

BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS

For Underemployed Professional Immigrant Women

Employer Toolbox

1

Credential Recognition & Canadian Experience

Barriers¹

1. A lack of experience assessing international experience and credentials may lead to qualified immigrant women candidates being screened out prematurely.
2. Many employers cite the time spent validating international credentials as a deterrent to considering skilled immigrant candidates.

Recommendations

1. Require human resources and hiring managers to take bias-free recruitment training.
2. Link your careers page to IRCC approved credential assessment services and ask applicants to verify their international credentials before they apply.

Strategies & Best Practices

1. Recognize and value international experience by creating a culturally safe environment where there is shared respect about shared knowledge and experience.
2. Provide leadership opportunities by offering opportunities to lead projects, assignments or secondment opportunities in other departments.
3. Develop orientation packages that provide clear information on the organizational culture, application and interview processes, professional development opportunities and organizational supports available to employees.
4. Form a Diversity and Inclusion Committee with a clear mandate, including identifying and removing *unseen* barriers, and use an *immigrant lens* when updating diversity and inclusion policies.
5. Develop or connect to a mentorship program.

How ISANS Can Help²

1. Make your workplace more *immigrant-friendly* by taking the ISANS **Workplace Culture Assessment** and using Workplace Culture themed workshops like **Supporting Immigrants in the Workplace** which identifies existing support and ways to improve it.
2. Access ISANS **Employer Support Services** and volunteer with the **Professional Mentorship Program** to develop cross-cultural communication skills and gain a better understanding of the skills and experience that immigrants provide.
3. Connect with ISANS to access training modules for immigrant employees on Canadian workplace practices, workplace specific training like **English in the Workplace**, and other programs to enhance workplace skills.



2

Unpreparedness of Navigating the Application Process for Promotion

Barriers

1. Many organizations that require fairly user-savvy online application processes can place immigrant women at a disadvantage.
2. Often, they are not familiar with certain technicalities of this approach (i.e. use of key words or phrases in order for application to be flagged for consideration).
3. Those who make the first cut may yet face the challenge of providing resumes the *Canadian way*, supporting documents (in prescribed form), as well as sitting for one or more interviews.
4. This process can be very daunting and can limit their ability to convey their true potential.

Recommendations

1. Require that human resources and hiring managers take bias-free recruitment training.
2. Provide immigrant women with information from the organization's human resources department on the application and interview processes and, as needed, be introduced to training or workshop programs.
3. Provide feedback to immigrant women on cultural nuances that are likely to be encountered and the particular requirements of the Canadian job market.
4. Implement policy with the intent that recognizes and values international experience.

Strategies & Best Practices

1. Develop orientation packages that provide clear information on application and interview processes, professional development opportunities and organizational supports.
2. Ensure that applicants understand required *competencies* and how to demonstrate them in applications and during interviews.
3. Form a Diversity and Inclusion Committee with a clear mandate, including identifying and removing *unseen* barriers, and use an *immigrant lens* when updating diversity and inclusion policies.
4. Develop or connect to a mentorship program.

How ISANS Can Help

1. Make your workplace more *immigrant-friendly* by taking the ISANS **Workplace Culture Assessment** and using Workplace Culture themed workshops like **Supporting Immigrants in the Workplace** which identifies existing supports and ways to improve them.
2. Connect with ISANS to access training modules for immigrant employees on Canadian workplace practices and workplace specific training like **English in the Workplace**, language training or programs to enhance workplace skills.
3. Access ISANS **Employer Support Services** and volunteer with the **Professional Mentorship Program** to develop cross-cultural communication skills and gain a better understanding of the skills and experience that immigrants provide.
4. Volunteer with ISANS as a **Practice Interviewer**—employers volunteer their time to interview an immigrant professional in their field of work, preparing them for a job interview.
5. Consult ISANS **Ten Strategies to Create a Welcoming Workplace for Professional Immigrant Women**.

3

Communication: Language Proficiency, Accents and Jargon

Barriers

1. Immigrant women may feel that their accent, and in some cases, the lack of knowledge of workplace jargon, is a barrier to promotion.
2. They may not know if help developing their language skills is available.
3. Taking English classes is not always supported/difficult to access on their own.
4. Those with suitable English may believe their accent is a barrier to promotion.
5. Lack of confidence in language skills may become internalized and result in a loss of self-esteem and lead to giving up seeking a promotion.

Recommendations

1. Ensure hiring managers provide a clear description of role requirements.
2. Require engaging and consistent performance appraisals, or evaluations, that include clear performance markers to enhance the promotion process.
3. Incorporate language and accent awareness in the organization's cultural competency programs.
4. Encourage employers and staff to participate in volunteer opportunities, where they can enhance leadership and coaching skills, increase their cultural awareness and learn how language, proficiency and accents can be a barrier that immigrant women face when seeking advancement.

Strategies & Best Practices

1. Develop orientation packages that provide clear information on the organizational culture, application and interview processes, professional development opportunities and organizational supports available to employees.
2. Ensure employees are aware of language programs and that attendance is supported.
3. Form a Diversity and Inclusion Committee with a clear mandate, including identifying and removing *unseen* barriers.
4. Update diversity and inclusion policies using an *immigrant lens*.
5. Implement a *culturally competent* workplace strategy and include on-site cultural competency training and education for managers and employees.

How ISANS Can Help

1. ISANS offers various workplace language and workplace skills programs:
 - Professional Communication—workplace specific supports for employees including **English in the Workplace** with various attendance options
 - Training modules that introduce clients to Canadian workplace practices
 - A range of communication courses available online
2. Make your workplace more *immigrant-friendly* by taking the ISANS **Workplace Culture Assessment** and using Workplace Culture themed workshops: **Supporting Immigrants in the Workplace** workshop identifies existing support and ways to improve it; **Cross-Cultural Leadership Excellence** provides organizational leaders with straightforward cross-cultural communication and organizational tips and ideas.
3. Volunteer with ISANS as a **Practice Interviewer**—employers volunteer their time to interview an immigrant professional in their field of work, preparing them for a job interview.

4

Promotion Subjectivity and Information Gaps

Barriers

1. The selection criteria for advancement are often not well defined – both in terms of what to look for in the employee and whether she is the right *fit* for the role (i.e. her skills and/or experience).
2. Immigrant women found they did not have enough information about training and other avenues available for professional development.

Recommendations

1. Require hiring managers to provide a clear description of role requirements.
2. Use engaging and consistent performance appraisals and evaluations, which include clear performance markers to enhance the promotion process.
3. Ensure that employers and employees work on a career pathway and succession plan together and that senior leaders are trained to reduce biases.
4. Promote development courses and training on navigating to the next level.
5. Require managers to make immigrant women aware of the services and programs available to encourage them in the direction required for advancement (e.g. internship opportunities, employer mentorship).

Strategies & Best Practices

1. Develop orientation packages that provide clear information on the organizational culture, application and interview processes, professional development opportunities and organizational supports.
2. Ensure that applicants understand *competencies* and how to demonstrate them in applications.
3. Require human resources and hiring managers to take bias-free recruitment training.
4. Develop a mentorship program or link employees to a mentorship program.
5. Require bias-free performance evaluations.

How ISANS Can Help

1. Connect with ISANS to access training modules for immigrant employees on Canadian workplace practices and workplace specific training like **English in the Workplace** where they can get *soft skills* or other communication training and other programs to enhance workplace skills.
2. Access ISANS **Employer Support Services** and volunteer with the **Professional Mentorship Program** to develop cross-cultural communication skills and gain a better understanding of the skills and experience that immigrants provide.
3. Make your workplace more *immigrant-friendly* by taking the ISANS **Workplace Culture Assessment** and using Workplace Culture themed workshops to improve your *cultural competence*.
4. Consult ISANS **Ten Strategies to Create a Welcoming Workplace for Professional Immigrant Women**.

1. Adapted from Fraser, M. & Root, L. (2016). *Gender Based Analysis Plus Needs Assessment: Moving Up Underemployment of Professional Immigrant Women*. Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia, Halifax, Nova Scotia.

2. For programs and services please visit: www.isans.ca. ISANS services are provided free of charge to both employers and immigrant employees.

3. Assessment tools to track progress could include: Training HR staff on how to screen, test and recognize transferable skills for international candidates. Ensure fairness in the selection for promotion by pre-screening (i.e. for conflict of interest elements) interview panels and staff who make decisions about advancement.

5

Feeling Unwelcomed and Unvalued

Barriers

1. Most women felt that their employers and coworkers were well meaning, but in practice did not do enough to make them feel welcome, safe, accepted and valued for their contribution to the organization.
2. They recounted experiences of not fitting in with their coworkers, or during after hour activities and networking arrangements.
3. Most importantly, they were aware that this had considerable weight in the promotion process and felt that the process was not fair.
4. They felt the employer should help with integration and make the pathway to promotion more transparent.

Recommendations

1. Provide diversity and inclusion practices training modules and arrange workshops to develop competency requirements and models for management, staff and others who make decisions about promotions.
2. Develop assessment tools to track progress.³
3. Get information on employer support programs and services at ISANS and access programs that help meet the needs of immigrant women.
4. Offer and encourage professional training and development.
5. Make management accountable for fostering and regularly evaluating inclusive and equitable practices and policies that would create a climate of openness to promotion.

Strategies & Best Practices

1. Develop a mentorship program or link employees to a mentorship program.
2. Recognize and value international experience.
3. Form a Diversity and Inclusion Committee with a clear mandate, including identifying and removing *unseen* barriers
4. Use an *immigrant lens* when updating diversity and inclusion policies. Include diversity and inclusion practices as performance requirements for managers.
5. Ensure organizational accountability for applying immigrant-friendly workplace practices by requiring program evaluation of policies and outcomes in annual reporting, to demonstrate how well the expected outcomes are being achieved.

How ISANS Can Help

1. Make your workplace more *immigrant-friendly* by taking the ISANS **Workplace Culture Assessment** and using Workplace Culture themed workshops like **Building a Cross-Culturally Competent Workplace** to get practical advice on creating a cross-culturally competent workplace.
2. Volunteer with ISANS **Professional Mentorship Program** to develop cross-cultural communication skills to gain a better understanding of the skills and experience that immigrants provide.
3. Consult ISANS **Ten Strategies to Create a Welcoming Workplace for Professional Immigrant Women** and **Best Practices for a Culturally Diverse Workplace** for simple strategies on improving your hiring and retention practices and becoming an employer of choice.

6

One-Size-Fits-All Approach

Barriers

1. The common approach to promotion is for employers to put in place standard procedures for posting and processing new openings.
2. Employers in the focus group perceived the notion of one-size-fits-all as being detrimental to immigrant women and recognized that not everyone will take the same path to a promotion.
3. There is an enhanced awareness that the needs of immigrant women are different in terms of: a) the transferability of skills and experience b) income expectations c) family circumstances d) navigating day-to-day life as women of a different race, color and culture.

Recommendations

1. Increase awareness of the barriers and challenges that individual immigrant women face on a day-to-day basis and fashion solutions to particular circumstances.
2. Recognize that equality does not equal equity.
3. Adopt a family centered approach in the workplace.
4. Create awareness and provide opportunities, where possible, for immigrant women to learn about childcare options, work schedule flexibility, family, maternity and personal leave choices.
5. Develop orientation packages with a range of information on career advancement and include practical tips on the dos and don'ts for successful integration into the workplace.

Strategies & Best Practices

1. Ensure orientation packages provide clear information on the organizational culture, application and interview processes, professional development opportunities and organizational supports available to employees.
2. Form a Diversity and Inclusion Committee with a clear mandate, including identifying and removing *unseen* barriers, and use an *immigrant lens* when updating policies.
3. Implement a *culturally competent* workplace strategy and include on-site cultural competency training and education for managers and employees.
4. Ensure organizational accountability for applying immigrant-friendly workplace practices and require evaluation of policies and outcomes in annual reporting to demonstrate how well the expected outcomes are being achieved.
5. Recognize and celebrate successfully creating an inclusive, safe workplace for immigrant women.

How ISANS Can Help

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