



## 2008 ALBERTA CHAMBERS OF COMMERCE RESOLUTION

### Improving Canada and Alberta immigration processes

Alberta's strong economy continues to produce jobs faster than the labour market can respond. The 2007 unemployment rate was 3.5 per cent and the Alberta government estimates that the province will experience a shortfall of 109,000 workers over the next 10 years.<sup>1</sup> While both levels of government are aware of this emerging issue, current processes related to attracting, recruiting and employing both temporary foreign workers and permanent residents are still expensive, time consuming, and complex. As a result, Canada loses valuable skilled workers to other countries with more expedient and straightforward processes.

#### Permanent Workers

Hiring a foreign worker to come to Canada as a permanent resident has become extremely difficult based on the time it takes to get that employee and family admitted to Canada. The lengthy wait times for approval from Immigration Canada virtually guarantees that the foreign worker will seek other opportunities. Applications for permanent residency are not prioritized but are processed on a first-come-first-served basis. In response to this, the Government of Alberta has implemented the Provincial Nominee Program (PNP). However, processing times in embassies and consulates overseas, combined with processing times in Canada, dramatically impact the overall length of time it takes to have a worker on the job even when nominated by an approved employer.

#### Temporary Foreign Workers

Most employers in Calgary rely on the Temporary Foreign Worker (TFW) Program to bring workers into Canada, even if the intention is to recruit long-term employees. Recruiting temporary foreign workers is generally a two-step process – the first step is a Labour Market Opinion from Service Canada, followed by a visa or work permit, which is provided by Citizenship and Immigration Canada at understaffed centres overseas. Obtaining a LMO, essentially as confirmation that there are no Canadians available to fill the position, currently takes approximately 25 weeks. The expedited LMO program for specific occupations is a positive step to improve processing times and the recent addition of new occupational categories helped to strengthen this valuable program. While the Alberta Chambers of Commerce appreciates the steps taken with regard to expedited LMOs, the regular LMO process is still slow and unresponsive to current labour market conditions related to pay, labour shortages, and recruitment processes.

<sup>1</sup> Alberta Employment, Immigration and Industry. 2006. Alberta's Occupational Demand and Supply Outlook 2006-2016. November.



Furthermore, with more severe labour shortages on the horizon, the Alberta Chambers of Commerce recommends the E-LMO process be further expanded.

### **International Students**

International students, studying at Canadian post-secondary institutions, are another valuable source of skilled workers for Alberta. To be accepted at a university or college, and to successfully achieve a Canadian post-secondary credential, students must be proficient in English. These students develop an attachment to the Canadian labour market through working off-campus during their studies and, once they complete their program, have Canadian credentials. Slow processing times and backlogs impact the approval of student visas.

### **The Alberta Chambers of Commerce recommends the Government of Alberta work with the Government of Canada to:**

1. Increase staffing levels and training, and optimize IT systems at Canadian Consulates to improve visa/ work permit processing times for permanent residents, temporary foreign workers and international students, especially at locations with large backlogs of applications.
2. Prioritize applications from foreign workers and international students based on the Occupations Under Pressure list rather than on a first-come, first-serve basis, to help speed the processing of applicants in the most needed occupations.
3. Examine the immigration processes in competing countries such as Australia and New Zealand, including the fees that immigrants are required to pay to government, and adopt effective practices to improve Canada's competitiveness.
4. Streamline the LMO process for any worker in an occupation on the Occupations Under Pressure list by considering the broader labour market for that skill rather than only the specific advertising efforts of each individual employer.
5. Consider broader information sources in determining the appropriate salary or wage level, including industry sector surveys that can often be provided by employer and employer associations.
6. To increase the number of candidates they are able to consider in the Provincial Nominee Program.