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Introduction

New immigrants are arriving in Canada at a rate of over 300,000 per year. The Canadian labour market is rapidly expanding and evolving day by day.

Some of these new immigrants will arrive at your door seeking information and guidance. Our goal is to ensure that as your clients, they are empowered to make informed decisions, without feeling overwhelmed.

This document is intended as a guide to assess and review your own knowledge to help clients in their orientation to employment, as well as to manage their expectations.

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Morteza is an active Lead Volunteer with Catholic Community Services of York Region and in partnership with the agency and its Integration Network Program, Morteza, along with other program volunteers, offers networking sessions, study groups in professional designations such as project management, Lean Six Sigma and Supply Chain, to newcomers.

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Part I

Understanding the Clients' Objectives

To get a proper grasp on how to assist a client in regard to employment, it is essential to have an understanding of their background, and what it is that they aspire to achieve. To develop the depth of understanding which is required, there are a couple of key questions that need to be asked.

1. "What is your dream?"

Usually there is a gap between what the client is able to achieve and what the dream job is. However, the answer to this question provides the direction for the client. In many cases, there needs to be a transition strategy from the starting job to the dream job. This should be clarified with the client.

This would be a good time to discuss and manage clients' expectations too. During your conversations with them, try to avoid:

- Making promises- e.g., *With your credentials, you'll find work in no time!*
- Setting deadlines for things you cannot control- e.g., *You only need to volunteer for 3 months. You'll be ready to get a job by the end of summer.*

2. "Do you have any work experience in Canada?"

If the client answers "Yes", then you could ask these follow-up questions:

- What position?
- When?
- Where?
- How long?
- What were your main responsibilities?

If the client does not have Canadian experience yet, then ask about the client's other work experience. The same follow-up questions listed above should be applied. Based on the answers, you can proceed to the next questions.

Identifying the Clients' "Value Proposition"

Once you have developed an initial understanding of the client's background and aspirations, you will be required to identify the Value Proposition of the client to the Canadian labour market.

A Value Proposition is the most basic form of grading a person's value to the labour market. In this model, it is based on three key factors, which, when put together, determine a candidate's strengths and weaknesses in the competitive labour market.

The three key factors in a person's Value Proposition are:

- hard skills
- soft skills
- related experience

Example:

As a painter:

- A hard skill would be painting. To grade hard skills in painting, you need to grade them on their level of skill: How well do they actually paint? What do they know about products and tools?
- The soft skill would be being able to communicate the technical terms of the position or about a specific job with a customer.
- The level of experience would identify their sufficiency in the position, how long they have been painting professionally, with certification, or testimonials from previous customers.

An evaluation of experience plus hard and soft skills will help to determine which pathways could be available to the client, such as starting out as a helper, or running their own projects.

What are Hard Skills?

Hard skills are the day-to-day skills in a profession that are job-specific and recognizable; for example, accounting is a hard skill of accountants.

Hard skills are broken down into two categories when referring to jobs:

- White Collar professions

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- White collar jobs consist of professional, managerial, or administrative work.
- Blue Collar (Manual Labour) jobs
 - Blue Collar jobs are much more hands-on and usually labour-intensive (Trades, manufacturing operators and supervisors, maintenance, shipping and receiving, etc.).

What are Soft Skills?

Soft skills are interpersonal skills, anything related to the way a person interacts with others, such as language. In many cases, language is the largest factor that affects soft skills as it is essential for communication.

Although language is a key factor, soft skills also include conflict management, the ability to fit in and work in a team, to socialize appropriately with colleagues, to manage stress, to share thoughts and ideas with others, to accept and provide feedback, the ability to manage fast-paced environments, tight deadlines, etc.

Essentially, soft skills are based on the ability to communicate and interact with others in a healthy way. Usually, in the short term, soft skills development is the most challenging area. To enhance this type of skillset, it requires cultural awareness, training, coaching and engagement in social and professional settings.

Community Connections programming- from English Conversation Circles to Community Kitchens, and from sports clubs to civic engagement events- is useful in helping clients to enhance their soft skills. So take the time to reflect on and review your arsenal of activities to identify the best tools to support clients in their orientation to employment.

What is Experience?

Experience is the largest contributor to a person's value proposition in the Canadian labour market. In some cases, experience may be valued more highly than academic background, as it identifies the ability to apply the skillset within a position.

When referring to work experience, Canadian employers prefer depth in one area of experience rather than a shallow execution in various tasks.

In many cases, when newcomers are asked about their experience, they speak on the positions they have had in a broad sense (e.g., I was a Project manager, sales person, etc.). When asked about job responsibilities, they provide big picture definitions.

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In the Canadian labour market, they need to speak about their day-to-day activities. When referring to experience, it is essential to highlight the most relevant, actionable items in a sequential manner.

There are several online open-source databases to assist the clients in describing their experience. Two reliable sources would be:

- [The National Occupation Classification](#) website, which is the Canadian reference for job descriptions.
- [The O*net Code Connector](#), which is the USA equivalent.

Part II

Exploring the Labour Market

Employment Counsellors, Job Search Specialists, and other specialized program counsellors supporting clients in their search for employment will focus on the areas detailed below. If you happen to play this specialized role at your agency as well, in addition to highlighting the importance of the clients' participation in Community Connections activities, you will need to be familiar with these concepts.

The Target Market

Identifying the target market, whether it is health care, oil and gas, trades, etc., is essential in the primary assessment. The target market is further broken down into two segments:

- Regulated occupations, and
- Non-regulated occupations

A regulated occupation is an occupation controlled by provincial and territorial (and sometimes federal) law, and governed by a regulatory body. About 40% of jobs are in regulated occupations. These include regulated professions (e.g., nursing) and skilled trades (e.g., plumbing).

Non-regulated occupations are essentially a profession or trade for which there is no legal requirement or restriction on practice with regard to licenses, certificates, or registration. Non-regulated jobs tend to be lower paying positions, and consist of roughly 60% of the job market. Although non-regulated occupations do not require any licenses, there are many certifications which are extremely advantageous to acquire.

These certificates are very job-specific. For this reason, to identify the most closely related and preferred certificates, consult with the relevant professional associations.

Guiding the Client through Job Postings

Required and Preferred Qualifications

Based on the job posting, the counsellor, working with the client, will make a list of the required qualifications in three areas:

- hard skills,

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- experience and
- soft skills.

In many cases, the hard skills and the experience required are mandatory, a “must”; and others are “assets”, meaning they are preferred qualifications, important but not essential.

Soft skills are mostly the determining factor for the employers to hire one candidate over the rest. However, in most job postings, this is not explicitly expressed.

At this stage, the counsellor and the client need to clearly know:

- What hard skills are required?
- How much experience is required on average?
- What level of soft skills is required?

Identifying Gaps and Next Steps

Once the job posting requirements and the client’s value proposition have been identified, the counsellor can work with the client to make a list of their deficits and competitive strengths. This will enable the counsellor to assist the client in making an informed decision on how to proceed.

Strategizing and Prioritizing

Depending on the clients’ readiness, there are different possible pathways to choose. Prioritization is essential when thinking about next steps.

Here are a few common scenarios to consider:

- The client is prepared, and may apply for the position (Required tools: Resume, cover letter, online profile, interviewing skills, negotiating and managing the job offer)
- The client understands there is a manageable gap between the requirements and their value proposition. The counsellor can help to weigh the pros and cons of the following options:
 - a. Assume the risk and apply.
 - b. Fill the gap by prioritizing the possible strategies before applying. (Based on the area of improvement, there are different strategies to compensate for the gap. Due to misinformation, clients may fail to prioritize effectively.

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For instance, a professional certificate/course may outweigh the prospects of a master's program.)

- There is a significant gap recognized by the client. The counsellor can help to weigh the pros and cons of the following options:
 - a. Prioritize, plan, and implement steps to solidify their value proposition.
 - b. Make adjustments within their objectives to match with their current skillset.

Sample Checklist for Self-Assessment and Referrals

This table can be used by a counsellor to self-assess their potential ability to assist clients directly at various stages of their search for employment.

	Community Connections can help ✓	Need to refer?
Identifying client’s hard skills		
Identifying client’s soft skills		
Enhancing client’s soft skills		
Describing relevant work experience		
Assessing certifications/diplomas from abroad		
Understanding the labour & target markets		
Assessing need for training, additional certification		
Creating/updating client’s online profile		
Interpreting job postings: required qualifications (“must”) hard & soft skills		
Interpreting job postings: preferred qualifications (“asset”) hard & soft skills		
Interpreting job postings: level of experience and required education/certificates		
Writing a resume		
Writing a cover letter		
Practicing job interview skills (mock interviews)		
Negotiating & managing a job offer		
Finding volunteer opportunities		
Finding mentorship opportunities (matching)		
Finding (un/paid) placement opportunities		

Always refer responsibly. Consider internal resources and the ones in the community. Have your colleague’s full name and contact information. Avoid just passing on the link to a website!