



2009 Employer Summit: Skilled Immigrants, Opportunity and the Evolving Workforce

Wednesday, April 08, 2009

On March 31 and April 1, the Hire Immigrants Ottawa (HIO) Employer Council of Champions hosted a summit on the theme: Skilled Immigrants, Opportunity and the Evolving Workforce.

The summit focused on exploring how barriers facing skilled immigrants can be overcome and how this burgeoning population can successfully integrate into the Ottawa region's workforce.

The summit was attended by senior executives and human resources managers from private and public sector organizations, political leaders, agencies serving immigrants, community stakeholders, immigrants and the media.

Activities of day one included a keynote address delivered by the Hon. Jean Augustine, Ontario's Fairness Commissioner, who spoke about the work being done with Ontario's regulated professions to ensure that *everyone* gets fair treatment when seeking registration or licensing. A panel of experts provided important information on projected skills shortages, resources for foreign credential assessment, the retention and advancement of internationally trained individuals, and the importance of developing cultural competencies in the workplace.

On the second day of the summit, Trevor Wilson, a Global Human Equity Strategist, delivered a dynamic and provocative keynote address. Speaking on the topic *Immigrants and the War for Talent in Tough Economic Times*, he emphasized the business case for hiring skilled immigrants and the missed opportunities if employers were to overlook this diverse and highly educated section of the labour force. A panel of employers shared their innovative practices in recruiting and integrating immigrants into their workplaces. The climax of the morning was the presentation of the 2009 HIO Awards. The University of Ottawa and Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC) received HIO Awards for outstanding practices in recruitment of skilled immigrants.

Since last year's summit, progress has been made by a number of employers. Current ECC employers report:

- increased participation in networking events that connect employers with skilled immigrants from a wide variety of sectors;
- in-depth assessment and adjustment of human resources processes and practices to
- enhance the capacity to access a diverse talent pool; and
- increased participation in mentoring and internship programs to provide immigrants with an opportunity to obtain work experience and new skills.

Future plans for the HIO initiative include:

- establishing a new working group with the biotechnology sector;
- delivering cross-cultural competency workshops to employers;
- increasing engagement with the federal public service, the region's largest employer; and
- Expanding the HIO model to communities in Eastern Ontario.