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CIC / HRDC

FUNDERS FOCUS GROUP REPORT ON A CONCEPT FROM THE ONTARIO SOCIETY OF PROFESSIONAL ENGINEERS

**RE: Labour Market Orientation and Employment Preparation for
Foreign-Trained Engineers in Ontario**

January 29, 2002

Prepared by Benyei Associates Limited

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 1. INTRODUCTION1**
 - Background 1
 - Objectives of this Report.....2
 - Objectives of the Focus Group2
 - Location of the Focus Group and Numbers of Participants3
 - Focus Group Format.....4

- 2. OVERVIEW OF THE PRESENTATION BY ONTARIO SOCIETY OF PROFESSIONAL ENGINEERS (OSPE)5**

- 3. OVERVIEW OF PRESENTATION ON EVALUATION METHODS7**

- 4. SUMMARY OF FUNDERS FEEDBACK8**
 - Overview8
 - Benefits of OSPE’s Approach.....8
 - Challenges of OSPE’s Approach.....9
 - Specific Recommendations10
 - Recommendations re: Evaluation..... 11

- 5. NEXT STEPS 13**

- 6. APPENDIX 14**
 - Agenda
 - Flip Charts from January 29 Session

1. INTRODUCTION

Background

In the fall of 2001, representatives from Citizenship and Immigration Canada and Ontario Administration of Settlement and Integration Services (CIC-OASIS) and Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC-Lawrence Square) met with representatives from the Ontario Society of Professional Engineers (OSPE) to seek advice about how to include employers in discussions about ways to help foreign-trained engineers in Toronto obtain employment in the engineering profession.

There was a discussion about the difficulties faced by foreign-trained engineers who want to practice their profession in Canada.

The discussion continued about ways in which OSPE could assist in bringing to the attention of employers the existence of highly trained immigrant engineers in Canada who could help to remedy the looming shortage of skilled engineers; and to obtain suggestions from employers about any additional skills these individuals may need to enhance their employment opportunities and career progression.

HRDC agreed to consider an application for funding from OSPE to conduct a focus group session with employers to facilitate a discussion of the above issues. It was also decided that a focus group session with foreign-trained engineers to determine their needs and the barriers they face in practicing their profession in Canada would be useful.

OSPE also stated that it would be interested in helping the foreign-trained engineers acquire some additional skills and knowledge that would help them to become more employable by offering a course for foreign-trained engineers that would highlight how engineering in Canada differs from other countries. Topics such as the status of engineers, how engineering interfaces with other professions, project management skills and teamwork skills were suggested by OSPE. CIC agreed to consider an application for funding from OSPE for the design of such a course.

In December, OSPE presented CIC with an “Initial Draft of OSPE’s Proposed 33-Week Program”, a concept designed with the assistance of several organizations that it had selected to help it deliver this potential project in partnership. CIC noted that it would be necessary to demonstrate that prospective employers and clients would support such a project before a formal proposal could be entertained.

The co-funding of a pilot project for foreign-trained engineers in Toronto with CIC and HRDC-Lawrence Square was being explored at that time by CIC, HRDC and the JSW Advisory Committee. This pilot, if approved for funding, would be independently evaluated to determine whether it was successful before any decisions would be made about continuing it or replicating it in other locations and a Call for Proposals process would be required to select Service Providers (SPOs) to deliver it on an on-going basis.

CIC and HRDC provided some feedback about the delivery structure of OSPE's conceptual project, as well as about paying a placement agency for workplace participants, the client intake process, language assessment and credential assessment by the PEO (Professional Engineers of Ontario).

OSPE then submitted a revision of the concept to CIC and HRDC. OSPE agreed to conduct the focus group sessions requested by CIC and HRDC prior to any decision on the submission of an application for funding.

OSPE stated that each work placement will be reviewed by PEO to ensure that the work the client performs during the placement period would count towards the one year Canadian work experience requirement for licensure.

Objectives of this Report

This report describes the SPO Focus Group Meeting of January 29, 2002. It provides an overview of OSPE's concept as well as the reactions of the participants to the concept and their subsequent recommendations. A complete agenda for the meeting is included in the Appendix.

In addition, participants were asked for specific feedback about appropriate evaluation for the OSPE's conceptual project.

Objectives of the Focus Group

CIC and HRDC wished to obtain input from focus group sessions with immigrant settlement Service Providing Organizations (SPOs), Funders, Foreign-trained Engineers and Employers about the proposal from OSPE regarding the potential benefits and challenges of the concept, as well as specific recommendations to enhance the concept's:

- delivery,
- management, and
- outcomes.

CIC and HRDC also wished to obtain specific feedback from the Funders focus group about their recommendations regarding appropriate program evaluation techniques and criteria to use in evaluating OSPE's conceptual project.

Location of the Focus Group and Numbers of Participants

The Funders focus group was held at the Colony Hotel in downtown Toronto. The arrangements were made by CIC.

Thirteen representatives from funding organizations attended, as well as speakers from OSPE and their associates and representatives of CIC HRDC. A full list of participants follows:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Organization</u>
Ron Birkett	CIC – OASIS
Pat Fia	HRDC – Lawrence Square
Fiona Corbin	CIC – OASIS
Ratna Omidvar	The Maytree Foundation
Richard Lecours	CIC - OASIS
Jenny Vane	Ontario Ministry of Citizenship
Cliff Fast	CIC - OASIS
Louise Sauvé-Dubois	Canadian Heritage-Multiculturalism
Rifky Gold	APT/MTCU
Catherine Laurier	APT/MTCU
Mario Bruyere	MTCU-EEP
Andy Gaul	HRDC
Bill Newburn	HRDC
Carol Olson	HRDC
Shamira Madhani	APT/MTCU
Karen Wilson	City of Toronto, Social Services
Don Ingram	CEO
John Gamble	CEO
Stephen Jack	Ontario Society of Professional Engineers
Wilf Flagler	Ontario Society of Professional Engineers
Rhonda Singer	Progress & Assoc.
Marni Johnson	Workplace Training & Services Inc.
Judith Bond	Workplace Training & Services Inc.
Jayne Edmonds	SpeakWell
Susan Corazzola	Archer Resource Solutions Inc.
Judie Benyei, Facilitator	Benyei Associates Limited

Focus Group Format

Each participant introduced themselves, outlining briefly the experience their organization has had with assisting foreign-trained professionals enter the Canadian job market at a professional level.

Participants worked in small groups and a plenary session. The facilitator led the groups through a discussion of each question soliciting input and recommendations on each and also acted as recorder. Participants commented as they wished and all input was recorded.

The questions asked of the participants were:

1. Please provide an overall statement of reaction to the concept.
2. What do you feel are the strong points/benefits and challenges of the concept from your point of view?
3. Please provide any recommendations you have with particular reference to the:
 - delivery component of the concept
 - management structure of the concept
 - outcomes
4. Please provide any other comments you wish
5. What do you feel is most important in evaluating this concept?

Small Group Representatives

Group 1

Andy Gaul
Rifky Gold
Catherine Laurier
Louise Sauvé-Dubois
Richard Lecours
Ratna Omidvar

Group 2

Mario Bruyere
Jenny Vane
Cliff Fast
Bill Newburn
Shamira Madhani
Karen Wilson
Carol Olson

2. OVERVIEW OF THE PRESENTATION BY ONTARIO SOCIETY OF PROFESSIONAL ENGINEERS (OSPE)

The presentation on behalf of OSPE was made by Wilf Flagler, Career Centre Coordinator. Stephen Jack, Professional Engineer, (P.Eng.), OSPE Director of Operations spoke about the Professional Engineers of Ontario (PEO) and their mandate and their interest in certifying foreign-trained engineers. Also speaking on behalf of another Engineering society was current President, Don Ingram, P.Eng., President of the Consulting Engineers of Ontario (CEO) and President-Elect, John Gamble, P.Eng. CEO represents over 265 engineering firms across Ontario and are very interested in the potential labour pool represented by foreign-trained engineers, both to fulfil the expanding market demand in Ontario, as well as to be able to expand Canada's export of professional engineering services.

OSPE's presentation highlighted their vision for the concept:

"To create a high quality experiential program capable of helping Ontario's foreign trained engineers make a smooth transition into the Canadian workforce in an engineering capacity."

and the objectives of it's concept:

"Use a systems approach to develop a feasible long term employment solution for foreign trained engineers in Ontario."

"Address the key issues and concerns raised by Ontario's employers for the hiring and integration of foreign trained engineers into their organizations."

Wilf Flagler introduced OSPE's service partners listed in the conceptual project:

- Marni Johnson and Judith Bond, WTS Inc. (Workplace Training & Services Inc.)
- Jayne Edmunds, SpeakWell (A Division of Gandy Associates)
- Rhonda Singer, P & A (Progress and Associates)
- Susan Corazzola, Archer Resource Solutions (A Division of Wardrup Engineering)

2. OVERVIEW OF THE PRESENTATION BY OSPE

Each spoke to their part in the concept. Highlights of the concept included:

- Thorough pre-screening of candidates to determine suitability for participation
- Classroom communication skills training
- Online advanced communication skills training
- Classroom work readiness training
- Paid engineering work placement
- Ongoing work placement support
- Monthly classroom job maintenance support
- 3 month access to OSPE's online career centre

Wilf Flagler then summarized OSPE and partners' view of the keys to their concept's success. They included:

1. Comprehensive Pre-Screening for
 - Candidate suitability pre-screening to be administered by front line referring agencies with completed LINC Assessment at High Level 4 or Level 5
 - Candidate transcripts then forwarded to PEO for Academic Assessment and ensuing PEO's ERCI (Eligibility Requirement Committee Interview)
 - OSPE's Work Placement Agency(s) or CEO will then meet individually with each applicant to assess on attitude, identify any work placement job maintenance issues, and to identify relevant work placement preferences prior to their enrolment
2. High quality state-of-the-art ongoing comprehensive English workplace communications skills training
3. Work readiness training that features innovative and strategic labour market and job search components associated with the engineering profession in Canada
4. Lengthy (26-week) paid engineering work placement plus ongoing individual job maintenance support that is recognized by PEO towards required one-year experience working directly in an engineering capacity
5. Program recognition and buy-in by the three top engineering associations for both members and employers in Ontario

OSPE's presentation was followed by a question and answer session for clarification of any necessary points.

Please note that the complete slides from the OSPE presentation are included in the Appendix.

3. OVERVIEW OF PRESENTATION ON EVALUATION METHODS

Guest speaker, Dr. Bob Power of Power Analysis Inc., provided a short overview of evaluation methodology to assist participants in framing their comments about program evaluation.

He focused on the three phases of program evaluation:

1. Pre-evaluation assessment
2. Process evaluation
3. Summarize evaluation

as well as evaluation methods and design. Several questions of clarification were answered by Dr. Power. Dr. Power then left before the feedback discussion took place.

4. SUMMARY OF FUNDERS FEEDBACK

This section presents the feedback for the session of January 29, 2002, utilizing the questions from page 4. The feedback is stated as much as possible as it was presented by the participants. This report has been edited for clarity only and not to “force fit” the feedback into the predetermined reporting categories.

In this way it is hoped that the participants’ concern for accuracy in reporting and the need for consistency of format have been met.

All flip charts from the sessions are attached in the Appendix. Where representative quotes are used in the text, they are highlighted and enclosed in quotations for easy identification.

Overview

Overall, there was unanimity among the participants on all the major points that follow.

Participants were overall very positive about the concept which they stated would meet a “specific serious need”, but had a variety of concerns about issues such as overlap with existing programs, sustainability, the role of the PEO and the need for a clear vision for the program.

Benefits of OSPE’s Approach

According to the participants the strongest points of the concept included:

- it brings employer to table in own self-interest
- building on existing strong programs and knowledge
- potential for replication system-wide with other projects
- responsive to concerns of community
- gets HRDC/ CIC working together
- meets a specific need – for a specific niche group
- good size sample – is a critical mass

Challenges of OSPE's Approach

The major challenges from the participants' point of view included:

- 1. Ongoing delivery if the pilot is successfully completed**
 - will program be sustainable?
 - perhaps position within institutions of higher learning
- 2. Narrow focus on a specific client group, i.e., the job-ready, foreign-trained engineer (FTE)**
 - who are we serving – not clear how this group is different
 - “creaming” of the easiest to place is a concern
- 3. The training content and the flexibility to accommodate different client needs**
 - absence of long-term vision / did not get a sense of vision
 - do we really know the client – who are they? Some clients need some skills, but not others; not all clients need the same training
 - who is screened in: is there flexibility re upfront work (some would not need full process)
 - if group has everything (skills) except Canadian experience why is the skill-building part necessary?
 - potential overlap – similar to STIC? We're not sure re link to STIC – better understanding needed (link to Job Search Workshop is clear) – how is this different?
 - why do new program rather than increasing STIC?
- 4. The partners in delivery**
 - use institutions of higher learning as partners in the project
- 5. Placement concerns**
 - why a placement agency?
 - how would placement happen from a funder's perspective?
 - what happens after 6 months?
 - lots of emphasis on removing barriers (Canadian experience) – pilot should not lose perspective on attitude change within employer community (perhaps policies, practices, attitude change in employers to help ensure success)
 - onus on changing/ polishing client but, how are employers practices changing/ shifting?
 - no post support – what happens to client after 6 months?

6. Apparent lack of role in this concept for existing service providers and the community

- lack of connection (formally articulated) to already existing community group: Coalition of Access to Professional Engineers (CAPE)
- The Maytree Foundation does a mentoring program already – think about these connections

7. Other

- how is PEO at table in evaluation so that PEO's goals would be met? (got good sense of CEO, OSPE role)

Specific Recommendations

1. Ongoing delivery if the pilot is successfully completed

- complete a demographic profile of the potential target group
- strategic alliance with an institution of higher learning

2. Narrow focus on a specific client group

- have a discussion with all the professional groups (e.g., pharmacists, engineers, etc.) to elicit best practices and publish
- get a better sense of who the client is? scope/profile? (only PEO can answer)
- what about doing something for all the other newcomers who need professional development?

3. The training content and the flexibility to accommodate different client needs

- more clarity and vision
- recommend a modular approach
- analysis of skill gaps would be useful
- complete a demographic profile of the potential target group
- get a better sense of who the client is? scope/profile? (only PEO can answer)

4. The partners in delivery

- create strategic alliance with an institution of higher learning
- CAPE should play a role at a systemic level especially in evaluation
- evaluate people who provide training (private suppliers) perhaps use institution of higher learning instead

5. Placement concerns

- CIC/HRDC should meet with the client (FTE)
- pilot should not lose perspective on attitude change within employer community (perhaps policies, practices, attitude change in employers to help ensure success)
- in practice, set the bar at a realistic level for systemic change – let's document but let's not scare employers away

6. Apparent lack of role in this concept for existing service providers and the community

- The Maytree Foundation does a mentoring program already – think about these connections
- CAPE should play a role at a systemic level especially in evaluation

Recommendations re: Evaluation

- communicate clearly evaluation intention at beginning
- keep attribution (e.g. does the program work) at the heart of the evaluation
- consider not just job but consider quality, salary
- develop a clear definition of what success is – licensing? job at 6 months or later? earnings? self esteem?
- involve funders / professional engineers in determining evaluation criteria
- need a comparative control group to truly evaluate success of program – establish a median (not difficult with PEO database)
- need a statement of evaluation: intention (do not do random assignment which is not in keeping with philosophy)
- tie evaluation into key objectives so all know (objectives-based evaluation)
- put statement of evaluation into proposal
- make sure number of participants in pilot design is appropriate / build into proposal
- assess impact of program on resistant employers as well as progressive employers
- include any employer changes (climate, etc) after pilot project concludes
- know upfront what the employment climate is like for diverse communities at each employer's workplace
- need effectiveness measures for evaluation of employers: are they buying in to concept?
- evaluate people who provide training (private suppliers) perhaps use institution of higher learning instead
- for the best evaluation outcome – clients should continue with the employers after 6 months

4. SUMMARY OF FUNDERS FEEDBACK

5. NEXT STEPS

After the conclusion of the focus groups, a short summary report about each will be prepared. These reports will be made available to all participants as well as other interested parties, likely on the CIC and HRDC websites.

CIC and HRDC will examine and analyze the feedback from the focus groups in detail to assist them to determine whether to consider a proposal from OSPE for a pilot project.

If a pilot project were to go ahead, an independent evaluation by a professional evaluator would be conducted. The evaluation data would be used to assist CIC and HRDC in coming to a decision about whether to proceed with an ongoing project.

6. APPENDIX

Agenda

Flip Charts from January 29 Session

FUNDERS FOCUS GROUP

Agenda

January 29, 2002

- 1) 8:45 A.M. Coffee/Social
 - 2) Welcome and Introductions - Judie Benyei
 - 3) Background - Pat Fia
 - 4) Presentation of proposed Concept - OSPE
 - 5) Questions of Clarification - Funder Representatives
 - 6) Break
 - 7) Feedback - Funder Representatives
 - Overall statement
 - What's positive & what are the challenges
 - Specific recommendations
 - 8) Evaluation Methods – Power Analysis
 - 9) Feedback - Funder Representatives
 - 10) Summary & Next Steps – Judie Benyei
 - 11) Statement of Thanks on behalf of CIC/HRDC– Fiona Corbin
- LUNCH

**FEEDBACK ON
PROPOSED OSPE CONCEPT**

January 29, 2002

GROUP 1

Overall Statement on the Proposed Concept

- Like proposal, have concerns and recommendations

Strong Points

- Great project will meet a specific, serious need
- Very positive

Challenges

- absence of long-term vision / did not get a sense of it; will it be sustainable; maybe position this within existing institutions of higher learning
- do we really know the client – who are they? Some clients need A,B,C's; CIC/HRDC should meet with them
- recommend a modular approach – use institutions of higher learning
- creaming a concern
- lack of connection (formally articulated) to existing group: Coalition of Access to Professional Eng. (CAPE)
- onus on changing/ polishing client but, how are employers practices changing/ shifting?
- Ratna's foundation does a mentoring program already – think about these connections
- no post support – what happens to client after 6 months?
- how is PEO at table in evaluation so that PEO's goals would be met (got good sense of CEO, OSPE)
- lots of emphasis on removing barriers (Canadian experience) – pilot should not lose perspective on attitude change within employer community (perhaps policies, practices, attitude change in employers to help ensure success)

Recommendations (for both groups)

- have a table of all the groups (Pharm, engineers, etc) to elicit best practices and publish
- CAPE should play a role at systemic level, especially in evaluation
- more clarity needed

- more vision
- what about all those who need professional development – other newcomers?
- analysis of skill gaps useful
- strategic alliance with a higher learning institution
- get a better sense of who the client is? scope/ profile? (only PEO can answer)
- demographic profile needed

Group 2

Overall Statement on the Proposed Concept

- Like proposal, have concerns and recommendations

Strong Points

- brings employer to table in own self-interest
- builds on existing strong programs and knowledge
- potential for replication system-wide with other projects
- responsive to concerns of community
- gets HRDC/ CIC working together
- meets a specific need – niche for specific group
- very positive
- good size sample – is a critical mass

Challenges

- potential overlap – similar to STIC? Were not sure re link to SNC – better understanding needed (link to JSW is clear)
- how is this different
- why do new program than increasing STIC
- presentation high level
- who are we serving – not clear how this group is different (more ?'s)
- if group has everything (skills) except Canadian experience why is the skill-building part necessary
- why placement agency
- how would placement happen from a funder's perspective

- what happens after 6 months
- evaluation outcome – should employers continue after 6 months
- who is screened in: is there flexibility re upfront work (some would not need full process)
- evaluation: effectiveness measures needed re employers buying in to concept

Evaluation (for both groups)

- What would be really important in evaluating this project?
- Keep attribution (e.g. does the program work) at the heart of the evaluation
- not just job but consider quality, salary
- clear definition of what success is – licensing? job – 6 months? later? earnings? self esteem
- involve funders / professional engineers in determining evaluation criteria
- need a comparative control group to truly evaluate success of program – establish a median (not difficult with PEO database)
- statement of evaluation: intention needed (not random assignment which is not in keeping with philosophy)
- tie evaluation into key objectives so all know (objectives-based evaluation)
- put statement of evaluation into proposal
- make sure number of participants in pilot design is appropriate / build into proposal (only 60?)
- communicate clearly evaluation intention at beginning
- include any employer changes (climate, etc) after project
- know upfront what the employment climate is like for diverse communities at each employer
- assess impact of program on resistant employers as well as progressive employers
- in practice, set the bar at a realistic level for systemic change – let's document – let's not scare employers away
- evaluate people who provide training (private) perhaps use institution of higher learning

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