

A scenic landscape featuring a wooden boardwalk that leads from the foreground into the distance. The boardwalk is made of light-colored wooden planks with teal-colored sections. The terrain is covered in low-lying vegetation with autumnal colors. In the background, a blue ocean stretches to the horizon under a bright blue sky with scattered white clouds. A person is visible walking on the boardwalk in the distance.

Thinking Forward On Immigration

Summer 2020

laboratory for
**artistic
intelligence**

Note To Readers

This report is a summary of our responses to a recent consultation by the Department of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship of Canada. Questions included the impact of COVID-19, and sought input on immigration levels, classes, and the new Municipal Nomination Program.

We are publishing this summary online as follow-up so that the newcomers we've worked with over the years can see how their input has been communicated to policymakers. We will also be circulating this summary via our networks to amplify the message and outreach.

The Laboratory for Artistic Intelligence works intensively with economic immigrants (Express Entry and Provincial Nominee Program), refugees, and international students. Since 2016, we have been studying and designing alternatives to the conventional newcomer experience in Canada.

Newcomer professionals are important to our business model. As an innovation lab, we bring together artists, analysts, entrepreneurs, engineers, scientists, and other professionals in business, health, finance, education, communications, human development etc to help develop unconventional solutions to public and social issues. We rely on diverse experts with international training and experience to help us think outside the box.

Apart from working with newcomers, our research and design projects span public policy, impact evaluation, education, and the creative sectors. This report, *Thinking Forward On Immigration*, draws from our cross-functional and multi-sectoral knowledge base.

Inquiries regarding this report may be directed to:

Helen Yung
Founder & Chief Artistic Officer
helen@artisticintelligence.com

Overview

In a globalized world, we need globalized knowledge workers. People born and raised in North America are not enough. For the innovation economy, we need the diversity of frameworks and life experiences that immigrants bring to help us collectively see beyond conventional paradigms.

The Laboratory for Artistic Intelligence proposes that the Department of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship (IRCC) update its policies and processes to be:

- 1. Contemporary**
- 2. Complete**
- 3. Human**
- 4. Real**

We need to modernize immigration requirements to correspond with contemporary realities. We need to complete the immigration system by building out the infrastructure and pathways needed for Canada to benefit from the professionals we've attracted to our country.

We need to humanize the process, particularly after arrival. Apply a human-centred approach to re-map and re-imagine the immigration process. We need to eliminate the bottlenecking of talent that is detrimental to Canada's post-pandemic economic recovery and growth.

As well, we need to provide appropriate information during pre-immigration stages to enable potential immigrants to better plan, prepare, and manage their expectations. As a country that has responded well to the pandemic, Canada can maintain its attractiveness to potential immigrants even while being upfront about the real challenges of being a newcomer in Canada.

1. The Contemporary Immigrant

On Modernizing Immigration Requirements To Correspond With Contemporary Realities

Immigration requirements need modernization. Contract work, self-employment, the gig economy, and working in a field different from what one studied in school are contemporary norms. Immigration policies must be revised to reflect current realities.

In Canada, many people work multiple jobs and ‘side hustles’ to satisfy economic and self-actualization needs. An international student may drive Uber or work at a grocery store to pay rent, while trying to network and/or volunteer their way to a better job, and all the while paying taxes and investing their life savings into Canada’s economy. Many of them also volunteer because they want, as we all do, to feel connected and purposeful. Throughout this pandemic, migrant workers and international students have played important roles as essential workers – both paid and unpaid.

Individuals like these are caring and devoted citizens, resourceful, highly adaptable, and have all the grit and Canadian life experience needed to succeed. Express Entry for people who are here and already contribute to Canadian society must be prioritized. This is a ‘no-brainer’ way to maintain positive population growth and ensure Canada’s economic recovery.

Specific barriers include:

- The Federal Skilled Worker program only considers employment gained while studying if the work was continuous (no gaps in employment) and paid by wages or commissions. The reality is that this level of continuous, paid employment is not feasible for many students, whether domestic or international.
- International students in Canada applying through the Canadian Experience Class program are not permitted to use self-employment or work experience gained while in school, even if it was during a coop work term.
- Canadian society’s functioning, and especially Canada’s nonprofit sector, depends heavily on skilled and sustained volunteerism. And yet existing immigration policies do not recognize volunteer work, even when it is important for the continued function of society, and even if the work is done on a continuous, professional, pro bono basis.

2. Completing ‘A Half-Done System’

On Building Out Pathways To Directly Place Immigrants In Positions Commensurate With Their Capacity To Deliver

Many newcomers we have surveyed and interviewed over the years indicate that the first half of the immigration process is organized and structured in an appreciable way. “And yet,” says one immigrant, “it’s a half-done system.” Life *after* arrival to Canada is summed up by another individual as: “Reality does not meet expectations.”

The situation is, at best, *inefficient*. Worse, from a systems and public health perspective, the systemic disorganization and lack of useful feedback loops mean healthy, optimistic, high-functioning new immigrants are subject to unnecessary trauma and unhealthy self-doubt.

- Immigrants report experiencing significant discrepancies between “the data provided by immigration for different NOCs and ground reality presented by employers.”

In some sectors, employers report skills gaps and a shortage of talent. Meanwhile, immigrants report “landing in Canada, thinking there are many opportunities... only to find a handful of them, and that too, [only] within the confines of networking and the hidden job market.”

- Many immigrants we interviewed report not receiving any interviews in response to their applications, even after applying to hundreds of employers for over a year. This applies even to credentialed professionals that speak fluent English, and with years of experience managing multi-million dollar companies, departments, and programs.

Failing to ensure that new Canadians can contribute fully in society leads to multiple cascading effects: poor mental and physical health in the short- and long-term, pressure on the healthcare system, strained social and familial relations, and reduced capacity for growth at the individual, household, and societal levels.

With so many ‘how to write a cover letter and resume’ resources widely available online and through community service providers, it is clear that existing recruitment methods do not work. We cannot keep doing the same things expecting different results.

Employment practices need to be reimagined. The Government can play a key instigating role in re-mapping and re-designing how immigrants connect with employers.

3. A Human-Centred Approach

On Reimagining The Next Era of Immigration

Employers need to be a part of the conversation and infrastructure development in new ways. “More coordination is needed,” is something we hear often from newcomers. Better collaboration and communication between IRCC, Provincial and Municipal Nominee Programs, employers, immigrants and intermediaries can be incentivized by targeted Government funding and policies.

We propose three principles to guide the next era of immigration:

1. **Everyone gets a job commensurate with their abilities.** Immigrants leave their country fully employed, self-sufficient, and able to put money aside for their professional and personal goals. It makes no sense for Canada to invite people at the peak of their professional prowess and income potential to come to Canada to be unemployed.
2. **Newcomer supports need to be embedded into industry.** Support is urgently needed from professionals with current experience and inside knowledge on industry and labour trends in the field(s) relevant to the newcomer’s profile. We can co-design new system flows by bringing together the people who need to hire, the people who want to be hired, and intermediaries who want and can work in new ways.

As one psychometrician shared: “They can’t help me if they don’t understand what I do.” Expecting social service delivery workers to be labour market experts is illogical. We can design a better human-centred and economically-sound talent identification system.

3. **Root immigration in local realities.** The idea of the Municipal Nominee Program excites us. To succeed, local resources must be mobilized to provide support that is anticipatory, context-specific, and timely. Labour shortages matter, but only to the extent that local authorities and infrastructure are committed to ensuring immigrants are being set up to enter those opportunities, and ultimately to be able to succeed economically and socially.

The Government can hold employers, intermediaries, and communities accountable for placing immigrants in relevant roles. Thousands of high-quality immigrants are overlooked in the traditional hiring process, never getting called to their first interview, let alone landing the job they deserve. This bottlenecking of talent is detrimental to Canada’s post-pandemic economic recovery and growth.

4. Painting A Realistic Picture

On Setting Immigrants Up For Success By Presenting A Realistic, Balanced Picture

As a country that has responded well to the pandemic, Canada can maintain its attractiveness to potential immigrants even while being more upfront and realistic in communicating the challenges of a new life in Canada. We advocate for greater transparency when marketing immigration abroad.

Immigrants may be too polite to say it, so we will: They have been wildly misled.

Imagine applying for university. Imagine submitting proof of academic history, completing an interview about your hopes and ambitions, and looking at housing online to consider where you want to live. Then imagine arriving on campus, and you are told you will have to repeat high school because you studied Math and Science abroad. You can't get into any classes. You have to apply to get in, they say, but really the best way is to know someone on the inside. You need to network to be a student. Meanwhile, housing is expensive, so you drain your life savings and/or get a job taking the trash out of the classes that you're not allowed to participate in. Imagine staying because you figure at least your kids will be able to take classes here.

Imagine this is Canada.

It would be unethical for a university to operate this way. And it is entirely unethical for immigration to operate this way. Doctors, nurses, and other internationally-trained professionals should not be discriminated against, on the basis of where they went to school or where they are invited to socialize.

Canada has a duty to fix what it can, make plans to promptly renovate the rest, and communicate realistically about the successes *and* shortcomings of the current system. Providing the appropriate information pre-migration would enable potential immigrants to better plan, prepare, and manage their expectations for the subsequent stages of their journey.

Intersecting Design Factors

On Looking At The Bigger Picture And How Shifting Systems Interrelate

As we think forward to reorganizing and redesigning Canada's immigration policies and plans, some key intersecting factors to consider include:

- Job hunting is anticipated to grow more complex, and likely more inequitable. The pandemic is increasing the digitization and global redistribution of the human experience.
- Falling birth rates globally mean that demand for highly-skilled immigrants will increase. The contemporary immigrant has different expectations around access, inclusion, work-life balance, opportunities, and self-actualization. Is Canada ready to meet those expectations?
- As climate breakdown progresses, humans need to learn to live with sharing less among more people. Society will need to reorganize. Canada can lead the way in designing sustainable, inclusive, and equitable systems that work for everyone.
- Communities in Canada with smaller populations are in a good position to experiment and model sustainable circular economies that can care for the elderly, support diverse livelihoods, and be much more self-sufficient for food systems and waste management.
- Economies and the political landscape are being re-shaped by corporations, new technologies, and global movements. To anticipate and advance positively into the next economy, we need to champion and support the perspectives and markets that only immigrants can help unlock.

Thinking Forward On Immigration

Taking Care Of Unfinished Business While Getting Ready For The Future

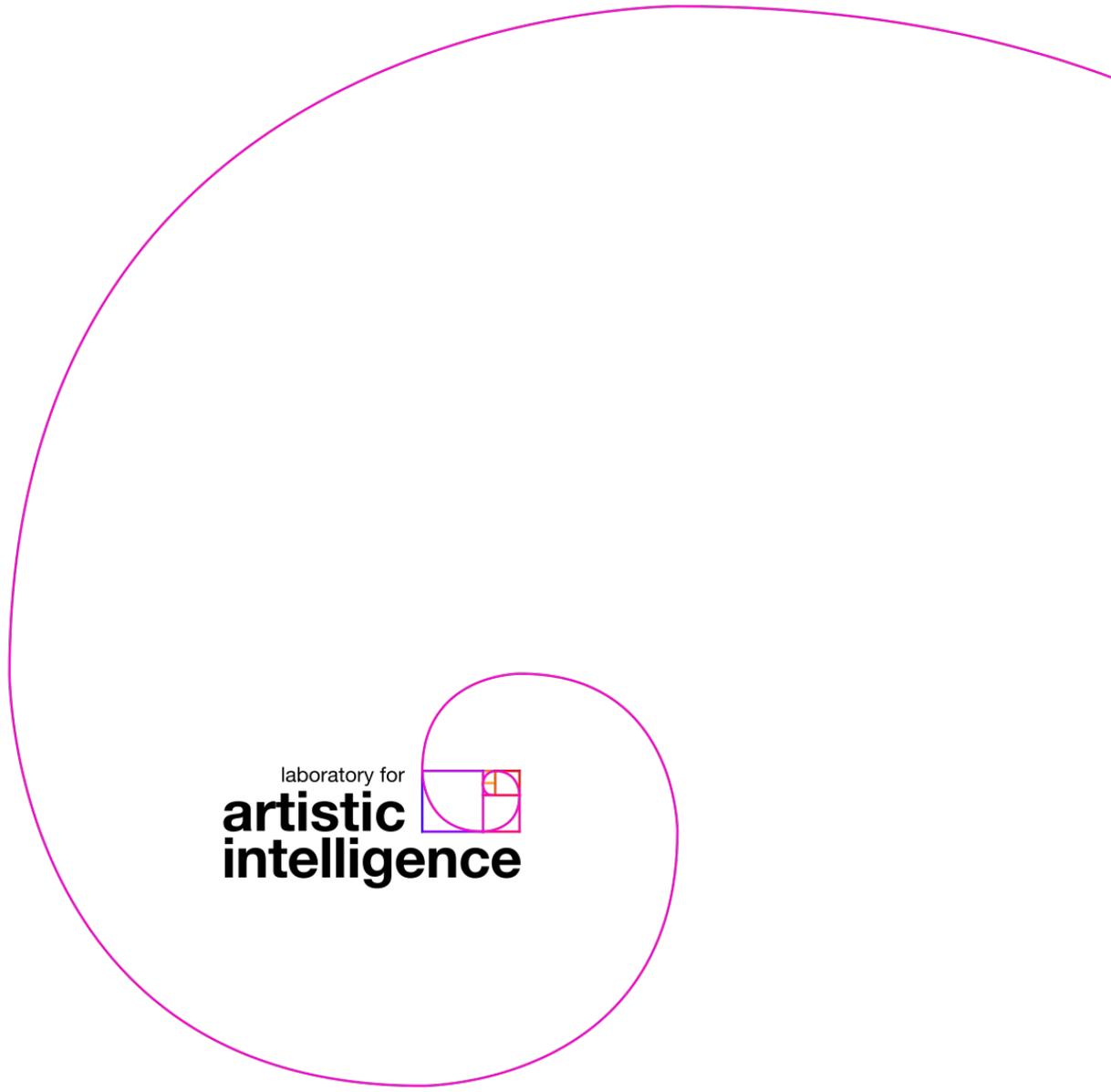
We urge the Government to work with subject-matter and process experts to reimagine and plan for long-term renovations to how Canada approaches welcoming and enabling newcomers to succeed economically, professionally, and socially. Let's work on fixing what's unjust and broken.

We call on the Government to enable international students, migrant workers, and others already in Canada to receive permanent residency, and for family reunification to assist with retention and mental health. We call on the Government to enable doctors, nurses, and other internationally-accredited professionals to work in their calling.

As world population falls, competition for economic immigrants will increase. Canada has this window of opportunity to improve on an immigration system that is well-designed, but still unfinished.

Going forward, smaller communities can particularly benefit from increased immigration, so long as community- and evidence-based supports are in place to welcome and guide newcomers. As the climate crisis continues, Canada must develop sustainable ways of responding to mass migration.

We all stand to gain more when everyone can contribute their full human potential in society.



laboratory for
**artistic
intelligence**

