



national
CONNECTOR
program

A YEAR IN REVIEW
2014-15 ANNUAL REPORT

2014-15 Annual Report

Introduction

The Halifax Partnership is Halifax, Nova Scotia's economic development organization. As a public-private partnership, the Partnership helps keep, grow and get business, talent and investment in Halifax. We do this through leadership on economic issues, through partnerships and collaborations, and by marketing Halifax to the world.

Six years ago, the Partnership developed the [Halifax Connector Program](#) to address a major workforce issue in the city. Of the 1,700 immigrants that came to Halifax each year, many were unable to penetrate the Halifax business network and 55% left the city to find work in their fields. Meanwhile, many Halifax businesses were reporting difficulty finding qualified talent.

The Connector Program specifically addresses the barriers immigrants face in developing professional networks by linking them to business and community leaders – called Connectors. Through direct referrals, Connectors help immigrants (Connectees) rapidly build their professional network which increases their likelihood of finding a job in their field. Connectors benefit by gaining access to pre-qualified job seekers and helping to grow their industry, local workforce and economy.

After the first year of implementation, immigrants were building up their networks, finding jobs, and staying in Halifax. Since then, the Partnership has expanded the Connector Program to target additional talent pools including local and international graduates.

With over 1,000 Connectees and 750 volunteer business Connectors, approximately 1 in 3 Connectees are finding jobs in Halifax. This success has garnered interest across Canada, as communities face declining workforces and fall short in getting immigrants to come and to stay.

Thanks to support from Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC), the Halifax Partnership has been leading the National Connector Program over the past two years to help other Canadian communities and industry associations launch Connector Programs focused on immigrant integration and retention.

“The Halifax Partnership has supported us throughout the process of establishing the Connector Program within Ottawa and over the past three months we have received exceptional support to discuss positioning Ottawa Connector Program for funding, sharing of resources, and training for our Mentorship team. The Partnership has not only helped established a program that is receiving considerable interest in our region, but has most importantly created a collaboration of organizations across Canada that are serving Internationally Educated Professionals.”
– **Karyn Steer, Ottawa Connector Program**

“The Halifax Partnership has been a tremendous support for TRIEC in developing our Connector pilot for Toronto. They have provided valuable guidance, information and resources from proposal development to our current stage of program development. There is already significant interest and excitement about the program launch in Toronto. Immigrants, service providers and employers recognize the importance of networking, and this program provides a simple, concrete and scalable means of facilitating it.” – **Racquel Sevilla, Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council (TRIEC)**

National Connector Program Overview

With support from CIC, the Halifax Partnership is leading the National Connector to assist 10 Canadian communities and 3 industry associations in launching Connector Programs over a three year period (2013-16).

The National Connector Program uses the efficient and proven Connector Program's pay-it-forward model which engages community and business leaders (Connectors) in helping employment-ready immigrants (Connectees) build professional networks and break into their local labour markets.

The National Connector Program works to:

- increase labour market participation (jobs) in Canadian communities
- increase labour market and community integration through connector meetings, networking associations and community-based activities
- Increase newcomer confidence and knowledge through mentorship; skill development, relationships and interactive training portal
- Increase strategic opportunities to secure employment through the successful and sustainable set up of 10 new Connector program and 3 pilot streams.

Since 2013, the Partnership's National Connector program has assisted 17 Canadian communities in launching their Connector Programs. In 2014-15, Connector Programs were launched in five communities including Ottawa, Campbell River, Surrey, Waterloo, Kingston and one industry association, the Applied Science Technologist and Technicians of BC.

This efficient and valuable program benefits everyone involved – newcomers to Canada who make professional connections and find employment in their new communities; employers who gain access to pre-qualified immigrants in their industry; immigrant serving organizations who are delivering an effective immigration integration and retention program; and Canadian communities who are able to retain more highly skilled immigrants which ultimately leads to stronger local, provincial and national economies.

The success of the National Connector program comes from the engagement of program partners in similar immigrant serving organizations. In February 2015, the Partnership continued to connect with immigrant employment councils including ANC and other industry associations during the CIIP conference in Ottawa. TRIEC and IECBC continuously reference their participation with the National Connector Program in national presentations.

The National Connector Program has also received two Excellence in Economic Development Awards from the International Economic Development Council.

2015 National Connector Program Outcomes

The National Connector Program has delivered on several of the expected program outcomes.

Increasing labour market participation:

- 331 newcomers connected through the National Connector Program
- 230 of these newcomers were connected in CPA Alberta Joint Venture
- 36 newcomers connected by ERIEC
- 45 newcomers connected by IECBC
- 11 newcomers connected by TRIEC
- 9 newcomers connected by the Calgary Connector Program
- 23 jobs found to date
- 306 Connectors engaged across Canada
- 250 Connector meetings have taken place across Canada
- 6 New Connector Programs launched in 2015 (Ottawa, Waterloo, Campbell River, Surrey, ASTTBC)
- Over 9 other communities have expressed interest in the program including St. John's NF and Manitoba.

Increasing labour market and community integration through community based activities and networking associations:

- National Connector Program monthly conference calls continue to provide an opportunity for sharing and support.
- 32 networking associations and community based activities have taken place

Multi-Community Program Support

- OCISO and TRIEC are very supportive and helping Waterloo secure additional funding to support their program
- IECBC has been engaging with the City of Vancouver, City of Surrey, IECBC PINS Group, Campbell River Chamber of Commerce, Prince George Chamber of Commerce, Prince Rupert Chamber of Commerce and Service Provider Organizations: ISS of BC, Back in Motion Rehab Inc., North Shore Multicultural Society, Training Innovations, Training Group at Douglas College, IMSS (Prince George), Hecate Strait Employment Development Society (Prince Rupert), Immigrant Welcome Centre of Campbell River.
- CPA-Alberta Joint Venture continues to provide IECBC with experience in a Connector Program focused on Accountants.
- IECBC and TRIEC have bi-weekly meetings to support the rolling out of their new programs.
- CPA Alberta Joint Venture continues to partner with Calgary Connector Program and are planning to hold an Improv Workshop in June together.

Private-Sector Partnerships

- ERIEC is in discussions with two settlement agencies: EMCN and Bredin Centre which resulted in 5 referrals.
- TRIEC established a partnership with Humber College.
- CPA Alberta Joint Venture continues to refer their prospective participants to their Mentorship program as well as immigrant serving agencies according to their clients' needs. They also continue to work internally with Career Service Advisor to support their students with resume writing, job search tactics and one on one career advising.
- IECBC provides coaching on informational interviewing techniques and how to strategically use it as a powerful tool for networking.

Interactive training & launching of network portal:

- In 2015, the interactive [online portal and website](#) was re-launched and refreshed for the National Connector Program. This portal allows for a resource library and sharing across communities and associations to ensure programs across the country and globe are receiving the support they need to make their Connector Program successful.
- On-going support and monitoring of survey feedback and tracking system customization for the Connector Program.
- Several upgrades have been made to the tracking system, however there are more requests for a more comprehensive system upgrade, but there is not enough funding to support these requests.
- The National Connector Program recruited a council of mentors from existing National Connector Programs to provide advice and support to prospective communities.
- All of the new programs received remote training and many of these received on-site training as well.

National Connector Community Learning Exchange

- In March 2015, the Halifax Partnership hosted a Learning Exchange with 6 Connector Communities from across the country including Ottawa, Waterloo, British Columbia, Calgary and Edmonton, Toronto and CPA Alberta Joint Ventures.
- The Learning Exchange covered: tool exchange, networking strategies, speed interviewing strategies and other resources. It focused on sharing knowledge around improving networking and knowledge of the labour market for newcomers.
- The creation of a training video based off of the Learning Exchange in 2015, to launch as a resource within 2015.
- Continued webinar information sessions from the Halifax Partnership to support and lead the roll out of the Connector Program in communities.

Increasing partnerships & Connector Program awareness at events:

- The National Connector program hosted a panel discussion called "Connector Program: A Best Practice Model for SME Engagement and Immigrant Success" in 2015 at the Metropolis Conference. Panel discussion focused on the Connector Program's global recognition as a best practice in immigrant retention through SME engagement in workforce development and included panelists: Nabihah Atallah of ISANS, Opreet Kang of EICBC, Parker Johnson from the City of Vancouver, Bruce Randall of CRIEC and Margaret Eaton of TRIEC.
- The National Connector program was presented at the Metropolis Conference in Berlin.
- Creation of a National Connector Program video that can be adapted for each community to promote the model to communities and associations.
- ERIEC including the Connector Program in the new ERIEC flow chart and is also being added to promotional flyers.
- IECBC has been working with the City of Vancouver to organize City of Vancouver Connector Program Wrap-Up event planned to take place in April to recognize 27 Connectors who came on board.
- Through IECBC, information on the Connector Program has been featured in newsletters from the Surrey LIPs, PINS and Burnaby Board of Trade.
- TRIEC presented the Connector Program to PIN leaders during Leaders Roundtable in March 2015.
- Presentation made to St. John's Newfoundland and potential partners in April.

Challenges

Although the Halifax Partnership's National Connector Program continues to grow and attract interest, there are some challenges. One of the major challenges we face is the future sustainability for National Connector Program communities. The results of the National Connector Plan in year two reflect this challenge. Several of the programs have been slow to ramp up and roll out which has made it difficult to reach our target before year three. The challenges with funding boil down to a lack of long-term, consistent funding.

It is difficult for communities to acquire long-term funding from Federal and Provincial providers. Several programs have received pilot funding, however the nature of the Connector Program model does require more consistent funding to see the full potential of program growth. Additional funding is required for upgrades as new communities come on board.

Ideally Connector Program funding will be private-public, long-term funding and this is a challenge Connector communities will seek to address moving forward.

Hosting an annual learning exchange would be optimal.

Conclusion

In two years, the Halifax Partnership's National Connector Program has seen significant success. Twenty communities across North America and Europe have replicated the Connector Program, a testament to the effectiveness and versatility of the program. As the National Connector Program continues to garner national and international interest, there is great potential for the Partnership to continue to lead the expansion and support of the Connector Program in other communities.

The Learning Exchange event this year was an example of this. The sharing of information is a vital component of the Partnership's support services with the National Connector program. The event brought together several of the communities and demonstrated the value of having an opportunity to swap resources and discuss tactics to overcome challenges like funding or industry engagement.

From this event IECBC and TRIEC have bi-weekly meetings to support the roll out of their new program. Other Connector Programs like CPA Alberta Joint Venture have also continued to partner with the Calgary Connector Program. They are planning to hold a joint Improv Workshop in June. All communities involved also request that an annual Learning Exchange take place going forward.

This positive feedback demonstrates the success of the National Connector Program in supporting and encouraging increased labour market and community integration across Connector Program communities. To continue to leverage this strength, the Partnership will continue to populate the National Connector Portal with resources like Connector Toolkits, promotional materials and success stories to help Connector communities share information and resources. In addition to this, the National Connector Portal features a forum where communities can discuss and share information in real time regardless of their location.

The National Connector Program is, and will continue to be, a valuable program for every community as it represents a true win-win scenario for both immigrants and local industry. This is a program that will only continue to grow.