



HALIFAX CHAMBER
OF COMMERCE

Recommendations on an Entrepreneur Stream for the NS Nominee Program

Prepared by: Immigration Sub-Committee of
the Business Environment Committee

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INTRODUCTION

The Halifax Chamber of Commerce has a long history of support for immigration as an effective tool for economic growth. In 1999, the Chamber's International Business Committee began re-examining the issue of immigration and formed an immigration sub-committee, which is still active. The Halifax Chamber concurs with the comment of the Canadian Chamber of Commerce that immigrants are critical to the economic viability and success of our nation.

While governmental responsibility for immigration rests largely with the federal government, Nova Scotia signed a provincial nominee agreement in 2002 to allow the province to nominate up to 1,000 immigration candidates plus their families over five years to address the economic and social needs of the province. Currently the Nova Scotia Nominee Program (NSNP) includes three streams, an economic stream, a skilled worker stream and a community-identified stream. As of March 31, 2005 there were 69 families in Nova Scotia who had entered under the Nominee Program.

January 2005 saw the introduction of a new immigration strategy for the province. The strategy recommended the addition of two new streams to the Provincial Nominee Program: an International Post-Secondary Students stream and a Family Business Stream. The strategy also recommended an assessment of the viability of an Entrepreneur Stream. An Entrepreneur Stream will address immigrant entrepreneurs wishing to reside in Nova Scotia and to invest in and grow a business in this province. This complements the existing/recommended economic and family business stream components of NSNP targeted at immigrant managers and providing human resources for existing immigrant businesses respectively. The

Entrepreneur Stream adds a new dimension to the program, improving access for immigrant entrepreneurs to economic opportunities in Nova Scotia.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Chamber supports the development of an Entrepreneur Stream for the Provincial Nominee Program. Such a stream would provide the immigrant with the opportunity to make a return on his/her investment and could provide a greater variety of investment opportunities to the immigrant.

The Chamber recommends the following principles guide the development of an Entrepreneur Stream of the nominee program. The program should:

- Be flexible;
 - o Assessment of applicants should focus on overall suitability of the candidate and on realistic, quality business plans - not on rigid rules and guidelines.
- Have clear guidelines;
 - o Application requirements, decision-making criteria and timelines must be clear to potential applicants up front.
- Be transparent in its processes;
 - o Processes and program results should be clear not only to applicants and program participants but all Nova Scotians.
- Be adequately supported;
 - o Support for both government and stakeholder delivery agents should reflect the costs of delivering the program and must be sufficient to meet immigration targets;
- Allow freedom for the immigrant entrepreneur;
 - o Constraints on the business decisions of the immigrant

should be minimal. The program should seek to provide the greatest amount of freedom consistent with that faced by any Nova Scotian entrepreneur so that immigrant entrepreneurs are free to make the best business-based decisions possible.

RECOMMENDATIONS - CRITERIA

The Chamber also makes the following recommendations on the criteria for an Entrepreneur Stream:

Investment/net worth requirements:
Beyond the basic requirements, expectations of net worth and investment level should be consistent with nature of the investment indicated in the business plan.

Good faith deposit:
If a good faith deposit is required, the return of the deposit should not be contingent on success of the business venture but rather on indicators of good faith such as a minimum residency requirement & the investment made.

Business Plan Requirement:
In addition to the usual information expected in a business plan, applicants should indicate some of the challenges they anticipate as newcomers. Recognizing that business conditions are constantly changing, it is also important to allow the entrepreneur flexibility in his/her business plan and to ensure the applicant is aware of this flexibility early in the application process.

Exploratory Visit Requirement:

While a requirement for an exploratory visit longer than 7 days is not realistic, applicants should be encouraged to make as long an exploratory visit as possible. During this visit the applicants should be encouraged to meet with immigration officials, attend an orientation session and to meet with business contacts or potential business contacts.

Sector/geographic constraint:
To enable success, newcomers should have the freedom to make the best business-based decisions they can - this means there should be no restrictions as to business sectors or geographic areas where they may invest.

Candidate Requirements:
Management experience should be required of applicants under this stream with value placed on a variety of experience. The requirement should not be for previous business ownership or for a specific type of management experience. The applicant should not be obligated to take an active management role in his/her business.

A self-assessment guide for the applicant, if included, should exist only as a tool for the immigrant himself/herself to gauge his/her level of preparedness.

Given the demonstrable and positive relationship between social networks and the retention of immigrants, applicants' existing personal, social or professional contacts in Nova Scotia should be

given considerable weight in the decision making process.

Other Requirements:

Applicants should be able to qualify whether they are starting a new business or investing in an existing business. There should be no specific job creation or improved market access requirements.

Business Supports:

Immigrant entrepreneurs should be provided with information on the support services available to them both on settlement in Nova Scotia and on the establishment and growth of their businesses. This includes information on existing immigrant support services, in particular MISA, and information on existing business support services such as the Chamber of Commerce and other Business and Professional Associations.

In general the program and its rules and regulations should be concerned primarily with positioning immigrant entrepreneurs for success and encouraging them to stay, not on onerous requirements or restrictions.

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CHAMBER ADVOCACY WORK

More information about the Chamber and its advocacy work can be accessed by contacting the office or visiting the Chamber web site:

Halifax Chamber of Commerce