities.

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Recruiting newcomer and visible minority talent: A clear imperative

In the HR Council's 2008 Labour Force Study, nearly half of employers who had undertaken recruitment activities in the year leading up to the survey said finding qualified candidates was "difficult" or "very difficult." Recruitment challenges affect many organizations working in many sectors. For this reason, many employers are beginning to invest in strategies for tapping into the full range of talent available in the Canadian workforce – especially new immigrants and members of visible minorities, both underutilized talent pools in the nonprofit sector. (See Report #1 in this series for more evidence of the pressures on the labour market.)

The first steps toward integrating the skills of new immigrants and members of visible minorities into the nonprofit sector are connecting with and recruiting members of these groups. Taking these first steps requires focused attention and investment. The lack of cultural diversity in the nonprofit sector today relative to the population at large (see Report #1) suggests that the inclusion of new immigrants and members of visible minorities is not simply happening on its own over time. This document summarizes some research on barriers to the recruitment of members of these groups – as well as best practices for overcoming these barriers.

Barriers to the recruitment of new immigrants and members of visible minorities

Employers outside the nonprofit sector have cited a number of challenges that may prevent them from hiring new immigrants.

Language. Language proficiency – not just basic competency, but a capacity for subtlety in English or French – tends to be the most commonly cited concern among employers considering new immigrant candidates. Notably, some studies have found a disparity between employers' and job-seekers' assessments of the challenge presented by a lack of language proficiency (with employers describing this as a serious issue and applicants believing their skills are adequate).

Foreign credentials. Assessing the quality and validity of skilled new immigrants' qualifications is a challenge for many employers. Lacking internal capacity for evaluating foreign credentials, firms often pay consultants or regulatory bodies for independent assessments. This cost works against candidates.

Cultural nuances. A study conducted by the Brampton Board of Trade found that employers expressed a sense that some new immigrant applicants were not sufficiently attuned to the norms and expectations of Canadian workplaces.

Economic conditions. During the recession following the economic crisis of late 2008, one study found that employers thought it was not the right time to make investments in greater diversity.

New immigrant and visible minority candidates, as well as labour market experts and other observers, indicate that other barriers may also be at work.

Lack of culturally sensitive processes and approaches. Some employers are not seen as doing enough to deliberately examine and counteract subtle biases that may be built into their recruiting processes.

Insistence on Canadian experience. A Statistics Canada study found a lack of Canadian experience to be the top barrier immigrants cited to their finding meaningful employment. One report argues that a need for Canadian experience may cloak discrimination; relevant experience, the report suggests, is a more appropriate requirement.

Lack of investment. Some studies have found that employers do not see new immigrant and visible minority talent as vital to the ongoing viability of their organizations and therefore do not invest adequately in recruitment initiatives.

Racialized discrimination. Because the employment outcomes of white or Caucasian immigrants tend to improve more quickly than those of visible minority immigrants, and because the employment outcomes of Canadian-born visible minorities (controlled for education and other factors) tend to lag behind the national average, racialized discrimination cannot be discounted as a feature of the Canadian labour market.

How does the nonprofit sector compare to other sectors?

To what extent do conditions within the nonprofit sector reflect or differ from conditions beyond the sector, as summarized above? The HR Council

posed some questions on recruitment to its network of employers and received 347 responses. Nonprofit employers echoed some of the main concerns that surfaced in the studies from beyond the nonprofit sector, and also noted some other issues.

Points of commonality between the nonprofit sector and other sectors

Language proficiency emerged as nonprofit employers' top barrier to recruiting new immigrant candidates. When nonprofit employers were asked to name difficulties they face when trying to recruit new immigrant employees, a plurality of about four in ten named candidates' lack of language proficiency. Similarly, when employers were asked to rate the magnitude of a number of potential barriers, language proficiency had the highest average score (3.4 out of 4).

A cluster of cultural issues were named as barriers to nonprofit organizations' recruitment of new immigrant talent. Substantial proportions of nonprofit employers cited applicants' lack of **understanding of the Canadian context** (23%), and lack of **Canadian experience** (19%) as barriers. 8% acknowledged that their own organizations' **lack of culturally sensitive hiring practices** may be a significant barrier to recruiting immigrants and members of visible minorities. (The fact that only eight per cent of nonprofit organizations are aware of subtle biases in hiring does not indicate that the problem is not more widespread.)

The difficulty of evaluating **foreign credentials** was a source of concern for some nonprofit employers – this issue received an average seriousness rating of 2.04 out of 4 – but the fact that only 12% of employers chose this from a list of possible barriers may suggest that credential assessment is not as big a problem for nonprofit organizations as it is for others. On the other hand, a larger proportion of employers (19%) cited a lack of qualified new immigrant and visible minority candidates as a reason for not hiring members of these groups; some credential-recognition problems might be buried in this response.

Lack of applicants: A point of difference

Notably, when reflecting on reasons why their organizations were not hiring more new immigrant and visible minority candidates, one in five employers in the nonprofit sector (19%) said they **did not receive applications from members of these groups**. This is an issue that does not emerge strongly in the literature from outside the nonprofit sector. The explanation may lie in geographic factors (nonprofit organizations' being situated in communities with little diversity), the small size of many nonprofits (which may tend to diminish their profile and their ability to publicize openings), or other factors.

The way forward: Best practices from within and beyond our sector

Roughly half (54%) of nonprofits report success in hiring and retaining new immigrants and members of visible minorities. About one in five (20%) have attempted to hire candidates from these groups but have experienced difficulty of some kind (either in attracting, hiring, or retaining the candidates). An additional 23% say they have not had occasion to hire members of these groups; the proportion giving this answer is higher (34%) among small organizations.

When nonprofit employers who have had success hiring new immigrants and visible minorities are asked to identify practices found in the literature that have helped them, the most commonly cited practices are:

- The elimination of subtle biases in the hiring process (37%)

- Internships and mentoring programs (32%)
- Providing information and pre-employment training to candidates who are new immigrants and members of visible minorities (19%)

In addition to these efforts at smoothing employees' transition into the workplace, HRSDC recommends a number of steps aimed at simply connecting with a wider range of applicants. These include posting ads in a wider variety of places; working with immigrant settlement agencies; and networking through organizations and events specifically geared toward immigrant and visible minority job-seekers.

Although all organizations operate with finite resources, it is more difficult for nonprofit organizations (especially small ones, which constitute the bulk of the sector) to find the means to invest in recruitment practices that will help to integrate new immigrant and visible minority talent into the nonprofit sector. Nonprofit employers named a number of supports that would make it more feasible for them to increase the diversity of their workforces. These supports included:

- Help with language training and communication
- Canadian cultural training programs for newcomers to help them adjust to Canadian workplaces
- Assistance with internship, apprenticeship, and bridging programs
- Help developing culturally sensitive recruitment processes

1. <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/080402/dq080402a-eng.htm>

2. <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/071204/dq071204a-eng.htm>

A NOTE ON DISCUSSING IMMIGRANTS AND MEMBERS OF VISIBLE MINORITIES TOGETHER

New immigrants and members of visible minorities are two distinct but overlapping groups. According to the 2006 census, members of visible minorities (defined by Statistics Canada as "persons, other than Aboriginal people, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour") represented 16.2 %¹ of the Canadian population, while immigrants, people born outside Canada (excluding temporary foreign workers and work- or student-visa holders), represented 19.8 %² of the population. New immigrants are defined as anyone who immigrated to Canada in the last five years. This document discusses new immigrants and members of visible minorities in combination because the HR Council has found that both these groups are underutilized pools of talent in the sector. Although there are important distinctions between them, their labour market challenges are interlinked to a great extent.

HR Council for the Nonprofit Sector

The HR Council for the Nonprofit Sector (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.