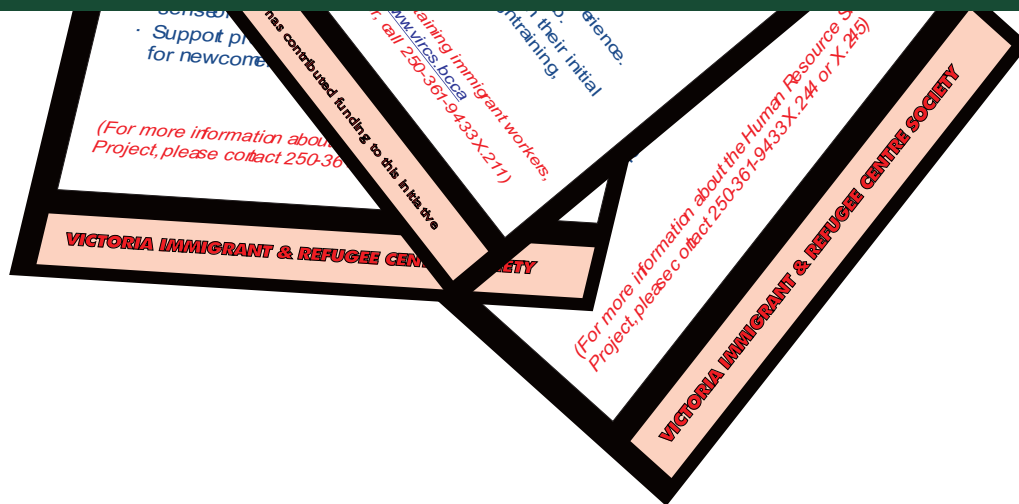


# PHASE II RACK CARD REPORT

December 2008



## LABOUR MARKET PARTNERSHIP HUMAN RESOURCE SOLUTIONS



By HR Solution Research Team

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## **Abbreviations**

- **CRD** means the Capital Regional District
- **EAC** means the Employer Advisory Committee
- **HR** means Human Resources
- **HR Solutions Project / HR-SP** means the Human Resource Solutions Project
- **MAC** means the Multicultural Advisory Committee
- **VIRCS** means the Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Centre Society

## **Charts and Graphs**

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## **Foreword**

*“The point of view expressed in this report does not necessarily reflect that of VIRCS, its partners, or Service Canada.”*

Production of a rack card containing tips and best practices for employers to hire and retain immigrant employees arose through a recommendation of the HR Solutions Research Project. The rack card project was initiated in March 2008 and included design, distribution, and evaluation. Evaluation occurred through the analysis of a questionnaire that was distributed with the rack card. Over 950 rack cards and questionnaires were distributed. The information garnered from this process has led to significant input regarding employers' perspectives on the current labour market as well as their needs for future outreach projects.

*“All those who come to Canada bring hopes and dreams for themselves and their families. Many partners have a role to play in helping newcomers to succeed. When immigrants use their skills and credentials in the Canadian labour force, we all benefit. Because when newcomers succeed, we all succeed”.*

*The Honourable Diane Finley, P.C., M.P.  
Minister of Citizenship and Immigration (Progress Report, 2008, p. i)*

## **Section 1: Introduction**

The Human Resource (HR) Solutions Project is a community-based research project undertaken by the Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Centre Society (VIRCS). The HR Solutions Project encourages businesses, employers and immigrants to engage in open dialogue on the challenges and diverse relationships associated with a multicultural workforce. The funding for the project is provided by Service Canada. Phase I of the project was completed successfully in March 2008.

In Phase I, local employers recommended the creation of a rack card, which includes tips and best practices for employers hiring and retaining immigrant employees. The rack card can be viewed at: [www.vircs.bc.ca/hr\\_solutions/files/TIPS-HIRE.pdf](http://www.vircs.bc.ca/hr_solutions/files/TIPS-HIRE.pdf). In conjunction with designing the rack card, the research team also designed a corresponding questionnaire. The questionnaire was distributed with the rack card in order to receive feedback from involved businesses. This feedback allows the HR Solutions Project team to know more about employers' perspectives on the development of HR tools which could support their needs in order to mitigate labour shortages. The information gathered provides necessary input and facilitate the research team's development of additional outreach projects.

This report outlines opinions and perspectives of employers in the Capital Regional District (CRD). Their opinions emerged through the rack card questionnaire, which focuses on best practices in hiring and retaining immigrants and challenges associated with hiring a multicultural workforce. The report concludes with recommendations for employer resources as well as recommendations regarding the conduct of future research projects. The research is significant for current and future actions because of its emphasis on the following research questions.

- How effective is the rack card in helping employers better hire and retain immigrant workers?
- To what extent does the rack card address employers' hiring challenges?
- What additional resources will be useful?

The data collected illustrates significant findings concerning the development and presentation of employer resources. Some examples of such findings are that:

- A significant segment of the population find the rack card useful for its main intended function (i.e.: that such resources are useful in aiding employers to more effectively hire and retain immigrants),
- Many of the respondents like the rack card's simplicity, while others want more information. Both segments of the population can be satisfied by including web links to more details and examples, and
- Several respondents express the desire for more assistance when hiring immigrants. Such resources could include a job posting board, information on immigrant labour pools, or having resumes emailed directly to the company.

## Section 2: Environment Scan

At the end of 2008, the labour market in the CRD continues to pose challenges for employers. A combination of strong economic growth and a high employment rate causes labour shortages both provincially and nationally. For example, in July 2008, the region's unemployment rate was 3.3 percent; this ranks Victoria ahead of markets such as Edmonton 3.4 percent, Calgary 3.6 percent, and Vancouver 4.1 percent (Labour Force Activity January 2008). Further, there is a national projected labour shortage of 400 000 by 2015 (Live, Work, Invest in BC, 2007, p.9). These situations present key roles for immigrants.

The tautness of the Victoria labour market was evident during the summer months when the majority of students found jobs (Leddy, August 12, 2008). This was largely a result of Victoria's high job creation rate — 8700 jobs or 4.7 percent over the past 12 months (Duffy, September 06, 2008). Therefore, one does not have to go far to see a plentiful availability of jobs in \$9 to \$12 per hour job category. "Help Wanted" or "Now Hiring" signs frequently appear in small business windows. Even BC transit busses carry an advertisement entitled "Hiring for Change". This situation indicates the difficulty businesses face when hiring and retaining employees in order to operate profitably.

This difficulty highlights the "societal need for new Canadians to remain in their chosen professions as much as they have a personal need for job satisfaction" (Hart, 2007). Further, Colin Hansen, past Minister for Economic Development, emphasizes that "the labour and skills shortage in this province is possibly the greatest current threat to BC's booming economy" (Employers get new tools, June 19, 2008). That said, the Canadian Labour and Business Centre finds that "Canadian communities and employers frequently face...difficulties in reaching out to new immigrants and tapping into their potential contributions" (Fitting in, 2005, p. 5). Consequently, there is a strong need for "a comprehensive and community-based approach" to linking labour market and immigration issues (p. 5).

Local research initiatives such as the HR Solutions Project as well as the *Attracting and Retaining Immigrants* (2007) and *Labour Market Dialogues* projects (2008) highlight this need for increased community interaction. Further, it is evident that skilled immigrants are crucial to ensure business continuity and achieve productive and healthy growth (Bernard, 2008, p. 13). An immersion process must thus provide adequate and suitable

conditions for immigrant success. Immigrants have high levels of education, valuable skills, and a wide range of work experience, which provides extensive knowledge of international markets (Profile of Immigrants, 2006). However, these qualifications are often misunderstood because of stereotypes that impede cooperation (Reitz, 2005, p. 12). Consequent failures and frustrations regarding immigrants as a viable labour source lead to an estimated loss of \$2.4 to \$5.9 billion annually (Progress Report, 2008, p.3).

## **Section 3: Research Methodology**

### **3.1 Mixed Methods Research**

Mixed methods research incorporates qualitative and quantitative aspects, while drawing from the strengths and minimizing the weaknesses of each perspective. Consequently, both the rack card and the rack card questionnaire emphasize “a respect and interest in understanding and depicting individual and social group differences” (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie 2004: 16). The questionnaire is thus classified as mixed methods research because it includes both forced choice and free response questions.<sup>1</sup>

Questionnaire-based research is popular because it allows for flexibility in response style and time (Trochim 2006). Further, questionnaires present a relatively inexpensive and time effective method for the researcher (Trochim 2006). An additional advantage is that they are an efficient method to gain information from a large sample. The research team used this method because it is effective in measuring employers’ needs, experiences, opinions, behaviours, and activities.

### **3.2 Project Design**

Design of the rack card stemmed from recommendations made in Phase I of the HR Solutions Project. Its primary purpose is to address an apparent lack of human resource policies and practices concerning the inclusion of immigrants. The rack card therefore emphasizes tips and best practices for employers.

VIRCS’ Multicultural Advisory Committee (MAC) provides input and assistance towards the development of the rack card. Doing so is the primary purpose of the committee. The MAC meets to discuss ideas for the rack card and input from the committee is submitted to the research team. The research team then condenses these ideas for activities such as producing a draft version of the rack card. The draft version was circulated to MAC and Employer Advisory Committee (EAC) members for their further input. A final version of the rack card was designed and 1000 copies were printed by the beginning of April 2008 (this is a 100 percent increase as per the original contract).

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<sup>1</sup>Forced choice questions ask the respondent to answer either ‘yes’ or ‘no’ or to answer from a list of fixed alternatives. Free choice questions provide respondents with a blank space in which to state their opinions.

In addition to designing the rack card, the research team also designed a related questionnaire. This questionnaire is designed to best meet research needs through the use of clear and concise questions. When designing the questionnaire three primary areas are emphasized: content, wording, and sequence/layout (Guide to the Design of Questionnaires, 2008).

The purpose of the questionnaire is to establish a baseline understanding of employers' perspectives for hiring and retaining immigrant employees as well as to develop more clarity regarding their needs for future outreach projects. The questionnaire includes seven forced choice and free response questions. It was submitted to the MAC and the EAC for their input and revisions were made accordingly.

### **3.3 Rack Card and Questionnaire Distribution**

For the joint distribution of the rack card and the questionnaire, the research team adapted a probability sampling technique with a sub-strategy of stratified random sampling. This method emphasizes creating mutually exclusive units to frame the sampling (Probability Sampling, 2006). This technique ensures that different business sectors, sizes, and locations are adequately represented. The following resources were used to randomly select businesses that received the package:

- Greater Victoria Chamber of Commerce membership directory (2008),
- Greater Victoria Canpages (2008–09), and
- VIRCS Business Directory (approximately 500 contacts).

The research team's goal was to distribute 1000 rack cards and questionnaires. The distribution plan aimed to include 40 percent small businesses (less than 10 employees), 35 percent medium sized businesses (10–19 employees), and 25 percent large businesses (more than 20 employees). Distribution surpassed the original goal (as per contract with Service Canada) by 91 percent. Additionally, the research team surpassed its contracted goal of collecting 25 completed questionnaires, instead it collected 34 questionnaires.

<b>Rack Card Distribution and Response</b>	
To be distributed as per the contract	500
Total distributed (to date):	953
Distribution in excess of target	453
Distribution achieved over the target (%)	91%
Completed responses as per contract	25
Responses Received	34
Responses received above the target (%)	36%
Percent response of total distributed	3.6%

Rack card distribution was achieved through volunteers (738), VIRCS case managers (100), VIRCS functions (50), direct mailings (40), and employer interview participants

(25). This distribution occurred from April–July 2008. The bulk of distribution was achieved through the efforts of dedicated volunteers.

### 3.4 Questionnaire Collection

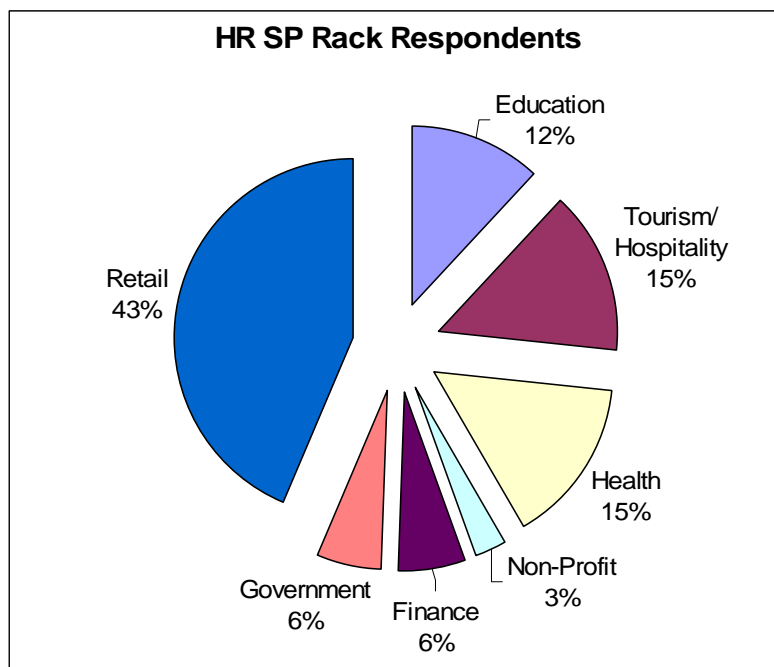
Fax was the primary mode for questionnaire collection. Additionally, two responses were received via e-mail. As part of the collection process, the research team conducted call-backs to approximately 200 employers. This process facilitated the timely return of questionnaires.

### 3.5 Data Analysis

The research team analyzed 33 of the 34 responses (1 being incomplete). To do this, the team conducted iterative readings of the material and organized the data by business sector. Analysis also included cross-comparisons between questions. Finally, the thematic analysis was characterized by participant voice, and, therefore, relied on quotes to illustrate themes (Hoepfl, 1997).

## Section 4: Data Results and Analysis

The research team received 34 responses. Thirty three (33) were completed and one was incomplete. The research team was not able to determine whether responses came from large or small organizations. Therefore, the research team categorized responses into seven broad sectors. A breakdown of survey participants is as follows:



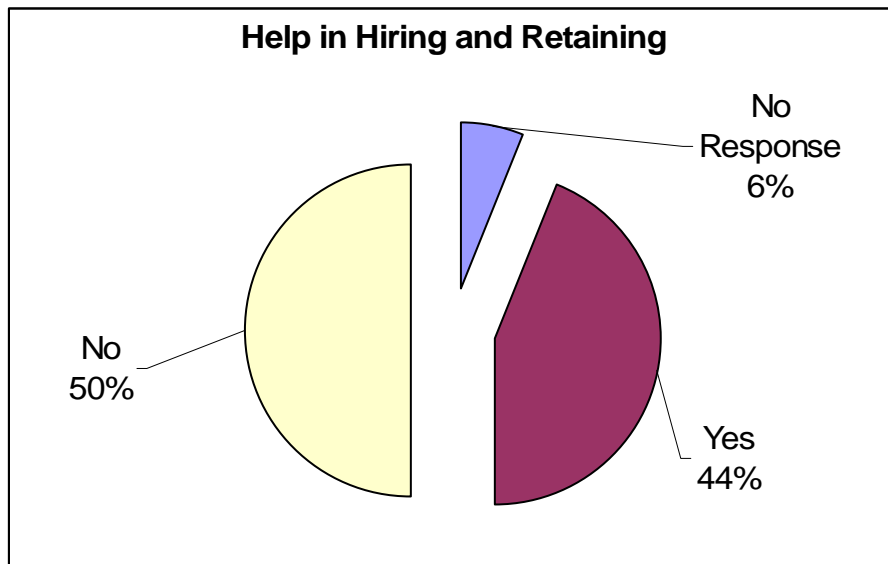
The responses represent the majority of business sectors in the CRD. One major exception is the construction sector. It is interesting to note that although the rack card team distributed 100 rack cards to this sector, no single response was received. The retail sector provides the highest number of responses (44 percent).

#### **4.1 Overall Analysis**

Respondents hold mixed views about the presentation of rack card and the information it contains. Some praise the rack card for its accessibility and utility, stating that they learn from it and/or they will incorporate it into future hiring practices. Others suggest minor cosmetic enhancements, such as bold text, an email address, or a link to a certain website. Another group of respondents feel it contains too little or no new information for employers, or that its purpose is vague. Three topics commonly discussed are usefulness of the rack card, potential strategies in addition to the rack card, and confusion over the role of the rack card and VIRCS.

##### **4.1a Usefulness of the Rack Card**

The information provided by survey participants leads to interesting findings. To begin, 50 percent of employers believe the rack card will help them better hire and retain immigrant employees, while 44 percent do not believe it will help them (6 percent of respondents did not answer this question). This information indicates that a significant portion of employers feel that they need help developing hiring strategies focused towards immigrants. These responses are also connected to the fact that employers are not homogeneous and, therefore, the wide variety of participants has various demands and expectations.



### ***4.1b Additional Strategies***

Sixty four (64) percent of respondents ask for additional web resources to help them better react to challenges associated with hiring and retaining immigrant employees. One of the respondents states that it “would be good to know of resources to help immigrant workers” while another adds that “it would be great to have info on immigrant targeted websites”. Potential resources mentioned by respondents include a job posting board, information on immigrant labour pools, and the ability to have resumes emailed directly to companies. This information clearly indicates that a substantial group of CRD employers need web-based assistance that will help them better understand the current and future immigrant labour pool.

### ***4.1c Confusion about the Role of VIRCS***

An additional trend is that some respondents believe that VIRCS (or perhaps the HR Solutions Project) is a hiring service for immigrants. For example, one volunteer often had to explain to business owners that VIRCS was not asking them to hire immigrant staff, nor offering immigrants seeking employment. This can be attributed to the low visibility immigrant-serving agencies have with some employers. Moreover, it is also possible that employers may not be aware of immigrants as a viable labour source.

## ***4.2 Sector Analysis***

As mentioned, the survey responses are separated into seven business sectors. Individual sector analyses are informative when specific trends differ from overall trends. However, due to the limited responses from some sectors, the research team did not deeply analyze all categories.

### ***4.2a Retail Sector***

The majority of responses (44 percent) come from the retail sector. This sector includes various businesses involved in retail operations (for example, businesses operating in e-commerce, food distribution, and general retail services). Additionally, this sector is primarily comprised of small businesses, which commonly offer jobs that are low paying and require basic skills. Consequently, this sector often experiences a high rate of employee turn-over.

Large survey participation from this sector implies that these businesses are hurting due to the current and predicted labour market crunch. For example, during labour shortages, employers compete for limited resources, and small businesses are often significantly affected. High participation from the retail sector also indicates this sector’s desire to know more about available workforce options. For example, because immigrants represent a substantial percentage of current and future labour resources, small businesses in particular appear to be interested in knowing more about how best to make use of this resource.

### ***4.2b Tourism Sector***

In the tourism sector, 80 percent of respondents feel that the rack card does not help them better hire or retain immigrant employees. However, these responses do not initially correlate with Victoria's status as a tourist destination. The tourism industry often has many job openings at either entry or seasonal level that generally require very basic skills (jobs normally termed as survival jobs). That said, employer responses can imply that due to the Canadian dollar's increasing strength there has been a substantial drop in the number of visitors from the United States (Victoria's main source of tourists).

Two rationales for negative employer responses are: that this sector is not looking at hiring even entry-level positions or that it is concerned about the labour market but does not recognize immigrants as a possible labour solution. This rationale is enforced by numerous comments questioning how to hire foreign workers. Here foreign workers are viewed as a reliable labour option as opposed to immigrants who may view the tourism sector as simply a springboard to further employment. Additionally, it also implies that this sector has acquired sufficient knowledge of cultural challenges from their existing immigrant staff, and, therefore, that the rack card does not interest them.

### ***4.2c Health Sector***

Conversely, 80 percent of respondents from the health sector feel that the rack card will help them better hire and retain an immigrant workforce. This can be attributed to the fact that this sector has a long tradition of hiring immigrants. However, despite this positive trend, respondents are more ambivalent when asked whether the rack card addresses their challenges. Additionally, participants often comment that the rack card increases their appreciation of immigrants' international education and experience. This feedback thus shows that the health sector is primarily concerned with retention challenges that can be met through a resource booklet (as mentioned by a respondent).

### ***4.2d Education Sector***

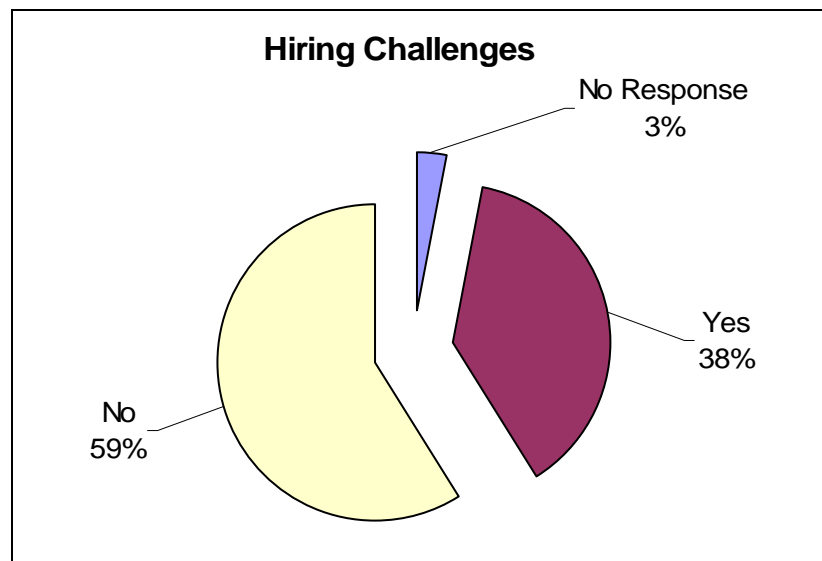
A participant from the education sector writes that "past experience is considered but regional, recognized institutional training is required". This statement points to an underlying issue of institutional or systemic barriers experienced by immigrants (i.e.: work experience and credential recognition). We can safely infer that immigrants with foreign experience and education will have to improve their credentials locally prior to being considered as a potential candidates for job openings in their field of expertise. Further, an additional participant states that "the awareness the [rack] card creates about people from overseas [is that they] may have education that is over looked here in Canada". This statement indicates that some employers do value the academic qualifications and work experiences offered by immigrants.

Fifty (50) percent of respondents in this sector agree that the rack card helps them hire and retain immigrants. These respondents often mention that they use similar principles and/or guidelines when considering new immigrants. For example, such respondents state that: the rack card is "not really applicable to our company," "we already do most of

it”, and we “already use many of the strategies”. However, these statements point to immigrant challenges such as prejudice against English language skills and high-level bureaucracy in hiring processes. This second issue is dominant in large organizations and often occurs in union environments. Such environments provide little flexibility to individual managers who try to initiate unique hiring and retention strategies.

### 4.3 Challenges

***“I think that it (referring to rack card) makes you more aware of the challenges immigrant workers face” rack card respondent***



59 percent of employers think that the rack card does not address their challenges hiring and retaining immigrants, while 38 percent believe that it does address their challenges (3 percent did not respond). The disparity of responses between this question and that referring to the rack card’s overall effectiveness is quite interesting. Several possible explanations are that:

- the rack card does not address employer’s broad challenges and, therefore, they want more resources (such as the web-based resources mentioned earlier), and
- employers may consider immigrants as a source for their basic labour need — entry level positions.

Correspondingly, immigrants often take entry level jobs as a trampoline to their professional career. Once they acquire sufficient Canadian work experience, these immigrants tend to move on to better jobs. This can create uneasiness and/or lack of trust for employers.

Significantly, 15 percent of the employers state they are neither aware of challenges nor do they face challenges associated with hiring and retaining immigrants. One

respondent says “we don’t face challenges in this area”. Another respondent adds “I don’t feel we have immigrant hiring challenges.” These opinions mean that either employers are already adopting new policies and practices for hiring and retaining immigrants or that they do not realize the complexities of working in a multicultural workforce.

## **Section 5: Conclusions and Recommendations**

Development and analysis of the rack card gave the research team a deeper knowledge of employer needs. This will lead to effective outreach projects for the current labour market. The data therefore leads to contextual and methodological recommendations. Additionally, project conclusions will be useful in future VIRCS initiatives.

### ***5.1 Contextual Recommendations***

Specific recommendations for the existing rack card:

- Inserting a paragraph detailing the value of immigrant workers,
- Enlarging the rack card to booklet size and making it available on-line,
- Including information about supports provided by immigrant-serving agencies,
- Adding more examples of success stories,
- Simplifying and clarifying the current bulleted information, and
- Adding Web-links and contact information to the card.

Recommendations for developing further HR tools to meet the extensive needs of employers:

- An employer resource guide with information such as useful Websites and local cultural organizations,
- A program guide to immigrant serving agencies for local employers,
- An employer guide to organizing a multicultural day,
- Mentors for employers new to hiring immigrants,
- A communication tool for employers and their partners,
- Sample immigrant-friendly job descriptions,
- Promotional material such as posters and brochures,
- An award system to recognize immigrant-friendly workplaces,
- Discussion groups between employers and immigrants, and
- Multicultural events and workshops for local employers.

### ***5.2 Methodological Recommendations***

Methodological recommendations for production, distribution, and evaluation:

- Developing evaluation methods which focus on the personal level, such as call-backs and face-to-face interviews in order to increase the quality of feedback,

- Ensuring that methods exist so that all sectors are included in feedback mechanisms (i.e.: the construction sector in this project), and
- Efficiently utilizing electronic distribution and collection methods.

### **5.3 Conclusions**

Businesses today are increasingly sensitive to demographic, political, and economic developments. Therefore, their success depends on their ability to quickly adapt to market fundamentals. The main purpose of undertaking the rack card research was to understand the current hiring and retention strategies used by local employers. The research team thus analyzed the information and made recommendations for additional resources. These resources will help employers make best use of the immigrant labour pool and successfully tackle the current and future labour crunch.

This rack card report begins by examining the current and future labour market environment for CRD employers and how immigrants add value to businesses. The methodology examines how the rack card and the questionnaire were designed, distributed and evaluated. Data results then presents trends and challenges both in general and by sector.

This research thus addresses the initial research questions. The information collected in the survey provides insight into employers' perspectives about the current labour market and their immigrant-targeted hiring and retention practices. The survey findings give the research team a broad understanding of how employers can best position themselves in the labour market and thus minimize the potential challenges associated with hiring and retaining immigrants.

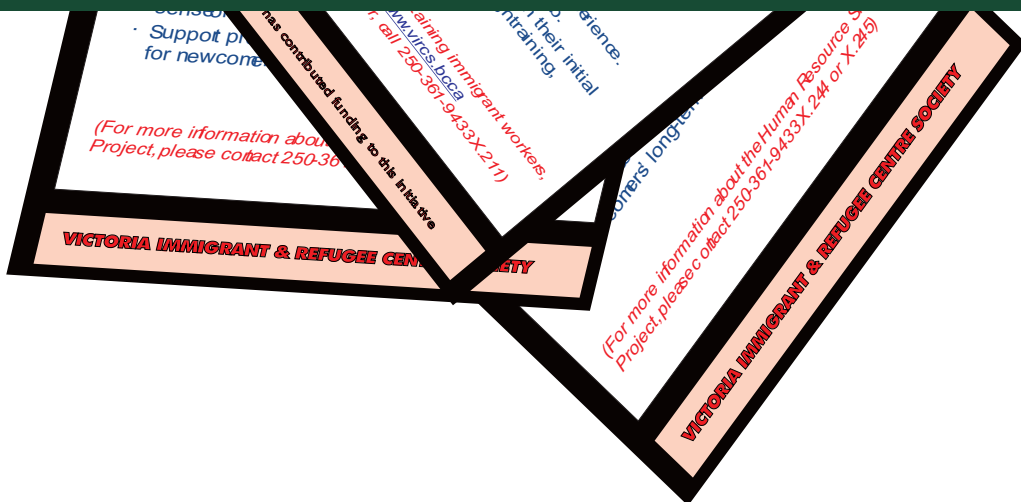
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