



ECONOMIC INTEGRATION NEEDS ASSESSMENT REPORT 2025



Acknowledgements

This project was a collaborative effort between BIPOC Business & Professional Network Native Council of PEI, WorkSource Alliance, Provincial Immigration Partnership hosted by Immigrant & Refugee Services Association (IRSA) PEI, and PEI Community Navigators.



Government of Prince Edward Island's Gender, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (GEDI) Fund, Foundation for Black Communities, and the Canadian Race Relations Foundation provided funding for this work.



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Economic Integration Needs Assessment Report

*Submitted to BIPOC Business & Professional
Network by Nishka Smith in December 2025*



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The BIPOC Economic Integration Needs Assessment was undertaken by the BIPOC Business & Professional Network (BIPOC BPN) to better understand the barriers, enablers, and opportunities shaping economic participation for Black, Indigenous, and other People of Colour (BIPOC) on PEI. As PEI experiences rapid population growth, labour shortages across key sectors, and increasing demographic diversity, ensuring equitable access to employment, entrepreneurship, and economic opportunity is both a social and economic imperative.

Completed in December 2025, this needs assessment provides evidence to inform program development, policy planning, and advocacy efforts aimed at improving economic integration outcomes for BIPOC entrepreneurs, workers, and career seekers across the province.

Methodology

The assessment used a mixed-methods approach combining a targeted literature review with community-based research. Data collection included five pilot interviews, one additional interview, nine focus groups involving 87 participants, and a demographic survey completed by 79 participants. Eight focus groups and four interviews involved immigrants, while one focus group and two interviews centred on Indigenous perspectives. This approach allowed the assessment to integrate system-level evidence with lived experience, ensuring findings reflect both policy context and community realities.



Key Findings

Changing demographics and labour-market context

PEI's population growth is being driven largely by immigration, with visible minorities representing a rapidly increasing share of the population. Immigrants and Indigenous peoples are already making significant contributions to the labour force and to entrepreneurship, particularly in sectors facing persistent shortages. However, growth in workforce participation has not translated into equitable access to stable, well-paid, or advancement-oriented employment.

Shared barriers across immigrant and Indigenous participants

Across focus groups and interviews, participants consistently described systemic barriers that limit economic integration, including:

- Credential recognition and validation of skills, resulting in underemployment for immigrants and the devaluation of Indigenous cultural knowledge and lived expertise.
- Fragmented and difficult-to-navigate systems, spanning employment services, licensing, training, settlement supports, housing, and business development. Informal hiring practices and reliance on personal networks, which disadvantage those without established local connections.
- Experiences of racism, bias, and exclusion, both subtle and overt, affecting hiring, advancement, and workplace belonging.
- Housing instability, transportation barriers, and limited healthcare access, which directly affect the ability to secure and maintain employment.
- Significant mental and emotional strain, linked to repeated barriers, uncertainty, and prolonged underemployment.

Despite these challenges, participants overwhelmingly expressed a desire to remain on PEI, contribute to their communities, and build long-term futures - provided that meaningful employment pathways and adequate supports are available.

Distinct Indigenous experiences

Indigenous participants described additional barriers shaped by colonial history, intergenerational trauma, identity gatekeeping, and the lack of Indigenous-led, culturally grounded employment and training supports. Participants emphasized that Indigenous knowledge, cultural practices, and land-based skills are frequently undervalued within mainstream labour and training systems. Short-term, project-based employment was also identified as a major source of instability, limiting long-term economic security and career development.

At the same time, Indigenous participants highlighted strong community assets, including cultural practices, relationship-based supports, and Indigenous-led organizations that provide trusted, culturally safe guidance.

Priority Recommendations

Based on the findings, the assessment identifies the following priority areas for action:

- ◆ **Improve access to meaningful employment and career advancement**
 - Strengthen and streamline credential recognition and prior learning assessment processes, including clearer timelines, reduced costs, and expanded bridging and supervised practice opportunities.
 - Increase access to short, applied, and work-compatible training options that recognize existing skills and support movement into higher-skill roles.
- ◆ **Simplify system navigation and coordination**
 - Improve coordination across employment, training, settlement, and business support systems to reduce fragmentation and conflicting information.
 - Expand human-centred navigation supports, including peer and culturally grounded guidance, to help individuals move through complex systems.
- ◆ **Promote equitable and transparent hiring practices**
 - Reduce reliance on informal, network-based hiring by strengthening transparent recruitment and evaluation processes.

- Support employers to better understand international experience, Indigenous knowledge, and cross-cultural communication.

◆ **Strengthen culturally grounded and community-led supports**

- Expand Indigenous-led employment, training, and wellness programs grounded in cultural knowledge, trauma-informed practice, and community values.
- Increase access to culturally specific supports, peer networks, and mentorship for immigrants and Indigenous participants.

◆ **Address foundational barriers to workforce participation**

- Improve access to stable, affordable housing, transportation, healthcare, and flexible language training that directly support workforce attachment.
- Strengthen mental health supports that reflect the lived experiences of immigrants and Indigenous peoples.

◆ **Support immigrant and Indigenous entrepreneurship**

- Improve access to mentorship, financing, and practical business navigation supports.
- Recognize cultural knowledge and lived expertise as legitimate economic activity and pathways to self-employment

Conclusion

The findings clearly demonstrate that BIPOC communities are essential to PEI's economic sustainability and future growth, yet systemic barriers continue to limit full participation. Addressing these challenges requires coordinated action across government, employers, educational institutions, and community organizations, with a strong emphasis on culturally grounded, people-centred approaches.

By reducing structural barriers, strengthening community-led supports, and creating clear, equitable pathways into meaningful employment and entrepreneurship, PEI can better harness the skills, knowledge, and contributions of BIPOC communities - supporting a more inclusive, resilient, and prosperous provincial economy.

BIPOC ECONOMIC INTEGRATION NEEDS ASSESSMENT

1. Introduction

BIPOC Business & Professional Network (BIPOC BPN) is dedicated to supporting and empowering BIPOC within the local business community. BIPOC BPN was established in response to the unique challenges faced by BIPOC entrepreneurs and professionals, with a focus on creating space that fosters collaboration, mentorship, knowledge exchange, skill sharing, networking, and economic growth.

As a new organization, BIPOC BPN aims to offer a range of programs and services, including workshops, training sessions, mentorship opportunities, and networking events, aimed at equipping members with the necessary tools and resources to thrive in the business landscape. Additionally, BIPOC BPN advocates for the interests of BIPOC entrepreneurs and professionals at local and provincial levels, raising awareness of the challenges they face to influence policies for more inclusive economic opportunities. Collaboration with various stakeholders, such as government agencies and educational institutions, further enhances its efforts to create a supportive environment that addresses systemic issues and promotes economic growth.

As part of these efforts, BIPOC BPN conducted a needs assessment aimed at providing evidence to inform solutions that facilitate economic integration for BIPOC in PEI. The aims of the needs assessment included:

- Identifying barriers to economic integration for BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and other People of Colour) on PEI
- Identifying gaps in existing services, resources and supports
- Recognizing enablers of economic integration
- Collecting suggestions and opportunities to address existing gaps and build on enablers

The needs assessment was completed in December 2025, and the findings will inform program and policy planning in the new year to improve access, equity, and outcomes for BIPOC entrepreneurs and career seekers.

2. Methodology

This project used a mixed-methods approach that included a literature review, pilot interviews, a semi-structured interview, a demographic survey, and focus groups. Combining these methods provided both system-level context and lived- experience insights from community members across PEI.

Literature Review

Recent literature (2020 onward) was reviewed to understand key labour-market trends in PEI and Atlantic Canada, with attention to economic integration, entrepreneurship, and sector-specific workforce needs for BIPOC. The materials were analyzed for recurring themes, evidence gaps, and insights relevant to the project focus. The review also highlighted gaps in available research, particularly related to Indigenous workforce pathways and immigrant credential recognition.

Pilot Interviews

Five pilot interviews were conducted with members of the BIPOC community to test and refine the focus group questions. Four interviews were held with immigrants and one with a member of the Indigenous community. The interview transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify which questions elicited the most meaningful and detailed responses. These insights were used to refine the question guide, strengthen relevance, and ensure alignment with the key areas of inquiry before beginning the focus groups. Early themes that emerged in the pilot interviews were later reflected in the focus group discussions and are integrated into the combined findings.

Focus Group

Nine focus groups were held across PEI with 87 BIPOC participants, using semi-structured questions to explore experiences with employment, training, and workforce participation. Eight groups were conducted with immigrants and one with the Indigenous community. All transcripts were analyzed using thematic content analysis. Patterns were identified across groups and organized into immigrant-specific themes, Indigenous-specific themes, and shared cross-group themes. Throughout the analysis, findings were grounded in participant voices to ensure lived experience remained central to interpretation and reporting.

Interview

One interview was conducted with a representative from the Indigenous community. The interview transcript was analyzed using the same thematic approach as the focus groups. Its insights were reviewed alongside the Indigenous focus group to identify shared themes, as well as to contribute to broader cross-group themes. This ensured that perspectives from both discussion formats were integrated and that Indigenous experiences were reflected accurately within the overall analysis.

Demographic Survey

A total of 79 participants completed a short demographic survey during the focus groups to capture basic background information. Survey responses were entered into a secure database and analyzed using frequency counts. These analyses helped identify patterns across participant characteristics and provided important context for interpreting the qualitative findings and understanding who was represented in the discussions.

3. Limitations

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings of this needs assessment:

Short project timeline

Due to the short project timeline, the breadth and depth of the literature review and qualitative analysis were constrained, meaning some relevant sources may not have been included.

Literature gaps

Atlantic-specific research on Indigenous and immigrant workforce pathways is limited, particularly in smaller provinces like PEI. Most available studies focus on larger urban centres or national patterns, which do not reflect the region's unique labour-market realities. As a result, there is little detailed evidence on how Indigenous and immigrant job seekers in Atlantic Canada navigate local training, credential recognition, and employment systems.

Sample representation

While nine focus groups, six interviews and 79 survey responses provided valuable insights, the participants may not reflect the full diversity of BIPOC experiences across PEI. Findings should be interpreted as indicative rather than exhaustive.

Self-reported data

All findings are based on participant perspectives shared through interviews, surveys, and focus groups. As with all self-reported data, responses may be shaped by individual memory, comfort, or willingness to share.

Focus group format

Group settings can influence what participants choose to share, as individuals may feel pressure to align with group norms or may be hesitant to speak about sensitive or personal experiences in front of others. As a result, some perspectives or nuances may not have been fully expressed within the group environment.

Despite these limitations, the mixed-methods approach and triangulation of data sources provide a strong foundation for understanding key challenges, opportunities, and priorities for supporting BIPOC entrepreneurs and career seekers in PEI.

4. Needs Assessments Findings

The findings in this section are organized into two parts. First, insights from the literature review are presented separately to highlight the broader policy, labour-market, and system-level factors shaping workforce experiences in PEI and Atlantic Canada. The subsequent section combines the findings from the demographic survey, pilot interviews and focus groups, which together reflect the lived experiences, perspectives, and priorities shared by immigrants and Indigenous participants. This structure allows the report to distinguish between external evidence and community-driven insights while showing how they complement one another.

4.1 Literature Review

The literature review provides a broad overview of existing research on the employment and economic participation of BIPOC communities in Atlantic Canada. The review draws on government reports, statistical data, institutional studies, industry analyses, and other relevant online sources to assess labour-market trends, identify barriers and challenges, and highlight emerging opportunities for inclusive economic development. It also examines strategies aimed at improving access, economic integration, and overall workforce participation for BIPOC individuals in the region.

While the literature offers valuable insights, the review is not exhaustive. Its scope was shaped by the availability of materials accessible through online and database searches within a limited project timeline. Nonetheless, the findings provide an important foundation for the broader needs assessment being conducted by the BIPOC BPN and inform the development of evidence-based strategies to support economic participation for BIPOC individuals in PEI.

The following section summarizes the key findings from the literature, highlighting labour-market contributions, opportunities for greater inclusion, and the systemic barriers that continue to affect access to employment, entrepreneurship, and

resources across PEI and Atlantic Canada.

4.1.1 PEI Population Dynamics

As of January 1, 2025, PEI has an estimated population of 179,280, an increase from 154,331 in 2021. According to the 2021 Census data, the province showcases a diverse and evolving demographic profile, with Indigenous peoples constituting 2.3% of the total population, individuals of European descent representing the majority at 88.2%, and immigrants accounting for 7.8% (Statistics Canada, 2021). Visible minorities¹ represent a growing segment of the population, reaching 9.5% in 2021, an increase from 4.7% in 2016. Among visible minorities, the table below shows that South Asian and Chinese communities are the most prominent, accounting for 2.5% and 2.2% of the population, respectively, while Black communities represent approximately 1.2% of the population, with ongoing growth supported by increasing immigration from African and Caribbean nations (Statistics Canada, 2021).

Visible Minority Population by Racial and Ethnic Groups (2021)

Groups	Population	Percentage
South Asian	3740	2.49%
Chinese	3340	2.22%
Black	1815	1.21%
Filipino	1760	1.17%
Arab	1130	0.75%
Southeast Asian	1040	0.69%
Latin American	590	0.39%
West Asian	290	0.19%
Japanese	185	0.12%
Korean	115	0.08%
Others	125	0.08%
Multiple visible minorities	175	0.12%
Total	14305	9.51%

1 Visible minorities include those who identify as such for the 2021 Census and would include some crossover with other diverse groups such as Black and immigrant.

Since 2021, the immigrant population has seen significant growth, with a 33.2% increase from 2023 to 2024, adding 4,149 new residents (PEI Statistics Bureau, 2024). The demographic breakdown shows that 52.6% of these immigrants were male, totaling 2,184 individuals, while 47.4% were female, amounting to 1,965 individuals. Most immigrants (67.4%/2,798) were between 15 to 39 years in age, with those aged 40 to 64 accounting for 15.0% (624) and those under 15 constituting 17.1% (710).

When examining the counties separately, as of July 1, 2024, Queens County experienced the highest population growth, driven primarily by immigration, along with net gains from both interprovincial and intraprovincial migration, and drew a larger share of young adults. In contrast, Kings and Prince Counties experienced steadier but slower growth across age groups, with population increases supported mainly by immigration and net gains from interprovincial migration, as detailed below (PEI Statistics Bureau, 2024).

- Kings County: The estimated population was 20,633, reflecting an increase of 1.8% (358² persons) from 2023. This growth was driven by immigration (+284) and interprovincial migration (+179). The population aged 0 to 14 increased by 2.2%, the 15 to 64 age group by 1.2%, and the population aged 65 and over by 2.9%.
- Queens County: The estimated population was 106,078, representing a significant increase of 3.5% (3,592 persons). Growth was primarily fueled by immigration (+3,892), along with net gains from intraprovincial migration (+82) and interprovincial migration, for which a specific county-level figure is not reported. The under-15 population grew by 0.9%, the 15 to 64 age group increased by 4.3%, and the population aged 65 and over expanded by 2.8%.
- Prince County: The estimated population was 51,839, showing a 1.7% increase (887 persons) from the previous year. Contributing factors included immigration (+897) and interprovincial migration (+201). The population aged 0 to 14 increased by 1.4%, as did the 15 to 64 age group, while the population aged 65 and over rose by 2.9.

2 The individual components of population change across each county do not sum to the total population increase because gains from immigration and migration are partially offset by deaths and out-migration.

Overall, these statistics highlight the significant impact of immigration on PEI's population dynamics, particularly the influx of younger individuals contributing to growth. This demographic shift is expected to influence the region's economic and social landscape in the foreseeable future. Projections indicate that by 2040, PEI is likely to become the most diverse province in Atlantic Canada, with visible minorities expected to represent 24% to 30% of the population, a marked increase from the 4% recorded in 2016 (APEC Looking Ahead, Bulletin 5, April 2021). Understanding these trends is essential as PEI embraces diversity and develops a multicultural community.

4.1.2 BIPOC Employment Landscape - Demographics and Trends

As demographic changes unfold in PEI, the employment landscape is evolving, particularly for Black, Indigenous, and other People of Colour. This section examines employment statistics and dynamics for these groups, focusing on labour force participation rates, trends in self-employment and business ownership, and representation in management positions. Analyzing these factors will provide insight into how various populations are navigating the job market and influencing PEI's economic environment.

Employment

In 2021, the Indigenous population in PEI comprised 2.3% of the total population and represented 2% of the province's workforce. Indigenous employment in PEI included 1,500 individuals, with the largest share working in public services, health care, and education. Notably, 8% of Indigenous people in PEI were employed in agriculture, forestry, fishing, and hunting - marking the highest rate in Atlantic Canada (The Significant Economic Contribution of Atlantic Indigenous Businesses and Communities, July 2024). A total of 1.5% of managers were Indigenous people and 1.8% of senior managers, which was significantly lower than in Atlantic Canada as a whole, where 3.8% of managers and 4.4% of senior managers were Indigenous during this time. The median earnings for Indigenous workers at this time across Atlantic Canada was approximately 92% of the overall median in the region (Spotlight on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Atlantic Canada, May 29, 2024).

Statistics Canada (2025) reports that immigrants in the PEI labour force experienced positive changes between 2020 and 2024. The total participation rate increased from 87.6% in 2020 to 89.7% in 2024, with noteworthy increases being seen in landed immigrants (81.0% to 88.5%), recent immigrants (78.1% to 88.5%), immigrants who landed more than 5 to 10 years earlier (90.0% to 92.6%) and immigrants who landed more than 10 years earlier (86.7% to 90.9%).

Across PEI, the number of landed immigrants working full-time (more than 30 hours a week) went from 3,500 in 2020 to 6,900 in 2024, and for recent immigrants, it went from 1,800 to 3,300. Immigrants who landed more than 5 to 10 years earlier saw an increase from 700 in 2020 to 2000 in 2024, and those who landed more than 10 years earlier went from 1000 to 1600 (Statistics Canada, 2025).

The number of landed immigrants working part-time (less than 30 hours a week) in PEI stayed the same at 700 in both 2020 and 2024. Among recent immigrants, the count decreased from 400 in 2020 to 300 in 2024. For those who landed more than 5 to 10 years earlier, the number increased from 200 in 2020 to 300 in 2024. The count for immigrants who arrived more than 10 years ago remained at 200 in both years (Statistics Canada, 2025).

Additionally, the May 2024 report titled “Spotlight on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in Atlantic Canada” reveals that in 2021, immigrants were significantly present in high-wage industries such as finance and professional services, but were overrepresented in low-wage sectors like accommodation and food services and had minimal presence in primary industries and construction, accounting for about 3%. During this time, approximately 9.1% of managers and 7.3% of senior managers were immigrants.



In relation to Black Canadians, in 2021 they comprised 1.3% of the workforce in PEI, but were underrepresented in management and senior management positions within Atlantic Canada, with no representation reported in PEI (compared to 0.8% for both roles in the broader Atlantic region). Employment rates for Black individuals in Atlantic Canada were 66% for immigrants and 50% for non-immigrants (Spotlight on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Atlantic Canada, May 29, 2024).

To better understand employment trends observed among immigrant and Black communities in PEI, it is useful to examine these patterns both from their individual perspectives and through the broader lens of visible minorities. This perspective shows a significant increase in workforce representation, rising from 4.1% in 2016 to 11% in 2021. However, this growth has not been evenly distributed across sectors. Visible minorities are overrepresented in lower-wage service industries, particularly accommodation and food services, while remaining underrepresented in goods-producing sectors such as primary industries and construction, where they account for approximately 3% of employment (Spotlight on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Atlantic Canada, May 29, 2024, and Growing Our Region: The Impact of Immigration in Atlantic Canada, 2025).

Leadership representation further reflects this imbalance. In 2021, 6.4% of management positions and 3% of senior management roles were held by visible minorities, indicating a substantial drop-off between workforce participation and leadership roles. While representation on the boards of TSX-listed companies in Atlantic Canada increased to 10% by 2023, up from 7% in 2021, these figures remain below overall workforce representation (Spotlight on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Atlantic Canada, May 29, 2024, and Growing Our Region: The Impact of immigration in Atlantic Canada, 2025).



Unemployment

According to Statistics Canada, the unemployment rate among Indigenous people in PEI in 2021 was 13.9%. In the case of immigrants, statistics from 2025 indicate that the unemployment rate for landed immigrants increased from 0.5% in 2020 to 0.8% in 2024. Recent immigrants, arriving within the last five years, maintained a low and stable unemployment rate, rising from about 0.3% in 2020 to 0.5% in 2024. By 2024, the unemployment rate for immigrants who settled 5 to 10 years prior and more than 10 years ago was similar at 0.2% (Statistics Canada, 2025). There was no specific data on unemployment rates among Black individuals in PEI, but the unemployment rate for the Black community in Atlantic Canada in 2021 was approximately 17% (Spotlight on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Atlantic Canada, May 29, 2024).

Self-Employment, Business Ownership and Start-Ups

The landscape of business ownership in Atlantic Canada has experienced significant growth among various BIPOC groups. According to data released in April 2024, PEI is home to nearly 50 Indigenous-owned businesses, generating a direct GDP contribution of \$96 million, equivalent to 1% of the province's GDP, and employing around 1,500 individuals (The Significant Economic Contribution of Atlantic Indigenous Businesses and Communities, 2024).

Immigrant entrepreneurship has grown significantly in PEI. In 2021, 20.3% of immigrants were business owners, compared to 15.8% who were Canadian-born (non-immigrants) and 5.5% who were non-permanent residents. These figures reflect the share of business owners by immigration status and are not mutually exclusive categories. All three shares exceed the Atlantic Canada averages of 15.4% for immigrants, 11.6% for Canadian-born business owners, and 4.1% for non-permanent residents. While there's a clear upward trend in the entrepreneurial contributions of immigrants in PEI, they continue to face challenges such as high input costs, inflation, and recruitment issues (Spotlight on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Atlantic Canada, May 29, 2024; Assessing the Diversity of Business Ownership in Atlantic Canada, December 5, 2024; Growing Our Region: The Impact of Immigration in Atlantic Canada, 2025).

From 2005 to 2018, the number of Black-owned businesses in Atlantic Canada³ increased by 45%, reaching approximately 240. However, this represents only 0.6% of all businesses, which is below their share of the overall population. These businesses collectively employed about 950 people and generated more than \$112 million in revenue (Spotlight on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Atlantic Canada, May 29, 2024). Key challenges faced by Black-owned businesses include retaining skilled workers, fluctuating demand, and accessing financing, as identified in the Statistics Canada 2024Q2 Canadian Survey on Business Conditions.

The 2022 Atlantic Startup Report from Entrevestor reveals that 1.4% of startup businesses in Atlantic Canada are led by Black founders, 2.0% by Indigenous founders, and 25.9% by immigrants. Each of these categories has shown an increase from the previous year, with Black founders up from 0.7%, Indigenous founders up from 1.6%, and immigrant founders up from 19.6%. In broader demographic terms, Black individuals make up approximately 1.4% of the Atlantic Canadian population, while Indigenous individuals account for about 5.5%. Despite these advancements, the statistics indicate a persistent gap between the presence of these groups in the startup ecosystem and their demographic representations in the region.

4.1.3 Overarching Labour Market Trends

The labour market in Atlantic Canada is undergoing significant changes, influenced by a range of demographic and economic factors. These changes not only impact overall employment trends but also highlight the experiences and contributions of BIPOC individuals within this evolving landscape. Key aspects include:

Workforce Demographic Shifts

Atlantic Canada faces significant workforce challenges stemming from low birth rates, an aging population, and evolving labour market demands. Projections indicate a potential 50% increase in retirements by 2040, leading to a decline of approximately 130,000 workers if proactive measures are not implemented. This demographic shift is particularly critical in PEI, where the senior population is expected to grow from 22% to 28% (Looking Ahead, Bulletin 4: Addressing Atlantic Canada's Labour Challenge, March 2021).

Immigration and Retention Challenges

Trends in PEI reveal significant barriers to immigrant retention. The five-year retention rate for the 2016 admission cohort was just 30.9%, the lowest in Canada, although this marked a 5.7 percentage point improvement from the 25.2% rate of the 2012 cohort. Analysis of one-year retention rates from 2016 to 2020 showed no clear trends, indicating relative stability during this period. However, for skilled immigrants admitted in 2020, PEI experienced a notable increase in retention, rising by 30 percentage points compared to the 2017 cohort, reaching a rate of 40.0% (Statistics Canada, 2024b).

Addressing Atlantic Canada's labour and population challenges depends not only on attracting newcomers, but on retaining them. To retain an average of 13,000 to 16,000 immigrants annually, the region must attract 18,000 to 22,000 newcomers each year, based on a 75% retention rate. This underscores the importance of settlement and integration supports, including language training and housing access, which play a central role in long-term retention (Looking Ahead, Bulletin 4: Addressing Atlantic Canada's Labour Challenge, March 2021).

Skilled Workforce Demand in Canada

In 2024, the mismatch between the supply and demand for skilled workers in Canada was projected to cost the economy \$2.6 billion and reduce overall productivity growth by 0.1 percentage points. Canada currently faces a shortage of 64,000 skilled workers across key sectors, including engineering, technical occupations, and healthcare, with each vacancy costing \$40,400 in lost productivity and economic output. The healthcare sector is notably impacted, with over 16,170 vacancies in nursing and therapy roles and 12,460 for technical specialists. Additionally, there are 10,250 vacancies in skilled trades and 1,750 in engineering. Importantly, 80% of these positions require formal post-secondary training, and two-thirds necessitate non-university credentials, such as college diplomas and trade certifications (The Conference Board of Canada, 2025).

The top sectors seeking skilled workers in PEI include technology and innovation, healthcare and wellness, agriculture and agri-food, tourism and hospitality, and the green economy and renewable energy (Canadavisa.org, 2024). These sectors align with provincial labour-market priorities identified through the PEI Provincial Nominee Program, which focuses on recruiting and retaining workers in areas experiencing persistent labour shortages - particularly health care, trades, and childcare, as well as other key industries. Examples of in-demand occupations include nurse aides, transport truck drivers, construction trades helpers, material handlers, and process operators, highlighting the province's need for both professionally trained and skilled trade workers (Government of Prince Edward Island, Occupations in Demand, May 27, 2024).

Attracting and Retaining Young Talent

Despite the increase in young immigrants moving to Atlantic Canada (Statistics Canada, 2025), further efforts are required to fully leverage their potential. Attracting young individuals is essential for addressing workforce challenges and fostering a dynamic labour market. To achieve this, Atlantic Canada should focus on enhancing cultural experiences, expanding educational opportunities, and providing affordable childcare. Implementing targeted initiatives that align with the interests and needs of younger demographics will be crucial for developing a vibrant and sustainable workforce in the long run (Looking Ahead, Bulletin 4: Addressing Atlantic Canada's Labour Challenge, March 2021 and Looking Ahead, Bulletin 5: Further Insights on Migration, April 2021).

4.1.4 Barriers to Participation in the Labour Market in Atlantic Canada

BIPOC communities in Atlantic Canada face substantial barriers in the labour market, including systemic discrimination, limited access to quality education and training, and difficulties in securing stable employment. These challenges impede their economic participation and growth, highlighting a critical intersection with broader labour market issues in the region. Addressing these obstacles is vital for creating a more equitable and inclusive labour market in Atlantic Canada.

Discrimination in Hiring Practices

Despite increasing recognition of BIPOC contributions to Atlantic Canada's economy, systemic discrimination in hiring practices continues to limit their representation across various sectors. Many BIPOC individuals encounter biases during the recruitment process, adversely affecting their chances of securing employment, regardless of their qualifications or experience (Spotlight on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Atlantic Canada, May 29, 2024).

Credential Recognition Challenges

Challenges related to credential recognition present substantial obstacles for immigrants seeking to enter or advance in their chosen professions. Many individuals with qualifications or work experience from their home countries struggle to have their credentials recognized in Canada, leading to underemployment or the need for further education at significant personal and financial costs (Growing Our Region: The Impact of Immigration in Atlantic Canada, 2025).

Financial Resource Access for Entrepreneurs

Access to financial resources remains a critical barrier for BIPOC entrepreneurs, who often struggle to secure funding from traditional financial institutions due to systemic biases, limited collateral, and insufficient credit histories. This lack of access to capital can stifle entrepreneurial efforts and inhibit business growth, contributing to economic disparities within these communities (Assessing the Diversity of Business Ownership in Atlantic Canada, December 5, 2024).

Integration Challenges for Newcomers and Immigrants

Newcomers and immigrants face several integration challenges, including language barriers and limited access to community resources, which affect their ability to integrate into the workforce and community. Additionally, rising anti-immigration sentiment in certain areas may foster a hostile environment, undermining community cohesion and complicating their integration efforts (Growing Our Region: The Impact of Immigration in Atlantic Canada, 2025).

Economic Barriers Unique to Indigenous People

While all BIPOC communities face significant challenges in the labour market, Indigenous communities encounter additional barriers. One major challenge is securing financing from traditional financial institutions. The Indian Act limits banks' ability to use on-reserve property as collateral for loans, reducing the range of financial options available to Indigenous entrepreneurs and potentially hindering business development (The Significant Economic Contribution of Atlantic Indigenous Businesses and Communities, July 2024).

Indigenous businesses, particularly those in rural areas where most First Nations are located, also face market access challenges due to smaller populations that restrict the customer base. Geographic isolation can distance these entrepreneurs from key markets and business networks, complicating their ability to compete with larger established companies (The Significant Economic Contribution of Atlantic Indigenous Businesses and Communities, July 2024).

Additionally, there is a notable difference in educational attainment between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations, which influences employment opportunities and income levels. As of 2021, 14% of Indigenous peoples in the Atlantic region had attained a university education, compared to 21% of non-Indigenous counterparts. This educational gap can limit the pool of qualified Indigenous individuals for skilled positions, resulting in underemployment. However, improved graduation rates among Indigenous populations since 2016 suggest progress toward greater educational equity (The Significant Economic Contributions of Atlantic Indigenous Businesses and Communities, July 11, 2024).



Adding to this is the fact that many rural Indigenous communities experience limited access to high-speed internet, which is becoming increasingly crucial for participation in the digital economy. Inadequate connectivity can hinder educational opportunities and restrict access to online resources essential for skill development. Additionally, limited internet access affects Indigenous businesses' ability to engage in e-commerce and other digital opportunities, widening the economic gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities (Importance of Broadband Access, 2022).

4.1.5 Addressing Barriers and Fostering Economic Inclusion for BIPOC Communities

The barriers and challenges faced by BIPOC communities in Atlantic Canada underscore the urgent need for a comprehensive strategy to address these issues and foster sustainable economic growth in the region. The “Addressing Atlantic Canada’s Labour Challenge” bulletins (March and April 2021) suggest that interconnected areas such as immigration, skill development, increased workforce participation, and technological investments must be aligned to effectively overcome the systemic barriers encountered by BIPOC individuals. Implementing a range of strategic solutions, as outlined below, will enable these communities to engage more actively in the workforce, ultimately fostering a more inclusive economic environment that benefits all.

Enhancing Equity Through Inclusive Hiring Practices and Strategies

The Atlantic Economic Council's report, "Spotlight on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Atlantic Canada" recommends implementing standardized hiring practices combined with diversity training for employers to help enhance equity in the workforce. These measures can help minimize biased behaviors in recruitment processes. Additionally, promoting the recognition of diverse qualifications and skills is important for facilitating the entry of BIPOC candidates into sectors where they are currently underrepresented.

While these specific strategies are vital, more extensive initiatives are necessary to address the representation issues faced by BIPOC communities. The February 2022 report, "By the Numbers - Diversity and Inclusion in Atlantic Canada," highlights various strategies adopted by businesses and government entities to improve diversity and inclusion, with a focus on supporting women and Indigenous communities. It notes that nearly 75% of senior managers in Canada incorporate diversity and inclusion into their business strategies. However, translating this commitment into effective action is challenging, as only about one-third of these leaders invest adequate resources in training and awareness initiatives. Collectively, these efforts to combat hiring discrimination and promote systemic change underscore the importance of a holistic approach to creating more inclusive and equitable workplaces in Atlantic Canada.

Streamlining Credential Recognition

Many BIPOC individuals face significant challenges in integrating into their professional fields due to the complexities of foreign credential recognition, highlighting the need for streamlined processes in this area. Transition programs designed specifically for internationally trained professionals can ensure that BIPOC individuals effectively enter their fields of expertise, thereby enhancing their economic prospects (Growing Our Region: The Impact of Immigration in Atlantic Canada, March 2025).

Enhancing Access to Financial Resources and Support Networks

Increasing the availability of funding through community-based and institutional support programs, especially those targeted at BIPOC-owned businesses, can streamline the loan acquisition process and reduce financial barriers that hinder entrepreneurial activities, thus promoting overall business growth. Additionally, fostering support networks and mentorship opportunities is vital because it equips BIPOC entrepreneurs with the tools, confidence and connections needed to thrive, ultimately contributing to economic growth and diversity in the market (Assessing the Diversity of Business Ownership in Atlantic Canada, December 2024).

Promoting Targeted Training Programs

To strengthen economic opportunities for BIPOC communities, targeted training programs and initiatives are necessary to promote skill development and employment in various sectors. These initiatives can drive local economic growth and support the integration of BIPOC individuals into the workforce. Additionally, by addressing the unique needs of underserved areas in Atlantic Canada, where BIPOC representation is limited, these programs can help dismantle systemic barriers and foster a more inclusive workforce environment. Collaborative efforts between organizations, training providers, and community leaders will ensure that these initiatives are aligned with local labour market demands, ultimately enhancing the socioeconomic vitality of these regions. (Summary of Key Sector Growth Opportunities for Indigenous Communities in Atlantic Canada, June 2022; Spotlight on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Atlantic Canada, May 2024; and Growing Our Region: The Impact of Immigration in Atlantic Canada, March 2025).

Enhancing Integration Support Services

Enhancing integration support services is crucial for helping immigrants settle and thrive in their new communities. Expanding services such as language training and culturally relevant community resources fosters a supportive environment conducive to empowerment. Programs that focus on cultural awareness and community-building are particularly effective in fostering social cohesion (Growing Our Region: The Impact of Immigration in Atlantic Canada, March 2025).

Addressing Anti-Immigration Sentiment

To address rising anti-immigration sentiment, it is essential to engage in community education campaigns that promote understanding and acceptance of diversity. Such initiatives can help mitigate prejudicial attitudes and create a more welcoming atmosphere for newcomers. By building partnerships between established communities and newcomers, social integration and cohesion can be significantly improved (Spotlight on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Atlantic Canada, May 29, 2024).

Inclusive Policy Development

Inclusive policy development plays a pivotal role in dismantling barriers faced by BIPOC communities. Government bodies should prioritize incorporating diverse voices into the policymaking process. This approach, highlighted in the "Spotlight on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion" report, advocates for frameworks that enable effective participation from various demographic groups.

Monitoring and Evaluating Diversity Initiatives

Monitoring and evaluation are essential for ensuring the effectiveness of diversity and inclusion initiatives. The "Diversity Review: A Summary of the State of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Atlantic Canada" underscores the importance of data collection and accountability measures to prompt organizations to effectively address diversity and inclusion efforts.

Supporting Indigenous Access to Capital

Enhancing access to capital for Indigenous businesses and entrepreneurs is crucial for overcoming the barriers they face and fostering economic growth. Organizations like the Ulnooweg Development Group play a crucial role by providing small business loans specifically for Indigenous enterprises, thereby mitigating the financial limitations imposed by the restrictions in the Indian Act. Furthermore, institutions operating under the First Nations Fiscal Management Act are vital in enhancing economic development. Through financial management facilitation and support for infrastructure projects, these institutions empower First Nations governments to invest in essential services and development initiatives that contribute to long-term community well-being (The Significant Economic Contribution of Atlantic Indigenous Businesses and Communities, July 2024).



Promoting Collaborative Partnerships for Indigenous Economic Growth

Establishing partnerships among Indigenous, non-Indigenous, and government entities is essential for resource sharing and fostering economic growth within Indigenous communities. Such partnerships, built on trust and a commitment to reconciliation, offer mutual benefits: non-Indigenous businesses gain valuable insights, while Indigenous communities receive vital skills development and infrastructure investments (Best Practices for Partnerships, 2022).

By addressing systemic barriers through meaningful dialogue, stakeholders can contribute to sustainable economic growth and enhance the well-being of Indigenous populations across Atlantic Canada. Ultimately, this collective effort can lead to a more equitable and prosperous future for Indigenous communities (Best Practices for Partnerships, 2022; Policy ViewPoint on Indigenous Partnerships, 2025; and Spotlight on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Atlantic Canada, May 29, 2024).

Recognizing Indigenous Rights in Economic Development

The evolving policy landscape surrounding Indigenous rights further emphasizes the need for collaboration in economic development. Frameworks such as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and amendments to the Indian Act highlight the recognition of Indigenous rights and the importance of meaningful participation in economic projects. These measures ensure that Indigenous voices are integral to decision-making processes, balancing equity and consent with economic involvement (Best Practices for Partnerships, 2022; Policy ViewPoint on Indigenous Partnerships, 2025; and Spotlight on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Atlantic Canada, May 29, 2024).

Building Educational Equity for Indigenous Communities

To help address educational disparities within the Indigenous community, initiatives that enhance educational attainment through scholarships and targeted training programs are required. These efforts are crucial to bridging the educational gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations (The Significant Economic Contributions of Atlantic Indigenous Businesses and Communities, July 11, 2024).

Investing in Broadband Infrastructure

Investments in broadband infrastructure are essential for overcoming challenges associated with inadequate internet access faced by Indigenous peoples, particularly in rural and remote areas. Federal and provincial initiatives, such as the Connect to Innovate and Universal Broadband Fund programs, aim to improve broadband connectivity in Indigenous communities, which is vital for supporting educational and business growth. The PEI Broadband Fund specifically targets enhancing access for First Nations, striving to achieve comprehensive connectivity in these areas by the end of 2025 (Importance of Broadband Access, 2022).

Promoting Digital Literacy and Skills Development Among Indigenous Peoples

Enhancing digital skills among Indigenous peoples is critical for bridging the gap between communities and the rapidly evolving digital economy. Educational programs focused on digital literacy can empower Indigenous individuals to use essential technologies for communication, commerce, and education, thereby improving their employability and fostering entrepreneurship. By investing in these skills, Indigenous peoples can navigate the digital economy more effectively, drive innovation, and contribute to the overall growth and well-being of their communities (Importance of Broadband Access, 2022).

4.1.6 Fostering Economic Empowerment - BIPOC Entrepreneurship Support Services

Fostering economic empowerment for BIPOC entrepreneurs is essential for overcoming systemic barriers and enhancing the overall vitality of communities across Canada. As these entrepreneurs navigate unique challenges, targeted support services and initiatives play a crucial role in facilitating their business success. Various organizations are dedicated to providing the resources, mentorship, and networking opportunities necessary for BIPOC entrepreneurs in Canada to thrive. By addressing access to capital, training, and community engagement, these initiatives not only empower individual business owners but also contribute to broader economic resilience and inclusion. The following sections detail specific programs designed to support BIPOC entrepreneurship, showcasing the positive impact of collaborative efforts in driving economic growth and opportunity.

The Tribe Network

The Tribe Network is a community of racialized people pursuing entrepreneurship and innovation in Canada. With over 1,000 members and 40 partner organizations, it provides valuable resources and programming designed to assist members in starting, building, and scaling their businesses. Two initiatives they have in place for Black entrepreneurs in Atlantic Canada are the Black Start-Up Project - START Program and the Black Start-Up Project - BUILD Program (The Tribe Network, About Us, and BIPOC entrepreneurs tackle systemic barriers in Atlantic Canada, April 22, 2021).

The START Program is a 10-week initiative designed for aspiring Black entrepreneurs and early-stage founders in Atlantic Canada, aimed at helping them scale their products and services. Participants gain valuable resources to enhance their confidence and skills for business success through knowledge-sharing and networking opportunities. The program provides insights on business management tools and best practices, inspires Black entrepreneurs to create values-driven businesses, facilitates connections among participants, and offers practical training workshops (The Tribe Network, Black Start-Up Project: START Program).

The BUILD Program is a transformative 15-week virtual program tailored for Black and other racialized entrepreneurs and early-stage founders. It provides participants with essential skills, expert guidance, resources, and a supportive community to help them scale their businesses and develop their products or services effectively (The Tribe Network, Black Start-Up Project: BUILD Program).



Black Business Initiative

The Black Business Initiative promotes economic independence within Black communities through business development, entrepreneurship training, and project management. The organization originated in Nova Scotia, but has recently started offering services across Atlantic Canada. They provide essential training, networking opportunities, and financing options, such as term- and micro-loans, to support the growth of Black-owned businesses. In 2023-2024, they provided business counseling to 327 Black businesses, approved \$573,894 in loans and grants, provided business training to 180 Black businesses, and secured \$465,900 in financing (Forging New Pathways: Annual Report 2023-2024, and BIPOC entrepreneurs tackle systemic barriers in Atlantic Canada, April 22, 2021).

Ulnooweg

Ulnooweg is an organization that focuses on providing business support services and resources to Indigenous entrepreneurs and businesses in Atlantic Canada through financial and community development services (Ulnooweg, About Us and BIPOC entrepreneurs tackle systemic barriers in Atlantic Canada, April 22, 2021). It operates under three divisions:

1. Ulnooweg Development Group: which provides financing solutions, including business loans and non-repayable contributions, along with essential tools to help entrepreneurs assess their needs and discover training and funding opportunities (Ulnooweg, Development Group).
2. Ulnooweg Education Centre: which enhances the skills and knowledge of Indigenous business owners through educational programs and workshops covering various business topics (Ulnooweg, Education Centre).
3. Ulnooweg Indigenous Communities Foundation: which focuses on community development and economic growth by promoting connections among Indigenous communities and facilitating strategic initiatives (Ulnooweg, Indigenous Communities Foundation).

Futurpreneur

Futurpreneur is a Canadian organization aimed at supporting entrepreneurs aged 18 to 39, who are citizens or permanent residents, by offering various programs and resources to start, buy, or grow businesses. It features specialized initiatives such as the Black Entrepreneur Startup Program and the Indigenous Entrepreneur Startup Program (Futurpreneur, About Us).

The Black Entrepreneur Startup Program offers up to \$75,000 in accessible loan financing through RBC, with an additional \$40,000 in financing options available through Futurpreneur. Participants benefit from two years of mentorship provided by a team of Black professionals with firsthand entrepreneurial experience, guiding young Black entrepreneurs through their business journeys. This program specifically addresses the systemic barriers faced by young Black entrepreneurs, including racism and biases that hinder access to capital.

In 2020, Futurpreneur observed a lack of research regarding the barriers encountered by entrepreneurs across different communities, primarily because most institutions fail to gather demographic data about borrowers or credit eligibility. To address this gap, they began collecting this demographic information in October 2020, and within three months, their findings indicated that while 17% of all surveyed entrepreneurs identified "bad credit score" as a barrier, this figure rose to 31% among Black entrepreneurs, which is more than twice the 15% reported by White entrepreneurs. This data highlights the significant impact of credit-related challenges on the Black entrepreneurial community (Futurpreneur, Black Communities).



The Indigenous Entrepreneur Startup Program offers startup loan financing and up to two years of mentorship to young Indigenous entrepreneurs, facilitated by an Indigenous team that provides access to essential tools and networking opportunities. It aims to equip Indigenous entrepreneurs with the resources, financing, and mentorship necessary to address the unique needs of young Indigenous individuals across Canada. The program team is made up entirely of Indigenous professionals from across the country, who are attuned to the challenges faced by Indigenous clients. To ensure equitable access to financial and mentoring support, adjustments have been made to the credit limits, acknowledging that many Indigenous individuals face credit barriers and disadvantages stemming from colonialism. All individuals who self-identify as Indigenous entrepreneurs are eligible to participate (Futurpreneur, Indigenous & Northern Communities).

Black Entrepreneurship Program

In 2020, the Government of Canada announced the Black Entrepreneurship Program as part of its commitment to support Black business owners and organizations. To ensure the program was tailored to the needs of the community, Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada conducted consultations with the Black Canadian community from September to November 2020, focusing on their realities and challenges. The discussions were held virtually, in both English and French, engaging Black entrepreneurs, business owners, community organizations, academics, and other key stakeholders in Black entrepreneurship across Canada. A total of 11 virtual sessions were held and attended by 125 participants from 64 different organizations, including the Black Cultural Society of PEI (Government of Canada, 2020). The key themes that emerged from the consultations hosted included:

- **Support Structure:** Participants highlighted the need for tailored training and support services, emphasizing that Black entrepreneurs require access to a comprehensive suite of tools, including training programs, mentorship, coaching, and capacity-building resources. Wrap-around supports would help entrepreneurs identify market opportunities, develop strong business plans, and navigate the various phases of business operations. This holistic approach is vital for equipping both new entrepreneurs and those scaling their businesses to

overcome systemic obstacles.

- **Funding Needs:** Access to funding is crucial, yet participants unanimously agreed that financial support should not be the only focus. While funding is essential to start and grow businesses, it must be complemented by educational and service-oriented supports. The discussions identified the need for a flexible funding model that adapts to the unique circumstances and needs of Black entrepreneurs, ensuring that financial resources enhance overall support rather than operate in isolation.
- **Community-Led Approach:** Participants strongly advocated for the program to be ministered by the Black Canadian community itself. This approach ensures that those who design and implement the program are attuned to the specific challenges and needs of Black entrepreneurs. The dialogue surrounding this theme also highlighted the importance of expertise - suggesting that while cultural representation is crucial, having individuals with experience and knowledge in entrepreneurship should also be prioritized in leadership roles.
- **Avoid Duplication:** It is essential for the program to build upon existing frameworks and services rather than duplicate them. Participants noted that learning from successful methodologies and integrating relevant organizations into the program can streamline operations and result in more effective delivery of services. Creating connections among organizations would enhance the ecosystem's overall efficiency by avoiding redundancy.
- **Flexibility and Adaptability:** The program must be designed to accommodate a diverse range of entrepreneurial needs, recognizing that Black entrepreneurs come from varied backgrounds and are at different stages in their business journeys. Flexibility in programming allows for personalized solutions that cater to the specific challenges faced by individuals, whether they are just starting out or looking to scale an established business.

- **Local Focus:** A decentralized approach was preferred, allowing for localized solutions that address region-specific challenges. Participants emphasized that entrepreneurship conditions can vary widely across different cities and communities, and the program should be responsive to these differences, ensuring that support mechanisms align with local needs.
- **Importance of Data:** Access to quality data has been identified as a significant barrier affecting the business progress of Black entrepreneurs. Participants called for a decentralized approach to data collection that fosters trust and transparency, utilizing insights from various organizations and institutions. Improved data will aid in driving policy changes and tailoring support to the unique challenges faced by Black entrepreneurs.
- **Gaps and Partnerships:** Participants identified notable gaps in knowledge regarding Black entrepreneurship, particularly concerning systemic barriers and opportunities. Effective partnerships with public institutions and academic organizations were highlighted as crucial for understanding these gaps better. Collaborations should prioritize institutions that have a history of engagement and trust with the Black community, ensuring that their needs are accurately represented and addressed.

The insights gained from these consultations played a crucial role in shaping the Black Entrepreneurship Program, a collaborative initiative that includes the Government of Canada, Black-led business organizations, post-secondary institutions, and the Business Development Bank of Canada. The program aims to create a strong, adaptable, and community-focused ecosystem that empowers Black entrepreneurs to overcome challenges and achieve sustainable business success, supporting Black business owners and entrepreneurs through the following components (Government of Canada, 2020):

- **Black Entrepreneurship Loan Fund:** This fund, in partnership with several organizations, provides loans of up to \$250,000 to Black business owners and entrepreneurs nationwide. Applications are accepted through the Federation of African Canadian Economics. Since its launch, the fund has approved over \$65 million in loans, benefiting more than 700 Black-owned businesses (Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada, n.d., and Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada, 2025).

- **National Ecosystem Fund:** With a budget of \$100 million, this fund supports 43 not-for-profit organizations nationwide that deliver mentorship, business training, and financial planning services to Black entrepreneurs. This initiative has impacted nearly 16,000 Black entrepreneurs by enhancing their access to essential support (Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada, n.d., and Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada, 2025).
- **Black Entrepreneurship Knowledge Hub:** The Hub is led by Carleton University's Sprott School of Business and the Dream Legacy Foundation and focuses on researching Black entrepreneurship in Canada to identify barriers and growth opportunities. It consists of six regional research hubs dedicated to community-centered research, which aims to enhance the understanding of Black entrepreneurship and provide localized insights. A key initiative of the Hub is the Ecosystem Mapping Tool, which was rolled out in August 2024. This interactive platform allows Black-owned businesses across Canada to access critical resources, mentorship, and investment opportunities while improving their visibility to customers. The tool also gathers valuable data to guide future government policies and support programs (Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada, n.d., and Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada, 2025).

In the 2024 Fall Economic Statement, the federal government announced its plans to build on the successes of the Black Entrepreneurship Program by investing an additional \$189 million to extend it for another five years. This investment will ensure that Black entrepreneurs continue to have access to the funding, mentorship, and business support they need to thrive (Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada, 2025).



PEI Connectors

PEI Connectors is a vital organization dedicated to empowering immigrant entrepreneurs and job-seekers in PEI, aiming to enrich their professional networks and expand career opportunities. The organization provides a comprehensive suite of support services tailored specifically for those who have migrated to Canada and currently reside in PEI. It identifies the unique challenges faced by these individuals, such as unfamiliarity with the local business landscape and limited professional connections (PEI Connectors, Expand Your Network).

To address these challenges, PEI Connectors employs dedicated Program Officers who offer personalized one-on-one support, helping clients articulate their goals and providing targeted guidance for their entrepreneurial or job-seeking journeys. Clients are introduced to a network of Volunteer Connectors, which includes accomplished mentors, established business leaders, and community partners, thereby facilitating invaluable connections that could lead to business success or employment opportunities. Additionally, clients can engage in free small-group networking sessions and speed networking events, fostering a collaborative environment for sharing ideas and resources (PEI Connectors, Expand Your Network).

The organization also hosts a series of free educational programming sessions covering a wide range of topics essential for both entrepreneurs and job-seekers. These sessions are designed to equip clients with practical knowledge and skills, enhancing their readiness to thrive in PEI's labour market. To qualify for these services, individuals must have immigrated to Canada and currently reside in PEI, encompassing new Islanders, international students who have recently completed post-secondary qualifications, and newcomers who have obtained relevant diplomas or degrees. By providing services in multiple languages - such as English, French, Mandarin, Vietnamese, Spanish, Hindi, and Persian - PEI Connectors enhances accessibility and inclusivity, striving to eliminate barriers and empower clients to achieve their goals in their chosen fields (PEI Connectors, Expand Your Network).

4.1.7 Literature Review Conclusions

This literature review has examined the economic participation and employment landscape for BIPOC communities in PEI and Atlantic Canada, highlighting their significant contributions as well as the substantial barriers they face within the labour market. Systemic challenges, including discrimination in hiring, difficulties in credential recognition, and limited access to financial resources, have impeded their full engagement. As the region's demographic shifts lead to pressing labour market needs, it is imperative to take actionable steps toward promoting inclusivity and equity.

The solutions highlighted serve as a roadmap for addressing these barriers and supporting the economic integration of BIPOC individuals. By implementing standardized hiring practices, improving credential recognition processes, enhancing access to financial resources, fostering community education and training programs, and promoting available programs that support BIPOC entrepreneurs, stakeholders can cultivate a more inclusive workforce that benefits all residents. Furthermore, ongoing evaluation and commitment to inclusive policy development will ensure that the needs of diverse communities are prioritized in decision-making processes.

In summary, by addressing systemic barriers and promoting equitable opportunities, PEI and Atlantic Canada can harness the strengths and contributions of its BIPOC communities, paving the way for a more just and prosperous future for all.



4.2 Community Research Findings

This section synthesizes findings from five pilot interviews, a demographic survey with 79 respondents, one additional interview, and nine focus groups involving 87 participants across PEI. Together, these data sources provide a detailed picture of the lived experiences, perspectives, and priorities of immigrant and Indigenous participants. The pilot interviews helped shape and refine the focus group question guide by identifying early themes, the survey captured key demographic and background characteristics of focus group participants, and the focus groups offered deeper qualitative insights into employment pathways, barriers, supports, and opportunities. Combined, these findings reflect both individual and shared experiences and highlight the factors shaping workforce participation and economic engagement across communities in PEI.

4.2.1 Demographic Survey Findings

Before presenting the qualitative themes, it is helpful to understand who participated in the focus groups. The demographic survey provides this context by capturing key background characteristics of participants, including age, gender, country of origin, residence on PEI, and employment status. A summary of the main findings is provided below, while the full set of survey tables and detailed results can be found in Appendix A.

A total of 79 out of 87 focus group participants completed the demographic survey. Of these, 52% identified as female, 46% as male, and 1% as gender diverse. Sixty-seven percent are between 25 and 44 years old, 92% were born outside of Canada, and 44% live in Charlottetown.

Participants represented a wide range of racial and ethnic backgrounds, with the largest groups identifying as Black/African/Caribbean (37%), Latin American/Hispanic (22%), and Southeast Asian (20%). An additional 10% identified as East Asian and 8% identified as Indigenous (First Nations, Inuit, or Métis), providing representation from both immigrants and Indigenous community members.

Employment status was generally strong, with 94% reporting prior work experience in PEI and 59% were employed full-time at the time of the survey. Length of residence varied, though 80% of participants had lived on PEI for five years or less, aligning with recent immigration and population growth trends.

Overall, 81% of participants indicated they plan to stay on PEI long-term, often citing the Island's safety, welcoming atmosphere, and sense of belonging as key reasons. Those who were unsure typically pointed to limited job opportunities and difficulties securing stable, well-paid employment. Participant quotes below illustrate this.

"I want to stay here a long time after my school to work and live because the people are very awesome and willing to help and learn."

"I have a family here and I plan to get established in my career and business."

"I feel safe. I'm living with my wife and we want to raise a family. We think this is the perfect place to do it."

"Yes, I would love to get a job when I'm done with school and apply for a permanent residency as here's become my home due to the friends I've made and my familiarity with the place."

"I love this Island. We have a life here. I want to build a career here."

"I plan to live in PEI for long-term because this is now my second home."

"We plan to raise our kids on the Island."

"I love the Island, I have a little one that will grow up in a safe space."

"PEI is my home."

"I am unsure because the work opportunities are very few and not well paid compared to other provinces."

"I might stay depending on the work opportunities."

"It all depends on how opportunities flow in my career."

"For convenience sake I'd love to stick around but unless employment situation changes...we might be forced to leave."

4.2.2 Focus Group and Interview Findings

This section presents the qualitative findings from five pilot interviews, nine focus groups, and the additional interview conducted across PEI. While the pilot interviews were used primarily to refine and strengthen the question guide, they also revealed early themes that were later echoed and expanded upon in the focus groups. The full set of focus groups and the additional interview provided deeper and more detailed accounts of participants' experiences with employment, training, and workforce participation on PEI. Together, these qualitative data sources offer rich insights into shared challenges, consistent patterns, and emerging opportunities to improve access to meaningful and equitable employment for immigrant and Indigenous participants.

The qualitative findings are organized around the key questions explored in the sessions, including participants' experiences navigating PEI's labour market as students, employees, or business owners. These discussions highlighted the barriers they faced in finding stable work or advancing in their careers, the supports they found helpful, and their ideas for improving workforce attachment.

While immigrant and Indigenous groups shared several similar system-level challenges, Indigenous participants also described experiences that are unique to their history and realities, including colonial harm, identity gatekeeping, cultural suppression, and long-term intergenerational impacts. These experiences differ from immigrant pathways and are presented separately.

- Immigrant Community Experiences
- Indigenous Community Experiences
- Shared System Challenges Across Communities

The goal is to highlight participants' lived experience and present the findings in a way that honours the differences between groups, rather than merging them together.

4.2.2.1 Immigrant Community Experiences

This section reflects the common barriers, supports, and improvement opportunities identified across the eight immigrant focus groups and four interviews. They highlight the shared experiences that immigrants encounter when navigating PEI's labour market - from systemic challenges and practical obstacles to the strengths, resilience, and ideas participants brought forward for meaningful change.

Barriers and Challenges

Lack of Credential Recognition

Across all eight focus groups and all four interviews, participants identified credential recognition as one of the most significant barriers to working in their trained professions. Immigrants described arriving with extensive qualifications (e.g., in healthcare, engineering, business, education, and the skilled trades) but encountering slow, costly, and often unclear processes to have their credentials recognized. Many shared feeling discouraged when their previous roles and achievements were not understood or acknowledged. As one person noted, *"It feels like everything you accomplished before doesn't matter here."*



Participants in both the focus groups and interviews described facing repeated assessments, long wait times, and requirements to redo schooling they had already completed. The financial strain of exam fees, course costs, and taking time away from work added further pressure. As one person explained, *“It’s not that I can’t do the job. It’s that I can’t afford how long it takes for them to say yes.”*

As a result, many were left working in roles far below their skill level - often in entry-level, part-time, or physically demanding jobs that did not reflect their training or professional experience. Several participants noted that this created a sense of “starting over” despite years of education and leadership experience in their home countries. Overall, participants emphasized that these challenges lead to prolonged delays, financial and emotional uncertainty, and widespread underemployment, explaining that unclear timelines, repeated requests for documentation, and the high cost of requalification made it extremely difficult to transition into the professions they are fully trained for.

System Navigation Challenges

System navigation challenges were identified across all eight focus groups and three interviews, with participants describing difficulty understanding and accessing services related to employment, licensing, immigration, training, and business development. Many noted they are unsure where to begin or how different systems connect. As one participant put it, *“Everything is everywhere. Nothing is in one place.”*

Both focus group and interview participants described receiving conflicting information, being redirected between agencies, or spending months trying to understand requirements. Many relied heavily on friends, classmates, or community groups because informal networks tended to provide clearer guidance than formal sources. Overall, participants emphasized that unclear and fragmented systems created delays and added stress during a period when they were already managing many transitions.

Lack of Short, Applied Skills Training and Bridging Programs

In seven of the focus groups and three interviews, participants described a consistent challenge in accessing short, practical training that would help them move into jobs aligned with their experience. They noted that most training options on PEI are long, full-time, and largely academic, which makes participation difficult while working, supporting families, or managing high living costs. As one participant shared, *“I don’t need another two-year program. I need something I can do while still working.”*

Participants described feeling unable to progress because there are few flexible options - such as micro-credentials, bridging courses, or supervised practice hours - that recognize skills they already have. Some described remaining in entry-level or survival jobs despite being qualified for more advanced roles because of lack of short, applied and work-compatible training options. They noted that restarting lengthy schooling feels like repeating work they have already completed elsewhere, with several participants sharing that they have turned down professional opportunities simply because the required pathways are too long or too expensive. This, in turn, has contributed to prolonged underemployment and limited opportunities for career advancement.

Reliance on Social Networks and “Who You Know” Hiring

The reliance on personal networks in PEI’s labour market was identified in seven focus groups and four interviews. Participants explained that job opportunities often depended on relationships, familiarity, or referrals. Many shared that they submitted numerous job applications with little response until someone personally recommended them. They noted that jobs were more commonly accessed through personal introductions than through formal hiring processes, which creates challenges for newcomers who are still building local connections. As one participant said, *“If you don’t know someone here, you don’t even get an interview.”*

Several participants described taking on volunteer roles or becoming more involved in the community to increase their visibility to employers. Together, these experiences suggest that the challenge is not a lack of skill, but a lack of established networks, making the job search process more difficult, discouraging, and dependent on who

you know rather than what you bring to the table.

Systemic Racism, Bias, and Exclusion

Across seven focus groups and three interviews, participants described experiencing racism, assumptions, and subtle or overt bias that shaped their access to employment and sense of belonging on PEI.

While many said the Island is friendly on the surface, they noted that discriminatory comments about accents, appearance, or “where you’re really from” were common. As one participant put it, *“People think because you don’t speak perfect English, you don’t know anything.”*

Participants also noted feeling viewed as “less entitled” to opportunities or not considered “real Islanders,” even after many years on PEI. One participant shared, “Sometimes it feels like no matter how long you stay, you’re still not from here.” Others pointed to policies, such as summer job programs restricted to citizens, that unintentionally reinforce this sense of exclusion.

These experiences often left participants feeling they needed to “prove themselves” repeatedly or work harder than others to be taken seriously. Several described being socially excluded at work or overlooked for opportunities despite having the right qualifications. This affected both confidence and long-term attachment to PEI.



Mental Health Impacts

Emotional and mental strain was a recurring theme across six of the eight focus groups and three interviews, with participants describing the cumulative stress of navigating financial pressures, job uncertainty, credential delays, and repeated rejection. Many noted they feel worn down by the number of steps required to secure stable employment and support their families. One person explained, *“It feels like everything is a fight - every form, every job, every step.”*

Participants described cycles of hope followed by discouragement, especially when job applications received no response or when progress on licensing or training stalled. These experiences affected confidence and overall well-being. Participants also noted that balancing work, family responsibilities, and immigration or credentialing requirements created ongoing pressure and anxiety.

Housing Instability and High Cost of Living

Across six focus groups and two interviews, participants described housing as one of the most challenging parts of settling on PEI. Many shared that high rental costs, limited availability, and strong competition for units often forced them to accept housing that was expensive, temporary, or not well-suited to their needs. As one participant said, *“You take whatever you can get, even if it’s not good.”*

Participants explained that they spent a large portion of their income on rent, lived far from work because of limited options, or had to move frequently due to unstable arrangements. These pressures made it difficult to focus on employment or training and created a constant sense of uncertainty. Several also noted that the housing situation influences whether they feel they can stay on PEI long-term.



Employment Instability - Seasonal and Short-Term Work

In six focus groups and two interviews, participants described relying on seasonal jobs, short-term contracts, or project-based roles—many of which ended abruptly or offered little security. Participants noted that early employment opportunities were often in sectors like tourism, hospitality, retail, agriculture, or manufacturing, while others described cycling through short-term administrative or community-based contracts. While these roles provided income, they offered limited stability or opportunities for advancement. As one participant shared, *“You get a job, but you already know it will finish soon.”*

This ongoing need to secure new work made it difficult to save, plan, or pursue training, contributing to financial uncertainty and limiting pathways to long-term workforce attachment.

Employment and Labour Market Barriers

Participants in six focus groups and three interviews described challenges accessing stable, well-paying jobs aligned with their skills or education. Many feel that available opportunities are concentrated in lower-wage sectors, even for people with extensive training or experience. *“It feels like the only jobs for us are the same low-paying ones,”* one participant shared.

Participants described difficulty breaking into higher-skilled roles without Canadian experience, local references, or credential recognition. Many applied for numerous positions without receiving responses and eventually accepted survival jobs in fields unrelated to their backgrounds. They noted that competition for better-paying roles often favoured long-term residents or those with stronger networks.

Distrust and Frustration with Government Systems

Across six focus groups and two interviews, participants described feeling uncertain or discouraged when navigating government systems related to immigration, licensing, financial supports, or housing. Many reported receiving inconsistent information, experiencing long delays, or being unsure about how decisions are made. As one participant said, *“Every time you ask, you get a different answer.”*

Participants spoke of sending documents without updates, having to restart processes after receiving inaccurate guidance, or waiting extended periods for responses that affected their employment or settlement plans. These experiences created stress and made it difficult to plan confidently.

Unclear Pathways for Advancement

Participants from six focus groups and two interviews spoke about wanting to progress beyond entry-level or survival jobs but described difficulties understanding how to move into better-paying, more stable roles. *“You work hard, but you don’t see the next step,”* one person shared.

They noted that information about advancement - such as internal promotions, bridging programs, or employer-supported training - is limited or inconsistently communicated. Some workplaces have little structure for career growth, while others rely heavily on informal networks. As a result, participants described feeling stuck in roles that provide short-term financial stability but do not align with their long-term goals.

Language Barriers and Perceptions of Lower Skill or Knowledge

Across both the focus groups and interviews, participants describe how limited English proficiency affects not only communication but also how others perceive their skills and experience. This theme appears in five of the eight focus groups and two interviews, with many immigrants sharing that their English level often shapes how employers and coworkers assess their competence. As one participant explains, *“I know what I’m doing, but when I pause to find the right English word, people think I don’t.”*

Participants note that accents, slower speaking, or searching for vocabulary sometimes lead others to assume they lack education or technical knowledge. Some share that they are spoken to more simply, left out of discussions, or assigned less complex tasks - even when they have strong qualifications. Several feel that their intelligence or capability is judged based on their language rather than their actual expertise.

Participants also describe how these language-related challenges play out in job interviews, workplace interactions, and their ability to demonstrate their abilities. Many say interviews are especially stressful because they understand the questions but struggle to express their full experience in English. Others avoid certain roles or responsibilities because they worry their communication will be misunderstood. These experiences, combined with assumptions about language and ability, affect their confidence, participation, and sense of belonging in workplaces on PEI.

Turning to Self-Employment Because Employment Pathways are Blocked

In five focus groups and two interviews, a few participants described turning to self-employment when they could not access employment that matched their skills. People shared that they developed business ideas - such as food products, home-based services, creative work, or consulting - because traditional hiring pathways felt closed to them. As one participant noted, *“If no one will hire you for what you can do, you create your own job.”*

Participants explained that while entrepreneurship offers independence and a chance to use their skills, it also comes with challenges. Many found the regulatory and administrative requirements difficult to understand, especially without familiarity with Canadian systems or access to local mentorship. Some shared that although they had strong ideas or talent, financial barriers made starting or expanding a business difficult. Together, these experiences suggest that self-employment was often not a first choice, but a response to barriers in the formal labour market.

Transportation Barriers

Transportation barriers were highlighted in five focus groups and two interviews, particularly among immigrants who do not own a vehicle. Participants described challenges related to limited bus routes, long travel times, or bus schedules that did not align with shift work or evening activities. As one person explained, *“If you don’t have a car, you’re stuck.”*

Several participants shared that they turned down job offers or missed shifts due to unreliable transportation. Others noted that driver's licence transfer processes are confusing or require them to redo driving tests despite having years of experience elsewhere. These transportation challenges limit job options, create stress, and affect participation in employment and training, as well as access to other essential services.

Access to Healthcare

Challenges accessing timely, consistent healthcare were noted across five focus groups and two interviews. Participants described difficulty finding family doctors, long wait times for appointments, and uncertainty about what services are covered. As one person shared, *"You can't work well when you're sick, and you can't get better when you can't see a doctor."*

Participants described relying on walk-in clinics or emergency departments, waiting extended periods for care, or avoiding services because they do not understand the system. For those managing chronic or mental health conditions, the absence of a regular healthcare provider makes continuity difficult. Some participants miss work or struggle to maintain stability when health concerns are not addressed in a timely way. Taken together, these experiences show how healthcare access barriers affect both well-being and the ability to participate consistently in the workforce.

Adapting to Workplace Norms and Canadian Work Culture

Across four focus groups and two interviews, participants talked about the challenges of adjusting to Canadian workplace culture, such as expectations and communication styles. Participants noted that the tasks themselves are usually manageable, but figuring out the "unspoken rules" is much harder - for example, how to speak up in meetings, when to ask questions, or how direct to be. As one person explained, *"It's not the work that is hard - it's understanding what people expect from you."*

Participants noted that behaviours that are polite or respectful in their home countries, such as being more reserved or modest, can be understood differently in Canadian workplaces. Some felt unsure about how their tone or communication was being interpreted, especially during interviews or when starting a new job. Others said it took time for them to get used to informal interactions, small talk, and the different feedback styles used in Canadian workplaces. These cultural differences often affected participants' confidence, sense of belonging on a team, and comfort in new roles.

Limited Employer Understanding of International Experience and Cultural Difference

In both the focus groups and interviews, participants describe feeling that their international qualifications, work histories, and professional roles are not always fully understood or valued by employers. This theme appears in four of the eight focus groups and two interviews, with many immigrants noting that expertise they developed elsewhere is sometimes viewed with hesitation during hiring. As one person shared, *“Back home I was a manager. Here, they don’t see that.”* Participants explain that employers are often unfamiliar with training systems, credential structures, and job titles from other countries, which can make previous leadership roles, technical experience, or specialized training seem less recognizable or less credible.

Participants describe needing to adjust how they present their experience so employers can interpret it, noting that differences in how accomplishments are described or communicated in their home countries sometimes lead to misunderstandings during interviews or early workplace interactions. Some explain that they revise their résumés multiple times or reword past roles to make their responsibilities clearer in a Canadian context. Others share that employers often ask for additional context about their previous positions, and that their experience is sometimes met with more questions than they anticipated. Together, these experiences suggest that limited familiarity with international backgrounds makes it harder for immigrants to have their full skill set recognized and can contribute to feeling as though they are starting below their actual level of expertise.

Helpful Supports and Services

Feeling Safe and Welcome on PEI

A strong sense of safety, calm, and community belonging emerged across all eight focus groups and four interviews. Participants frequently described PEI as peaceful, friendly, and a good place to raise a family, noting that the Island felt less stressful than larger cities. Many framed this sense of safety as a major reason they wanted to stay long-term. At the same time, participants stressed that emotional safety alone was not enough - remaining on PEI depended on having stable housing, meaningful employment aligned with their skills, and clear opportunities to grow. As one participant put it, *“PEI feels like home, but staying depends on whether we can actually build a future here.”* The combination of physical safety, community connection, and long-term economic stability was essential for people to feel rooted on the Island.

Peer Support and Lived Experience Networks

Participants across eight focus groups and four interviews emphasized how powerful it was to connect with people who had already navigated the same systems, barriers, and transitions. Peer support made information easier to understand, reduced isolation, and provided emotional reassurance.

Immigrants described feeling more confident when advice came from people who had “lived it,” explaining that formal services often felt overwhelming, but conversations with peers felt relatable and trustworthy. One participant said, “When people who lived it explain it, it makes more sense.” These lived-experience networks helped participants understand realistic steps forward, learn strategies that worked for others, and feel less alone in their journey to employment and settlement on PEI.



Human-Centered Navigation Support and Short, Practical Skill Development

In seven focus groups and three interviews, participants highlighted the value of programs that offer personal guidance, relational support, and short, targeted training. Initiatives such as Career Bridges, Immigrant and Refugee Services Association (PEI IRSA) settlement and employment support, Connector-style networking models, and short certification courses helped people move forward in ways that felt manageable and effective. These supports reduced confusion and gave participants clear, manageable steps forward, helping them build confidence through short, achievable milestones. In addition, human-centered navigation offered by staff who understood their situations played a key role in reducing stress and sustaining motivation.

Recommendations

This section outlines recommended support and solutions identified by participants across the immigrant focus groups and interviews.

Strengthen Credential Recognition and Pathways into Regulated Professions

In all eight focus groups and four interviews, participants consistently emphasized that unclear, lengthy, and unpredictable licensing requirements limit their ability to re-enter their professions and contribute their full skills to PEI's workforce. Recommendations include:

- Making credential recognition processes transparent and easier to navigate, including clear timelines, eligibility criteria, step-by-step pathways, and the total expected cost and time required.
- Reducing wait times and ensuring timely communication from regulatory bodies so applicants can make informed decisions about employment, training, and financial planning.
- Expanding prior learning assessment and recognition (PLAR) to acknowledge existing international education, clinical hours, and work experience, reducing the need for full retraining.

- Providing financial supports such as bursaries, fee waivers, and exam-preparation assistance - to offset costs related to exams, bridging courses, document translation, and recredentialing-related travel.
- Partnering with employers and educational institutions to increase supervised practice opportunities, mentorship, and bridging placements in high-need fields.

Simplify System Navigation and Information Access

Participants in all eight focus groups and three interviews described navigating employment, licensing, settlement, and training systems as confusing and fragmented, highlighting the need for clearer, more coordinated information and supports. Recommendations include:

- Developing a centralized, user-friendly online hub that consolidates key information for immigrants, including licensing steps, employment programs, training options, housing, childcare, and business start-up requirements.
- Providing clear, step-by-step guidance through visuals, checklists, sample timelines, and multilingual resources to help immigrants understand where to start and how to progress.
- Improving coordination between government, non-profits, and regulatory bodies to reduce contradictory information and ensure consistent messaging.
- Offering personalized navigation support through staff or peer navigators for individuals with complex needs or limited digital literacy.

Promote Fair and Transparent Hiring Practices

In seven focus groups and four interviews, participants noted that hiring processes often rely on informal networks and personal connections, underscoring the need for more consistent, equitable, and transparent recruitment practices. Recommended actions include:

- Reducing reliance on informal hiring or “who you know” approaches by strengthening policies that require competitive posting and transparent evaluation processes.
- Ensuring jobs are publicly posted, accessible, and widely shared, including in immigrant-serving organizations and multilingual platforms.

- Implementing structured hiring tools - including standardized interview questions, skills-based assessments, and anti-bias screening - to ensure fair evaluation.
- Providing hiring managers with training on equitable recruitment practices and how to assess international experience and credentials fairly.

Expand Access to Short, Applied, and Work-Compatible Training

Across seven focus groups and three interviews, participants expressed a strong desire for training options that are practical, flexible, and designed to recognize and build on the skills they already possess. Recommended actions include:

- Increasing micro-credentials, sector-specific certifications, and short applied courses that allow immigrants to upskill quickly and move into better jobs.
- Developing bridging programs that acknowledge prior experience and shorten pathways into high-demand regulated and semi-regulated occupations.
- Creating work-integrated learning opportunities, such as supervised practice hours, mentorship, job shadowing, and workplace-based skill demonstrations.
- Designing training that accommodates work and family responsibilities, including evening/weekend classes, part-time options, hybrid delivery, childcare supports, and transportation subsidies.

Strengthen Mental Health Supports Tailored to Immigrant Experiences

In six focus groups and three interviews, participants described the emotional strain associated with settlement, employment barriers, and uncertainty, pointing to a need for mental health supports that reflect their specific experiences and cultural backgrounds. Recommendations include:

- Improving access to culturally responsive mental health services, including multilingual counsellors and practitioners familiar with migration stress.
- Offering mental health supports that address stress, isolation, financial strain, and immigration-related uncertainty, including drop-in counselling, group sessions, and navigation support.
- Creating community-based opportunities for social connection, such as peer circles, immigrant support groups, cultural gatherings, and mentorship programs that strengthen belonging and resilience.
- Increasing health-system literacy supports, helping immigrants understand how

to access care, referrals, and crisis resources.

Strengthen Workplace Orientation and Cross-Cultural Communication

Participants in six focus groups and two interviews emphasized the need for clearer guidance on workplace expectations and stronger cross-cultural understanding within PEI workplaces. Recommendations include:

- Providing immigrant-focused workplace orientation and cultural onboarding that explains communication styles, expectations in meetings, email etiquette, small-talk norms, decision-making processes, and team dynamics.
- Equipping employers and supervisors with cross-cultural communication training so they can identify cultural differences in communication, set clear expectations, and provide explicit guidance when norms differ.
- Encouraging workplaces to adopt inclusive onboarding practices, such as assigning workplace mentors, offering structured check-ins, and providing written guidance to reduce misunderstandings.

Increase Community-Wide Education on Cultural Diversity and Anti-Racism

In six focus groups and two interviews, participants emphasized the need for broader community education to reduce stereotyping, build understanding, and encourage respectful communication with immigrants. Suggestions include:

- Delivering Island-wide cultural education initiatives - including public workshops, school programming, and community sessions - to build awareness of immigrant experiences and respectful communication.
- Implementing public awareness campaigns that challenge stereotypes, promote inclusive language, and highlight the value of cultural diversity.
- Developing community outreach efforts that encourage everyday interactions between Islanders and immigrants, helping foster a more welcoming, curious, and supportive culture across PEI.

Support Clear and Structured Career Advancement Pathways

Participants in six focus groups and two interviews noted that unclear or informal advancement structures make it difficult to build long-term careers, identifying the need for more transparent and accessible pathways for growth. They emphasized the importance of developing structured routes for moving beyond survival work into long-term, stable careers that align with their skills and experience. Recommendations

include:

- Providing clear, accessible information on promotion pathways, required skills, training opportunities, and internal job postings.
- Developing structured advancement systems, including competency frameworks, mentorship programs, and formal performance review processes that map out advancement options.
- Increasing access to employer-supported upskilling, such as tuition reimbursement, paid training time, and internal bridging opportunities.

Increase Availability of Affordable and Stable Housing

Across six focus groups and two interviews, participants emphasized that housing instability impacts every aspect of settlement and employment, identifying affordable and secure housing as a foundational need. Recommendations include:

- Expanding the supply of affordable and stable rental units, including through partnerships with non-profit and cooperative housing providers.
- Providing targeted housing supports for immigrants, including rental assistance, immigrant-specific housing navigators, and multilingual resources.
- Offering clear guidance on navigating the rental market, including tenant rights education, sample lease explanations, and support for avoiding exploitation in competitive markets.

Improve Access to English Language Learning and Workplace Communication Support

Participants from five focus groups and two interviews noted that strong English skills are essential for job access and workplace participation, emphasizing the need for language supports that are flexible, affordable, and tied to real work environments.

Recommended actions include:

- Expanding flexible and affordable English classes, including evening/weekend options, online delivery, and targeted supports for different proficiency levels.
- Linking language learning to workplaces and sectors, such as job-specific vocabulary, employer-requested communication modules, and sector-focused English as a Second Language (ESL) training.

- Providing workplace communication support, including interview preparation, résumé language assistance, pronunciation support (where requested), and professional writing skills.

Strengthen Supports for Immigrant Entrepreneurs

In five focus groups and two interviews, participants described turning to self-employment when traditional hiring pathways were inaccessible, indicating the need for clearer guidance, mentorship, and financial support for entrepreneurship.

Recommended supports include:

- Providing practical, step-by-step guidance on business registration, permits, taxation, insurance requirements, and provincial/federal regulations.
- Expanding mentorship opportunities, particularly with business owners who understand Canadian business norms, financing systems, and local market expectations.
- Increasing access to financing, such as micro-grants, low-interest loans, start-up funds, and financial literacy workshops.
- Offering administrative supports, including bookkeeping training, tax filing guidance, marketing support, and business-planning assistance.

Improve Transportation Access for Work and Training

Participants across five focus groups and two interviews highlighted transportation as a major determinant of job access, especially for shift work, rural employment, and training opportunities. Recommended actions include:

- Extending bus routes and service hours to reach more rural communities and accommodate early/late shift work.
- Simplifying driver's licence transfer processes and offering support for immigrants navigating testing requirements.
- Providing transportation subsidies for training, interviews, and initial employment when transit options are limited.

Enhance Access to Healthcare That Supports Workforce Participation

In five focus groups and two interviews, participants linked limited healthcare access to missed work, reduced stability, and greater stress, indicating the need for more timely and accessible health services. Recommendations include:

- Increasing access to primary care providers, including through mobile clinics, immigrant-focused intake pathways, and expanded walk-in services.
- Providing clear information about coverage, referrals, interpretation, mental health supports, and how to navigate the healthcare system.
- Improving access to services that directly affect workforce participation, such as physiotherapy, mental health care, and chronic-condition management.

Increase Employer Awareness of International Experience and Cultural Differences

Participants in four focus groups and two interviews emphasized that unfamiliarity with global training systems and workplace norms affects how their skills are recognized, highlighting a need for stronger employer awareness. Actions include:

- Training employers on interpreting international qualifications and work histories, reducing unnecessary barriers related to “Canadian experience.”
- Building awareness of cross-cultural leadership and communication, helping supervisors understand how cultural norms affect feedback, communication, and team participation.
- Providing tools to evaluate skills fairly, such as practical assessments, portfolios, and competency-based interviews.

Build Inclusive and Culturally Responsive Workplaces

Across four focus groups and two interviews, participants underscored the importance of workplaces where diverse communication styles, cultural norms, and lived experiences are understood, respected, and valued. Recommended actions include:

- Providing training for employers and staff on cross-cultural communication, workplace expectations, and diverse norms.
- Implementing everyday practices that foster inclusion, belonging, and mutual understanding within teams.

- Creating workplace cultures where immigrants feel comfortable asking questions, contributing ideas, and participating with confidence.

Increase Access to Culturally Specific Supports

Participants in four focus groups emphasized the importance of supports grounded in cultural identity, lived experience, and community connection, noting that culturally aligned programs make it easier to navigate systems and build a sense of belonging.

Recommended actions include:

- Expanding culturally specific programs and services that reflect community values, traditions, and approaches to learning.
- Increasing access to peer navigation or peer-support models delivered by people with shared lived experience.
- Creating spaces and supports that strengthen identity, connection, and a sense of belonging during settlement and career development.

Increase Representation and Visibility of Success Pathways

Participants from three focus groups described the need to see real examples of people with similar backgrounds progressing into meaningful careers, building businesses, or advancing into higher-skill roles. They noted that visible success stories help build motivation, belonging, and confidence. Recommended actions include:

- Sharing stories of immigrants who have advanced into higher-skill jobs, entered regulated professions, or achieved success in entrepreneurship.
- Highlighting diverse role models who reflect different cultural identities, languages, and professional pathways.
- Showcasing practical, real-world examples of career progression to help immigrants understand what is possible and how to get there.

4.2.2.2 Indigenous Community Experiences

This section highlights the distinct barriers, supports, and opportunities identified in the Indigenous focus group and the two interviews. While some challenges mirror broader systemic issues, participants also described experiences shaped by colonial history, identity gatekeeping, cultural suppression, and intergenerational trauma - factors that differ significantly from those faced by immigrants.

Barriers and Challenges

Ongoing Colonial Harm and Intergenerational Trauma

Across both the focus group and the Indigenous interviews, participants described how intergenerational trauma continues to shape everyday experiences, wellbeing, and engagement with work or training. Although the harms of residential schools, cultural suppression, and forced assimilation are often treated as historical, participants emphasized that the impacts are still felt “every day,” affecting motivation, confidence, trust in institutions, and emotional capacity to enter or stay in the workforce. This ongoing trauma can create additional layers of stress when navigating employment systems that often feel unfamiliar, unwelcoming, or overwhelming. Participants also noted that trauma shows up differently for each person, and that some community members face significant gaps in education or confidence as a result of these long-term impacts, requiring additional support to “meet them where they are” and help them catch up academically or emotionally before they can fully engage in training or employment.

Lack of Indigenous-Led Supports and Services

Participants from both the focus group and interviews highlighted that most employment and training supports available to them are operated by non-Indigenous organizations that do not fully understand cultural realities, community needs, or the impacts of colonial harm. They stressed the need for Indigenous-designed and Indigenous-led programs that are grounded in cultural values, trauma-informed practice, and lived experience. Participants also noted that many mainstream supports do not account for the day-to-day realities Indigenous people face, such as the need for flexible timelines, wraparound support, or space to manage trauma through culturally grounded practices. The lack of culturally rooted supports was described as a major barrier to navigating systems, building trust, and finding services that feel relevant, respectful, and safe.

Identity Gatekeeping and Pressure to “Prove” Indigeneity

Focus group participants described being asked to justify or validate their Indigenous identity through paperwork, genealogy, or colonial status definitions. These experiences left many feeling scrutinized, excluded, or “not Indigenous enough,” particularly when trying to access supports or programs. This gatekeeping can create emotional strain and undermine people’s sense of legitimacy and belonging. Participants noted that identity validation processes designed by colonial institutions can create division within communities and restrict access to opportunities.

Undervaluing of Indigenous Knowledge, Skills, and Cultural Practices

Participants in the focus group described how Indigenous teachings, land-based knowledge, and traditional skills, such as beadwork, sewing, crafting, language, and harvesting, are frequently dismissed as hobbies rather than recognized as legitimate expertise. This lack of recognition can act as a barrier to meaningful employment, entrepreneurship, and cultural continuity. Participants noted that these skills carry deep cultural, economic, and community value, but are not treated as credible qualifications in mainstream training or labour systems. As one participant noted, cultural skills are “real knowledge,” yet they are often devalued or ignored.

Systemic Racism and Workplace Exclusion

Across the focus group and one interview, participants spoke about both subtle and overt racism, stereotypes, and exclusion within workplace and community settings. Some noted that they were overlooked for jobs despite having the required skills, while others witnessed Indigenous people being judged based on appearance or identity. These experiences were linked to broader systemic inequities, including hiring practices that privilege “who you know,” workplace cultures that are not welcoming to Indigenous worldviews or communication styles, and uneven educational preparation that puts many Indigenous people at a disadvantage long before entering the labour market. Together, these dynamics limit opportunities for advancement and contribute to feelings of isolation within education, training, and employment pathways.

Participants also described experiences of lateral discrimination within Indigenous communities, where individuals may be questioned about whether they are “Indigenous enough” or treated differently when they pursue education or professional success. They framed this as another layer of harm rooted in colonial identity systems - one that can undermine confidence, discourage engagement, and reduce the support available to individuals as they navigate employment or training.

Mental Health Strain Intensified by Systemic Inequities

Focus group participants noted that constant exposure to barriers, such as racism, rejection, system complexity, and identity scrutiny, adds emotional weight that can affect their ability to pursue employment or training. Many described feeling exhausted, discouraged, or overwhelmed by the repeated need to navigate systems that were not designed for them. This emotional strain, layered on top of intergenerational trauma, was described as a significant barrier to long-term career stability and participation.

Preference for Long-Term, Stable Employment Rather Than Short-Term Project Work

Participants in the focus group expressed frustration with the prevalence of short-term, government-funded positions in Indigenous-serving programs. These roles often end abruptly, create financial instability, and limit career development. Participants emphasized that they want stable, long-term employment that provides meaningful career pathways rather than cycling through temporary contracts tied to funding cycles. This instability was described as a significant barrier to planning for the future and building economic security.



Entrepreneurship as a Response to Exclusion from the Colonial Labour Market

Participants in the Indigenous focus group described entrepreneurship - such as selling crafts, running workshops, cultural education, or small business start-ups - as a way to create their own opportunities in response to exclusion from mainstream employment. This was framed not as a preference for self-employment but as a response to “doors being closed” in the colonial workforce, where Indigenous people often face racism, gatekeeping, and undervaluation of their skills. Entrepreneurship can offer a pathway to economic independence, cultural expression, and self-determination, but participants noted there are barriers such as limited funding, mentorship, and business navigation supports.

Importance of Relationships and Community Networking for Workforce Success

During the interview with the Indigenous participant who works with youth, it was emphasized that relationship-building, community connection, and culturally grounded support are essential for employment success. This person shared that Indigenous youth often rely on trusted community members, not formal systems, to navigate the labour market. While not framed as a barrier directly, the absence of strong, culturally grounded networks in mainstream employment settings represents a structural gap that makes navigation more difficult.

Helpful Supports

Community Connection, Cultural Practices, and Everyday Acts of Care

Across the Indigenous focus group and the Indigenous interview, participants emphasized that cultural connection and community care play a central role in wellbeing and workforce readiness. Activities such as craft making, beadwork, sewing, drumming, language, and land-based teachings were described as grounding, healing, and identity-affirming. These practices provide strength, reduce provides meaningful career pathways rather than cycling through temporary isolation, and help people stay emotionally well while dealing with systemic barriers.

Participants also highlighted the importance of everyday acts of care - checking in on each other, visiting, sharing food or small gifts, and gathering socially. These relational practices were described as “medicine,” offering emotional support and a sense of belonging that mainstream services cannot replicate. Together, cultural practice and community care were viewed as essential, not optional, supports that help people maintain stability, resilience, and confidence.

Indigenous-Led Employment Supports, Cultural Programming, and Community-Based Relationships

Participants across the focus group and interviews noted there are some strong Indigenous-led supports already available on PEI, particularly through the Native Council of PEI (NCPEI), the Mi'kmaq Confederacy of PEI (MCPEI), and the Mawi'omi Indigenous Student Centre at UPEI. Several noted that these organizations provide trusted, culturally grounded places where people feel safe, respected, and understood, offering guidance that reflects community realities and lived experience.

Some participants also highlighted that NCPEI and MCPEI provide practical employment and training supports, including job search help, funding navigation, counselling, and access to training subsidies. At the same time, their programs integrate cultural ways of learning - such as storytelling, traditional crafts, land-based activities, visual or oral teaching, and group-based discussion - which help people feel more connected and confident as they pursue employment or education pathways.

A key strength identified across all sources was the relationship-centered nature of these supports. Many participants noted that they rely on community networks and Indigenous staff who “get where they’re coming from,” offering non-judgmental encouragement and practical help rooted in shared experience. These relationships help people stay motivated, manage stress, and navigate formal systems that often feel rigid, overwhelming, or disconnected from Indigenous realities.

One interviewee also emphasized the value of inclusive programming that brings Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants together. These models help reduce stigma, foster mutual understanding, and build stronger, more connected communities, while still honouring Indigenous identity in a supportive space.

Suggestions for Improvement

Strengthen and Expand Indigenous-Led, Culturally Grounded Employment and Training Programs

Participants from the focus group and interviews emphasized that while several Indigenous-led programs exist, more capacity, visibility, and reach are needed. They noted that Indigenous-designed and Indigenous-delivered programs offer cultural safety, reflect lived experience, and incorporate ways of learning that help community members feel grounded, confident, and ready to engage in employment or training. Recommended actions include:

- Expanding the number and capacity of Indigenous-led employment, training, and wellness programs offered through Indigenous organizations so supports can reach more community members.
- Embedding Indigenous ways of learning - including group dialogue, storytelling, visual/oral methods, traditional crafts, ceremony, and land-based activities - into employment and training pathways where appropriate.
- Strengthening Indigenous mentorship models, where guidance is provided by Indigenous leaders and peers who understand lived experience and support healing “bit by bit” through mind-body practices and trauma-informed approaches.



- Increasing funding and staff capacity for employment counselling, training subsidies, job search support, and youth programming across Indigenous organizations.
- Improving visibility and awareness of existing Indigenous programs so community members know where to go, what is available, and how to access supports.
- Offering flexible timelines and wrap-around supports to reflect diverse realities, including caregiving responsibilities, trauma impacts, and uneven high school or post-secondary pathways.
- Creating bridging supports that help people transition from Indigenous-led programs into post-secondary education, apprenticeships, credentialed training, or stable long-term employment.

Improve Coordination Across Indigenous Employment Supports

Participants from the focus group and one interview noted that although Indigenous organizations on PEI offer employment and training supports, these services are not always well-connected or easy to navigate. They emphasized the need for better coordination and communication across organizations so community members can access supports more easily and receive consistent, streamlined guidance. Recommended actions include:

- Creating a coordinated referral and navigation system across various Indigenous organizations (NCPEI, MCPEI, Lennox Island, and Abegweit First Nation).
Developing a shared tracking system so organizations can follow participant progress, identify gaps, and measure outcomes across programs.
- Increasing communication across organizations so participants know where to go and don't fall through the cracks or receive contradictory information.

Value Indigenous Knowledge as Professional Expertise

In the focus group and one interview, participants shared that Indigenous teachings, community knowledge, and traditional skills are often undervalued within mainstream employment and training systems, frequently viewed as “hobbies” rather than legitimate expertise.

When cultural knowledge is minimized in this way, it undermines confidence, limits opportunities, and reinforces colonial assumptions about what counts as “real” or “valuable” skills. Recommendations include:

- Recognizing cultural knowledge (crafts, land-based skills, language, ceremonies, harvesting, traditional technologies) as legitimate areas of professional skill and economic activity.
- Creating pathways where cultural knowledge can be formally recognized through micro-credentials, certifications, or experiential assessments.
- Funding cultural skills-based employment, entrepreneurship, and training opportunities.
- Ensuring Indigenous knowledge keepers and Elders are central contributors to training design and delivery.

Address Systemic Racism and Bias in Employment Systems

Participants from both the focus group and interviews spoke about different forms of racism, including subtle and overt discrimination, stereotyping, and lateral racism within Indigenous communities, as well as exclusion in hiring and workplace practices. They noted that Indigenous people are sometimes overlooked, judged based on appearance, or left out of opportunities because of “who you know” networks that do not include them. Recommended actions include:

- Implementing anti-racist hiring practices and accountability systems across employers and training institutions.
- Providing workplace training on Indigenous communication styles, cultural norms, and trauma-informed engagement.
- Reducing reliance on informal hiring networks that disadvantage Indigenous applicants.

Strengthen Community-Based Navigation and Relationship-Centered Supports

In both the focus group and interviews, participants emphasized that relationship-based support is one of the most important, and already active, forms of assistance for Indigenous people on PEI. They expressed a desire to see these relational supports strengthened and expanded. Recommendations include:

- Increasing the number of community navigators and outreach workers who bring lived experience and cultural understanding.
- Embedding relational approaches within employment and training programs, recognizing that trust, connection, and shared experience drive engagement. Creating more community spaces that support connection, healing, cultural practice, and informal support.
- Leveraging Elders, knowledge keepers, and peer supporters as mentors and guides within programs and services.

Reduce Reliance on Short-Term, Underfunded Contract Work:

Participants in the focus group and one interview noted that the instability of short-term, project-funded employment creates uncertainty and makes long-term planning difficult. Recommended actions include:

- Increasing long-term, stable funding for Indigenous-serving organizations so they can offer permanent roles rather than temporary contracts.
- Investing in sustainable program models that build long-term capacity rather than restarting work each funding cycle.
- Supporting Indigenous workers to move into secure employment pathways rather than repeated short-term positions.

Reduce Colonial Identity Gatekeeping:

Across the focus group and one interview, participants shared that being asked to “prove” their identity through status cards, genealogy, or colonial enrollment systems often felt uncomfortable and out of step with how Indigenous communities define belonging. They described this type of gatekeeping as discouraging and not reflective of community-based understandings of identity. Recommended actions include:

- Allowing self-identification, community recognition, or organizational verification (e.g., NCPEI/MCPEI membership) as adequate for accessing supports.
- Reducing administrative requirements tied to colonial definitions of identity.
- Ensuring eligibility policies in employment, training, and funding programs do not exclude Indigenous people who may not fit colonial categories.

4.2.2.3 Shared Experiences Across Immigrant and Indigenous Participants

Across both the immigrant and Indigenous focus groups and interviews, several shared themes emerged. While the underlying causes and lived experiences differ, participants from both groups described parallel barriers that shaped their access to employment, training, and long-term workforce attachment. These shared themes show that both groups face similar challenges when systems are confusing, opportunities are limited, or their skills and identities are not fully recognized. They also highlight how important community, cultural connection, and peer support are in helping people keep going despite these barriers.

Credential Recognition and Validation of Skills

Participants from both groups described being unable to fully access meaningful employment because their knowledge, experience, or cultural skills were not recognized as legitimate. For immigrants, this often meant formal credentialing barriers, costly licensing steps, and requirements to repeat education they had already completed. For Indigenous participants, it showed up as cultural knowledge, teachings, and community expertise being undervalued or dismissed as “not real skills.” In both cases, participants felt their abilities were underestimated, leading to underemployment and lost opportunity.

Systemic Racism, Nepotism, and Bias

Participants in both groups spoke about structural and interpersonal bias affecting hiring, advancement, and day-to-day workplace experiences. Immigrants described racism based on accent, appearance, or perceived lack of “Canadian experience,” while Indigenous participants described stereotyping, exclusion, and lateral racism within communities. Across both groups, participants emphasized that hiring often depends on informal networks or “who you know” systems they are not part of, making it harder to access or advance in stable, meaningful jobs.

Mental and Emotional Strain from Persistent Barriers

Across groups, participants described significant emotional strain tied to ongoing barriers. Repeated rejection, financial pressure, settlement or housing insecurity, and navigating systems that felt unwelcoming led to stress, anxiety, discouragement, and burnout. Many said these challenges reduced motivation and made long-term workforce participation harder, particularly when combined with family responsibilities or trauma histories.

System Navigation Challenges

Participants in both groups described employment, training, and support systems as overwhelming, fragmented, and difficult to access. Many struggled to understand where to start, who to talk to, or how different programs and pathways fit together. Conflicting information, long wait times, and unclear processes made progress slow and frustrating. People often relied on informal networks or peers, not systems, for accurate guidance.

Value of Community, Belonging, and Peer Support

Despite systemic challenges, participants from both groups emphasized the powerful role of community, cultural connection, and peer support. They described feeling more understood, confident, and motivated when engaging with people who shared their lived experiences. Peer networks offered practical guidance, emotional reassurance, and a sense of belonging that formal services often could not replicate. Community-based and culturally grounded programs, when available, were seen as vital sources of resilience and success.

Seasonal and Short-Term Employment Instability

Across both the immigrant and Indigenous focus groups and interviews, participants described how seasonal, short-term, or project-based work creates ongoing instability that limits long-term planning and opportunities for advancement. This instability was consistently identified as a major barrier to economic mobility and workforce retention, preventing people from moving beyond short-term survival and into secure, meaningful employment.

Need for Clear Advancement Pathways

Both groups expressed a strong desire to move beyond survival jobs and into long-term careers that reflect their strengths, experience, cultural knowledge, and aspirations. Participants explained that advancement pathways are often unclear, inconsistently communicated, or tied to informal networks rather than transparent processes. They emphasized the need for visible, structured routes to progress - supported by training, mentorship, and employers who value diverse forms of knowledge and experience.

4.2.3 Community Research Conclusion

Despite these barriers, participants repeatedly expressed a strong desire to stay on PEI, contribute to their communities, and build stable futures for themselves and their families. What they described needing most were clearer pathways into meaningful work, culturally grounded supports that reflect their realities, and systems that are easier to navigate and more transparent. They also emphasized the importance of workplaces that understand diverse experiences, value different forms of knowledge, and provide consistent opportunities for growth.

Participants noted that many of the strengths required to improve outcomes already exist within communities. Cultural knowledge, peer networks, lived- experience guidance, and strong relationship-based support systems play a central role in helping people overcome barriers, remain resilient, and stay connected to opportunity. Strengthening these existing assets – while reducing systemic barriers – will be essential to supporting long-term workforce attachment and creating a more inclusive, equitable labour market on PEI.



5.Overall Conclusions

Across the literature, demographic data, interviews, and nine focus groups, a consistent picture emerges: BIPOC community members are central to PEI's current and future labour market, yet they continue to face barriers that prevent them from fully contributing their skills, knowledge, and experience. While the province is experiencing rapid demographic change, labour shortages across key sectors, and increasing reliance on diverse populations, systems have not kept pace. The result is a labour market where opportunity exists, but access remains uneven.

The literature highlights systemic issues - such as credential recognition challenges, discrimination, limited access to capital, and complex system navigation - that act as structural barriers. The community findings deepen this understanding, illustrating how these barriers shape people's daily lives, mental health, and long-term decisions about staying on PEI. Across focus groups and interviews, participants identified clear needs: transparent pathways into meaningful work, systems that are easier to navigate, culturally grounded supports, stronger recognition of diverse forms of knowledge, and workplaces that understand and value differences.

Importantly, participants emphasized that many of the strengths required to drive change already exist within communities. Peer networks, cultural knowledge, livedexperience guidance, and community-led supports help people navigate complex systems, stay resilient, and remain connected to opportunity. Strengthening these assets - while reducing systemic barriers and improving coordination across supports - will be essential to improving equitable access to employment and training.

Taken together, the findings point to a clear conclusion: if PEI wishes to sustain economic growth, address workforce shortages, and support long-term community well-being, it must build systems and practices that recognize and value diverse knowledge, reduce structural barriers, and invest in culturally grounded, people centred supports

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Appendix A – Survey Findings

As part of the needs assessment process, focus group participants were invited to complete a short demographic survey. A total of 79 participants did so. Of these, 46% (n=36) identified as male, 52% (n=41) as female, and 1% (n=1) as gender diverse. One participant did not complete this question.

The table below provides an overview of the ethnic and racial backgrounds represented among participants.

Table 1: Ethnicity/Racial Background of Participants (n=79)

Ethnicity/Racial Background	Percentage	Frequency
Black/African/Caribbean	37%	29
Latin American/Hispanic	22%	17
Southeast Asian	20%	16
East Asian	10%	8
Indigenous/FN/Inuit/Metis	8%	6
South Asian	3%	2
Middle Eastern/North African	1%	1

Most participants were born outside of Canada (92%, n=73), while a small proportion were born within the country - 3% (n=2) in PEI and 5% (n=4) in other provinces.

As shown in Table 2, most participants were between 25 and 44 years old.

Table 2: Age Range of Participants (n=79)

Age Range	Percentage	Frequency
18-24	14%	11
25-34	34%	27
35-44	33%	26
45-54	19%	15
55+	0%	0

A total of 94% (n=74) of participants reported having worked in PEI, with the majority being employed full-time currently, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Current Employment Status of Participants (n=79)

Employment Status	Percentage ⁴	Frequency
Employed full-time	59%	47
Employed part-time	14%	11
Student	13%	10
Unemployed and seeking work	9%	7
Self-employed/Business owner	8%	6
Missing	1%	1
Unemployed and not seeking work	0%	0
Retired	0%	0

⁴ The total exceeds 100% because some respondents checked more than one response – e.g., students, working part-time.

While participants represent a range of communities throughout the province, most are currently residing in the greater Charlottetown area, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Area of Residence (n=79)

Area of Residence	Percentage	Frequency
Charlottetown	44%	35
Souris	14%	11
Summerside	11%	8
Stratford	7%	5
Cornwall	4%	3
Tignish	4%	3
Murray River	1%	1
Montague	1%	1
Fort Augustus	1%	1
New Glasgow	1%	1
Johnstons River	1%	1
Bloomfield Corner	1%	1
Woodstock	1%	1
O'Leary	1%	1
Abram Village	1%	1
Missing	7%	5

As indicated in Table 5, length of residence varied among participants, with most having lived on PEI for one to five years.

Table 5: Years of Residence on PEI (n=79)

Years of Residence	Percentage	Frequency
Less than 1 year	16%	13
1- 3 years	46%	36
4-5 years	18%	14
6-10 years	11%	9
More than 10 years	9%	7

Table 6 presents the immigration status reported by participants. Most 51% (n=41) were permanent residents or Canadian citizens.

Table 6: Immigration Status of Participants (n=79)

Immigration Status	Percentage	Frequency
Permanent resident	35%	28
Work permit holder	27%	21
Student visa holder	18%	14
Canadian citizen	16%	13
Prefer not to say	4%	3

Eighty-one percent (n=64) of participants said they plan to stay on PEI for more than five years, sharing that the Island feels like home and that they value PEI's safety and welcoming atmosphere. Sixteen percent (n=13) were unsure, often noting that limited employment opportunities are the main factor influencing their uncertainty. The comments below provide important context to these responses, illustrating both the reasons behind long-term commitment and the ongoing factors that create hesitation for some participants.

"I want to stay here a long time after my school to work and live because the people are very awesome and willing to help and learn."

"I have a family here and I plan to get established in my career and business."

"I feel safe. I'm living with my wife and we want to raise a family. We think this is the perfect place to do it."

"Yes, I would love to get a job when I'm done with school and apply for a permanent residency as here's become my home due to the friends I've made and my familiarity with the place."

"I love this Island. We have a life here. I want to build a career here."

"I plan to live in PEI for long-term because this is now my second home."

"We plan to raise our kids on the Island."

"I love the Island, I have a little one that will grow up in a safe space."

"PEI is my home."

"I am unsure because the work opportunities are very few and not well paid compared to other provinces."

"I might stay depending on the work opportunities."

"It all depends on how opportunities flow in my career."

"For convenience sake I'd love to stick around but unless employment situation changes... we might be forced to leave."

