

Unlocking Our Talent Potential



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Today, businesses across all sectors are threatened by a lack of available talent, skills gaps, and greater competition for skilled workers. In the first quarter of 2022, Alberta's unemployment rate was 5.9 per cent – almost a percentage point lower than our natural rate of unemployment. While low unemployment may appear positive, a lack of equilibrium in our employment rates underlines the labour shortages many businesses are facing. With a record 88,000 vacant jobs in Alberta, we simply don't have enough people available to work – and natural market changes are unlikely to resolve a challenge of this magnitude.

We're on the right track – ATB Financial indicates that in September 2022 nearly 10,000 people relocated to Alberta from elsewhere in Canada – a higher rate of migration than anywhere else in the country. Notably, those arriving are largely in their mid-20s, increasing our vibrancy and helping strengthen Alberta's economy long-term. This impressive level of relocation will require a renewed focus on talent retention as well.

To build on Alberta's momentum, the provincial government has invested \$2.6 million into the Alberta is Calling advertising campaign. Launching in major Canadian cities such as Toronto and Vancouver, the campaign focuses on attracting talent by highlighting Alberta's affordability, lifestyle, and career opportunities.

Addressing Alberta's talent gap requires sustained focus, collaboration, and new perspectives. Identifying innovative ideas for growing our talent pool, addressing skills gaps, and strengthening our talent pipeline requires diverse groups to come together. As a convener and catalyst for business, the Calgary Chamber has worked alongside our members to address this challenge. Convening thought leaders from business, speaking directly with young Calgarians, and informed by consultation with local businesses, we have developed policy recommendations and tangible solutions to some of the most pressing issues concerning talent. These recommendations provide a framework for addressing the talent crisis today and ensuring our resilience in the future.





FOREWORD

Refining our immigration policies to grow our talent pool is one of four sections of *Unlocking Our Talent Potential*, a set of recommendations created by business, for business. These recommendations are intended to advance the conversation and spur increased collaboration on talent and labour shortages in Calgary. *Unlocking Our Talent Potential* tables creative ideas and opportunities that all levels of government can capitalize on to strengthen our talent pipeline and eliminate gaps experienced by many businesses – large and small.

This section of *Unlocking Our Talent Potential* examines the impact our immigration system and processes have on talent attraction. Exploring both our challenges and opportunities, recommendations have been developed that focus on refining

our immigration policies as a means of alleviating our talent shortfall. To develop the recommendations contained within, the Calgary Chamber convened a policy council with thought leaders from businesses across several sectors, post-secondary institutions, childcare providers, immigration law firms, recruitment firms, professional services, and small business owners. We spoke directly with young Calgarians and, consulted local businesses.

We look forward to working closely with government to implement the recommendations identified in *Unlocking Our Talent Potential*, and maintaining a focus on collaboration with community and government organizations on achieving our common goal of ensuring Calgary remains a top destination for talent globally.



OUR VISION

We envision a diverse Calgary that attracts global talent from all backgrounds, enabling our city and businesses to have the people needed to thrive in the economy of today and tomorrow.

OUR CHALLENGE

Canada's worsening labour shortage is muting the levels of optimism amongst Canadian businesses. According to the Q3 2022 Business Outlook Survey, 31.5 per cent of Canadian businesses are concerned about labour shortages. Given businesses impacted by labour shortages are 65 per cent more likely to be low-growth companies, it is easy to understand why many Canadian firms are feeling bearish about their business' outlook. To this end, examining how we can most effectively grow Canada's labour force is critical to improving businesses' economic outlook.

Representing almost 100 per cent of labour force growth nationally, immigration can be leveraged as a potential solution to Canada's growing and sustained labour shortage. Yet, fewer than one-quarter of Canadian businesses believe the immigration system serves their needs well, citing complex rules, application processing delays, and the cost associated with navigating the system.

Compounding these issues are burdensome and restrictive immigration policies for prospective newcomers. Existing programs such as the Canadian Express Entry System favour highly skilled workers, leaving newcomers seeking opportunities in lower-wage positions reliant on provincial programs such as the Alberta Opportunity Stream.

However, restrictive requirements around the need for prior work experience, language skills, and career ineligibility mean these programs are only available to a select few. This, despite a massive and growing need for workers in the arts, entertainment, accommodation, and food services sector.

Once in Canada, newcomers continue to face systemic issues preventing the recognition of the credentials and experience earned abroad. In addition, newcomers face several key challenges to finding employment in Canada, including difficulty obtaining Canadian work experience and a perceived bias against hiring newcomers. To this end, even when a newcomer is suitable for a job, employers are often unable to move forward with them, and in some cases, choose not to move forward with them.

Many Albertans recognize these challenges. Data collected by Leger suggests 50 per cent of Albertans see improving the transfer of credentialing from other provinces and countries as a solution to current labour shortages. Leveraging immigration as a solution requires refining our immigration policies to better serve the needs of businesses and newcomers.

Labour shortages continue to concern business owners



○ Q3

○ Q2





Businesses impacted by labour shortages are 65% more likely to be low-growth companies.

OUR OPPORTUNITY

During our policy council session, businesses stressed the importance of immigration in alleviating labour shortages. Canada is already making headway in this regard, with the Government of Canada setting ambitious immigration targets to welcome over 700,000 economic immigrants by 2024. Research by Statistics Canada supports this focus, with historical data showing immigration accounted for 84 per cent of labour force growth during the 2010s.

Alberta and Calgary are well-positioned to be leaders in leveraging immigration. Calgary businesses have developed innovative immigration solutions and the provincial government provides a variety of support to immigrant services organizations.

As a result, businesses and newcomers already have a wealth of resources at their disposal. However, there is room for improvement. Policy council participants noted that the Province, the City, and businesses must continue to champion much-needed reforms.

Working collaboratively to address systemic issues in our immigration system will help ensure businesses have access to the talent they require to grow and succeed over the long term. We need to be forward-looking as we address these issues, proposing solutions that create an immigration system that benefits everyone today, and tomorrow.

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Recommendation 1

Reform eligibility requirements within federal and provincial immigration programs

Our ability to attract talent through immigration is dependent on the effectiveness of our immigration programs. Ensuring these programs' policies and requirements are flexible enough to enable the immigration Canadian businesses require is essential to remedying labour shortages.

PROVINCIAL

Expand eligibility for [Alberta Advantage Immigration Programs](#) by reducing the required work experience to six months within Canada, allowing post-graduation work permit holders to apply to positions unrelated to their field of study, and expanding eligibility to include open work permit holders.

PROVINCIAL

Consolidate the three existing entrepreneur immigration programs within the [Alberta Advantage Immigration program](#) into a single Alberta Entrepreneur Stream with expanded eligibility, similar to B.C.'s [Entrepreneur Immigration program](#).

FEDERAL

Create a limited-eligibility family sponsorship program – premised on the economic benefits associated with family re-unification – whereby siblings and extended family members of Canadian permanent residents can be sponsored to immigrate to Canada.

PROVINCIAL

Within the provincial [Alberta Opportunity Stream](#), review and modify eligibility requirements to increase the pool of potential candidates by ensuring the list of eligible occupations is representative of labour market needs, reducing the work experience requirement to six months in Canada, and allowing eligible job offers to include part-time work or a contract of six months or more.

PROVINCIAL

Raise awareness of the [Alberta Rural Renewal Stream](#) amongst rural communities and provide tailored support to communities interested in leveraging the program to streamline applications.

FEDERAL

Create a complimentary [Express Entry Program](#) aimed at facilitating the immigration of workers with [National Occupation Classification](#) (NOC) codes of C or D, based on national labour market needs.



Recommendation 2

Empower businesses to leverage immigration in talent

Empowering businesses to leverage immigration means equipping them with the information and resources needed to successfully navigate complex programs and policies.

MUNICIPAL

Work with community partners to group sponsor immigration applications for newcomers seeking employment opportunities, reducing pre-existing immigration wait times, and facilitating access to talent for early-stage companies.

PROVINCIAL / FEDERAL

Create a “Representative Portal” that allows businesses or third parties to apply to immigration programs on behalf of a prospective applicant.

FEDERAL

Expand on Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada’s existing virtual learning sessions by offering monthly information sessions to businesses that focus on providing information on immigration programs, eligibility requirements, and the application process.

PROVINCIAL

Consult with Alberta-based businesses to better understand the tools and resources organizations need to successfully leverage provincial immigration programs.

FEDERAL

Support small and medium businesses seeking to hire temporary foreign workers by reducing or removing the fee associated with processing a Labour Market Impact Assessment.

Recommendation 3

Reduce employment barriers and create meaningful employment opportunities for newcomers

Alberta’s economic growth is predicated on providing newcomers with meaningful economic opportunities once they arrive. With the right support, Alberta can become Canada’s destination of choice for newcomers seeking job opportunities.

PROVINCIAL

Leveraging the Fairness for Newcomers Office, convene Alberta’s professional associations and colleges to identify and reduce barriers regarding the testing and administration of Canadian credential equivalencies for foreign-trained professionals and skilled workers.

PROVINCIAL

Direct Alberta Settlement and Integration Program funding toward organizations stewarding social infrastructure projects and affordable housing developments – such as immediate-term and mixed-income housing – to support newcomers who have just arrived.

FEDERAL

Demonstrate leadership through a review of obstacles to foreign credential and experience recognition within the Canadian Public Service, identifying solutions and paths to improve employment opportunities for newcomers.

PROVINCIAL

Leveraging funding available through the federal Foreign Credential Recognition Program, expand the remit of the provincial government’s International Qualifications Assessment Service (IQAS) to include evaluation and certification of the skills and knowledge newcomers have acquired through work and life experiences, similar to the Queensland government’s recognition of prior learning program.

FEDERAL

Institutionalize a program that will provide a path to permanent residency for undocumented newcomers who are working in, and contributing to, Canadian communities.





Better Together.

The Calgary Chamber exists to help businesses thrive. As the conveyor and catalyst for a vibrant, inclusive, and prosperous business community, the Chamber works to build strength and resilience among its members and position Calgary as a magnet for talent, diversification, and opportunity. As an independent, non-profit, non-partisan organization founded and funded by our members, we build on our 131-year history to serve and advocate for businesses of all sizes, in all sectors, across the city.



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