

Supporting the Innovation and Creative Economy By Improving and Extending the Global Talent Stream Program

Issue Summary:

Burnaby businesses in the innovation and creative economy, and their related sectors such as technology, digital media, and film/television, often need access to highly-skilled, specialized talent to support their growth and which is not always available locally. The Global Talent Stream pilot program, operated as part of the federal Temporary Foreign Worker program, provides these innovative businesses with special, expedited access to these unique foreign workers to help them scale and grow. As such, the Global Talent Stream program should be extended past its June 2019 deadline, made a permanent feature of the Temporary Foreign Worker Program, and improved to ease some of the administrative requirements.

Background:

The most important input for business is talent. And for technology firms and other companies in the innovation economy, highly-specialized talent is often needed to facilitate growth and further development. Occasionally, this type of talent is not available locally and international workers are needed to fill in the gaps. This local shortage may be due to demand from the growing technology sector outstripping local supply, or in some cases of new innovations or new fields, there may simply not be any local workers with sufficient experience in an area.

“We’ve been delighted by our experience with the Global Talent Stream, because before this program the process was just too unruly and burdensome. If companies can’t bring specialized talent to fill vacant positions efficiently then there’s no way to be competitive, and the Global Talent Stream helps us do this.”

- Alpha Technologies, Burnaby Manufacturer of Power Solutions

The Government of Canada has responded to this need for access to specialized international talent with the Global Talent Stream pilot program. This program offers dedicated, expedited services to companies looking to access this type of unique international talent to scale up and compete globally. Canadian companies need to be either referred to Employment and Social Development Canada by a designated referral partner¹ or need to be seeking a worker from a specific list of high-skilled occupations.² The program offers dedicated service for companies, and expedited processing of both the employer’s application and the employee’s work permit.

By facilitating this talent being sourced internationally, the Global Talent Stream program allows local businesses to unlock new innovations and opportunities which will allow them to scale up and grow, which in-turn generates spin off economic benefits.

“So many companies get stuck at 300 or 400 employees and can’t scale beyond that. And locally, there is a lack of the senior tech talent that can help with that. Programs like the Global Talent Stream allow us to access this kind of specialized talent that can help us scale and achieve that kind of growth.”

- Burnaby Technology/Software Company

¹ In BC, those partners include the Business Development Bank of Canada, the BC Tech Association, the Vancouver Economic Commission, and various provincial and federal government departments.

² These occupations include mathematicians, software engineers, and others. For the full list visit:

<https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/services/foreign-workers/global-talent/requirements.html#gtol>

As the Global Talent Stream is generally well received by those businesses which use it, the program should be extended beyond its June 2019 expiration date. As part of this extension, some of the administrative requirements of the program, particularly the Labour Market Benefits Plan, should be eased to make the program more accessible to applicants, especially those that are small or start-up businesses.

Currently, applicants are required to develop a Labour Market Benefits Plan which outlines how the talent they are bringing in will create spin-off job creation and opportunities for Canadians. While this spin-off benefit should be a goal of such a program, the Labour Market Benefits Plan is not simply aspirational, it creates mandatory commitments on behalf of the applicant. These commitments extend to not only hiring more employees, but to establishing other internal and external initiatives such as providing post-secondary institutions with free software, holding hack-a-thons to hire new employees, and paying for employees to travel to industry conferences.

“Every business today is a tech business, so the competition for talent is stiff and the supply is limited. We’ve used the Global Talent Stream to find the mid to senior level talent we need to grow and that we just don’t have in supply locally yet. This program needs to be extended.”

- Traction on Demand, Burnaby Software Consulting and Development Firm

While these types of programs may be laudable ideas, they require the applicant to commit to all sorts of changes to current HR practices, labour and employment policies, and financial expenditures just to be eligible to use a federal employment program. Feedback from some actual and potential Global Talent Stream applicants identifies this as a barrier to some using the program as fully and successfully as it was intended, particularly for small companies or start-ups which may lack the in-house expertise or staff resources to manage the Labour Market Benefits Plan commitments.

Recommendations:

Therefore, the Burnaby Board of Trade recommends that the federal government:

- 1) Extend the Global Talent Stream program past its June 2019 deadline
- 2) Incorporate this program permanently into the Temporary Foreign Worker Program
- 3) Work with the business community to ease some of the requirements of the Labour Market Benefits Plan part of the Global Talent Stream application