



# Evaluation Report of the Employer Engagement Program

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## Introduction

This report summarizes the evaluation of the Employer Engagement program delivered under the *Work* pillar of the Waterloo Region Immigration Partnership (IP). The goal of this program is to engage employers in Waterloo Region in a variety of awareness-raising and networking activities to build their capacity and create opportunities for them to network with, hire, and retain internationally trained individuals (ITIs) in meaningful work and career pathways. This report addresses the program's processes, outcomes and areas for further improvement based on the most recent funding cycle (2018-2020).

The report begins by providing an overview of the program. Next, the evaluation purpose and research questions are presented, followed by the evaluation approach and methods. The findings section is organized according to the main research questions about program processes, outcomes, and recommendations for program improvement.

## Program Overview

The Employer Engagement Program was funded by the Province of Ontario. The Greater Kitchener-Waterloo Chamber of Commerce was the agreement holder and worked with the Immigration Partnership (hosted by the Region of Waterloo) to implement the program. The **Work Steering Group** of the Immigration Partnership which consists of approximately 20 local employers played the role of the advisory committee to this program. This group met regularly and provided guidance to planning and implementation of different program components. **Three main stakeholders** were engaged in this program: (1) employers in Waterloo Region; (2) community partners including service providers, job developers, immigrant serving agencies, and large employer networks; and (3) ITIs with varying levels of education and skill sets.

**The six core activities** carried out by the program are listed below. Outputs are reported for each activity from April 2018 to the end of November 2020 (evaluation cut-off point). Combined, the intended immediate and intermediate outcomes of these activities were to raise employers' awareness of the international talent pool available in Waterloo Region, facilitate employers' access to ITIs, and to have more ITIs hired and retained by local employers. The ultimate goal was to have ITIs more recognized in the broader community and contributing to Waterloo Region's economic growth. Program components and their intended outcomes can be seen in the program logic model (see Appendix A). This logic model was developed in conversation with the program coordinator and the Work Steering Group.

**1. Hosting ITI/employer networking events.** The Immigration Partnership hosted networking events in partnership with community partners such as Greater Kitchener-Waterloo and Cambridge Chambers of Commerce, Communtech and other large employer networks. The program coordinator and community partners invited local employers and ITIs to these events to meet informally, expand their networking, and explore employment opportunities. Due to the difficulties involved in setting up networking events such as organizing the venue and food, recruiting employers and speakers, the program coordinator decided to tag on the events hosted by community partners such as the Workforce Planning Board and Kitchener-Waterloo Multicultural Centre. The Immigration Partnership held seven networking events and tagged on

three virtual events in the report period. Overall, about 462 employers and 2668 ITIs attended these networking events.

**2. Meeting one-on-one with local employers.** The program coordinator connected and developed relationships with local employers by making phone calls or meeting in-person. Individual connections with employers enabled the program coordinator to better understand the labour needs and hiring challenges of local employers. During these one-on-one communications, the program coordinator raised employers' awareness of available talent pool, shared employment support and services available to employers, and encouraged them to hire and retain ITIs. Job postings shared by employers following these meetings were shared within the Partnership's network to help with finding the right ITI. Overall, the program coordinator was successful in individually connecting with 208 employers between April 2018 and the end of November 2020. Due to many challenges that local employers were facing during the COVID-19 pandemic, communications with employers were primarily made through group emails.

**3. Hosting/sponsoring employer targeted educational seminars.** The Immigration Partnership partnered with community partners such as Greater Kitchener-Waterloo Chamber of Commerce and Human Resource Professional Association (HRPA) to host small and large educational seminars. The Immigration Partnership also sponsored and participated in educational seminars (in-person and virtual) hosted by other community partners such as Greater Kitchener-Waterloo Chamber of Commerce and BestWR. Educational seminars were intended to raise employers' awareness of the available talent pool, encourage hiring ITIs, and support employers to retain ITIs in their workplaces. Local immigration lawyers and employers with success in hiring and retaining ITIs and immigrants were invited as guest speakers to these seminars. In total, four in-person educational seminars were hosted, and more than 19 seminars (in-person and virtual) were sponsored by the Immigration Partnership during the report period. Overall, approximately 820 employers attended these educational seminars.

**4. Participating in/sponsoring employer networking events hosted by community partners.** The Immigration Partnership attended and sponsored networking events hosted by community partners such as the Greater Kitchener-Waterloo and Cambridge Chambers of Commerce, Workforce Planning Board, Communitech, and Manufacturing Innovation Network. Sponsoring and engaging in these events enabled the program coordinator to connect with new employers, re-connect with old employer partners, and connect employers to agencies directly supporting ITIs. In total, the program coordinator engaged in 37 networking events (in-person and virtual) and built awareness amongst 2840 employers through these opportunities.

**5. Coordinating with community partners and scanning the environment.** Building and maintaining relationships with community partners helped the planning and delivery of the program. Partnering with Workforce Planning Board, Kitchener-Waterloo Multicultural Centre, Reception House Waterloo Region, and Cambridge and Kitchener-Waterloo YMCA provided a better understanding of the labour market needs and facilitated employers' access to the international talent pool. Moreover, these partners helped the program coordinator to recruit employers for educational seminars and invited employers and ITIs to networking events. Overall, the program coordinator met over 25 times with these four community partners during the report period.

**6. Promoting and marketing the program.** Program activities were promoted through partners' publications (Greater Kitchener-Waterloo and Cambridge Chambers of Commerce) and the employer portal on the Immigration Partnership's website. Additionally, other community partners who helped to deliver the previously mentioned core activities promoted networking events and educational seminars within their networks and social media platforms. The Immigration Partnership also launched the #HireImmigrantsWR campaign that was promoted on local radio, cinema, and the Immigration Partnership's website and social media platforms. As of November 2020, 21 posts with #HireImmigrantsWR were shared on the Immigration Partnership's LinkedIn, Twitter, and Facebook feeds. Program promotion also took place during different events, seminars, and one-on-one meetings with employers. In total, the program coordinator developed about 419 new relationships with employers in Waterloo Region since 2018 across all six core activities.

## Overview of Evaluation

### Evaluation Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this evaluation was to determine the extent to which this program was **implemented** successfully, to assess its **impact**, especially on employers in Waterloo Region, and to **improve** the program. Three corresponding main research questions guided the evaluation:

1. What is working well and not working well as the Employer Engagement Program delivers its six core activities? How have these activities been adapted by the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. To what extent have Employer Engagement Program activities contributed to the desired changes it wishes to see in Waterloo Region?
3. What improvements can be made for the Employer Engagement Program to have a greater impact in Waterloo Region? What has our response to the COVID-19 pandemic taught us about how program implementation could be effective remotely?

### Evaluation Approach

This evaluation was conducted by the Centre for Community Based Research and followed a community-based research approach, meaning it aimed to be *participatory, action-oriented, and as useful and relevant* as possible (Ochocka & Janzen, 2014). One way to follow these principles was to have the Immigration Partnership's Work Steering Group help guide the evaluation process. The research questions, logic model, and data collection protocols were shared and shaped by the Work Steering Group at the beginning of this evaluation. Preliminary findings were then shared and discussed by the Work Steering Group at the mid-point of this evaluation. Lastly, a draft of the report was shared with the Work Steering Group with members helping to finalize the evaluation recommendations.

### Methods

This evaluation used mixed methods (qualitative and quantitative) to gather insights from three main stakeholder groups (community partners, employers, and ITIs) engaged in the Employer Engagement

Program. Five methods of data collection were used which are detailed below in order of their implementation.

**1. Secondary Document Review:** Secondary document review was done first to gain a general understanding of the program and its components. Documents that were reviewed included the program’s progress reports and promotional materials (including social media posts) as well as the Immigration Partnership’s Community Action Plans, website, and newsletters. This information was primarily used for context to help inform the overall evaluation.

**2. Individual Interviews:** Individual interviews were carried out to gain detailed understanding of program process and outcomes and enabled in-depth probing for focus groups. In total, 12 individual interviews were conducted. First, three Local Immigration Partnership (LIP) staff including the program coordinator and two members of the Work Steering Group were interviewed. Next, four interviews were carried out with community partners who were active in co-raising awareness and co-promoting the program activities. Lastly, five interviews were conducted with employers who had different levels of engagement in program activities (three highly engaged, one not very engaged and one not engaged at all).

**3. Focus Groups:** Two focus groups were held in total. One focus group was held with five ITIs who attended at least one of the ITI/employer networking events hosted or sponsored by the Immigration Partnership. Another focus group was carried with six community partners who had a long-term relationship with the Immigration Partnership and co-raised awareness, co-promoted and co-hosted different program activities. For the first focus group the Kitchener-Waterloo Multicultural Centre helped to recruit ITIs who took part in their Global Skills Conferences and other networking events sponsored by the Immigration Partnership.

**4. Online Survey:** An online survey was distributed to 301 ITIs including 260 ITIs who attended in-person Global Skills Conferences in 2019 and 2020, and 41 ITIs who attended one virtual event hosted by the Workforce Planning Board in 2020. The survey was completed by 50 ITIs. A limitation of this evaluation was that only two community partners kept a record of the ITIs who registered for networking events. Other community partners who hosted other networking events which were sponsored by the Immigration Partnership did not have a record of ITI registration and therefore could not distribute the survey. However, ITIs who received the survey likely attended other networking events hosted or sponsored by the Immigration Partnership which had been promoted by the Workforce Planning Board and Kitchener-Waterloo Multicultural Centre.

**5. Program Tracking:** A tool was developed to track all program outputs from April 2018 to the end of November 2020. These outputs included the total number of ITI/employer events, employer educational seminars, employer and ITI participants, #HireimmigrantsWR posts on social media platforms, meeting with employers and community partners, and new relationships developed with employers. The data was collected in an Excel spreadsheet primarily from the progress reports and secondarily by information that the program coordinator provided.

## Evaluation Findings

Evaluation findings are summarized across all five methods and are organized according to the three main research questions related to program implementation, program outcomes, and future directions. The results within each section are organized in order of strength and note any stakeholder and method differences.

### Program Implementation

This section presents the key strengths and challenges in program delivery. Overall, evaluation results indicate that the program was largely effective in providing useful information and making positive connections across its three main stakeholders (employers, ITIs, and community partners). There were five main program strengths identified (detailed below) which are mostly internal to the program and the Immigration Partnership. These strengths cut across all core program activities and therefore demonstrate what is working well when the six core activities are delivered together. One particular note was how evaluation participants viewed the passion and competence of the program coordinator as being the essential element in implementing these different program components. One employer stated that “maybe there needs to be more Nora’s getting out there [in our community].”

In addition to program strengths, five main implementation challenges were identified through the evaluation (also detailed below). These challenges were more external to the program. For example, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic was one commonly mentioned challenge that affected the program delivery and effectiveness. Other challenges shared by evaluation participants were mostly related to the way the employment and settlement system is set up in Waterloo Region.

### Key Strengths

#### **Strength #1: Partnering with diverse community partners.**

The Immigration Partnership collaborated with multiple community partners including service providers, employment services, immigrant serving agencies, and large employer networks in order to co-promote and co-host different program activities. The majority of community partners who participated in focus groups and interviews noted that the collaboration between them and the Immigration Partnership was integral in moving the program forward.

Community partners actively promoted networking events and educational seminars sponsored by the Immigration Partnership within their networks, on their website and social media platforms. They were also helpful in recruiting employers for educational seminars and networking events as well as inviting ITIs to networking events. LIP staff also emphasized the importance of having these relationships with community partners: “As the Immigration Partnership becomes more clear and credible, it gains more partners, and we need those partners or else we could never achieve the goals of the [Employer Engagement] program.”

Community partners supported the goal of the program by informing the program coordinator of different opportunities and engaging her in their events. As one community partner commented, “Nora has been engaged in many of our events, for example, being sponsor of the November and February

virtual events, the part-time career expo, manufacturing day tours, and being a stakeholder of the Findyourjob.ca. We run the job developer network for Employment Ontario, so she is always been invited to take part in that piece as well.”

The benefits of partner collaboration were not only limited to program promotion and implementation. Program planning also relied on the information provided by a few community partners who assessed the labour market needs. These community partners, who participated in interviews and focus groups, were very passionate and supportive to share information about region’s employment needs with the Immigration Partnership and other collaborators. Community partners also acknowledged the program coordinator’s work in disseminating this information within the Partnership’s network.

Finally, the benefits of partnership went beyond the Immigration Partnership. Evaluation participants, specifically employers and service providers, expressed having more visibility and expanding their networks by participating in networking events and educational seminars hosted and sponsored by the Immigration Partnership. Moreover, community partners found the program coordinator supportive in promoting their activities.

*“We host this conference each year and the networking session through [Immigration] Partnership has been an integral part of that since the beginning. There’s a lot of coordination that way in helping, working together on events, recruiting employers, letting our clients know about different job opportunities, as well as different kinds of seminars or workshops [hosted or sponsored by IP] that they [clients] might be able to benefit from. So, I feel that it has been a good, productive relationship and a good two-way street over all these years.”* (Community Partner, Focus Group Participant)

### **Strength #2: Having diverse stakeholders in the Work Steering Group.**

Numerous interview participants, including those who were also members of the Work Steering Group, explained that the diversity of members in the Work Steering Group worked well in guiding different program components. One community partner who participated in an interview stated that, “They [members of the Work Steering Group] have all been pretty receptive and willing to think creatively to solve a problem.”

More specifically, communication and information sharing between members of the Work Steering Group were beneficial to the Immigration Partnership and other partners. For example, one community partner stated that “having service providers present in this group facilitates their connections with other businesses which consequently open more doors to access the [international] talent pool.” Two highly engaged employers thought this group was a great place to hear from others, learn about market needs and what other service providers and employers have to offer.

*“I am very supportive of hiring newcomers and immigrants. The needs of immigrants and newcomers are different though, so to have a voice at the table is important. I love working with Nora and the Work Steering Group. I certainly feel heard at those tables and they have incorporated suggestions that others and I have made.”* (Employer, Interview Participant)

In addition to contributing “new ideas and solutions” beneficial to the Employer Engagement Program, members of the Work Steering Group were helpful in promoting the program activities within their networks. This support increased over time as the goal and activities under the *Work* pillar became more recognized and valued by different members of the Work Steering Group.

*“During the last couple of years, the conversation has improved [in the Work Steering Group] and I think that is a good thing. One thing that has been going well is that this conversation [of implementing some ideas shared by Nora] has been taking place lately. We need to do something new and be more impactful. Before, they [Work Steering Group meetings] were more like reporting sessions.” (Work Steering Group Member)*

### **Strength #3: Providing useful information and raising awareness.**

Evaluation participants explained that ITI/employer networking events, #HireimmigrantsWR campaign, and one-on-one connections with the program coordinator worked well in providing information to different stakeholders and raising awareness for local employers.

Highly active employers and ITIs rated ITI/employer networking events very positively and saw the events as helping ITIs to learn about Canadian workplace culture, the job market, and current opportunities in Waterloo Region. One ITI stated: “when I participate in this event [Tech Jam], it gives me more information about the [job] market itself and how to connect with other participants and employers. Talking to recruiters help get more information about involved companies and make connections in the market.” Forty percent of ITI survey respondents had similar opinions about networking events in response to the survey question “what, if anything, did you find most helpful about your experience with networking events?”

Some highly engaged employers that participated in evaluation interviews explained that #HireimmigrantsWR was successful in raising awareness of the international talent pool and engaging employers. One employer stated: “we knocked it [the campaign] out of the park! It was one of the greatest successes we have had to date; creating that local buzz and having employers reach out to the [Immigration] Partnership.” This campaign was also effective in expanding the reach to ITIs. When asked “How did you first find out about networking events?”, 30% of ITI survey respondents chose “social media platforms” such as #HireImmigrantsWR campaign on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, cinema, and local radio.

Finally, community partners explained that they received useful information through one-on-one communication with the program coordinator. Information shared by the program coordinator about the job market, immigration, and employment in general was considered especially important for immigrant serving agencies.

*“Working with the Immigration Partnership and the Work Steering Group helps us know what employers are saying and provides us with the on the ground feedback. Numbers are great but we want the story as well. Nora’s contributions feed into the story. She helps provide the context for my numbers. When we do an event and we know that newcomers are a significant portion of the talent pool, it helps with our attendance and engagement.” (Community partner, Interview Participant)*

### **Strength #4: Making positive connections between employers and immigrant serving agencies.**

Overall, the program worked well in making positive connections between employers and immigrants serving agencies which facilitated employers’ access to the international talent pool.

Highly engaged employers who participated in interviews explained that the program coordinator acted as a “one-stop shop” for them in connecting them to immigrant serving agencies and ITIs. One local employer that had success hiring and retaining immigrants was connected to two immigrant serving agencies through the program coordinator. This connection was effective in fulfilling the employment and

language needs of the immigrants they hired. Another employer who reached out to the program coordinator for referrals mentioned that she would have been lost in the system if she wanted to look for an ITI herself “due to lack of a direct contact in community”.

Immigrant serving agencies that participated in interviews and the focus group also found the program and its coordinator helpful in connecting them to local employers. One focus group participant stated: “Nora has been doing an amazing job with the employment community. She has connected us to a number of employers and we have been invited to a large number of employment-related events that have been organized or sponsored by the Immigration Partnership.” One interview participant found the networking events to be working well in meeting diverse employers and connecting them to ITIs in their client pool.

### **Strength #5: Improving ITIs’ networking and connections.**

Overall, ITI/employer networking events were considered successful in creating an opportunity for ITIs and employers to connect. ITI focus group and survey participants found it easy to connect with employers and other ITIs in networking events hosted or sponsored by the Immigration Partnership. In addition, expanding their network was the highlight of ITIs’ experience with these events. Overall ITIs’ impression of networking events was positive with 71% of survey respondents stating that they will likely attend these events in the future.

The majority of ITIs who participated in the focus group considered these events effective in helping them to expand their network. For instance, they had the opportunity to make friends with other participants, connect with employers, and expand their network on LinkedIn. ITIs valued having the opportunity to make new connections and maintain their contacts with employers. For example, 45% of ITI survey respondents expressed that having the opportunity to expand their network and make connections was the most helpful aspect of their experience with networking events specifically for in-person ones. In response to the survey question, “If these networking events did not exist in our community, what, if anything, would be missing?” one ITI explained that “these networking events are very productive and makes newcomers feel included and that they are not alone.”

ITIs had differing views about the ease of building relationships with local employers at networking events. According to the survey, 61% of respondents found it “very easy” and “easy” to connect with local employers and 32% found it “not very easy” to make connections with employers. Lastly, slightly more than half (57%) of ITIs “agreed” and “strongly agreed” with this statement in the online survey: “I had more opportunities to make meaningful connections with employers.”

## **Key Challenges**

### **Challenge #1: The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.**

The impact of the pandemic was noted as the major challenge for the program this past year by most evaluation participants. This impact was highlighted in two main areas: (1) connecting ITIs and local employers virtually, and (2) maintaining program involvement and promotion.

*Connecting ITIs and local employers virtually.* Evaluation participants from across stakeholder perspectives agreed that the pandemic negatively impacted ITIs’ online engagement and connections with local employers. Some considered accessing and using technology to be the main barrier to ITIs’ participation

in online networking events. They recognized that many individuals in their client pool have limited computer literacy and internet access needed to attend these virtual events. Youth in particular “might have strong social media skills to use WhatsApp and Instagram, but they lack technical and functional digital skills.” Technology was also considered a barrier for employers’ online engagement. One community partner explained that “employers need technological support in a virtual recruiting world. Especially small business owners need to learn how to adapt to the new online system to be able to attend online job fairs.”

However, focus group and survey results show that ITIs’ primary concern about the impact of the pandemic was not technology itself, but the lack of the real face-to-face interactions with employers. Immigrant service providers agreed, with one stating: “in-person interaction is really diluted when networking events moved online.” Overall, all ITI focus group participants and 69% of survey respondents preferred in-person communication rather than online: “In person [networking events] are much better, they allow immigrants to get out of their comfort zone and make stronger connections [with local employers]. Online limits this interaction.”

***Maintaining program involvement and promotion.*** In addition to ITIs and employers struggling to connect, program stakeholders generally found it difficult to maintain their level involvement in the program and to help promote its activities during the pandemic. This included members of the Work Steering Group. For example, some employers on the Work Steering Group acknowledged that their involvement dropped due to the pandemic challenges they were facing within their own organizations/companies. The pandemic also had implications for positive messaging about the hiring of immigrants given the decreased numbers of immigrants entering the country during the pandemic and given the high unemployment rates experienced across the community.

### **Challenge #2: Employer-talent matching.**

Connecting the right talent to the right job and employer was another major challenge shared by many evaluation participants. Employers and LIP staff framed this challenge as an ongoing gap between the type of jobs available and the type of talent that enters Waterloo Region. One employer stated that, “We have a gap in manufacturing sector yet we’re bringing in people with PhDs.” Moreover, highly skilled immigrants need to get certified in their field because most times, their home country certifications are not accepted in Canada. One ITI survey respondent emphasized this challenge and stated: “Change the degree evaluation system in Ontario for the foreign graduates.”

The gap between the types of jobs and talent available in Waterloo Region had implications for the effectiveness of networking events hosted and sponsored by the Immigration Partnership. One employer who attended a networking event stated that the education level of ITIs was higher than what she needed in a factory. Survey results give evidence to this statement; 92% of ITI survey respondents who attended the networking events had postsecondary education. One survey participant explained: “The events are not suited to people with education and years of experience. It’s mostly suitable for people looking for low paying jobs or those with low English proficiency.”

Community partners who participated in the focus group commented on the existing skills’ mismatch between employers’ needs and “what people in the labour force have.” ITIs who participated in the focus group shared similar examples that emphasize this point. Others evaluation participants acknowledged that this mismatch is more complex than what the program could address.

*“Because I have 30 plus years of experience in my career, I think it is difficult to find a suitable job for my experience. I switched to quality management so maybe I will be more suitable for a starting position in quality management.” (ITI, Focus Group Participant)*

*“In the end, we ultimately cannot provide exactly what employers and job seekers, specifically newcomers are looking for. Because this is just a bigger, systemic problem and not necessarily something we can put forth immediately to resolve.” (Service provider, Focus Group Participant)*

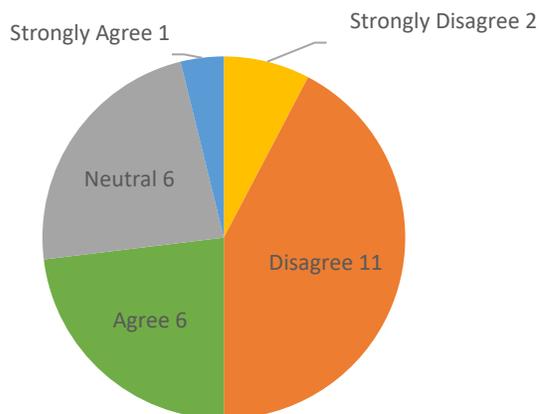
### **Challenge #3: Employers’ lack of awareness, readiness, and engagement.**

Community partners, employers, and LIP staff who participated in interviews and focus group shared challenges associated with local employers that affected the effectiveness of the program. Three main employer challenges are discussed below related to employer awareness, readiness and engagement.

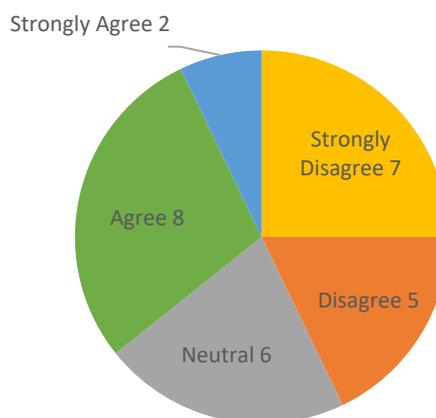
***Employers’ lack of awareness of the international talent pool.*** While the program was effective in raising awareness for employers, especially through the successful #HireimmigrantsWR campaign, one-on-one meetings, and educational seminars, evaluation participants stated that there are still many business owners that are not aware of the available talent pool in the community. Employers interviewed in this evaluation shared their personal examples that reinforced this view. For example, one highly engaged employer was not aware of the international talent and benefits of hiring them before she connected with the program coordinator. Another employer’s company hired two ITIs from abroad through the Labour Market Impact Assessment program not knowing that there were candidates available in Waterloo Region.

Employers interviewed also explained that there are still other employers within their network who are not aware of the talent pool. One stated: “This is a secret talent pool that other people do not know about.” ITI survey responses reinforce this point. One half of ITI respondents disagreed that taking part in networking events made them feel more recognized by local employers (see Figure 1). Moreover, 43% of ITIs did not agree that their skills are more valued as a result of attending these networking events (see Figure 2).

**Figure 1.** I feel more recognized by local employers (n=26 ITIs)



**Figure 2.** I feel my skills as an internationally trained individual are more valued (n=28 ITIs)



According to evaluation participants, employers also do not fully know the benefits of hiring ITIs which affect their willingness to hire and retain ITIs. Immigrant service providers and employers (with success in hiring and retaining ITIs) mentioned that employers need to know that by employing the ITIs, they not only help them thrive in their personal lives, but also contribute in “improving the standard of living and the economy of the region as a whole.”

Several evaluation participants commented that the Immigration Partnership is still relatively unknown in our community which contributed to employers not being aware of the ITI talent pool. One community partner explained that not having a large budget for mass advertising might be another reason that there are still many employers who are not familiar with the Immigration Partnership or the activities of the Work pillar including the Employer Engagement program. Community partners did note, however, that employers who are present on the Work Steering Group are more familiar with the Partnership.

*“When I talk to other employers, they say, what is this [Immigration Partnership] about, how do we connect to the Immigration Partnership and different programs under work pillar. People just do not know what is out there.” (Employer, Interview Participant)*

**Employers’ lack of readiness to employ and retain ITIs.** Several evaluation participants from different stakeholder perspectives, agreed that employers’ lack of readiness in creating a welcoming and supportive workplace for ITIs presented a challenge to employing and retaining ITIs. Employers need to understand and prepare for the challenges involved in hiring and retaining ITIs if they want to bring diversity to their workplace. Examples of these challenges shared by evaluation participants included language barriers, understanding the Canadian work culture, and adjusting communication and skill sets to the Canadian work setting. Employers with success in hiring newcomers and ITIs explained that if employers “invest time” and support ITIs to overcome these challenges, their businesses would benefit in the long term.

*“If you [as a local employer] expect someone to come in and fit your mould, you might be disappointed. But if you can stretch what you are expecting, you will get a bit more. Language is a barrier but is not insurmountable. There are things we can move and things we can’t in preparing folks [ITIs]. You have to be flexible and adjust accordingly to retain immigrants. There are barriers such as*

*language, understanding the work culture in Canada and taxation system, but they all can be addressed over time.” (Employer, Interview Participant)*

***Employer relationship-building and engagement.*** Evaluation participants agreed that while the Immigration Partnership did well in engaging employers from different sectors, there were still many businesses of all sizes that have not yet been engaged. Recruiting employers for networking events and educational seminars as well as connecting with them individually were found to be labor intensive and time consuming. Involving employers was particularly difficult during the pandemic given the many issues businesses were facing. One service provider noted that many employers are not easily receptive to messages about hiring ITIs that the Immigration Partnership and other community partners are promoting.

*“But I think the answer is around relationship building and communication and that’s kind of what we have to work at every day. I think the [Immigration] Partnership has done a good job of that given the level of resources that they have and the cooperation of other service providers and agencies, but there is still a lot more work to do.” (Community Partner, Focus Group Participant)*

### **Challenge #4: Lack of a one-stop shop to access the international talent pool.**

Another common theme that emerged throughout this evaluation was the lack of a one-stop shop for employers to access the international talent pool. Employers found it confusing to reach out to multiple service providers and employment organizations within the community to access and hire ITIs. Dealing with one place to access the talent pool was considered less labor intensive and more efficient. The existing multiple points of contact also presented challenges for the Employer Engagement program promotion as the coordinator had to rely on multiple service providers to market the program and its activities to employers and ITIs within their client pools.

In response to this challenge evaluation participants pointed to the emerging idea of developing a local “Immigrant Talent Hub”. The Hub would act as a centralized place for employers to access and hire the immigrant talent from Waterloo Region, across Ontario, Canada, and around the World. Moreover, employment support would be provided to employers and ITIs throughout the hiring process and after it (see Appendix B for more details).

### **Challenge #5: Knowledge gap of real labour market needs.**

A final challenge shared by community partners was the lack of in-depth understanding of what labor market needs are in the community. While agencies such the Workforce Planning Board were considered helpful in conducting environmental scans to provide better understanding of labor market needs, community partners explained that there is still a considerable gap in knowing what exactly employers and ITIs want. This gap makes the employer-talent matching (challenge #2) even more difficult.

Community partners who participated in the focus group agreed that this knowledge gap is directly related to employers’ lack of clear and honest communication about their employment needs and problems. Employers have varying interpretations of “what skills really mean; what skills are necessary to do jobs”, and what they expect from ITIs’ skill sets. Community partners thought clear communication in these areas would help to bridge the gap in ITI-job matching.

*“There are lots of internationally trained immigrants with mental breakdowns due to an inability to find qualifying jobs. Most [of them] have to start out in low level and underpaid jobs because Canadian employers disregard their education and employment experiences. ... Do more to educate Canadian employers not to classify these people the same as 18-year old’s just leaving high school. Only those in the IT sector are getting recognized.” (ITI Survey Respondent)*

### Program Outcomes

This section assesses the key outcomes of the program. These outcomes are organized into three chronological categories: **immediate**, **intermediate**, and **ultimate** outcomes. Immediate outcomes are changes in knowledge, attitudes, and behavior directly resulting from the program activities. Intermediate and ultimate outcomes are more systemic in nature of which the program is expected to be one contributing factor. Intermediate outcomes are medium-term changes anticipated in the labour market that result in part from program activities. The ultimate outcome is the long-term changes in the broader Waterloo Region community that the program contributes to overtime.

Overall, evaluation data shows that the Employer Engagement program has led to most of the immediate outcomes anticipated by the program (see program logic model in Appendix A). Some intermediate outcomes have also been met while there is limited evaluation data available to assess the program’s ultimate outcome.

### Immediate Outcomes

#### Immediate Outcome #1: Raised awareness for employers.

The most significant outcome of the program was that employers in Waterloo Region were more aware of both the available international talent pool and of local immigrant serving agencies. This increased employer awareness provided an avenue through which the Employer Engagement Program could achieve other intended outcomes.

***Raised awareness of the available international talent pool.*** Raising awareness of the international talent pool for employers was achieved through marketing, including the successful #HireImmigrantsWR campaign, ITI/employer networking events, employer educational seminars, one-on-one meetings with employers, and through word of mouth. Led by the program coordinator, this marketing and information sharing permeated multiple stakeholder groups including community partners who in turn helped to further disseminate marketing materials to employers within their networks. The program coordinator also developed strategic partnerships among professional associations such as the Human Resources Professionals Association (HRPA) and partnered with local educational seminars that increased the awareness among local businesses about the value of hiring ITIs.

Through these methods, the program coordinator built relationships with local employers to provide valuable information, answer questions, and expand the Immigration Partnership’s network. These efforts provided employers with new perspectives on the benefits of hiring ITIs along with broader, systemic issues related to hiring immigrants such as anti-racism efforts and fostering a sense of belonging within the community through employment. One employer noted, “I was completely blind to what the community had to offer. The Immigration Partnership opened my eyes. That is the difference between the private and public based organizations. The Immigration Partnership has been a great bridge to that.”

Networking events hosted or sponsored by the Immigration Partnership also provided employers with the opportunity to connect directly with the international talent pool, learn about their lived experiences, and become aware of the value of hiring them. This awareness increased in its magnitude over time, with one LIP staff noting, “Across my network, there is a better understanding and perceived value in terms of hiring immigrants and newcomers”.

***Raised awareness of local immigrant serving agencies.*** Employers also became more aware of local immigrant serving agencies because of the program activities. This awareness in turn enabled immigrant serving agencies to fulfill their mandates of helping ITIs find employment. Through initial connections facilitated by the program coordinator, service providers and employers have maintained working relationships with one another that resulted in partnerships independent of the Immigration Partnership. One community partner working directly with ITIs noted that through these relationships, employers “contact us looking for clients in specific industries to hire and we provide the names of the clients.”

### **Immediate Outcome #2: Increased positive connections between local employers and ITIs.**

The second most significant outcome of the program was the increased positive connections between local employers and ITIs. Positive connections ranged from informal conversations, to formal interviews, the hiring of ITIs and retaining them in the workplace. These connections were made: (1) directly between employers and ITIs, and (2) indirectly through immigrant serving agencies. These positive connections benefited both the employer and the ITIs, who were able to learn more about one another.

***Positive connections directly between employers and ITIs.*** The increased awareness of the available international talent pool and immigrant serving agencies among employers was instrumental in facilitating positive connections between them and newcomers. ITI/employer networking events that were hosted or sponsored by the Immigration Partnership were the primary activity which provided opportunities for local employers and ITIs to develop these connections. For employers, positive connections were generally characterized as being informal, while not surprisingly ITIs were more concerned with formal connections that resulted in hiring.

According to ITI survey results, ITIs had conversations with between two and nine employers across all networking events that they attended. About half of respondents (47%) had conversations with two to four local employers and 35% had conversations with five to nine local employers. From the perspective of employers, community partners and LIP staff, these conversations were a positive step towards hiring. One community partner noted, “A number of them [ITIs] were hired when they were at those events because they talked to employers and the employers were very impressed and asked them to come to complete the process to be hired”. One ITI who participated in the focus group shared that she was interviewed on the spot at an event she attended:

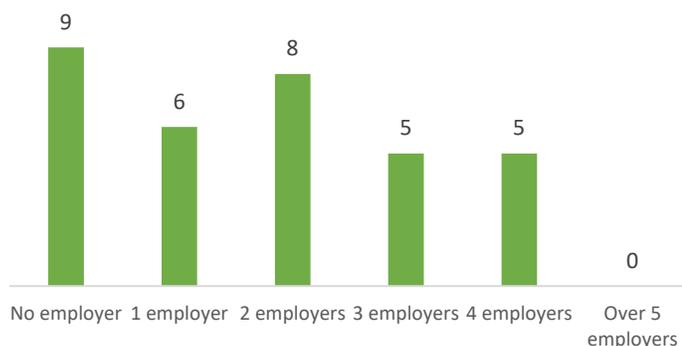
*“I had a short interview with [the company] in their booth and then I had another interview, and I got a job with their help... At the same conference, I had a short interview, it was like two minutes, with RBC and they invited me to a panel interview but then the lockdown happened. It was a good opportunity”.*  
(ITI Focus Group Participant)

On the other hand, the long-term significance of these positive connections at networking events and job fairs were unknown mainly because it was beyond the scope of the program to gather data on how many ITIs were hired as a direct result of the program activities. Evaluation participants acknowledged that

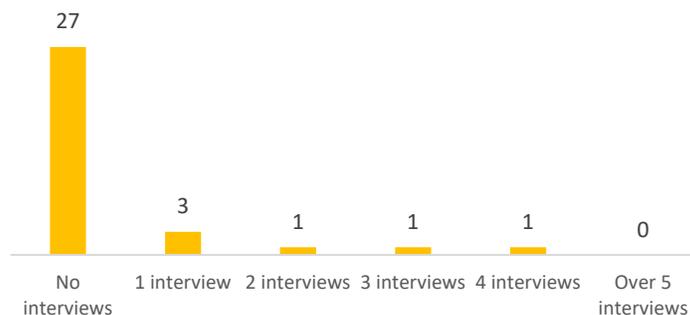
despite all the efforts put forward by the Immigration Partnership and other service providers, there is uncertainty about immigrants’ hiring data in the community as a whole.

Evaluation data was collected on the follow-up contacts ITIs had with employers after participating in networking events. When asked to self-report on their success following the networking events, most ITIs followed up with one to four employers (see Figure 3). However, the vast majority were not invited to any interview as a direct result of participating in networking events (see Figure 4). For those who were invited to interviews, 76% (25 out of 34) did not get hired.

**Figure 3.** How many employers did you follow up with after the networking events? (n=33 ITIs)



**Figure 4.** How many interviews were you invited to as a direct result of these networking events? (n=33 ITIs)



**Positive connections indirectly through immigrant serving agencies.** Relationships initiated by the program coordinator between employers and service providers facilitated positive connections between employers and ITIs. One employer was introduced to a local service provider through the program coordinator and hired immigrants through a multi-year project. These types of connections also increased service providers’ capacity to serve ITIs in their client pool by offering an opportunity to bolster their own employment programming. One service provider noted that “the job fairs are very important for us and for our clients [ITIs] because we refer them to those job fairs... we used to recruit volunteers and that helped the Connector program because through it, we recruited a number of volunteers.”

**Immediate Outcome #3: Greater engagement in networking events and educational seminars.**

Another significant outcome of the program was the greater involvement of local employers, community partners, and ITIs in networking events and educational seminars that were hosted and sponsored by the Immigration Partnership. The greater awareness of the available international talent pool among employers (immediate outcome #1) and the increased positive connections between employers and ITIs (immediate outcome #2) contributed to this outcome.

Marketing and information sharing resulted in more attendance at ITI/employer networking events and employer educational seminars over time. One employer noted, “I see a more variety of employers involved; [there is a] really good turn-out at networking events”. A community partner working directly with ITIs recalled, “The trend is more involvement from us...in different activities planned and implemented by the Employer Engagement program.”

These events were also considered relatively effective in connecting relevant recruiters and job seekers. According to the survey result, 58% of ITIs found networking events to be “highly relevant” or “relevant”

to their job field. Moreover, 16% and 39% of ITI survey respondents had conversations with one employer and two employers in their job field, respectively. While 32% of respondents had conversations with three or four employers in their job field.

Having employers share success stories in educational seminars about hiring and retaining immigrants was considered impactful in inspiring other employers who had not yet ‘bought in’ to the Employer Engagement program. One employer who presented at an educational seminar as a guest speaker considered these stories eye-opening for employers to understand the change that they can make in newcomers’ lives by hiring them. Employers could find personal satisfaction in “seeing them [ITIs] smile because they can afford going to the dentist, waiting for a mortgage to buy a house while they could not before”. Another employer stated: “You [as an employer] are more involved because you’re looking at their progression.”

### **Immediate Outcome #4: Increased recognition of the Immigration Partnership over time.**

Raised awareness of the Immigration Partnership was an unanticipated outcome that was commonly shared by employers and community partners. The presence of the Immigration Partnership on social media and its collaboration with diverse community partners contributed significantly to this outcome. Those who became more aware of the Immigration Partnership included employers, local government, and the broader community.

*“The Partnership has expanded more than what WRIEN [Waterloo Region Immigration Network] was and it’s an important thing for our region ... It grows with each year and there is more awareness of the Partnership. Regional Council is more aware of it and more connected to it which gives it some currency.”* (Community Partner, Interview Participant)

The increased recognition of the Immigration Partnership and the activities of its *Work* pillar increased the number of employers who were involved in the program. For example, as community partners became more familiar with the program and its intention, they referred more employers to the program coordinator. Also, highly engaged employers helped the Immigration Partnership to become more recognized by spreading the word within their networks especially through online meetings and social media platforms such as LinkedIn and Facebook.

For most evaluation participants, it was the program coordinator, rather than the name of the program, that was the “recognizable face” of the program. Hence, the majority of evaluation participants were unable to identify the Employer Engagement program without additional information linking the program to the program coordinator. This fact may hold challenges for the longevity of the program if staff transitions are to take place in the future, with one community partner stating: “they should start to succession a plan for when Nora moves on from the role. She has a lot of community and institutional knowledge.”

### **Immediate Outcome #5: Employers better informed about available supports to hire and retain ITIs.**

Employers who were highly engaged in the program were more likely to know about and contact local supports to help them hire and retain newcomers. Employers learned about different service providers and the types of support they offer to ITIs and employers. For example, one employer benefited from the translation service provided by one agency to orient employees with low English proficiency. Overall,

individual connections with the program coordinator and educational seminars were considered the most impactful in learning about these different supports.

### **Immediate Outcome #6: Better understanding of labour market realities and employment support.**

Partnering with organizations that conduct environmental scans resulted in better understanding local labour market needs. These partnerships enabled the program to know “what sectors are struggling, where ITIs are coming from, and what ITIs and employers’ needs are”. While this information was still seen to be inadequate (see challenge #5), information that was available aided program planning and delivery, particularly in light of the changing labour market due to the pandemic. Meeting one-on-one with local businesses was another avenue through which hiring challenges were understood.

*“With Nora and the group, they have always been really supportive of the fact that we have a lot of research and are constantly looking into immigrant or industry research to figure out where the hiring is and where the mismatches are. So, it just supports us, how we advocate, and how we can help the greater group advocate. Everyone, from what I can tell, reads the reports, finds them informative, and is able to use them to support programming. And I think that is true for the Immigration Partnership as well as all the partners at the table.” (Community Partner, Interview Participant)*

## Intermediate Outcomes

### **Intermediate Outcome #1: Reduced barriers for employers to access and hire ITIs.**

Overall, the program was successful in reducing employers’ barriers to access and hire ITIs by increasing positive connections between employers and ITIs directly through networking events or indirectly through immigrant service providers (immediate outcome #2). The program coordinator played a key role in facilitating these connections by either directly referring employers to immigrant serving agencies or introducing them to each other in different networking events and educational seminars. The program coordinator also shared job postings of employers with immigrant service providers which facilitated employers to find the right ITI to meet their needs. Whether the program contributed to a broader reduction of barriers for employers not connected to the program is not known with the current evaluation data.

### **Intermediate Outcome #2: Decreased employment barriers for ITIs.**

Evaluation data shows that the program and its activities took positive steps towards reducing employment barriers for ITIs. For ITIs, networking events were considered helpful in addressing some of their employment barriers. ITIs acknowledged that these events helped them learn about the Canadian employment system, available job opportunities, and make positive connections with employers. More than half (59%) of ITI survey respondents felt better prepared to find a job as a direct result of attending these events.

Despite this progress, evaluation participants explained that there are many employment barriers that ITIs face that are out of the scope of the program. The most notable employment barriers mentioned were: (1) employer-talent matching (challenge #2), (2) the lack of credential recognition for those internationally educated, and (3) the lack of customized support to help ITIs land a job in their specific fields.

### Intermediate Outcome #3: More ITIs hired by local employers.

The Employer Engagement program was successful in increasing the positive connections between employers and ITIs (immediate impact #2) which in some cases resulted in ITIs or other newcomers finding employment. Several evaluation participants were able to share a few examples of employers who had hired newcomers as a result of their connection with the program, but the majority were unable to do so at a larger scale. Uncertainty about immigrant hiring remains a challenge because: (1) service providers do not consistently track and share about their clients' employment status, and (2) many local businesses are not willing to disclose whether they hired ITIs.

### Ultimate Outcome

#### Broader ITIs' recognition and contribution to Waterloo Region's economic growth.

That fact that the program met many of its immediate outcomes and contributed to other intermediate outcomes gives hope that the program on its way to contributing to its ultimate goal of having ITIs more recognized in the broader community and contributing to Waterloo Region's economic growth. However, this outcome cannot be confirmed given previously mentioned limitations in the data currently available within the community. Future evaluations might wish to explore this impact in more detail.

### Future Directions

Throughout the evaluation, participants made a number of suggestions to improve the program. These suggestions are summarized below as recommendations in two categories. First are recommendations targeted at the Immigration Partnership and its community partners to improve the program. Second are suggestions that are more systemic in nature and that require support from the community and government more broadly. The recommendations below were developed in consultation with the Work Steering Group.

### Suggestions for Program Improvement

#### Recommendation #1: Continue to support the launch of the Immigrant Talent Hub.

Throughout the evaluation, employers, LIP staff and community partners, emphasized the importance of continuing to advance the implementation of a Waterloo Region Immigrant Talent Hub (see appendix B). Evaluation participants emphasized that the Hub could be a solution to many of the program challenges such as employer-talent matching (challenge #2), lack of employers' awareness, readiness, and engagement (challenge #3), and lack of one-stop-shop for employers to access the international talent pool (challenge #4). Moreover, the existence of an Immigrant Talent Hub would make it easier for service providers to track whether ITIs are hired and retained by local employers.

*"In order to keep the employers that we have engaged, we need to keep moving the Hub forward. It is a really big thing to employers so I think we need to find that place to land and leveraging that idea [the Immigrant Talent Hub] will be critical so we actually can see that we are making a difference."*  
(Work Steering Group Member)

*“Without a Hub, we can continue doing what we are currently doing. With a Hub, we can do more. I think we could have a greater impact if what we have been doing for all these years was incorporated or a part of something greater, like a Hub.”* (LIP Staff, Interview Participant)

ITIs were also supportive of having a centralized place where they can connect with employers, receive customized support for language, resume development, and interview preparation. While the existing assistance provided by different service providers and immigrant serving agencies was considered helpful, ITIs found it confusing to reach out to multiple agencies for support in different areas.

*“I think, instead of struggling between many agencies like YMCA and KW Multicultural Centre that are similar in their services, it will be a good idea to have one place joining all the people and resources.”* (ITI, Focus Group Participant)

While community partners were very supportive of running the Immigrant Talent Hub, they had two major concerns about its implementation: (1) deciding on the population it will serve, and (2) finding a home for it.

***Decide on the population the Immigrant Talent Hub will serve.*** Community partners had different views about who the Hub should serve. Several interview participants were in favor of having a Hub dedicated to newcomers. Given the Federal government’s increased immigration targets in the near future, having a centralized place only for immigrants would help attract the right talent to the Region and prepare newcomers for the local labour market.

On the other hand, other community partners thought that having a general Talent Hub for all residents of Waterloo would be more beneficial. This type of Hub would be more inclusive and not perpetuate stereotypes and discriminatory practices that currently exists in the hiring of newcomers.

*“Employers are looking for skilled individuals and I do not think it matters where the skills are coming from. By having a general Talent Hub, we will be supporting the employment needs of Waterloo Region including immigrants that are big part of it as well as people who were born here.”* (Community Partner, Focus Group Participant)

***Find a home for the Immigrant Talent Hub.*** Community partners found it challenging to identify an agency who would have the capacity to run the Immigrant Talent Hub. From their perspectives, the Hub should be community-driven as it is a community initiative. This means that multiple organization would need to be committed to promoting and implementing the Hub. Community partners and LIP staff also commented that the Immigration Partnership does not have the resources or the capacity to be the host of the Hub.

Community partners, however, had varying ideas about the source of funding needed to run the Hub. Some interview participants believed that government (not specified whether federal or provincial) funding would be the best option, while several others were in favor of private sector dollars. Overall, it was suggested to have a virtual Hub instead of being housed in a “brick and mortar” building. This suggestion was considered particularly important given the pandemic and the resulting need to operate remotely.

**Recommendation #2: Expand marketing to better engage employers.**

While the program was successful in raising employers’ awareness of the international talent pool, of local employment supports, and the Immigration Partnership, evaluation participants suggested program marketing should be expanded. Such promotion would further help extend the reach to more employers including both small and large business owners. It was suggested to run big campaigns and promote the program and the Immigration Partnership more regularly on social media platforms such as Instagram, LinkedIn, and Twitter. Online marketing was considered to be more impactful in reaching out to as many employers as possible compared to connecting with them one-on-one. However, the need for “strong dollars” to support mass marketing of the program was acknowledged by evaluation participants.

**Recommendation #3: Hold more sector specific ITI/employer networking events.**

Both employers and ITIs suggested holding more sector-specific networking events and being more targeted in advertising them to allow participation of ITIs with the relevant field of work and studies. However, segmenting sectors in order to hold targeted events will present a challenge, with one employer noting: “Waterloo Region is popular for insurance, manufacturing, and technology, so we can have events for these areas. But what about all other amazing segments?”

*“They [employers] only have so much time to go to an event. They want to ensure that it’s impactful for them. They have to send three people [to these events]; the goal is to get at least one hire from events. So, the more specific the better.” (Employer, Interview Participant)*

Equally importantly, evaluation participants highlighted the need for educating ITIs about the purpose of the networking events and “how to sell themselves to employers”. These events are to foster positive connections between employers and ITIs that might lead to employment in long-term. However, many ITIs’ expectation is to “walk away with a job” when attending the networking events.

**Recommendation #4: Prepare for the influx of immigrants to Canada in the next few years.**

The growing number of immigrants expected to arrive in Canada over the next few years presents a significant opportunity for Waterloo Region to attract ITIs and fill available job openings. Evaluation data supports that having an Immigrant Talent Hub would help attract the right talent to the community. However, the challenge would be to match the right talent with the right job and employer. Equally important, local employers need to be prepared for this expected influx of immigrants.

*“Many communities across Canada will be competing for the talent, hence, we should be doing whatever we can to attract those who we want in the region. That was in connection to conversations around the Talent Hub. What should we be doing as a community to get everyone we can into the workforce and attract those who might be faster fits and longer fits?” (Community Partner, Interview Participant)*

Interview participants also noted the importance of considering virtual options when planning the expected influx of newcomers. This suggestion is directly related to the pandemic and the resulting transition to online service delivery across the community. The pandemic raised the importance of being flexible, creative, and embracing online opportunities. These virtual options helped to engage employers that were not previously active in the program and helped the program to gain more visibility on social media, expand partners beyond Waterloo Region, and enhance technological skills.

### **Recommendation #5: Develop a plan to sustain institutional knowledge and experience.**

Throughout the evaluation, the program coordinator was highlighted as being successful in managing the *Work* pillar including the Employer Engagement program. In fact, the meeting of program goals was often linked to the program coordinator’s passion and active involvement in community events and her well established relationships with diverse employers and community partners. Given that the program coordinator has become the “face” of the Partnership’s *Work* pillar for many within Waterloo Region, the Immigration Partnership would do well to consider how to sustain the wealth of that institutional knowledge and experience in future for the time when the program coordinator moves out of her current role.

### **Suggestions Beyond the Program**

#### **Recommendation #1: Better prepare ITIs for employment in Canada.**

While the efforts made by different immigrant serving agencies to prepare ITIs and newcomers for employment in Canada were acknowledged by evaluation participants, there seems to be a gap in training ITIs and newcomers on “how to sell themselves to employers”. This gap is mainly about resume development and interview preparation, as noted by both employers and ITIs.

There is need for more HR professionals and well-trained individuals who can provide customized support and training to ITIs as the current guidance received by ITIs seems to be too general. Assistance from individuals more familiar with the ITI’s field of study and work could increase the opportunity of securing job interviews. Receiving “reliable feedback on weaknesses” during the interview preparation was noted essential by ITIs. However, supporting ITIs is not only about resume development and interview preparation. One community partner noted, “teaching them how to survive in a Canadian workplace is actually more important.”

#### **Recommendation #2: Offer internship or volunteer programs for ITIs.**

Several evaluation participants suggested that more volunteer and internship opportunities should be available in Waterloo Region. Building on existing efforts already underway in the community, increasing these opportunities would allow ITIs to gain Canadian work experience, become familiar with Canadian work culture, and have more time to prove their skills to employers. Employers would also have the opportunity to “interact and work with ITIs and see the value in having them in their workforce.” ITIs agreed that having the opportunity to work with employers for a few months is more impactful than the brief interactions during networking events.

*“I think partnering with a recognized educational institution is really important and being able to provide internship opportunities. The only challenge with internship will be the ability to extend it to a contract which is really important. So, if you train someone for three months and they are done at month four, that is really hard [for the employer in terms of time and resources spent].” (Employer, Interview Participant)*

The program could consider how to equip ITIs who are already hired to be peer mentors within their workplace. For example, newcomers with established positions could be supported to encourage their HR departments and managers to hire ITIs. Experienced immigrants within the workplace could also become

trained to be mentors to other newcomers and guide them “step by step to upgrade their skills”. Eventually, those who were trained can be mentors to other immigrants in the future.

### **Recommendation #3: Provide incentives to employers to encourage hiring ITIs.**

ITIs and employers in this evaluation suggested that providing incentives to employers increases ITIs’ chances of employment. One ITI who was a hiring manager in his home country explained that he would select a local candidate over a newcomer if there was no wage incentive. Otherwise, it is easier for employers to hire someone local who is more familiar with the work culture compared to a newcomer with “slightly different technical skills”.

*“If I am being honest, incentives from the government would be very helpful. At least for small businesses, we rely on that so if there were incentives associated with that, [that would be] big wins.”*  
(Employer, Interview Participant)

## Conclusion

This report summarized the findings of the Employer Engagement Program evaluation. Results show that the program was largely effective in providing useful information and making positive connections across its three main stakeholders (employers, ITIs, and community partners). The strengths of the program were detailed, with the program coordinator frequently acknowledged as a key ingredient to program success. However, challenges in program delivery were also noted largely due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the way that the employment and settlement system is set up in Waterloo Region.

The evaluation found evidence that many of the intended immediate outcomes were being achieved, most notably that employers in Waterloo Region have become more aware of the available international talent pool and local immigrant serving agencies, and that this led to more positive connections between them and newcomers. In addition, some intermediate outcomes related to labour market changes were being achieved including reducing barriers for ITIs’ hiring. There was limited evaluation data available to assess the program’s ultimate impact on the broader community. The report concluded with eight recommendations, the most urgent being to implement a Waterloo Region Immigrant Talent Hub.

## Appendix A: Program Logic Model

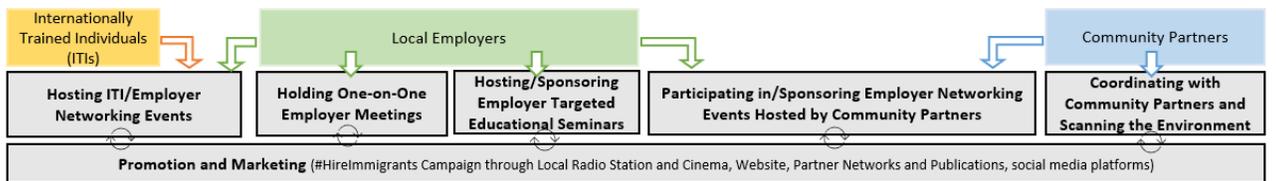
### Employer Engagement Program: Program Logic Model



**Inputs**  
Resources & service capacity generated by the project

Waterloo Region Immigration Partnership, Greater KW Chamber of Commerce & Other Partners  
Program Staff, Advisory Committee (Work Steering Group), Government of Ontario (Funder)

**Activities**  
Program strategies that engage ITIs, local employers, and community partners



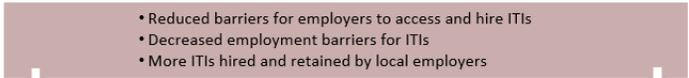
**Outputs**  
Immediate products resulting from program activities



**Immediate Outcomes**  
Changes in knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors directly resulting from program activities



**Intermediate Outcomes**  
Changes in the labor market resulting from the program activities



**Ultimate Outcomes**  
Changes in the broader Waterloo Region community



## Appendix B: The Waterloo Region Immigrant Talent Hub: The Concept

The plan for an Immigrant Talent Hub in Waterloo Region was developed by LIP staff and some community partners. The Hub will be a one-stop space (physical or virtual) providing employers with access to the immigrant talent pool from Waterloo Region, across the province, country, or the world. The Hub will also provide support to employers and immigrant candidates before, throughout, and after the hiring process.

The **rationale** for the creation of the Hub is three-fold: (1) currently, there is no effective, centralized location for employers to easily access immigrant talent, (2) employers may hold a stigma associated with immigrants who contact them through current employment agencies that may be categorized as “social services”, and (3) demographic shifts and trends in the Region of Waterloo project an increasing need among employers to find new and untapped candidate pools to fill gaps in employment.

The **goal** of the Hub is to bring together employers and immigrants to fulfill the employment needs of both entities. This goal is achieved through the work of Employer Representatives who connect with employers seeking immigrant talent, providing ongoing support to the employer throughout their hiring process and beyond. The resources provided to the employer include recruitment, training, onboarding and retention, and the sharing of best practices in diversity and inclusion.

Prospective candidates are pre-screened by Representatives who assess job readiness markers including English language skills, workplace culture training, credentialization, and resume creation. Job Seeker Representatives provide customized support and coaching to immigrant job seekers to prepare them for potential employment connections, including preparing them for the job readiness pre-screening.

In order to implement this programming, the Hub relies upon the support and collaboration of partners and allies including employers, Chambers of Commerce, professional associations, and service providers. The effectiveness of this model will be assessed through evaluating outcomes including the number of immigrants hired, length of time to fill vacancies, and employer retention.