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**Guidelines for Professional Associations Serving  
The Needs of Skilled Immigrants**

**An Offering of  
Assistance to Associations in Developing  
Materials for the Skilled Immigrant**

**Burnaby School District 41  
Adult and Continuing Education**

*for*

**The BC Ministry of Community, Aboriginal  
and Women's Services**

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## ***Acknowledgements***

I am pleased to present this report: “Guidelines for Professional Associations Serving the Needs of Skilled Immigrants. This report and the guidelines included are the summation of many individuals’ contributions and generous sharing of their expertise and experiences.

Foremost I would like to acknowledge and thank the research team led by Jody Johnson, for all their work and contributions. Their extensive research has resulted in all elements of this guide and their efforts spanned the breadth of the project from its inception to the final edits and production.

My appreciation and thanks also goes out to the Ministry of Community, Aboriginal and Women’s Services for their sponsorship and support of this project. I would also like to acknowledge the many skilled immigrants and foreign trained professionals, employers, and representatives of industry, trade and professional associations who willingly gave of their time and expertise to provide meaningful input.

Lastly, I would like to extend my gratitude to my administration team at the Burnaby School District, Adult and Continuing Education Division, for their support and contributions to the project.

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## ***Executive Summary***

The Burnaby Adult and Continuing Education Division, School District #41 is pleased to submit this recommendations report: “Guidelines for Professional Associations Serving the Needs of Skilled Immigrants”.

While there are many excellent resources available to job seekers, there are very few developed with the targeted purpose of assisting the skilled immigrant. Job search for the skilled immigrant is a unique and complex task and the labour market information required is extensive. One of the best sources of labour market information for the skilled immigrant is industry, professional and trade associations. Unfortunately, service provider and job seeker awareness of these associations, and their utilization by the skilled immigrant job seeker, is low. The purpose of this report is to develop recommendations to assist professional and trade associations to enhance, provide, and or develop services for the skilled immigrant.

The specific objectives of the project included:

- The identification of gaps in information provided by professional and trades associations to the BC’s skilled immigrant job seekers
- To analyze and understand the perceptions of employers, skilled immigrants, and professional associations for the responsibility of finding employment or assisting skilled immigrants find employment.
- Development of a recommendations template that could be adapted by associations

Consultations with skilled immigrants, employers, and industry, professional and trade associations’ representatives revealed that all three parties agree that skilled immigrants are responsible for finding work related to their field. However, it was also identified that associations should have a role in assisting skilled immigrants find employment related to their field. While both a majority of employers and skilled immigrants adhered

to this perception, it was identified to a lesser degree (41% agreement and 32% neutral) by the associations' respondents. All three groups consulted responded that they disagreed with employers being responsible for assisting skilled immigrants find work. Government was widely held to have a role in assisting skilled immigrants find employment related to their field.

Among the numerous roles, services, and benefits professional, industry and trade associations could provide to skilled immigrant job seekers, the following were identified most pervasively and form the basis of the recommendations of this report:

- Enhance Communications and Information
- Facilitate Networking and Professional Contacts
- Provide Career and Educational Planning Services
- Provide and Facilitate Employment Integration
- Provide Specific Local Knowledge and Requirements
- Increase Access to Associations

Lastly, in providing recommendations and specific actions in response to the above strategies it was recognized that associations are often limited by their mandates, their responsibilities to their members and stakeholders, and also by the extent of their resources and personnel. Therefore, the specific recommendations have been divided into three categories:

1. Low resource commitments
2. Limited resource commitments
3. Medium to high resource commitments

It is expected that these guidelines will be reviewed and applied at the full discretion of each individual association. It is the intent of this report that these guidelines and the manner in which they have been presented will facilitate consideration and planning of initiatives related to the skilled immigrant population.

## ***Introduction and Rationale for Project***

It has been well documented that Canada will soon be facing a skills shortage. At the same time, it has been well documented that Canada is experiencing a skills wastage; that is, skilled immigrants are coming to Canada but are not finding positions in which their skills are utilized. While there are several reasons for this skills wastage, one of the most significant reasons is the time it takes newly immigrated professionals and trades people to find the required information regarding their fields in order to begin a professional job search. For many the quest for information takes months, others years. For many, financial pressures dictate that a “survival” job is pursued. Survival work, though essential and certainly respected, impinges greatly on time and energy, information gathering, and next steps in a professional job search must often wait.

We can maximize the economic and social contribution of immigration to BC and Canada by ensuring that newcomers have the resources they need to make use of their skills and education as quickly as possible.

While there are a great number of resources available to assist the skilled immigrant job seeker, one of the most vital pieces of information required by the newly landed skilled immigrant is information related specifically to their professional background. Much information can be gathered from “general” job search sources, i.e. the National Occupational Classification

(<http://www23.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/2001/e/generic/welcome.shtml>) or Working Futures ([www.workfutures.bc.ca](http://www.workfutures.bc.ca)); however, as good as these resources are in providing the newcomer with much needed information about their profession, they do not answer the unique job search and occupational questions/concerns of the new immigrant.

Furthermore, as these and many other similar resources are primarily “static” in nature, they often can not keep up to the rapidly changing modern labour market. One of the best

and most up to date sources for the unique type of information required by the newly immigrated skilled worker, is the associations governing and/or related to their professions. The sooner the newly immigrated skilled worker could be guided to the appropriate professional or trade association, the sooner a directed job search and informed career planning could begin.

Professional, trade and industry associations hold many of the key pieces of information required for the skilled immigrant to establish a career plan. Some of the associations such as the Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of British Columbia (APEGBC) and the Registered Nurses Association of British Columbia (RNABC) offer assistance specifically for skilled immigrants. These associations assist skilled immigrants in the process of credential evaluation and in the development of career and educational plans. Other associations offer a variety of services that could assist skilled immigrants including: networking opportunities, professional development, job postings sites and member/employer directories, assistance establishing internships, volunteer work experience or job shadows.

Although there are hundreds of occupation related associations offering all kinds of useful resources, their potential as a tool for enhancing labour market attachment for skilled immigrants is underutilized. Research of professional, trade and industry associations and interviews with employers, association representatives, and immigrants revealed several causes of this underutilization. These same interviews also elicited recommendations to improve association services for skilled immigrants. This report will outline these findings and offer recommendations, in the form of a list of guidelines, for increasing utilization and effectiveness of associations.

## ***Approach and Methodology***

### ***Project scope***

As outlined in the initial proposal to the BC Ministry of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services, the intent of this report is to develop recommendations that will assist professional and trade associations develop services for BC's skilled immigrants. The project's geographic scope was limited to British Columbia. Therefore, in identifying associations for inclusion, associations located in BC or existing as BC chapters were given first priority. However, it was also recognized that some associations exist only at a national or international level. In the event that a BC based organization could not be identified national or international associations were selected and or identified.

The research for this report and development of this guide incorporated four key steps in its research and formulation.

### ***Review of Print and On-line information***

1. The research team conducted a review of existing print and on-line materials and documentation of BC's professional and trade associations. This review formed the basis of the industry, professional, and trade association listings and provided the initial understanding of the scope of BC's professional and trade associations. In finalizing the lists of occupations and associations the project used only public sources of information. Final listings were fact checked through direct telephone follow-ups with the associations.

### ***Employer Interviews***

2. Twenty-five (25) employers were interviewed to establish how employers perceive the role of associations in assisting immigrants transition into meaningful employment. A set questionnaire was employed to guide the interview process. Employers were selected from a broad range of industries and sectors, and as originally proposed were geographically located within the BC Lower Mainland.

### ***Skilled Immigrant Interviews***

3. Twenty-five (25) working and non-working skilled immigrants were interviewed to establish skilled immigrants' perceptions of needs for information sources and points of distribution for labour market information and to develop a comprehensive understanding of labour attachment barriers and information gaps specific to professional and trade associations. Skilled immigrant participants were sought from multiple sources including: Burnaby School District English as second language programs, other community agencies offering ESL programs or employment/career planning programs, and direct referrals from participants and associated organizations.

### ***Associations Representative Interviews***

4. Twenty-five (25) representatives from professional and trade and industry associations were interviewed to develop an understanding of current services, information available to skilled immigrants, and assess the interest in the development of services and materials specifically for skilled immigrants. A set questionnaire was employed to guide the interview process. Association representatives were sought from a broad range of occupations and selected to represent a cross-section of association types (see Definitions section) and a broad range of occupational classifications including both trade and professional occupations. In keeping with the project's priority on BC information, only associations based in British Columbia were interviewed (although several had national affiliates or associated provincial chapter associations).

The research involving human subjects maintained both confidentiality and anonymity of their participation. Free and informed consent was obtained from the subjects by letter and verbal approval. All subjects were provided the opportunity and decision whether to participate or not. There was minimal to no risk to the human subjects in participating in this research, and the benefits of the research will aid future skilled immigrants in achieving employment success. Only the results of the research will be shared with Ministry of Community Aboriginal and Women's Services, while the original data will be kept confidential with the researchers.

## ***Definitions***

During the research for the Associations Guidebook and this report, it became clear that there are several types of associations offering a multitude of services and having a variety of mandates. Categorizing each association was not an easy task; the mandate, the structure, the purpose, the services, the membership, and the personnel continually evolve and change. To further complicate the task of categorization, there are multiple and often conflicting definitions and overlapping usages of the terms: self-regulated, regulatory, and government regulated in relation to trades and professions. However, it was deemed important by the research team to categorize the associations in order to give the reader a sense of the mandate and general purpose of the association. For the purposes of this report the following definitions were used for professional, trade, and industry associations.

### ***Associations***

#### ***Professional Association***

An association of practitioners of a given profession.

#### ***Trade Association***

An association of firms that operate in a specific industry.

#### ***Industry Association***

An organization dedicated to promoting the interests and assisting the members of a particular industry.<sup>1</sup>

In addition to these base-line definitions, the research team further categorized the various associations based on either their membership structure, and / or the services

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<sup>1</sup>Definition of Trade Association on the Web, Accessed March 2004. URL: <http://www.google.com/search?hl=en&lr=&ie=UTF-8&oi=define&q=define:trade+association>

provided to the membership and the public, and in some cases the authority held by the association. The following categorizations do not have a major impact on this report and were intended primarily as an aid to immigrant job seekers and service providers working with skilled immigrants. However, in considering the findings and recommendations of this report they serve as a useful touchstone and one must always consider a particular association's mandate and purpose when identifying and recommending potential services or approaches.

### ***Regulatory***

This report has defined regulatory associations as those associations charged with the responsibility for setting and upholding occupational standards and examining qualifications. Approximately 20 professions in BC are provincially self-regulated. This means the BC legislature has enacted laws to give these 20 professions the ability to regulate themselves. These professional associations govern qualifications, control who may enter and/or remain in the field, define the nature of the work, establish ethical standards and codes of conduct and are accountable for the profession to the public.<sup>2</sup> Beyond these self-regulated occupations, many other occupations, most trades for example, require some level of certification or qualifications recognition for entry into employment.

### ***Non-regulatory***

Non-regulatory associations are defined as those associations that offer services and membership to individuals within a specific profession or trade. Non-regulatory associations offer many different services to their members: professional development and training, networking opportunities, company/membership directories, mentoring programs, work experience opportunities, newsletter/industry updates, job posting sites, etc.

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<sup>2</sup> BC College of Teachers, Understanding Professional Self-Regulation in British Columbia, Accessed April 2004. URL: [www.bcct.bc.ca/documents/underst\\_self\\_regulation.pdf](http://www.bcct.bc.ca/documents/underst_self_regulation.pdf)

### ***Industry***

Industry associations are those that offer membership to companies not individuals. Although individual memberships are typically not available, these associations can be excellent sources of local labour market information, industry news, job postings, networking opportunities, company directories, related educational programs/institutions, first contact and advice.

### ***Government Information***

Government Information listings are important sources of occupational information, apprenticeship information, registration and examination services, educational requirements, career planning resources, and industry and related government news.

## ***Defining the Skilled Immigrant***

Of course, defining the “skilled immigrant” is really an impossible task as there is possibly no segment of the population more diverse. In fact, this diversity is one of the main causes of the difficulty experienced in developing resources, services and programs for the skilled immigrant population. Each new immigrant is an individual arriving with a unique and complex combination of skills, education, experience, language ability, family and financial support, cultural differences, motivation, etc.; although the list is potentially endless, it is important to be aware of some of the more commonly shared characteristics of the newly arrived skilled immigrant and the barriers to employment that they face. And that, regardless of where the newcomer emigrates – from Britain or Vietnam – the vast majority require some form of assistance to attach to the local labour market.

### ***Generally, skilled immigrants share the following characteristics:***

- A combination of marketable skills and experience
- Optimism about their future career prospects in Canada
- A positive work ethic
- A willingness to enter their field in BC at any level
- Commitment and motivation to work in and contribute to their field of expertise
- A desire to learn about their field of expertise in Canada
- Unemployed for the first time in their working career

### ***Barriers Faced by Skilled Immigrants***

As mentioned above, this population is extremely diverse. Regardless of country of origin the skilled immigrant is hindered by at least one of these barriers and, in some cases, by several of these barriers. To develop an understanding of the skilled immigrant, it is important to have a sense of the barriers they face. These barriers include:

- Lack of knowledge of how their career or occupational field is practiced locally
- Lack of workplace terminology
- Difficulty identifying transferable skills
- Lack of awareness of employability skills sought by Canadian employers
- Lack of knowledge of the current labour market
- Lack of information about Canadian job search etiquette and the necessity to contact employers.
- Lack of Canadian-style job search skills
- No “Canadian experience” and no references
- Few or no local contacts in their profession. Immigrants have left their professional network behind in their country of origin and find themselves unsure how to build it up again
- Little or no recognition from Canadian professional associations and professionals about their experience or credentials
- Difficulty researching their field due to inadequate English language skills
- A general lack of confidence

## ***Perceptions: Skilled Immigrants, Employers and Professional Associations***

### **How Immigrants Perceive the Role of Professional Associations in Assisting Skilled Immigrants**

The skilled immigrants and foreign trained professionals contacted during the research for this project reported a high awareness of a professional and trade associations related to their occupation or professional background. The majority (80%) also indicated that professional associations were not difficult to find, citing access over the internet or networking with friends or contacts as the prevalent means of discovering the associations. However, when asked if they had contacted their associations only 52% answered affirmatively. Furthermore when participants were asked to identify the importance of trade and professional associations in their job search only 32% identified that it had been important or strongly important. And yet, 72% respondents agreed or strongly agreed that professional and trade associations should assist skilled immigrants to find employment related to their fields. Of the 25 skilled immigrants surveyed:

- the majority (68%) reported that they were employed
- 12% were unemployed
- 12% were self-employed
- 8% reported being under-employed (work unrelated to their professional background)

When asked about their highest completed level of education all respondents reported a minimum of a college diploma, 48% had a university degree and a significant portion (40%) reported having completed a graduate degree. 80% of the sample group reported that they had participated in further education or professional development since coming to Canada, however as this was an open-ended question it also includes those who

reported participating in language upgrading, and employment or job search programs. The majority of the respondents had immigrated to Canada since 1999 (80%), however, the remaining 20% had all immigrated prior to 1995. Respondents were between the ages of 31 and 57.

The prevailing response from the immigrant participants was that associations need to be an active source of current occupational and industry information and that it is the associations' role to clearly communicate that information both to their membership and potential entrants to the occupation. While the distinct majority of respondents were aware of the existence of a related professional association, only half had reported that they had made direct contact with the association and very few reported that had become members. Several of the respondents in describing their experience expressed that they felt that professional and trade associations "were not open" to new immigrants and that the information they received was unclear. Nevertheless, the immigrants also expressed an understanding of the limitations, in both the mandates and the resources of associations, in assisting skilled immigrants. For instance when asked his interpretation of the role of associations assisting skilled immigrants, one respondent stated that, "it depends upon the association as they must have the time and the resources to be able to provide services." Others expressed an understanding of associations' limits in this area and stated that they saw a role for government to assist with the funding and development of resources for associations working with skilled immigrants. Also it is important to note that a strong majority of the skilled immigrants acknowledged their own role in finding work in combination with assistance from government and professional and trade associations.

In commenting on assistance received during their job search the skilled immigrants who had contacted associations reported that associations provide:

- Access to website links, job postings, and occupational information
- An understanding of occupational “limitations” and inter-provincial variations related to licensing and regulations
- Access to employer names and contacts
- Assessment of qualifications and credentials
- Employment seminars

The following descriptions outline the skilled immigrants’ perceptions in greater detail.

***Provide access to detailed occupational information***

Several respondents reported that they see a role for associations to provide clear and detailed occupational information. While it was acknowledged that many associations provide some information for their members and the general public, skilled immigrants are seeking detailed information outlining a career path, salary levels, entry or related occupations, and the specific steps and direction required for meeting the professional qualifications including clearly outlined certification paths. The skilled immigrants expressed a clear need for not only the professional designation, but for descriptions of entry level or junior positions that could be ladderred with further experience and, over time, towards a particular professional standing. As one respondent stated, “you must have the (appropriate) knowledge to choose a professional job or adopt a survival job, and it is important to get your credentials evaluated as soon as possible.”

***To provide information and education on specific local and regional requirements***

Skilled immigrants, particularly those in technical occupations, saw a need for associations to provide information on local and regional technical specifications, code requirements, law, and specific legal practices. It was recognized that this lack of information and experience was critical to entering the job market as a qualified candidate and that associations could be both an information source and provider of education, lectures, or seminars on specific topics.

### ***To offer networking opportunities***

Respondents stated both experience with and a desire for further access to associations' networking events and information. Website links to related sites and company directories were cited as valuable information, and inclusion in association meetings or conference attendance was noted as very valuable to the skilled immigrant seeking employment.

### ***To provide access to educational resources***

Skilled immigrants see associations as a resource for educational information, particularly as it relates to certification requirements, professional qualifications, and professional development. While some participants expressed an interest in associations providing education or upgrading, most expressed a desire for ready information and clear descriptions of professional educational requirements, as well as guidance as to where these programs may be offered.

### ***Job search assistance and integration***

Some respondents felt that associations should provide opportunities for work experience, volunteer placements, or internships as a means to gain Canadian experience and demonstrate their capabilities and value. In addition, some respondents stated that a closer link between associations and employment or career planning programs would be beneficial as it would allow for quick referral for new immigrants lacking a clearly outlined career or educational plan.

### ***To increase employer awareness foreign trained workers***

Immigrants stated that employers could benefit from a greater understanding of foreign trained professionals and skilled workers and felt associations could provide information to employers about the availability of these workers and assist employers to understand their qualifications and skills.

## **How Employers Perceive the Role of Professional Associations in Assisting Skilled Immigrants**

In general, the employers contacted believe it is the role of associations to provide services that meet the needs of its membership and, particularly, that all services be available to all members. Amongst the various perceptions of roles described, the requirement to establish and maintain standards and guidelines of professional conduct and practice was emphasized and frequently stated. Within this perception of standard bearer there was a wide variety of responses regarding the regulatory role of associations. Given the broad nature of both the employers questioned and the broad and sometimes conflicting definitions of associations (see Definitions Section), this is not surprising.

Employers, especially those employers in fields experiencing or anticipating skills shortages, did see value in:

- Associations heightening their profile within the community at large
- Developing their abilities to serve as industry information centres
- Increasing their accessibility
- Facilitating the assessment and acquisition of necessary local qualifications
- Increasing their ability to match jobseekers with employers

The following descriptions outline the employer perceptions in greater detail.

### ***Job search assistance and integration***

Several employers saw associations as facilitators for on-the-job training opportunities. Internships, mentorship programs, volunteer work experience placements, job shadowing programs were all mentioned as services associations could assist employers to develop. Employers see these services and programs as offering skilled immigrants opportunities to get local experience, to develop work place language, to become oriented to company, industry and local culture. It was expressed that these types of on-the-job programs offer employers the opportunity to assess an individual's skills and competencies and may alleviate some of the hesitancy employers have towards hiring foreign trained workers.

### ***To increase profile of specific industries***

Employers, especially those experiencing or anticipating skills shortages, felt it the responsibility of associations to heighten the profile of the specific industry and, in some cases, to heighten awareness of an industry and its needs within the “skilled immigrant” community. Of note, a few employers highlighted the role of international communication and liaison with other related professional associations as a means to aid information flow to skilled immigrants as part of the immigration or pre-immigration process.

### ***To operate as a resource centre***

The majority of employers see associations as information providers. There is a perception that associations should act as a “library” and be able to offer information about local standards, industry regulations, licensing, training, and professional development. An environmental engineering firm stated: “Government cannot offer adequate or specific enough information about different fields” and so skilled immigrants need to go to the source and associations should be able to offer the information required. Several employers cited the need to “clearly map out” the educational and occupational requirements for entry into a particular occupation, and where possible, provide information on outlining a career path.

### ***To offer networking opportunities***

Several employers saw networking and the provision of professional and employer contact as a key role in assisting skilled immigrants. However, it was also noted that this is a role typically provided by associations and the service already exists in both formal and informal approaches.

***To offer professional development and training***

Employers thought associations could offer skilled immigrants professional development including assistance to improve communication and presentation skills. Local and regional requirements, technical codes and regulations, and professional expectations were frequently cited as training or educational requirements.

***To increase employer awareness of foreign trained workers***

Many employers spoke of the “unknown” quality of a foreign trained worker and felt associations could provide information to employers about the availability of these workers and assist employers to understand their qualifications and skills.

***To act as a recruitment source***

Employers look to associations to recruit in competitive fields; profile members by posting resumes or bios and maintain job posting sites.

***To offer credential evaluation and skills assessments***

Employers look to associations to facilitate hiring foreign trained workers by evaluating credentials and assessing skills.

***To assist in the development of career and educational plans***

Employers see associations as a good place for foreign trained workers to get assistance developing career and educational plans. It was acknowledged that many associations, particularly those of a non-regulatory nature, are not staffed full-time and are often staffed by volunteers and so may not be able to offer formalized career/educational counseling but should offer informal assistance towards the development of a plan.

## **How Professional Associations Perceive Their Role in Assisting Skilled Immigrants**

Professional Associations respond to the demands of the labour market and the needs of their membership, whether the membership is individual professionals or companies. Associations indicated that it is their role to strive to respond to the needs of their members and indicated that if a portion of the membership is skilled immigrant or if potential members are skilled immigrants an attempt will be made to serve their specific needs.

Professional Associations representing industries and occupations that were experiencing or anticipating a “skills shortage”, identified that mandates were being reviewed and initiatives developed to increase the profile of the industry and the related association and to offer easier access to greater resources. Not surprisingly, professional associations representing industries/fields not experiencing or anticipating a skills shortage, and in some cases experiencing a “skills surplus”, were less interested in, and have fewer funds for, increasing profile and attracting new members.

Similar to the employer respondents, association representatives typically underscored the role of associations in establishing, maintaining, and protecting professional standards, certifications, and qualifications. While, this is clearly widely understood for regulatory associations, it was also a representative response for industry and non-regulatory associations where the professional profile and standards for its membership was seen as critical to the practice and public image of various occupations. In certain instances this was also a reflection of the need for specific safety standards and public or employee protection.

Regardless of how actively associations are involved in profile growth and member recruitment, a significant portion of association representatives see professional, trade,

and industry associations as playing a significant role in assisting skilled immigrants attach to the labour market. However, a minority of respondents noted that assisting skilled immigrants attach to the labour market was outside of their mandate and cited no role in assisting skilled immigrants.

The following descriptions outline the association representatives' perceptions and responses in greater detail.

***To offer the same service and resources to all members***

Most of the Professional Associations interviewed had a strong value attached to serving all members and offering the same services to all members.

***Information and communication***

The majority of association respondents articulated a clear role in providing information and communications as a means of assisting skilled immigrants seeking employment. Specific suggestions included the listing of employment opportunities, clear descriptions of industry and occupational conditions and requirements, indications of employment supply and demand, and clearly outlined career profiles. Some association respondents also listed a role in communicating required language and technical skills for specific occupations or careers.

***To act as a liaison between job seekers and employers***

Associations see themselves as liaisons between job seekers and employers. This is most often accomplished by maintaining job posting sites, member/employer directories, or referring to recruiters who specialize in the field. It was also noted that many associations fulfill a valuable informal job search role for its members through the provision and coordination of day to day networking events.

### ***To offer educational and career planning advice***

Many associations have the ability to offer educational and career advice. Essential to this service, was the widely held and acknowledged role associations have in the provision of specific and up to date labour market information. In some instances associations indicated the development of specific resources for skilled immigrants and / or new entrants into an occupation or industry: for e.g. occupational fact sheets, descriptions of required certifications, and website employment postings. In addition, many associations noted willingness, and for some a regular practice, of providing career and professional advice on an informal and ad hoc basis. It was also said that some associations could not assist in the development of a whole career plan but could assist in understanding requirements, obligations, and expectations of unions and the qualifications of a specific profession or trade.

### ***To refer to other sources and to assist in developing resources***

Associations perceive themselves as having the ability to refer to other resources; for example, to be able to refer to educational institutes for appropriate training. Associations also have some ability to assist educational institutes to understand labour market demands and to develop programs or courses to meet those demands. A few associations noted that they are either partnering or working with a third party organization for the development of skills upgrading, certification training and professional development, or technical language skills training specifically with the skilled immigrant population in mind.

### ***To provide networking opportunities***

Networking opportunities were cited as one of the main roles of associations. These are generally offered to members but are often open to potential members or non-members. Associations coordinate and advertise networking events.

***To heighten profile of association and its industry in the community***

Associations see this as one of their larger roles. In order to heighten the profile of an association and its industry, many associations mentioned sending industry representatives to speak to groups, their involvement in task forces, their efforts to increase their profile internationally and therefore draw more trained workers to BC, and their existing relationships with immigrant serving agencies and other community groups.

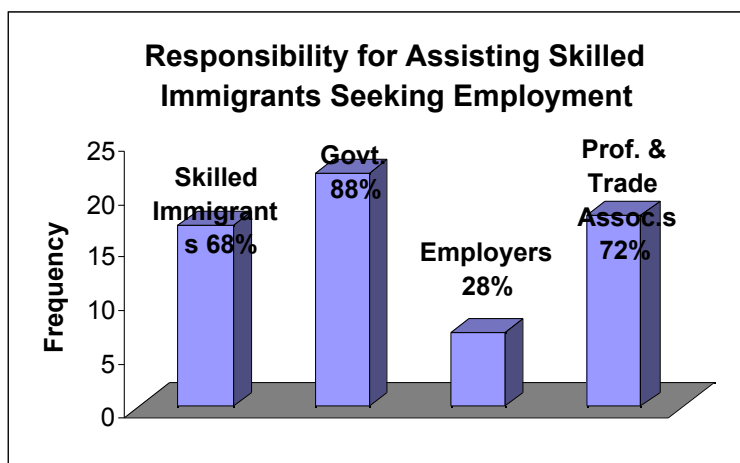
***To facilitate the credentialing process***

For many regulatory associations credential assessments and other skills assessments is an important function. Others are making efforts to facilitate recognition of foreign credentials. Some, for example APEG, offer provisional memberships to assist employers to identify candidates that have many of the requirements/qualifications of the profession but require work experience to gain full designation or professional recognition.

## **Responsibility: Who is responsible to assist Skilled Immigrants?**

All three interview groups (skilled immigrants, employers, and association representatives) were requested to indicate the degree of agreement on a five point scale concerning four statements with “1” as strongly agree and “5” as strongly disagree. The statements were intended to examine perceptions of responsibility for finding employment or assisting skilled immigrants find employment.

The charts below illustrate that skilled immigrants and foreign trained professionals contacted during the research for this project reported both a strong belief that they are responsible for finding employment related to their field and that professional and trade associations should have a role in assisting them find employment related to their field. However, government’s (federal and provincial) role in assisting skilled immigrants find work was identified most strongly with combined agreement and strong agreement of 88%. The following three figures represent the interview groups’ responses of agreement or strong agreement.



**Figure 1: Immigrant respondents**

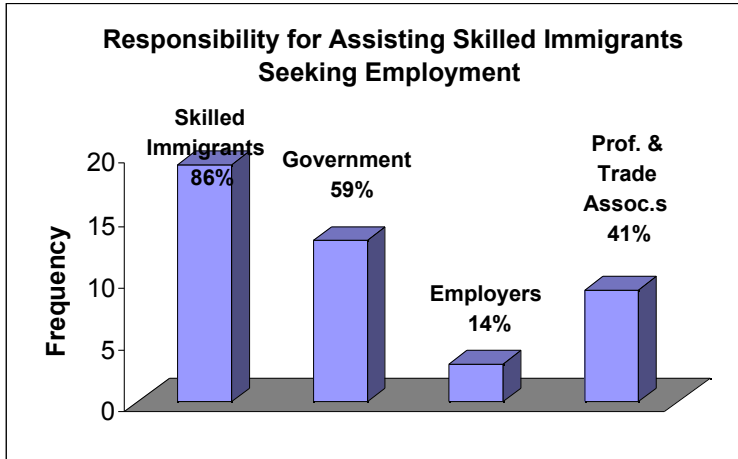


Figure 2: Association representatives

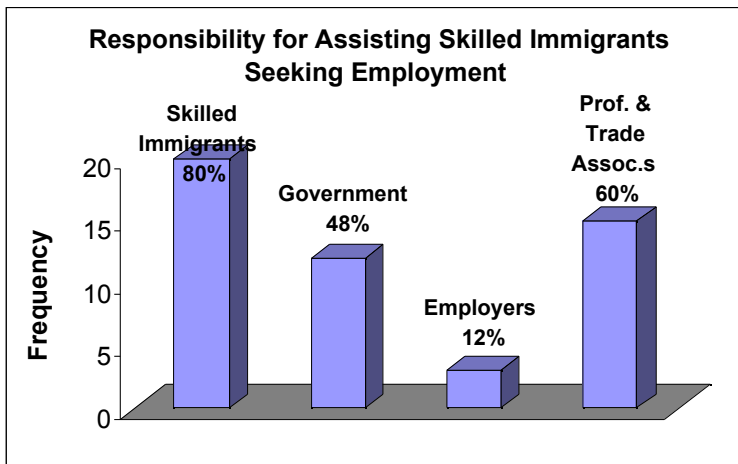


Figure 3: Employer representatives

As the charts above illustrate, all three respondent groups agree or strongly agree that skilled immigrants themselves have responsibility for finding employment related to their field. However, it is also clear that there is a strong perception that this is not a responsibility that they have in isolation. Rather, the respondents indicated that there is also a strong role for both government and professional and trade associations to play in assisting skilled immigrants find employment related to their fields. Only employers were seen not to have significant responsibility in assisting skilled immigrants find employment.

While these findings do not put the onus on professional, industry and trade associations to take full responsibility for assistance with skilled immigrants' job search, they do demonstrate that their involvement would benefit BC's skilled immigrants either through direct or combined effort strategies to assist their attachment to the labour market.

## ***Guidelines Overview***

Professional Associations representing industries/fields that are not experiencing or anticipating a skills shortage, and in some cases experiencing a “skills surplus”, are less interested in and have fewer resources for increasing profile and attracting new members. Although this seems an obvious observation, it is important to state. Government and media reports of upcoming skills shortages might be easily and incorrectly interpreted as a shortage experienced across all occupational fields. It is important to note that some fields are clearly experiencing or anticipating skills shortages (construction trades, some computer technology fields, speech and language pathology, etc.) and other fields are experiencing a skills surplus (cosmetologists, social workers, chef/cooks, English language instructors). With this in mind, it is understood that the guidelines presented by this report will likely only be considered by those associations representing fields in need of workers. Of course, given the rapidly changing economy and labour market we exist in, associations may find this resource useful for near future consideration; shortages and surpluses experienced by an industry this season or year may change considerably over the next decade.

Furthermore, it must be recognized that many associations are already active in supporting the labour force attachment of skilled immigrants. Some associations, as previously mentioned, have created dedicated services and programs and others frequently provide informal and one to one assistance to skilled immigrant job seekers. The intent of these guidelines and recommendations is to:

1. Assist professional and trade associations in working with skilled immigrants seeking employment
2. Provide alternatives or information to support and enhance existing services and offerings; both formal and informal
3. Provide an easy to use information template outlining progressive levels of service or intervention.

It is not the intent of this report or any of the following recommendations to dictate or imply revisions to the mandate of any association. Rather, implementation or adaptation of any of the guidelines and recommendations must be at the sole discretion of individual associations and be considered within the context of their industry, membership, and governance.

## The Guidelines

The guidelines and recommendations are arranged and presented in three categories:

1. **Low resource commitment** – these recommendations recognize the limitations on resources and personnel faced by many associations and provide suggestions for strategies that can be adapted with little or no additional resources.
2. **Limited resource commitment** – these recommendations require some dedication of personnel and / or financial resources, but are intended to be manageable without additional personnel or significant investment
3. **Medium to high resource commitment** – these recommendations require dedicated financial resources and personnel, and therefore are expected to be applicable to large scale associations or those experiencing a pronounced skills shortage.

The guidelines were developed from the input of professional associations, employers and skilled immigrants as outlined in previous sections.

<b>1. Low Resource Commitments</b>		
<b>Strategy</b>	<b>Actions or Implementation</b>	<b>Benefits / Implications</b>
Enhance communications and information	Designate an “in-house” expert to handle skilled immigrant inquiries	<b>Improves</b> access to information <b>Clarifies</b> organizational responsibility <b>Establishes</b> procedures for inquiries
	Provide association information and relevant occupational and membership materials (print and web) to immigrant serving agencies	<b>Reduces</b> uninformed inquiries from skilled immigrants <b>Increases</b> awareness of association within the skilled immigrant community <b>Facilitates</b> development of career and educational plans

## 1. Low Resource Commitments

	Post links to related education institutions and programs (particularly for credentialing or certification requirements)	<b>Facilitates</b> access to educational information and requirements <b>Expedites</b> credentialing or certification process
Facilitate Networking and Professional Contacts	Invite skilled immigrants participation or limited participation in seminars, association networking events, or conferences; establish a special fee structure	<b>Provides</b> skilled immigrants access to professional community and contacts <b>Offers</b> access to up-to-date and specific occupational Labour Market Information
	Post directories and / or profiles of member companies on website or print handouts	<b>Provides</b> access to professional community and contacts <b>Offers</b> access to up-to-date and specific occupational Labour Market Information
	Post related links, organizations, and contacts on website or in print handouts	<b>Provides</b> access to professional community and contacts
Provide career and educational planning services	Acknowledge and address career and professional inquiries from skilled immigrants on an ad hoc or case by case basis	<b>Assists</b> in formation of career plans and evaluation of association membership <b>Offers</b> access to up-to-date and specific occupational Labour Market Information

## 2. Limited Resource Commitments

Strategy	Actions or Implementation	Benefits / Implications
Enhance communications and information	Prepare and provide clear documentation on occupational profiles, certification and education requirements, occupational requirements including entry level and related occupations (web and print)	<b>Establishes</b> a clear and accessible career path <b>Allows</b> for the development of an informed career and educational plan
	Participate in employment fairs, career expositions and / or immigrant serving agencies' job finding seminars	<b>Improves</b> access to information <b>Increases</b> public profile for Association and industry <b>Provides</b> direct contact between job seekers and association and industry experts <b>Increases</b> association/industry awareness of foreign trained workers
	Provide guest speakers for employment programs for skilled immigrants	<b>Improves</b> access to educational information and professional requirements <b>Demystifies</b> industry locally
Facilitate Networking and Professional Contacts	Host networking events or coordinate round table sessions specifically for skilled immigrants at regular meetings or seminars	<b>Provides</b> direct contact between job seekers and association and industry experts <b>Assists</b> employers to understand skilled immigrants, their potential and their barriers to employment
	Participate in Human Resources or employment information panels for skilled immigrant job seekers	<b>Provides</b> direct contact between job seekers and association and industry experts <b>Increases</b> public profile for Association and industry
	Provide links or bulletins for employer / member job postings	<b>Provides</b> direct contact with industry <b>Offers</b> quick access to employer expectations and qualifications

## 2. Limited Resource Commitments

Provide career and educational planning services	Develop and provide materials (web and / or print) for educational and certification requirements	<p><b>Facilitates</b> skilled immigrant self-assessment of skills and qualifications</p> <p><b>Provides</b> base for offering further career and educational planning services to skilled immigrants</p>
	Provide referrals to outside or third party educational institutions that can assist with professional upgrading or certifications. Maintain course or program materials for distribution.	<p><b>Assists</b> to clarify role and mandate of associations vs. educational institutes</p> <p><b>Facilitates</b> the offering of career and educational planning services</p>
	Develop and provide easy to understand Labour Market Information: salary rates, career path, and entry qualifications for positions	<p><b>Assists</b> in development of career and educational plans</p> <p><b>Reduces</b> number of uninformed inquiries</p>
	Develop and provide job descriptions (web and or print) for all occupations within the occupational category	<p><b>Assists</b> in development of a career and educational path</p> <p><b>Clarifies</b> points of career entry and next step options</p>
	Host periodic career information sessions for skilled immigrants	<p><b>Assists</b> to clarify career path</p> <p><b>Demystifies</b> industry and the qualification process</p>

### 3. Medium to High Resource Commitments

Strategy	Actions or Implementation	Benefits / Implications
Enhance communications and information	Liaise with international professional and industry associations to offer information related to Canadian and / or British Columbian professional, occupational, and educational requirements	<p><b>Facilitates</b> career planning process of skilled immigrant prior to arrival</p> <p><b>Increases</b> awareness of qualification similarities and differences and may facilitate recognition of qualifications</p>
	Liaise with government and immigration officials regarding professional, occupational, and educational requirements. In partnership with government and immigration, assist in development of materials accessible to skilled immigrants prior to arrival or immediately upon arrival.	<p><b>Facilitates</b> career planning prior to arrival</p> <p><b>Quickens</b> attachment to meaningful employment</p> <p><b>Increases</b> skilled immigrant awareness of association and its purpose</p>
	Participate on a board or in an advisory capacity to immigrant serving agencies or employment programs	<p><b>Increases</b> association and industry profile and heightens understanding of industry expectations</p>
Facilitate Networking and Professional Contacts	Coordinate networking events that profile/celebrate successful skilled immigrants and invite newly landed skilled immigrants	<p><b>Increases</b> profile of association and industry</p> <p><b>Motivates</b> newly landed skilled immigrants</p> <p><b>Attracts</b> new members</p>
Provide career and educational planning services	Develop and provide professional upgrading programs or certification courses	<p><b>Provides</b> direct access to industry standards and certifications</p> <p><b>Streamlines</b> approach to gaining qualifications and having them recognized</p>

### 3. Medium to High Resource Commitments

	Establish educational partnerships with immigrant serving agencies and employment programs to develop bridging programs	<b>Provides</b> customized curriculum and programs to accurately meet the needs of a specific sector <b>Expedites</b> attachment to labour market <b>Defines</b> technical and worksite language expectations accurately
	Establish credential and evaluation procedures and provide clear overviews of these procedures	<b>Streamlines</b> process of credential recognition <b>Clarifies</b> requirements for qualification or designation
Provide and facilitate employment integration	Coordinate volunteer work experience placements, internships or co-op terms between skilled immigrants and employers or member organizations.	<b>Provides</b> skilled immigrants with critical Canadian experience <b>Offers</b> familiarity with Canadian workplace culture and language <b>Provides</b> networking opportunities <b>Provides</b> opportunity to assess, refresh or enhance professional skills
	Develop a mentorship program matching senior workers within industry with skilled immigrants	<b>Provides</b> networking opportunities <b>Provides</b> opportunity to assess, refresh or enhance professional skills
Provide specific local knowledge and requirements	Coordinate or develop learning materials for local and regional occupational requirements: particularly local technical, legal, and code requirements	<b>Streamlines</b> process of qualification and professional recognition <b>Assures</b> adherence to and maintenance of industry standards
Increase access to professional associations	Provide “associate memberships” to qualified skilled immigrants seeking entry or provisional status which recognizes those with foreign credentials	<b>Increases</b> access to networking opportunities <b>Facilitates</b> employer understanding of skilled immigrant jobseekers’ qualifications <b>Expedites</b> skilled immigrant entry into employment <b>Builds</b> skilled immigrants’ confidence

## **Conclusion**

Like any job seeker, the skilled immigrant job seeker needs:

- *An understanding of the local labour market*
- *An understanding of local licensing, certification or qualification requirements*
- *A network of employment related contacts*

It is the conclusion of this report that industry, trade and professional associations are rich, and often underutilized, existing sources of the very information skilled immigrants require most. Professional, industry and trade association have many responsibilities and similarly many constituents: their membership, government, employers, corporations and organizations, and the public. In addition, it is clear that associations operate on the basis of or are governed by firm mandates, obligations to their membership, stewardship to the public and government, and often limited resources. Nevertheless, in BC's culturally diverse population they also have a role in the assistance of labour market attachment for skilled immigrants; not only as new residents and citizens, but as professional colleagues, new occupational entrants, experts, and as part of the "skills shortage" solution facing many industries. Large or small, formal or informal, professional, industry and trade associations are a rich resource of occupational, industry, local, and professional information. As outlined in the recommendations of this report, it is not expected that associations need to revise their mandate or shift their criteria for membership. Rather, professional, industry, and trade associations, particularly in those industries facing a skills shortage, should assess their capabilities to assist skilled immigrants and provide assistance in keeping within their roles and the resources available to them.

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