

Unlocking Our Talent Potential



WINTER 2022



Recommendations for government to support businesses in attracting, retaining, and developing talent

FOREWORD

Unlocking Our Talent Potential was created by business, for business. 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.

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. Bringing together a diversity of participants, we have endeavoured to ensure our recommendations reflect the diversity of Calgary’s business community and work towards a more equitable and just economy and society.

Recognizing the ongoing work of countless community and government organizations focused on a common goal of ensuring Calgary remains a top destination for talent globally, we look forward to continuing our engagement with businesses, associations,

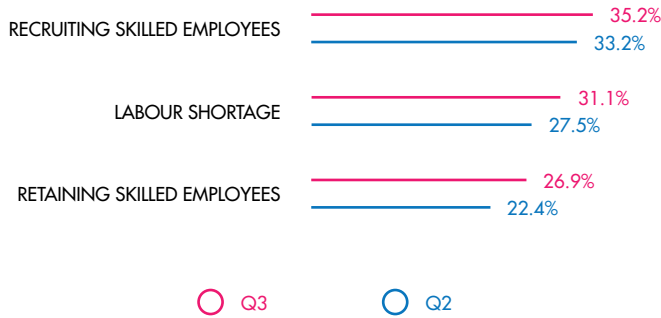
partners, and other stakeholders because we know that growing the talent and labour pool requires coordination and collaboration across all aspects of our economy.

With the release of *Unlocking Our Talent Potential*, the Calgary Chamber will work closely with all levels of government to adopt and implement the recommendations proposed within. Our advocacy will be in service of our common interests – strengthening Canada’s long-term productivity, building an inclusive and diverse workforce, and developing skillsets that match the evolving needs of our economy.

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Labour shortages continue to concern business owners



Our lens

At the Chamber, we are 100% member founded and funded, and we operate with our members’ best interests at heart. Our members drive our public policy initiatives, which are far-reaching in both influence and impact. The Calgary Chamber of Commerce provides perspective and advocates for changes to policies affecting the business community. Calgary is driven by businesses, and the Chamber is here to help businesses succeed.

As we look into the future, we know that Calgary’s economy needs to innovate, attract and keep new talent, and grow our city to become a thriving economic hub. Therefore, all policy should:



- 1 Provide certainty and stability for businesses, facilitating economic growth and investment.
- 2 Incorporate the principles of inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility, and encourage economic participation with specific consideration for equity-deserving groups.
- 3 Encourage and enable collaboration among all orders of government, and leverage tools to realize the full potential for economic growth.

Our priorities

Based on input from our policy council participants, and informed by consultation with young Calgarians and local businesses, four priorities emerged as critical to strengthening Calgary’s talent pipeline:

- 1 **Investing in People, Culture, and Infrastructure**
Investing in our people, culture, and infrastructure will create a Calgary that is a magnet for talent, known for our quality of life, cultural scene, youthful energy, and vibrancy.
- 2 **Strengthening Calgary’s Brand and Reputation**
Our brand and reputation must better reflect the diversity of our city – and the people in it – to attract new talent and investment for years to come.
- 3 **Building an Inclusive and Values-Driven Workforce**
In a competitive labour market, we must demonstrate leadership in inclusion, diversity, equity and accessibility – from childcare to mental health.
- 4 **Refining Our Immigration Policies to Grow Our Talent Pool**
By leveraging and creating flexibility in our immigration policies, we can attract talent while alleviating labour shortages.





Unlocking our talent potential

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.



OUR VISION

We envision a vibrant Calgary, known for our quality of life, cultural scene, and youthful energy, and are leaders in creating the communities in which people seek to live, work, and play.

OUR CHALLENGE

Calgary’s focus on talent attraction is evident through campaigns such as *Live Tech*, *Love Life* and our delegation to Toronto’s *Collision*. While these initiatives are bearing fruit, Calgary also faces challenges to retaining and developing the talent that is already within the city. Investment in the Calgary of tomorrow will prevent the city from becoming stagnant, ensuring we can attract and retain talent long-term.

Youth between the ages of 15 and 29 account for 18 per cent of the city’s total population, making young Calgarians a key workforce demographic. However, this group has also been the slowest-growing demographic over the last 20 years, emphasizing the need to retain the youth we currently have. To better understand the issues impacting youth retention, we met directly with a group of young Calgarians. They told us they are looking for greater vibrancy and diversity in arts, entertainment, and cultural experiences.

The stalling of the new Event Centre was cited as causing entertainment experiences and concerts to bypass Calgary. For some, it is seen as an indication of the City and business’ ability to work together to invest in Calgary’s long-term future.

Intra-city visitation will also be key to our success. The city’s different quadrants often operate in isolation due to sprawl, and more can be done to incent visitation across quadrants. Several factors contribute to this including access to and cost of public transportation, real and perceived public

safety concerns, the cost of parking in the downtown core, and a lack of awareness about events occurring across the city.

Retaining talent also necessitates that we prioritize talent development. Polling by Leger shows 37 per cent of Albertans value opportunities for professional development and growth in their jobs. To retain employees and prepare them for emerging economic trends, further investments are needed in work-integrated learning, reskilling and upskilling programs, and micro-credentialing. While support for these programs is high, their success in creating an agile and employable workforce is dependent on awareness and recognition. Research shows that only one-quarter of Canadians have heard of micro-credentials and 59 per cent of employers were unclear or not familiar with them at all. Raising awareness of talent development options among prospective employees and employers will be critical to leveraging existing and future programming.



37% of Albertans value opportunities for professional development and growth in their jobs.



OUR OPPORTUNITY

Investing in the infrastructure and culture that will help retain and develop Calgary’s talent is an important step toward addressing labour shortages. These investments must be strategic in nature, prioritizing what Calgarians want and need from their city now, and in the future.

During our policy council session, and in conversation with young Calgarians, we heard support for investments made to date. Funding to transform the Arts Commons, the Glenbow Museum, construction of the BMO Centre Expansion, and the creation and revitalization of key communities are all examples of infrastructure investments that will bring vibrancy to our city.

Additionally, with skill vacancies accounting for \$25 billion in unrealized economic value nationally, Calgary is pursuing opportunities in the skills-based economy. The Calgary Chamber, Calgary Economic Development, and all seven of Calgary’s post-secondary institutions are collaborating to address work-integrated learning. Several organizations are leveraging the Opportunity Calgary Investment Fund to support work-integrated

learning initiatives, providing reskilling and upskilling programs like EDGE UP, and working with community partners such as CityXLab to drive research on ensuring Calgary maintains an adaptable workforce.

Supporting this work are Calgary’s educational institutions – the University of Calgary is a principal provider of continued learning programs locally, offering over 1,200 courses and seminars and over 45 in-demand certificate programs. These types of initiatives are starting to strengthen our talent pipeline by making Calgary an ideal place to live, work, and play. However, governments and businesses must continue collaborating on investments that excite people about the future of our city.



Recommendation 1.1

Invest in infrastructure that positions Calgary as the destination of choice for talent

While significant work is underway to enhance and modernize Calgary’s infrastructure, further investments are required. Public transit, affordable housing, and cultural and sporting centres are just a few examples of infrastructure investments that will contribute to our city’s appeal to talent.

MUNICIPAL

Ensure affordable housing options are available to all income levels by providing more flexibility in municipal zoning, allowing more people to call Calgary home.

MUNICIPAL

Review and update the City’s Cycling Strategy, prioritizing new bikeway projects and improvements based on consultation with Calgarians and informed by best practices from other municipalities.

MUNICIPAL / PROVINCIAL

Work collaboratively to fund community development and regentrification projects, such as the West End.

MUNICIPAL

With a focus on cost-effectiveness, move forward with the construction of the Green Line, transit to the airport, and shared transportation to the Rocky Mountains.

MUNICIPAL / PROVINCIAL

Work with post-secondary institutions locally and nationally to move, open, or expand campuses and residences within Calgary’s downtown core.

MUNICIPAL / PROVINCIAL / FEDERAL

Collaborate amongst all orders of government to unlock funding and supports to advance Calgary’s Event Centre and the Culture + Entertainment District.

Recommendation 1.2

Invest in community vibrancy including sports and entertainment

Calgary’s vibrancy must be a competitive advantage. Investments in attracting and promoting arts, entertainment, and cultural events are critical to ensuring Calgary has a diversity of experiences.

MUNICIPAL

Leveraging Calgary’s business improvement areas (BIAs) and various community organizations, create a city-wide events calendar to promote arts, entertainment, and cultural experiences across the city.

MUNICIPAL

Leveraging funding available through the Government of Alberta’s Community Initiatives Program, identify and attract major sporting events to Calgary.

MUNICIPAL

Provide free transit access in the city during major events, such as Stampede, music festivals, and major sporting events to encourage inner-city visitation and increase accessibility for people living across the city.

MUNICIPAL / PROVINCIAL

Invest in sporting infrastructure to advance Calgary’s position as a hub for recreational and elite sport, including a downtown recreational facility, and investments in WinSport and the Olympic Oval.

Recommendation 1.3

Position Calgary as a talent leader through investments in skills development

Workforce development is critical to talent retention. Investments that support Alberta’s education system and promote alternative means of acquiring employable skills ensure Albertans can meet the rapidly changing needs of our economy.

MUNICIPAL

Support ongoing work to enhance Calgary’s labour force adaptability by providing grants and bursaries to research organizations, such as CityXLab.

PROVINCIAL

Evaluate the creation of a “Continuous Learning” tax incentive for businesses that provide their employees with opportunities for professional development and upskilling.

PROVINCIAL

Leveraging lessons learned from the existing Micro-Credential Pilot Program, commit to multi-year funding to support Alberta educational institutions in delivering micro-credential courses.

MUNICIPAL

Leverage municipal invest funds, such as the Opportunity Calgary Investment Fund, to support businesses seeking to provide Calgarians with work-integrated learning opportunities.

PROVINCIAL

Utilize labour market studies to identify current skill and competency gaps in Alberta’s workforce, aligning new funding to educational programs anticipated to fill workforce skills gaps.

Recommendation 1.4

Leverage businesses as talent developers

Businesses are uniquely positioned to develop talent to meet their needs. Recognizing this, governments must collaborate with the business community to support them in developing their workforce.

MUNICIPAL

Develop a City-run municipal student work experience program, similar to the Alberta Municipal Internship Program, or the Federal Student Work Experience Program, to promote student workforce participation and training within Calgary.

PROVINCIAL

Extend support for businesses hiring and training talent by re-opening the training component of the Alberta Jobs Now program.

PROVINCIAL

Create a tuition credit for students participating in the work-integrated learning programs offered by their post-secondary institution.

MUNICIPAL

Support the Regional Work-Integrated Learning Pilot as a collaborative approach that leverages post-secondary institutions to support industry adoption of work-integrated learning.

PROVINCIAL

Create a “Business-to-Government Secondment” program that facilitates talent exchanges between businesses and government, across sectors, to promote skills training and sharing of best practices across sectors.





PRIORITY 2 STRENGTHENING CALGARY’S REPUTATION AND BRAND

In a study examining youth mobility in Alberta, participants estimated that around 40% of Albertans worked directly in oil and gas—six times higher than reality.

OUR VISION

We envision Calgary’s story shared around the world, attracting talent and businesses that aspire to invest in a city where the future is bright and the possibilities for growth and prosperity are the best in the world because of the economic opportunities and quality of life.

OUR CHALLENGE

With many Canadians facing the consequences of inflation, Alberta and Calgary are turning heads as places where people can enjoy an affordable and high-quality of life. While our marketing campaigns are excelling at promoting these advantages, some branding challenges hamper our progress. To understand the impact these challenges have on talent, both regional and local narratives must be examined.

Regionally, Alberta is struggling with stereotypes that exacerbate a misperception that the province is counter to many Canadians’ common goals. Public opinion research indicates that upwards of 50 per cent of Canadians wouldn’t feel comfortable living in the province. Our political narrative has often been associated with anger and frustration, resulting in those outside of Alberta holding unfavourable views of Albertans and our political environment.

Locally, Calgary is struggling with a perceived lack of economic and social diversification. As a province synonymous with oil and gas, many people believe their economic futures in the city are reliant on the energy sector.

During our policy council, businesses expressed that while Calgary’s brand acknowledges the traditional importance of our natural resources, it risks perpetuating a myth there is a lack of diverse economic opportunities in the city. The perception that the city is focused on a single industry may explain why many Calgarians have chosen to pursue economic opportunities elsewhere.

Another worrisome trend has been the perception that Calgary has not been diverse or inclusive. In a survey of Calgarians’ outlooks and attitudes, 82 per cent of those aged 18 to 24, and 68 per cent of those aged 25 and older, believe Calgary needs to address racism and discrimination. To attract the talent businesses require, Calgary must be welcoming and inclusive – and this must be reflected in our brand.

To attract the talent businesses require, Calgary must be welcoming and inclusive—and this must be reflected in our brand.

OUR OPPORTUNITY

How Alberta and Calgary are perceived is critical to attracting and retaining talent. Effectively addressing our labour crisis requires businesses, governments, and citizens work together to develop and amplify narratives that not only attract people to visit but motivate them to stay. These narratives must dispel misperceptions, accurately depicting the Alberta and Calgary of today: we are inclusive, diverse, opportunity-ready, and future-focused.

Locally, these narratives already exist. But they need to be amplified. Calgary is progressive both socially and economically. Our city is a regional leader on climate change, setting ambitious climate goals and developing strategies to meet them. Our energy sector is the largest investor in clean technology nationally, creating many diverse career opportunities throughout the province. We are Canada’s third-most diverse major city, with 54 per cent of newcomers to Calgary arriving from outside of Canada. A focus on economic diversification is driving a burgeoning tech

scene, bringing in \$433 million in venture capital investment and positioning us as a top 20 fintech hub globally.

Amplifying these stories beyond regional echo chambers will attract the talent we require to succeed. However, this is only possible when businesses, governments, and other stakeholders are unified in the story we tell about Alberta and Calgary’s future.

We are Canada’s third-most diverse major city, with 54% of newcomers to Calgary arriving from outside of Canada.



Recommendation 2.1

Develop a unified vision and narrative for Calgary, working with businesses and other partners to promote Calgary’s story nationally and internationally

Calgary’s long-term success hinges on our ability to align our reality with others’ perceptions. We must develop a cohesive story that shares our diversity, optimism, forward-looking mentality, and focus on sustainability nationally and internationally.

MUNICIPAL

Convene City officials, the Calgary Chamber of Commerce, Calgary Economic Development, Tourism Calgary, Invest Alberta, and other contributors to Calgary’s story to review opportunities to align on messaging and strengthen collaborative efforts to articulate and amplify Calgary’s story.

PROVINCIAL

Create an inter-governmental marketing committee – comprised of Invest Alberta, Travel Alberta, the Alberta Chambers of Commerce, regional tourism agencies, regional economic development agencies, and other levels of government – to review opportunities to align on messaging and strengthen collaborative efforts to articulate and amplify Alberta’s story.

MUNICIPAL

Create a Chief Brand Officer (CBO) position within City Administration, responsible for coordinating and managing Calgary’s brand across all sectors and communities.

FEDERAL

Within Innovation, Science, and Economic Development (ISED) Canada’s Strategic Innovation Fund (SIF), remove advertising as an ineligible expense for Canadian firms looking to grow or expand their business internationally.

Recommendation 2.2

Create an authentic Calgary brand by engaging local businesses and Calgarians in telling the story of our city

Attracting talent to Calgary requires authentic messaging that incorporates the stories and experiences of local businesses and Calgarians. Highlighting those who have chosen our city as home shares in promotion efforts, providing prospective talent first-hand insights into what it means to be Calgarian.

MUNICIPAL

Encourage local businesses to support City marketing efforts by offering in-kind incentives.

PROVINCIAL

Within the Jobs, Economy, and Innovation portfolio, create a community marketing grant program that supports Alberta businesses in developing community-driven marketing campaigns that promote the benefits of living and working in their regions.

PROVINCIAL

Leveraging lessons learned from the ONLYLYON Ambassadors program, and in collaboration with Invest Alberta’s Global Teams, establish an Alberta Ambassadors network that leverages Albertans at home and abroad in promoting the province as a place to live, work, and play.





Recommendation 2.3

Market the Alberta and Calgary of today, focusing on what makes us a desirable place to live, work, and play

Countering misperceptions about our province and city necessitates we focus on what makes Calgary a desirable place to live, work, and play. To do this, we must market the Alberta and Calgary of today, highlighting our diversity, affordability, optimism, and open-mindedness.

MUNICIPAL

Create a marketing campaign focused on highlighting Calgary’s cultural advantages across the city, including investments in arts and entertainment spaces and the revitalization of community spaces.

PROVINCIAL

Extend the ‘Alberta is Calling’ campaign in major cities across Canada.

FEDERAL

Create an additional Prairies Canada funding program focused on providing businesses with the capital needed to attract regional and national talent of all skill levels, including advertising costs associated with hiring.

PROVINCIAL

Convene officials from Jobs and Economy, Innovation and Technology, Labour and Immigration, Travel Alberta, and regional technology companies to design and execute a marketing campaign that brings awareness to Alberta’s diversification, including our growing tech scene.

PROVINCIAL

Leverage lessons learned from the Government of B.C.’s Small Business Spotlights program, identify opportunities for the Government of Alberta and municipalities to collaborate on initiatives that amplify employment opportunities with small and medium-sized businesses across the province.



OUR VISION

We envision an inclusive Calgary, offering prospective talent the opportunity to work for organizations aligned with their values and in an environment where work-life balance is taken to heart.

OUR CHALLENGE

The pandemic has caused several fundamental changes across the workforce, including an emerging dialogue around the rise of values-driven employees. Today, organizations seeking talent have a competitive advantage if they embrace inclusion, equity, diversity, and accessibility (IDEA) and offer compelling total value packages (TVPs) to their employees. Research supports these trends, showing upwards of 61 per cent of workers now choose their jobs based on their beliefs and values, with nearly one-third believing comprehensive benefits are as important as salary.

The rise of the values-driven employee means many workers now expect organizations to embrace IDEA and meaningfully engage equity-deserving groups within their workforce. This is to the benefit of businesses, with research suggesting an emphasis on IDEA leads to higher retention rates, more innovation, and increased profits. Despite this, issues such as a lack of buy-in from leadership or reluctance to organizational change mean many organizations continue to underinvest in the component parts of IDEA, such as labour market integration – an approach that ensures equity-deserving groups have meaningful employment opportunities and are set up for success in their roles. As a result, equity-deserving groups continue to struggle with barriers to employment, such as language skills and perceived workplace fit.

Illustrating the impact underinvestment has, research has shown that diverse employees are less likely to join a workplace that they perceive to be alienating. With employees seeking organizations that are aligned with

their values, a business’ total value package (TVP) – the benefits it offers to its employees – is critical to attracting and retaining talent. Post-pandemic, three elements are emerging as essential to a competitive TVP: hybrid work, childcare, and mental health support. Since the pandemic, hybrid work has surged in popularity. Businesses that would prefer to see employees return to the office full-time are seeing increased resistance, with research from January 2022 suggesting that upwards of 85 per cent of employees would prefer to work virtually at least two to three days per week.

Childcare remains another essential benefit, especially amongst working parents. Many working parents have redesigned their lives to be more available to their children, considering childcare benefits a top priority as a result. Experts agree that offering generous parental leave and flexible work options will go further towards retaining top senior talent than other traditional workplace perks.

Mental health supports are another highly sought-after benefit. During the pandemic, many Canadians experienced negative mental health consequences. Today, over 500,000 Canadians miss work due to mental illness every week, resulting in a direct impact on talent retention. In one survey, upwards of 20 per cent of respondents said they voluntarily left their previous job for mental health reasons.



61% of workers now choose their jobs based on their beliefs and values.



OUR OPPORTUNITY

For businesses to attract and retain the talent they need to grow, embracing the rise of the values-driven employee is now a strategic imperative. Embracing this trend requires businesses recognize the benefits meaningful action on IDEA and comprehensive TVPs will bring.

In a competitive labour market, businesses must embrace IDEA as essential to their long-term success.

The Bank of Canada has found that organizations that offer equitable access to the labour market for equity-deserving groups can increase the size of their labour force in addition to their competitive advantage. Alberta is already a strong supporter of IDEA, with the province consistently ranked highly across the country nationally for charitable contributions, volunteering, and participating in community events. Furthermore, companies that utilize benefits as a strategic recruiting tool are reporting above-average employee retention and better overall company

performance. Research supports this, with a survey on job satisfaction showing that 92 per cent of employees see benefits as important to their overall job satisfaction.

During our policy council session, we heard that while many Calgary organizations are embracing these trends, there are still opportunities to improve. Participants stressed the importance of Calgary organizations demonstrating leadership in IDEA and TVPs, believing that by doing so we can become synonymous amongst talent for our progressive and inclusive work culture.

80% of employees see inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility as important when choosing an employer, with 39% indicating they would leave their current position to work for a more inclusive employer.

Recommendation 3.1

Address ongoing challenges to the delivery and accessibility of affordable childcare

Affordable, accessible, and high-quality childcare is critical to parents being able to rejoin the workforce, thereby facilitating high labour force participation. The Canada – Alberta Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement is a landmark step forward, however the changing economic landscape including record inflation and labour shortage, as well as the ongoing lack of clarity presents significant hurdles for many operators. As Alberta works to attract and retain talent – and young workers in particular – we must ensure competitiveness between other jurisdictions.

- MUNICIPAL

Within the City’s Greater Downtown Plan, prioritize the creation of additional childcare spaces, collaborating with all orders of government to ensure existing and new spaces remain affordable.
- PROVINCIAL

Build upon the recently announced enrolment capacity expansion to include financial benefits for educators seeking to obtain ECE Level 2 and 3, and include employer-paid vacation time paid out per paycheque.
- PROVINCIAL

Amalgamate Early Childhood Educator Recovery and Retention Grant Agreements to require one agreement per organization, rather than per site, reducing the administrative and reporting burden for organizations with multiple facilities.
- PROVINCIAL

Allow new and existing private childcare providers access to the Space Creation Grant to meet waitlist and accessibility demands.
- PROVINCIAL / FEDERAL

Allow for operational expenses to be included in cost control framework or as top-ups for operators, allowing organizations to absorb new auditing and reporting requirements.
- PROVINCIAL

Index wage top-ups to inflation, and increase top-ups a minimum of \$2 per hour at each level, for each Early Childhood Educator (ECE) certification level to attract and retain necessary talent.
- PROVINCIAL

Increase funding to the program, returning childcare funding to pre-agreement levels. Provide grant funding for infrastructure improvements, acknowledging the slim margins and increased costs providers are facing.
- PROVINCIAL

Create a pathway for internationally trained educators to receive foreign credential recognition to ensure newcomers are eligible for wage top-ups, and not financially disadvantaged due to a burdensome credential recognition process.
- PROVINCIAL / FEDERAL

Urgently develop the cost control framework based on feedback from operators. This is currently holding up the For-Profit Expansion Plan, preventing private operators from expanding operations to meet rising demand.
- PROVINCIAL / FEDERAL

In light of record-high inflation, amend the 3 per cent cap on fee increases mandated by the federal-provincial agreement to 3 per cent plus inflation, reindexed annually.



Recommendation 3.2

Leverage opportunities to incentivize and promote IDEA within Alberta’s workforce

Equity-deserving groups continue to face systemic barriers to labour force participation. With recent events further highlighting the requirement for governments to address systemic injustices, racism, and oppression faced by Black, Indigenous, and other marginalized groups, Alberta has an opportunity to step up and become a leader in workforce inclusion and equality. Each initiative must also acknowledge that there is no one-size-fits-all solution. Initiatives must be developed that support distinct workforce demographics in ways that problem solve for them.

- MUNICIPAL

Showcase leadership through the continued implementation of the City’s Gender Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Strategy.
- PROVINCIAL

Prioritize the creation of provincial accessibility standards through an Alberta Accessibility Act, leveraging lessons learned from similar acts in other provinces.
- PROVINCIAL

Work with employers to ensure Alberta’s aging workforce (55+) has access to the tools and resources they require to continue participating in the labour force.
- PROVINCIAL

Develop a province-wide strategy to promote, advance, and implement IDEA initiatives across Alberta businesses, including funding support for small businesses to access IDEA resources.
- PROVINCIAL

Create an Alberta’s Inclusive Business Award for organizations that exemplify leadership in IDEA.
- FEDERAL

Revive and permanently implement the Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Institutional Capacity-Building Grant, expanding eligibility to include organizations providing micro-credentials and reskilling and upskilling programs, to foster IDEA within Canada’s educational ecosystem.

Recommendation 3.3

Position Alberta businesses as benefits leaders

With the right support from government, Alberta businesses can position themselves as leaders in offering comprehensive employee benefits.

- MUNICIPAL

Collaborate with businesses to offer transit passes or parking in designated city lots as low-cost employee benefits.
- PROVINCIAL

Provide Albertans with a yearly health-spending account to subsidize costs not covered by employers and promote preventative healthcare.
- PROVINCIAL

Create a tax incentive for businesses that offer student loan repayment as an employee benefit.
- PROVINCIAL / FEDERAL

Work with businesses to offer flex days which allow employees to celebrate religious holidays and days of cultural importance.
- FEDERAL

Prioritize affordable access to mental healthcare through the implementation of federal transfers to the provinces that support capacity building and service delivery.



PRIORITY 4 REFINING OUR IMMIGRATION POLICIES TO GROW OUR TALENT POOL

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.



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.

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

50% of Albertans see improving the transfer of credentialing from other provinces and countries as a solution to current labour shortages.

Recommendation 4.1

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 4.2

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 4.3

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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