



# Employer Guide:

Recognizing transferable skills,  
diversifying your workforce



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# Contents

- 04** Introduction: Why should I have a diverse workforce?
  - 05** What are transferable skills?
  - 08** What do I need now, and what can be learned?
  - 10** Where do I find diverse applicants?
  - 12** How do I create a job posting that diverse applicants will apply to?
  - 14** Recruiting from overseas
  - 17** You've found some potential candidates. Now what?
  - 19** Conducting effective interviews
  - 21** How to develop an inclusive and thorough onboarding process
  - 22** Leveraging the skills of your workforce
  - 24** Fostering cultural integration in the workplace
  - 26** How local employment services can support your business
  - 30** Conclusion
  - 32** Acknowledgements
  - 33** Resources highlighted in this guide
- 



# About this guide

This guide was created by the Huron County Immigration Partnership, with support from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. An Employment Working Group, with representatives from eight organizations, provided guidance and direction on the project, and an external consultant, Hayley Linfield, developed the content found within this guide.

The Huron County Immigration Partnership aims to build a welcoming community where newcomers to Canada feel supported, have a sense of belonging and are integrated through participation in all areas of life. Huron County's Immigration Partnership collaborates with immigrants, service providers, community organizations, businesses and community members to strengthen collaboration, build capacity, organize welcoming community events, develop information and conduct research.

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# Introduction: Why should I have a diverse workforce?

Businesses in Huron County who have diverse workforces see strong financial returns and significant levels of employee workplace satisfaction. These experiences align with the findings of study after study showing that organizations that embrace diversity in all its forms are better positioned to handle unforeseen changes and are more likely to explore new ideas and approaches to dealing with problems. They are also recognized as being more innovative and socially responsible.

There are many types of diversity, including gender, age, race, ethnicity, nationality, cultural background, physical/mental ability, socioeconomic status, education level, and cognitive/neurodiversity, and all forms of diversity can have a beneficial impact on a workplace. In fact, more employers are embracing inclusive employment, revisiting traditional hiring and onboarding requirements as they relate to prerequisite certifications or experience, or rigid scheduling and transportation expectations. This broader thinking allows employers to find practical and often innovative ways of reducing or minimizing unnecessary obstacles to having a full and productive workforce, one that supports all types of workers, including immigrants and new Canadians.

Besides benefiting from diverse ideas and new approaches to doing business, organizations that employ immigrants and new Canadians are able to expand their customer base and open new markets. Statistics Canada reported there were 4,200 immigrants in Huron County in 2021, and Immigration, Refugee and Citizenship Canada data highlights how the number of newcomers has grown since then. As the County's population becomes increasingly diverse, businesses who employ multilingual and multicultural staff find they can build relationships with that growing customer base, thereby increasing revenues.

Still, despite the well-researched benefits of having a diverse workforce, a 2026 report from the Four County Labour Market Planning Board highlights that there continues to be a reluctance among some employers to hire newcomers to Canada. This reluctance may be due to fears surrounding issues with communication or workplace culture, confusion about religious accommodations, or concerns about newcomers being able to integrate with current employees. There may also be confusion regarding immigration requirements or how to attract newcomers to your company.

**The aim of this guide is to alleviate concerns. In this guide, local employers share advice on best practices for attracting, onboarding, and integrating newcomers into your workplaces.**

**This guide also intends to point you to organizations working in the community who can support you as you build a diverse workforce.**

We hope to demonstrate that if you, as an employer, are informed, prepared, and able to focus your attention less on specific abilities and certifications, and more on the undervalued transferable skills offered by workers, you will find that the benefits of hiring a diverse workforce significantly outweigh the challenges.

**Above all, the goal of this guide is to assist our local Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in taking advantage of the rich diversity Huron County has to offer.** By the end of this guide, we hope to have convinced you to...

**...commit to diversity.**

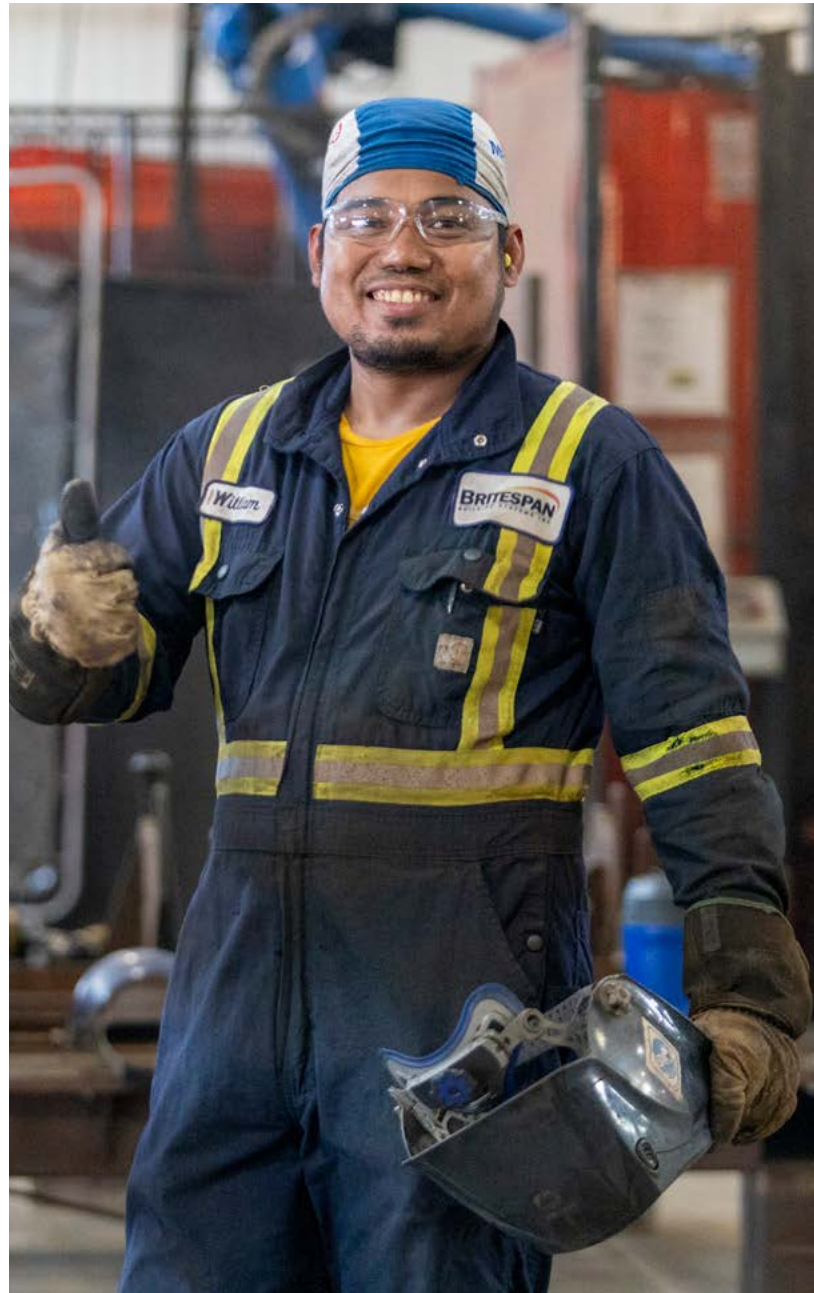
# 1 What are transferable skills?

While everyone is an individual, immigrants and newcomers to Canada have already proven they have many valuable skills. It takes not only courage, but resourcefulness, determination, and adaptability to move to a different country with a different culture and, perhaps, a different language.

With the rapid rate of technological change in our society, successful employers are increasingly looking for workers who possess 'transferable' skills: abilities, knowledge, and attributes acquired through previous experience that can be applied to new workplaces, companies, industries, or countries.

## **Transferable skills include, but are not limited to:**

- Communicating in multiple formats
- Setting goals and priorities
- Analyzing information
- Using technology / tools
- Team building
- Mentoring and coaching
- Problem solving
- Self-directed learning
- Researching
- Collaborating
- Planning
- Managing resources
- Adapting to change
- Managing and leading
- Critical thinking
- Multitasking



For example, a concrete worker from Syria might have little to no experience building wooden fences, but he very likely is able to complete tasks on time, work effectively with a team, and understand how to operate various power tools. A telephone salesperson from Ukraine may have no experience working in a Canadian monetary institution, but she is likely comfortable helping members of the public, addressing concerns, and being empathetic to their needs.

The specifics of what product, which program, or what customers can all be learned, often quite quickly, as long as the core, transferable skills that take time to develop are already in place. Throughout Huron County, employers and organizations are already embracing transferable skills in solving some of their labour force needs.

# Huron County employer examples

**Manufacturing and Industrial Sector:** Local manufacturers have recognized transferable skills from workers with backgrounds in agriculture, construction, and heavy equipment operation, such as **mechanical aptitude, safety compliance, teamwork, and shift-based work experience.**



“We know that if someone grew up on a farm and knows how to tear down a combine, they can work on our machines. It’s electrical, it’s hydraulic, it’s pneumatic. They understand that.”  
– Paul McInnis, President | Jokey North America Inc., Goderich



## Healthcare Sector

The healthcare industry has drawn on transferable skills from retail, hospitality, and administrative sectors for entry-level healthcare and support roles. **Communication, customer service, time management, and empathy** are prioritized alongside formal credentials.



## Social Services and Community Support

Local social service providers and community agencies have looked for **experience in client service, case coordination, and documentation management** when recruiting for roles related to housing support, employment services, and community outreach.



## Tourism and Hospitality

Tourism operators regularly rely on transferable skills when recruiting seasonal and permanent staff. Workers transitioning from manufacturing, retail, or agriculture bring **reliability, teamwork, and operational discipline.**



## Municipal and Public Administration

Local municipalities within Huron County, including administrative and clerical departments, have benefited from hiring candidates with private-sector experience, such as **customer service, project coordination, budgeting support, and digital literacy.**

## Benefits Observed Across Organizations

Organizations in Huron County that emphasize transferable skills have experienced:

- Increased access to local talent
- Shorter vacancies
- Lower recruitment and training costs
- Improved employee retention
- A more resilient and adaptable workforce

The experience of employers in Huron County is that valuing core competencies over narrow job histories leads to measurable benefits.

## Spotlight: General Coach | Hensall, Ontario

### Engaging refugees in employment

**Background:** The first time General Coach hired international workers was in 1986 when Canada welcomed Vietnamese refugees. The company hired many Vietnamese workers at that time and four of those original hires are still working at the company today. In 2015, General Coach found its production expanding, and that coincided with the influx of Syrian refugees to Canada and Huron County. The company was in a similar situation in 2022 when Ukrainians fleeing war arrived, and they gladly received many referrals from different organizations supporting newcomers.

**On Hiring Transferable Skills:** Given that none of these refugees have had any Canadian work experience, hiring staff at General Coach needed to assess applicants' suitability for work based on other factors, such as transferable skills. They do look at resumes to see if applicants have basic abilities, such as the ability to read a tape measure, but the decision is more based on the interview process (in which bilingual members of the community or current workers are often used).

"Here we give everybody a chance, so we bring them in [for an interview], try to explain what we want, [and] use our phones to interpret [if needed],"  
– Luke Harris, Operations Manager | General Coach, Hensall.

The business looks for soft skills like work ethic and punctuality.

"I can teach you anything, but I can't teach you how to come to work... If they tell me their attendance is perfect, I'm going to give them the opportunity to come work here. [In most cases, once hired] they go to town with it and just excel quickly."

”

## 2 What do I need now, and what can be learned?

Arguably, one of the most valuable transferable skills is the **ability to learn**.

The possession of ‘hard’ skills, such as knowledge of specific software or experience in specific tasks or the use of specific tools, while important, is less important than the ability to take in and process new information and knowledge. **Investing in workforce training and on-the-job learning** is necessary for a business to stay relevant, grow, innovate, and, ultimately, remain economically viable.



“When hiring we don’t focus solely on technical skill sets. We look for individuals who demonstrate drive, motivation, and a strong eagerness to learn.”

– Allison Letteau, HR Manager | Royal Homes, Wingham

So, before starting the hiring process, stop and ask yourself what skills you need an employee to have right away, and what skills can be learned either on the job, or through training programs.

To determine what skills you need within your workforce, you might consider something called “Skills-Mapping.” In simple terms, a ‘skills-map’ is an itemization of the skills your workforce currently possesses. It can be organized in different ways and should be regularly updated as your workforce evolves. Employers, even those who don’t have a very large workforce, may find having a skills-map useful in identifying gaps or deficiencies in their workforce needs. This knowledge can then be used during the hiring process to find candidates who can fill these gaps, or to offer training to employees based on those needs. See more about Skills-Mapping in Section 9. At its heart, however, **it’s simply about knowing who your workers are and what they can do.**

### Spotlight: BM Ross, Goderich, Ontario

#### Investing in Learning Ability

For BM Ross, whether they are hiring someone from Canada or a new immigrant, the number one skill an employee must possess is the ability to learn.



“Someone with 20 years of experience somewhere else won’t necessarily be able to step in and plug that experience, apples to apples, with what we do here... We do have specific codes and regulations and standards... within the province, and we’d be in a lot of trouble if we try to put out a work product that didn’t meet [those standards]. So it can be a bit of a process to get really acquainted with what the local requirements are.”

– Andrew Garland, Vice President | BM Ross, Goderich

Often newcomers to Canada consistently demonstrate motivation in completing training, and in obtaining advanced certifications at BM Ross.

# Identifying training opportunities

Remember that employee training does not happen only at the time of onboarding. Employers should provide staff with training opportunities at regular intervals or as needs are identified. Once you've identified what skills your workers need, the next step is to find suitable training programs.

## Keep in mind:

■ Employment Ontario service providers offer funding for job placements for eligible workers<sup>1</sup> paid out over a period, and these may include training allowances. Paperwork requirements for this program are minimal for employers. *Check for eligibility criteria.*

■ Funding for off-site training programs exists, though availability fluctuates, such as the Canada-Ontario Job Grant<sup>2</sup>, which can offer employers up to 100% of the cost of employee training.

■ There are many private training organizations. The Technical Training Group<sup>3</sup> focuses on skilled trades, and while the training is not free, it is customizable and local, operating in Huron and Perth Counties.

■ Ontario colleges are an excellent source of training and some of them have programs that specifically focus on getting immigrants to Canada, from which local employers may recruit.

■ If applicable to your industry, consider apprenticeships, including group sponsorships where more than one employer can sponsor an apprentice, which can be helpful for small employers who may not have enough licensed technicians to fully take on the apprenticeship requirements. *Be sure to also ask at your local Employment Ontario office about Apprenticeship Signing Bonuses.*

■ Co-ops, both high school and college or university level, are excellent opportunities for employers, allowing time for training and getting to know new staff members before fully committing to the requirements involved in apprenticeships or regular employment. Note also that co-ops may be paid or, particularly with high school students, unpaid.

■ The Centre for Education and Learning of the Avon Maitland District School Board offers free training, including literacy and basic skills upgrading<sup>4</sup>, as well as English as a Second Language Classes. *Check eligibility requirements.*

**The key is to be flexible with what you're looking for in a new employee and remember that transferable and soft skills will, over time, win out over hard skills and specific experience. For support in finding suitable training programs, reach out to the Huron County Economic Development office or a local employment service provider.**

<sup>1</sup> Visit Agilec, the employment service provider in Huron County for office locations. Inquire about eligibility criteria. <https://agilec.ca/>

<sup>2</sup> Check the status of this Ontario-Canada Job Grant regularly. Visit: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/canada-ontario-job-grant-cojg>

<sup>3</sup> Visit Technical Training Group: <https://www.technicaltraininggroup.org/>

<sup>4</sup> Get SET (Skills, Education and Training) – Employment Ontario Partners Gateway: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/adult-learning-literacy-program>

# 3 Where do I find diverse applicants?

It may be tempting to immediately turn your attention overseas to find diverse workers. However, before navigating the various immigration programs look closer to home. Recruiting diverse workers who already hold open work permits, or who are already Permanent Residents or Canadian citizens, is a much simpler process.

To make sure that your job postings are seen by a diverse set of potential workers, make sure you advertise in a variety of places.



## Online job sites

Post job advertisements on websites such as Job Bank, Connect2Jobs.ca, Huron County Job Board, Indeed, LinkedIn, ZipRecruiter, Glassdoor etc.



## Social media

Advertise your job on Facebook and Instagram. Post the job advertisement in Facebook groups that cater to newcomers, such as the Huron Welcome Hub for Newcomers, etc.



## Employment service providers

In Huron County, Agilec can help businesses develop advertisements and pre-screen potential hires. They can also prepare and support candidates who may already be registered and eligible for funded training or employer hiring bonuses and wage incentives.



## Networking and word-of-mouth

Get into the community and let people know you're hiring. Share the information with those in the community who are well-connected with newcomers, such as local immigrant sponsors (e.g. churches, clubs such as Rotary, Lions, Kinsmen/Kinnettes), English as a Second Language instructors (through Avon Maitland District School Board), Huron County library volunteers and staff, and the Huron County Local Immigration Partnership.



"We are growing quickly. We had 35 employees on the manufacturing floor at the end of June 2025, and by November that number had grown to 109. By next year, we could be anywhere between 300 to 400. To support that growth, we'll need to access every talent pool available."  
– Allison Letteau, HR Manager | Royal Homes, Wingham

While Huron County is becoming more and more diverse, it's also possible to **pull workers from urban spaces**. Keep in mind, however, that barriers to employment for many newcomers to Canada exist, such as a lack of transportation, and a lack of affordable housing. (This is true for workers both in and out of Huron County.)

- Explore the possibility of carpooling or other transportation programs for your staff and make sure your job posting lets them know assistance will be provided.
- Use your own resources and established connections to help new staff find housing that they can afford. Consider including a housing allowance as part of your salary components.



“When you’re running 250 employees...and in Huron County it’s tough to find 250 employees, you have to go outside. And we’ve had such a great experience.”

- Roger Faulkner, President | General Coach, Hensall

## Spotlight: Jokey North America Inc., Goderich, Ontario

### Attracting Diverse Workers

Immigrant communities in small towns tend to be very tight knit, meaning once you have a few workers from diverse backgrounds, it becomes easier to get more. Jokey uses a Referral Program: money is given to current workers if they provide the name of someone whom they feel could fill a role at the company. If that person is actually hired, the person who made the referral receives more money, and if that person ends up staying with the company, there are additional bonuses.

Currently, at Jokey North America, the majority of their staff comes through word-of-mouth.



Jokey also draws staff from urban areas, but to be successful, the company provides significant support.

Support is personalized to the needs of the individual and may include help finding suitable housing, covering rent for the first couple of months, arranging for transportation such as organizing carpooling, and assisting in obtaining Ontario driver’s licences. They also provide significant support related to immigration paperwork requirements.

# 4 How do I create a job posting that diverse applicants will apply to?

It is possible that your job advertisements are limiting your applicants. Below is a list of Dos and Don'ts to refer to when creating your job postings.

**DO... focus on diverse experience and skills.**

**DON'T... ask for 'Canadian experience'.**

As discussed in Step One, when you list required skills, make sure they are ACTUALLY required and not simply your wish list. Studies show that many applicants (particularly women) will abandon a job application if they do not feel they possess 100% of the listed requirements. Instead, emphasize transferable and soft skills, and remember that not all experience is paid experience. Volunteer work, unpaid work, or work within informal economies is still valid experience. You may want to explicitly say, "Alternative experience or expertise will be considered."



As of January 1, 2026, Ontario prohibits employers from requiring Canadian work experience in job postings, application forms, or interviews. This rule, under the Working for Workers Five Act, aims to remove barriers for newcomers, as requiring such experience is considered a form of discrimination. Employers must focus on skills, credentials, and experience regardless of where they were obtained, unless Canadian experience is legally required.\*

**DO... consider foreign credentials if possible.**

**DON'T... abandon resumes that use unfamiliar terms.**

Many immigrants to Canada use organizations such as World Education Services (WES) or International Credential Assessment Services (ICAS) to let employers know how their foreign credentials, which may use unfamiliar terms, compare to Canadian standards. While these are great services, they can be cost prohibitive (several hundred dollars) and take a significant amount of time (several months). So, if you receive an application that lists foreign credentials that you are unfamiliar with, don't reject the application outright. Instead, take the time to connect with the applicant and start a conversation about it.

**Note: Credential Assessment is not the same as official Canadian Credential Recognition, which is required by law for certain regulated professions, such as healthcare.** In these cases, the process in obtaining Credential Recognition can be long, and frustrating for newcomers. As an employer, you can familiarize yourself with the process for your specific industry so that you can both provide assistance and take advantage of bridging or internship programs.

To learn more about bridging programs, visit:

<https://www.ontario.ca/page/adult-learning-ontario-bridge-training-program>.



Note: Staff at Employment Ontario offices can help you create job postings for free. For complete steps on how to create a job posting yourself, see **How to Hire In Huron Employer Guide** from the Economic Development office.

<https://www.huroncounty.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Employer-Toolkit-How-To-Hire-FINAL-KH-2024-09-09-1.pdf>

**DO...** use simple, clear, and concise language.

**DON'T...** overuse 'keywords'.

You may have been told that using 'keywords' for Search Engine Optimization will result in more people seeing your job posting, but if you overdo it, your job posting just comes across as vague. Be clear, keep it fairly short, and use everyday language. Avoid jargon or terms that would not be familiar outside of your workplace and community. Be explicit about job duties and responsibilities. And though you might think you are being open to all applicants, you need to come right out and say it, for example:

- "We are an equal opportunity employer committed to diversity and inclusion."
- "We encourage new Canadians/Permanent Residents, and those with different backgrounds and ethnicities to apply."
- "Don't have all the required skills/experience? Let's talk."

One final **DO** is to consider **potential barriers** that applicants may have, and **explicitly address them in your job posting**. E.g. assistance may be provided for transportation, housing, or immigration requirements.

## Which job posting is more likely to attract diverse applicants?

### Job Posting Example A: Restaurant ABC

**Job Title:** Server

**Description:** We are seeking an experienced server to work in our fast-paced restaurant, full time, Wednesdays to Sundays, 2 to 9pm.

**Required Skills & Experience:**

- 2+ years of experience working in a restaurant or food service industry in a customer-facing role.
- Demonstrated experience managing competing demands and working in a fast-paced environment.
- Must hold Smart Serve and Safe Food Handling certifications.
- Knowledge of local area preferred.
- Able to read and write in English required.

**To apply:** Send resume and cover letter with 3 references by email to [contact@restaurantabc.ca](mailto:contact@restaurantabc.ca).

### Job Posting Example B: Restaurant XYZ

**Job Title:** Server

**Description:** We are seeking a friendly, energetic, adaptable, and hard-working individual to join our team as a full time server, working Wednesdays to Sundays from 2 to 9pm.

**Required Skills & Experience:**

- No previous experience in a food service setting is required, but candidates must be willing to learn.
- Ability to multitask and remain calm in a fast-paced environment.
- Willingness to obtain Smart Serve certification within 3 months and Safe Food Handling Certification within 3 weeks (assistance and training will be provided for the right candidate, employer will cover cost of certifications).
- Must be willing to communicate with customers in a friendly manner.
- We encourage applications from diverse candidates.

**To apply:** Get in touch! Send us your resume at [contact@restaurantxyz.ca](mailto:contact@restaurantxyz.ca), drop it off in person, or pop in to see us between 2 to 5pm preferred.

# 5 Recruiting from overseas

Most employers will meet their needs faster by hiring newcomers already in Canada. However, in some circumstances, employers may be interested in bringing economic migrants to Canada. This requires knowledge of the various legal pathways required to bring workers to Canada. The main pathways for hiring a foreign worker are:

1. Temporary Foreign Worker Program
2. International Mobility Program
3. Various Permanent Residency Programs such as Express Entry or Provincial Nominee Program



For assistance in navigating these programs, contact the Local Immigration Partnership at Huron County's Economic Development office, or a Regulated Canadian Immigration Consultant or immigration lawyer.

Find a registered immigration consultant through the College of Immigration and Citizenship Consultants: <https://college-ic.ca/publicregister>

Find an immigration lawyer through the Canadian Immigration Lawyers Association: <https://cila.co/>

Note: In almost all cases, employers must show that there are no Canadians or Permanent Resident workers who can do the job for which you are hiring. To fulfil this requirement, you will have to complete a Labour Market Impact Assessment (LMIA). An LMIA is an application demonstrating the labour market need for the worker/position. An LMIA is reviewed by Employment and Social Development Canada (EDSC) who decide whether the application is successful or not. An LMIA application is evaluated based on NOC codes.

National Occupational Classification (NOC) are used to standardize job descriptions across borders and industries. They include information regarding industry type, responsibility level, typical educational requirements, and a clear and detailed list of usual duties performed for each job. NOC codes are used to match job duties and confirm that the worker has the required experience. **This makes them valuable tools not only for employers seeking to hire foreign workers, but also for employers seeking to hire workers in Canada with international experience.**



## Where do I find more information about NOC codes?

The government of Canada provides this information: <https://noc.esdc.gc.ca/>

## How do I use NOC Codes to hire diverse workers already in Canada?

- When you create job postings, refer to the Lead Statement and Main Duties list to ensure you are being clear and haven't missed anything.
- Use them to determine typical salaries across industries and to ensure that those salaries align properly with the responsibilities workers are taking on.
- When assessing resumes, use the Lead Statement and Main Duties list (and NOT job titles, which may vary widely from country to country) to determine a potential candidate's relevant experience.



## Advice from an Employer:

Invest in a reliable immigration consultant or lawyer. ESDC requirements change often, and it's difficult to keep up. Make sure your representative is authorized and trustworthy. Many people pay high fees and receive almost no real support. To protect yourself, contact Huron County's Local Immigration Partnership. They can help you confirm you're getting proper, accurate advice.

- Rebecca Ferguson, HR Manager | Jokey North America Inc.

## Spotlight: Bayfield Berry Farm

### Recruiting from Beyond Canada

**Background:** Marlene Beyerlein started the Bayfield Berry Farm in 2001. In the high season - spring to early fall - Marlene depends on a reliable workforce to assist with many tasks in the orchard and fields along with processing the fruit and berries. Some berries are baked into pies, or made into jams and other products. In 2019, Marlene and her father diversified the business by starting a winery and distillery. The field to table products are available at the on-farm retail store, numerous local Farmers' Markets, online platforms and wholesale accounts.

For the first several years of operation, the Bayfield Berry Farm struggled to hire enough workers to plant and harvest the berries. Though Marlene would consider anyone local who was willing to do the job, students were the main demographic, and reliability was a constant issue. Workers often arrived late or sometimes didn't show up at all. This situation came to a tipping point in 2005, when, as a result of lack of workers, the company actually lost its contracts to deliver products to local grocery stores. Marlene decided she couldn't continue with such an unreliable workforce, and she turned her attention to hiring workers from overseas.

**Finding Reliable Staff:** Now, the Bayfield Berry Farm employs six seasonal workers through the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP) of the IRCC. All six are from Trinidad and Tobago. With the SAWP Program, employers must choose one country from a specified list. Trinidad and Tobago was chosen as English is spoken there. During the eight months in Canada, the workers live on-site in housing. They are able to use Marlene's car to go to town at least once a week. They are required to have an international driver's licence before they arrive in Canada, and once here, Marlene pays for them to get their Ontario licence. From the workers' perspective, the money is excellent and the living conditions are comfortable, so the same workers return every year. A working family relationship and it is very unique to have the same workers travel each season and be part of their personal advancement and family life back home.

Building the required housing facilities was a major investment but has proven to be well worth the effort and money. At first, it was a challenge, having to figure out the application process, but assistance was available from an organization called Foreign Agricultural Resource Management (FARMS) and liaison officers through the SAWP program.

Besides the six Temporary Foreign Workers, the Berry Farm also employs two workers, also from Trinidad and Tobago, who have become Permanent Residents in Canada, as well as some part-time newcomers to Canada from Ukraine.



“Just be persistent, keep on it, don’t get frustrated by the process... Once you make up your mind just to push through, you will get there.

“Sometimes there are a few hurdles... it’s not foolproof, but I’m 99% better off than what I had going on. If I didn’t have this workforce, there’d be a closed sign on my door.”

- Marlene Beyerlein, CEO | Bayfield Berry Farm Inc.



# 6 You've found some potential candidates. Now what?

It has long been lamented by employment counsellors that the qualities that allow someone to excel at job interviews are rarely the same qualities that allow them to perform effectively at their jobs. Traditional interviews reward extroverted, highly verbal, quick-thinking and processing individuals who are familiar with and comfortable with their environments. Diverse applicants may be communicating in second or third languages and may be fairly new to interactions with any Canadians, let alone potential employers.

To help diverse applicants perform well in job interviews, standardize your process by offering candidates clear information and accommodations at least a week prior to the scheduled interview date. You should also be aware of your unconscious bias.



Unconscious biases are shortcuts our brains use to process vast amounts of information quickly. The behaviour is a natural, evolutionary trick and in all likelihood allowed our ancient ancestors to make split-second, life-saving decisions in the face of potential dangers. However, in our modern age, unconscious bias can lead to discrimination in our communities and workplaces. Even when our unconscious biases are not inherently negative, they can still result in misleading and unfair stereotyping. **Try to see everyone as an individual**, and not as a member of a specific group.

## Before the interview:

- Send the applicant information about the interview structure, the types of questions they'll be asked, and who they'll be speaking with. Send this information both in Word format and in video or audio format.  
.....
- Offer accommodation, ensuring candidates they can have breaks or extra processing time if needed, or any specific technology (including translation tools). Note, it is acceptable to offer the services of interpreters. You can find interpreters through the London Cross-Cultural Centre, or simply use trusted contacts in your community, providing you explain clearly to them the requirements of their role.  
.....
- When scheduling the interview with the candidate, be clear and explicit about the details and requirements. Do not use vague language.  
.....
- Offer the option of virtual interviews, and make sure you provide the candidate with back-up methods of contact. Eg. you may be accustomed to using Microsoft Teams, but it may be a challenge for candidates to access that program. Offer alternatives such as Zoom, GoogleMeet, WhatsApp, or simple phone calls, in case there are technical difficulties or glitches.  
.....
- Prepare your questions: Besides using a standardized list of questions (that you use for ALL candidates), focus on behaviour-based or situational questions, rather than focusing on past experience or credentials.



## Illegal questions:

Questions are illegal if they may lead to discrimination based on Canada's Human Rights Act. Often times, employers just think they are making pleasant small talk and are unaware that the question they may be asking is illegal. Briefly, you cannot ask a potential candidate about:

- Age
- Gender
- Marital status
- Race or Ethnicity
- Sexual orientation
- Whether they have disabilities
- Religion
- Personal appearance
- If they have children

If your production facility operates on weekends and you are concerned that a potential candidate will need to attend church, simply ask, "Are you available to work on Saturdays and Sundays if needed?" rather than asking, "Are you religious?" or "Do you attend church?"

**Note: If you ask one candidate this question, you must ask ALL candidates the same question.**



Visit Canada's Human Resources Centre website for a clear and thorough explanation of what questions are legal and illegal:

<https://www.canadahrcentre.com/base/interview-questions/>

## Spotlight: BM Ross | Goderich

### A Picture is Worth a Thousand Words

When management at BM Ross received a referral to hire an engineer who spoke very little English, they weren't sure how they would assess her skills and experience, but they agreed to meet with her. The applicant brought an interpreter with her to the interview, which was helpful, but even more useful was a USB containing a portfolio of projects she'd completed in Ukraine. Being able to look at drawings was tremendously helpful.



"If I had to review [only] written content, I would have been lost and unable to make a comparison."

- Andrew Garland, Vice President | BM Ross, Goderich

The lesson here is to be flexible with the structure your interview takes and allow potential candidates to demonstrate their skills to you in different ways.



# 7 Conducting effective interviews

You have your questions ready and have sent clear, thorough instructions to your interviewees. You have interpreters on standby if they've been requested and have offered either in-person (if possible) or virtual interviews. How do you make sure your interviews are actually measuring someone's skills and potential, and not simply their language ability?

- First, take the time to create a safe and comfortable environment. Don't rush into your questions. Start with simple small talk (keeping in mind that you cannot ask illegal questions) and build rapport.
- If you are interviewing someone without a translator who speaks English as a Second Language, be sure that you are not using too many idioms or colloquial expressions and limit your use of phrasal verbs (such as get at, take off, go for...) in favour of more formal language. Though phrasal verbs are extremely common in spoken English, they tend to be challenging for English as a Second Language speakers. If a candidate is struggling with a question, it's okay to reword it. One of the reasons for the prominence of the English language in the world is its flexibility; it has many ways to say the same thing. You can also allow candidates to use translation tools.



## Advice from an ESL instructor:

In polite English, it is the custom to soften or modify what we are saying so as not to be too direct or appear forceful. For advanced English as a Second Language speakers, this is an important skill to learn. However, you may be interviewing someone with very basic English ability, and for them, your attempts at politeness are likely to be misunderstood, or not understood at all. Keep your language simple, and convey politeness with your tone, rather than your words.

- Don't make judgements based on non-verbal cues like eye contact, tone, pauses, or head movement. These are heavily influenced by cultural background. Focus on the content of their answers.
- Consider non-typical interview techniques, such as demonstrative or active interviews where you may ask a candidate to simulate a task. This takes the pressure off of verbal communication and gives you the opportunity to see that applicants have the skills needed to do the job.
- Don't rush. Allow candidates time to think about their answers. While not everyone is good at thinking things up on-the-spot, this is especially difficult when you are conducting yourself in a second or third language.
- Note that newcomers to Canada may have a hard time providing employment references. If they do have past employers who are both able to communicate with you and willing to connect with you, that's great, but if not, and if reference checks are a definite must for your organization, consider using more personal references, such as host families, landlords, employment counsellors, or other members of the community who have gotten to know your potential workers.

Above all, make sure you're looking for transferable skills. Focus on potential, not a narrow checklist of specific skills and abilities.



## Events to Watch for:

Employment Service providers in Huron County are developing a series of event days, where candidates hoping to work in different industries (e.g. health care, welding, carpentry, electrical) can actually present their skills for local employers. These activities have been hugely successful for employers hiring apprentices in Bruce County, allowing them to take on skilled, new staff members that they would not otherwise have considered.

Employment Service providers will be coordinating with the Avon Maitland District School Board, Technical Training Group, Huron Manufacturers' Association, local colleges, and other organizations to bring skilled job seekers and employers together. For more information on these upcoming event days, contact the Economic Development Office of Huron County.

## Spotlight: Steve & Mary's On the Square | Goderich

### Interviewing for 'Character'

Steve and Mary Bruce are proud of their diverse workforce. Staff at the restaurant vary in ethnicity, citizenship, gender identity, and learning ability. Out of eight to twelve staff (depending on the season), they currently employ two new Canadians.



"We didn't go out looking for [diversity]; we didn't go out looking for people who might have challenges otherwise finding employment, we just evaluate people as they come in the front door to apply, and we are all about someone's character rather than their skill sets. We find it really important to listen to people's stories, and then that tells us a little more about their character... It's not always about the skill. Skills can be taught."

- Steve Bruce, Owner | Steve & Mary's On the Square, Goderich

And this is true even for candidates who don't speak English well. "You can learn a lot from somebody just taking the time and patience to explain things at a slower pace, and ask the questions at a slower pace, and ask really basic questions. And from those basic questions, I find you get a really good sense of who they are and what they're about," says Steve.

Steve and Mary are always looking for transferable skills, but some things, like work ethic or motivation, are hard to get a grasp on during the interview process. "You don't really see that until you see them work. [In an interview,] people will tell you whatever they want you to hear. You don't actually see it until they start working for you. And then you can't even really see that for the first little bit of time. It takes a while to get there." This is why, for Steve and Mary, a candidate's personal history plays a big role. "We like 'second chance' stories... we think that's really important. Everyone has challenges in their life at some point, and how they get through it is part of their story. It's from there that we make our hiring decisions."

# 8 How to develop an inclusive and thorough onboarding process

## Congratulations! You've found a great new employee.

The next step is to bring them onboard. You may already have a prepared 'Welcome Package' for new employees, which includes required paperwork for payroll and benefits, and which outlines workplace rights and expectations. If so, great, but keep in mind how overwhelming all of that can be for new Canadians. To make the experience a positive one, ensure that you take the time to sit down with your new employee and go over things in detail, even things that may seem obvious to you.



Many local employers spend the time and money to translate as many onboarding documents as possible, particularly if they are hiring several workers from the same country. This ensures not only that the new staff will thoroughly understand workplace policies and procedures but makes the work site a safer place for all staff.

### Support mandatory training

Depending on the position, your new employee may have low reading comprehension or language ability, and they likely have never been exposed to Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System (WHMIS) training, Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities (AODA) training, or any other required training. This may be true both for established and new Canadians. Offer assistance in going through the welcome package and in completing any required health and safety training. **Note: Get Skills, Education and Training (SET) program through the Avon Maitland District School Board can assist with this.**

### Help workers understand their rights

Ensure that your new employees understand the Ontario Employment Standards Act. Rights that Canadians take for granted, such as statutory holidays, vacation pay, and the right to refuse unsafe work may be new information for new Canadians and immigrants to Canada. This includes ensuring they understand that you, as an employer, will undertake your 'duty to accommodate'\* any sincerely held religious beliefs, such as dress code, prayer breaks, or time off for religious holidays or events.

**Note: Information is available online in different languages:**

<https://www.ontario.ca/page/posters-required-workplace#section-1>

### Provide guidance on payroll and deductions

Review the payroll process and ensure that your employees understand their pay stubs. New Canadians are often shocked at the number of deductions from their gross income. Benefits such as Employment Insurance, Canada Pension Plan, and other health insurance options may not exist in other countries. Take the time to explain what all the codes mean.

### Communicate expectations


Finally, do not assume that your new employees understand your workplace culture. Be clear about expectations including what time your employees usually arrive at work, how much time is spent in idle chit-chat about the weather, weekend plans, or sports games, when and how often they take breaks, and when they leave for the day. In short, be thorough and take the time needed to ensure understanding.

# 9 Leveraging the skills of your workforce

While the actual statistics are difficult to pinpoint with accuracy, estimates show that a significant portion of immigrants are under-employed compared to non-immigrant Canadians, meaning their talent and skills are being under-utilized. While there may be many reasons for this – difficulty in obtaining Canadian credentials from regulatory bodies, lack of language skills, prejudice or racism – the result is an economic loss. While many immigrants, for lack of choice, continue working in under-utilized positions, others will leave to seek better opportunities elsewhere.

One way to keep talented immigrants and to make better use of their skills is to provide them with opportunities for advancement within your organization. The first step in doing this is ensuring your staff understands what skills or credentials are required in order to perform different tasks and at different levels. The second step is to make sure staff have regular opportunities to undergo training, so they are able to take advantage of that knowledge. See Section 2 more information on training initiatives.

A skills-map may be used by your workforce to identify internal growth opportunities. There are no limits to the ways in which a skills-map can be organized, but the key is for staff to be able to visualize potential career ladders.



Note: Skills-maps mirror the organization of the National Occupational Classification (NOC) codes, which were referenced in section 5: Recruiting from overseas. Familiarity with this framework may be useful for staff who are hoping to advance within your organization. Put simply, NOC codes classify jobs into Training, Education, Employment and Responsibilities (TEER) categories. Low skilled positions require little formal education and on-the-job training (TEER 5) to management positions requiring a great deal of formal training and experience (TEER 0).

Two examples are below:

## Example 1: Manufacturing / Production Pathway

Level	Role	Key Skills & Competences	Training/Support Needed	Timeframe*
Level 1	Production Operator	Basic machine operation, safety awareness, teamwork	On-the-job, WHMIS, safety training	0-12 months
Level 2	Skilled Technician	Troubleshooting, preventative maintenance, data recording	Technical certificate, internal mentoring	1-2 yrs
Level 3	Shift Supervisor	Leadership, scheduling, quality control	Supervisory training, leadership coaching	2-4 yrs
Level 4	Production Manager	Budgeting, process improvement, team development	Diploma/degree, management training	4-6 yrs

\*Typical timeframes

This kind of map helps employers articulate “if you join at level 1, here’s how to advance” — setting expectations and making talent investment visible.

## Example 2: Health / Care-Services Growth Ladder

Step	Role	Skills & Competences	Internal Pathways	Supports
A	Personal Support Worker (PSW)	Direct care, communication, empathy	Mentoring by senior staff	Foundation certificate
B	Registered Practical Nurse (RPN)	Clinical skills, planning, patient management	Internal bridging program	RPN licensure
C	Registered Nurse (RN)	Advanced care, supervision, tech use	Employer-sponsored RN program	RN licensure
D	Unit Coordinator / Nurse Mgr	Leadership, budgeting, human resources	Leadership development	Mgmt certificate

This map emphasizes cross-role mobility and shows how newcomers (including internationally trained) can grow into higher-credential roles.

If you'd like more information about skills-mapping, use the **skill-mapping toolkit**. It provides step-by-step guidance on assessing current employee skills, recognizing transferable competencies from internationally trained professionals, and addressing skill gaps through targeted training.

An example of a skills-mapping tool for the Information and Communication Technology sector can be found at: <https://etalentcanada.ca/skills-mapping-tool/selection>



### Advice from an employer:

While the myriad translation software at our fingertips is undeniably beneficial for workplace communication among staff from different backgrounds, for highly skilled workers who may need a specific level of English competency to obtain professional credentials, that easy-to-access technology may have drawbacks. Be aware that, at a certain level, dependence on translation technology can hinder an employee's language acquisition. Where possible, encourage your workers to attempt to communicate using English, even if it takes a little longer and even if some errors are made. Fostering a culture of learning means allowing for mistakes.

- Andrew Garland, Vice President | BM Ross, Goderich



# 10 Fostering cultural integration in the workplace

All employees want to feel safe and comfortable, and they want to be seen and heard. In diversifying your workforce, **there may be push-back from some segments of your organization who hold biased views**. Understand that in most cases, this is borne of ignorance. It is human nature to feel uncomfortable or threatened with what is unfamiliar.

## So, as an employer, what can you do about it?

Understand that cultural integration is a two-way street. For newcomers, it takes time to develop awareness and understand the culture that surrounds them. Management can help newcomers walk across a metaphorical bridge that spans two cultures and show existing staff how to do the same.

Besides implementing operational accommodations for all staff, such as offering flexibility with breaks, scheduling, and holidays, it is incumbent upon the employer to provide **strong leadership**. Inclusivity starts at the top. Management at ALL levels must model the behaviour and attitudes it hopes to see among its workforce. Many workplace disagreements and tensions result from misunderstandings. Consequently, **open, respectful communication must be encouraged**. It is no secret that kindness and respect begets kindness and respect.

### Best practices:

- Cultivate 'cultural ambassadors'. These are individuals who may or may not be in management positions who foster team building among diverse workers. This could include organizing workplace or off-site get-togethers like potlucks (nothing brings people together like sharing food), sharing music from different cultures, or fun ideas like 'word of the day' where all staff learn one word in a different language that can be used on the job.
- Explore the idea of mentorship programs or partnering programs where existing staff are paired with new staff. This could be for actual work shifts, breaks, or training. And keep in mind that your most experienced employee may not be the best at communication and training. Consider compatibility and, above all, the skill of patience.
- You also might consider cross-cultural or diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility (DEIA) training for all management positions.
- Develop a deeper understanding of how to build a workplace culture where everyone feels a sense of belonging. Review the **Building Belonging: Equity, Diversity and Inclusion in Rural Communities** guide. <https://www.huroncounty.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Building-Belonging-Equity-Diversity-and-Inclusion-in-Rural-Communities-S.pdf>

Just as it takes time to build solid relationships, true cultural integration also takes time, but it is worth it, as both the economy and society in general benefit. Cultural integration in the workplace leads to cultural integration in the community.



"At Royal Homes, we value diversity in our recruitment. Several Immigrants have recently joined our team and are fitting in nicely with our Royal Homes team."

- Allison Letteau, HR Manager | Royal Homes, Wingham

# “Training is a constant movement forward.

“It might be one small little detail a day, but it’s still forward momentum. If you become stagnant, that is your worst enemy.

“We know how we want our guests to be treated when they walk through the door. We want them treated like family... so that’s what we encourage our team to do as well.

“We want them to feel welcome, and feeling welcome is different in every culture. So it’s learning and teaching people who don’t have the same cultural background that we have how to [behave here.] We teach it by modelling it... I work side by side with my team, and teach them, whether it’s skills in the kitchen or skills communicating with others in the workforce, or just communicating with customers - I mean we have an open kitchen, so from the kitchen we talk to everybody, as we can.

“It’s about helping people acclimatize to the culture they find themselves in today... how to help envelope them into the Canadian way of life.”

**Steve Bruce, Owner | Steve & Mary’s On the Square, Goderich**



# 11 How local employment services can support your business

Local employment services are publicly funded organizations that support both employers and job seekers. Their role is to strengthen the local workforce by helping businesses find and retain employees who are a good fit.

## ■ They regularly support employers hiring:

- Newcomers to Canada
- Youth and recent graduates
- Career changers
- Internationally trained professionals
- Apprentices and skilled trades candidates

## ■ How employment services can assist your business

- Clarifying hiring needs and identifying transferable skills
- Connecting you to broader talent pools
- Preparing and pre-screening candidates
- Sharing support during hiring through wage subsidies or training supports (when available)
- Supporting onboarding and early retention
- Assisting with training and apprenticeship pathways

## ■ What employers are not expected to do

Working with employment services does not require employers to:

- Become experts in immigration or government programs
- Lower hiring standards
- Take on unsuitable candidates
- Manage added paperwork alone

## ■ When to connect

Employers often reach out when they:

- Are having difficulty filling roles
- Want to explore new recruitment approaches
- Are interested in hiring newcomers, youth, or apprentices
- Are looking to improve retention



## A good place to begin

Visit <https://employmentbghs.ca/employers/> to learn more and connect with local employment services.

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## **Steve & Mary's on the Square**

Steve Bruce, Owner



# Conclusion

Most would agree that a company's workforce should be representative of our wider society. According to Statistics Canada, by 2041, if current trends continue, half of Canadian society will be made up of first- and second-generation Canadians. Just like the rest of Canada, Huron County – and consequently, your customer/client base – is becoming increasingly diverse. It is imperative that you, as an employer, adapt in order to respond to client needs and to new local (and national) markets.



In conclusion, we will let the employers in Huron County who have been making diversity a part of their workforce fabric say it in their own words:



“Diversity of opinion and culture and food – all of those things – bring a stronger, more robust business... you start to get a global perspective when you're bringing [different kinds of] people in... Just do it. I don't know the downside... We're all struggling to hire, so why would you limit a segment of the population? Reach out... Good people are good people... That's all that matters at the end of the day.”

- Paul McInnis, President | Jokey North America Inc., Goderich



“Giving immigrants a chance is important. While training can take a little longer because of language or cultural differences, you need to look at long term investment as they are loyal employees and usually remain long term members of your team.”

- Allison Letteau, HR Manager | Royal Homes, Wingham



"I would encourage a potential employer to take stock of their own situation. Have you been fortunate enough to have good business opportunities and all that on your own? Could you pay it forward a little bit by taking on somebody [who finds themselves in the situation of having to immigrate to a new country] and maybe you'll be surprised the same way that we were.... There's been some net benefit for us that I didn't necessarily think would be there right away."

- Andrew Garland, Vice President | BM Ross, Goderich



"[Embracing diversity means my business is] better, more successful. People, in general, need to be open minded about what their needs are, and have some concessions, because there's always a diamond in the rough. You never know what you're going to get until you – in kitchen language – peel the layers of the onion back."

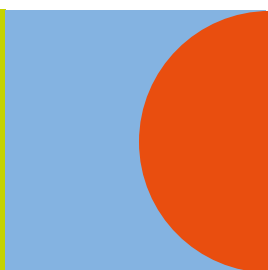
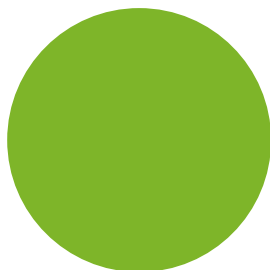
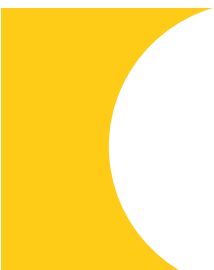
- Steve Bruce, Owner | Steve & Mary's On the Square, Goderich



"It's been nothing but positive. [New Canadians and immigrants] will outwork anybody in this factory... We've had an amazing time with our Syrians. They proved themselves... [and have been some of the most productive workers we've hired.] They're always here; they're always on time....For eight hours every day, you get eight and a half out of them. And that's not just the Syrian people. I'd say that's the overview of a lot of our 'off shore' people....

"They came here with a mission, and that was to get a job and look after their family...There's a certain stigma out there [among some Huron County employers about hiring immigrants and new Canadians] that it's trouble... and it's just not so. It's just not so."

- Roger Faulkner, President | General Coach, Hensall



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