



**THE IMMIGRANT  
EDUCATION SOCIETY**

**THE FOUNDATIONS IN AGRICULTURAL-BASED  
INDUSTRIES FOR REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS  
(FARM) PROGRAM 2018-2019**

**Public Summary**

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**Background:**

A continuing labour shortage in the agricultural industry and higher rates of unemployment amongst immigrants has provided the basis for a pilot project undertaken by The Immigrant Education Society (TIES) in 2018 and 2019. The Immigrant Education Society (TIES) received funding from Alberta Labour, under the Settlement, Integration and Language Projects (SILP) stream to develop a program that prepares permanent residents for employment in the agricultural and related industries. The FARM program proposes that new immigrants can play a role in supplementing a labour force that has relied heavily on temporary foreign workers partly because they may enter the agricultural industry as part of a structured integration process, instead of lacking access to one as in the case of Temporary Foreign Workers (TFW).

**New Strategy:**

The favourable response of employers to the FARM program indicates it is a viable and novel strategy to bridge sectoral businesses with newcomers seeking employment. The FARM program establishes a roadmap on how to link newcomers in urban settlement agencies seeking their first jobs in Canada with employers seeking employees. Settlement agencies can play an important and *effective* intermediary role in bringing these two groups together. The approach employed in the FARM project may also serve as a strategy to bring newcomers from larger urban areas to their communities.

The program’s partnership engagement model allowed for a program that was relevant to both employers and participants. This was also critical in ensuring: 1) meaningful content in the curriculum 2) practicum placements 3) strengthening the possibilities for participants in gaining employment after completion of the program.

**Summary of Project Activities:**

The activities for this project were to: 1) Create a FARM curriculum, 2) Implement four cohorts over two years, 3) Engage industry employers to accommodate practicum placements for participants, 4) Ensure a majority of graduates attain employment in their desired field. The table below provides detail on the activities and timeframes:

**2018:**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Activity</b>
January – March 2018	Curriculum development and marketing, student recruitment
Early April – mid June 2018	Cohort 1 in class and internship
Mid June- early July 2018	Recruitment for cohort 2
Mid July 2018- end of September 2018	Cohort 2 in class and internship
October- December 2018	Feedback and curriculum refining

**2019:**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Activity</b>
January – March 2019	Curriculum revision, incorporation of last year’s feedback and recommendations and marketing, and student Recruitment for Cohort 3
Early April 2019 – mid June 2019	Cohort 3 in class and internship



Mid June- early July 2018	Recruitment for cohort 4
Mid July 2019 –End of September 2019	Cohort 4 in class and internship
October- December 2019	Feedback, sharing and final reporting

*Activity 1) Create FARM curriculum*

The development of the FARM curriculum involved extensive feedback and participation by engaged employer partners. Through focus groups before, during and after the development and implementation process, the FARM project was able to create a practical and relevant workplace language curriculum. The final versions of the curriculum and workbook are available for download on the TIES website.

*Activity 2) Implement 4 cohorts over 2 years*

The second project activity was to implement 4 intakes/cohorts over the course of 2018 and 2019. For 2018, the FARM project implemented one class per intake, while in 2019, two classes per intake were implemented.

<b>Intake</b>	<b>Total number of enrolees</b>
intakes 1&2	20
intake 3	21
intake 4	26

The project’s original target as proposed was to serve a total of 78 students. The total served was 67. The reason for a slightly lower result in enrollees involved the seasonal timing of the classes which triggered higher dropout rate after registration. Each year involved starting in April to align with the Government of Alberta’s fiscal year. Employers, however, preferred a March training start to ensure April and May hires. While the project originally proposed an adjustment to respond to this development in year 1 (2018), it was already impossible to change the scheduling of the training due to the constraints imposed by the GoA’s fiscal year.

The project found greater success, however in percentage of participants graduating. There was a total of 50 graduates from 4 cohorts. The target was 69% of students to graduate and successfully perform tasks and demonstrate appropriate knowledge. The actual number of those who graduated is 50 students out of 67 for a total of 74%.

<b>Cohort</b>	<b>Graduates</b>
Cohort 1:	11 graduates (1 class)
Cohort 2:	9 graduates (1 class)
Cohort 3:	13 graduates (2 classes)
Cohort 4:	17 graduates (2 classes)

*Activity 3) Engage industry employers who will accommodate practicum placements for participants*

The Immigrant Education Society developed a strong partnership with several experts and business owners in Alberta to sustain the continuation of the FARM program. They have acted as in-class assessors and offsite practicum supervisors:



Name of Partner
Paradise Landscape
Cobblestone Garden Centre
Winter's Turkey
ULS Landscaping
Hale Landscapes Inc.
Florana Gardens
Alpha Better Landscapes
Beaver Dam Nursery

Partnerships were an integral part of the FARM program as participants were able to visit work sites prior to their practicum experiences and receive direct feedback. Partner feedback included classroom simulations through case studies, learn by doing tasks, and active learning onsite tasks.

*Activity 4) Ensure a majority of graduates attain employment in their desired field*

One of the greatest successes of FARM was ensuring a majority of graduates attain employment after completing project. By December 2019, out of 50 graduates, 38 gained employment. The original target outcome for the project was a 55% employment rate. The actual achieved employment rate for the program as such the was 74%, a significant increase.

Of the 12 unemployed graduates in December, 2019, 8 had just completed their practicums and continued to search and were facing seasonal issues. Some of the unemployed 12 had moved cities, were given job offers by could not accept for personal reasons, some had health issues at the time of reporting, or chose to continue studying.

**Project Outputs / Deliverables:**

A key output for the FARM project is the development of a new language curriculum oriented to the agricultural, horticultural, landscaping and related industry. The finalized curriculum is a workplace oriented, flexible and targeted curriculum. The approach to curriculum design involved the use of the Analysis, Design, Development, Implement, and Evaluate (ADDIE) model. This model first appeared in instructional design in the early 1950s, but appeared in written curriculum design in 1975 by the Center for Educational Technology at Florida State University. The design of tasks and activities utilized Universal Design for Learning, an educational framework and set of principles in supporting different ways of learning with targeted creation of varying in-class



activities. Andragogy educational theory related to the Principles of Adult Learning were also incorporated in the design, which suggests that learning for adults should be self-directed, experiential, practical and relevant, and problem based (Smith, 2002). Consequently, a Performance Based Learning model was used which is a balance of theory and content (knowledge and comprehension tasks) and applied and demonstrable tasks (learner practice and production) that indicate a student's level of competency in a given work place task.

The final curriculum includes six units: Pre-Employment, Communication Essentials, Health and Safety, Technical Tasks, Workplace Processes and Procedures, and Practicum Experience. The program outcomes and final learning objectives have been included below.

### **Project Outcomes:**

To achieve the outcomes articulated in the original project proposal, the FARM project developed a 96-hour, part-time, workplace readiness language training program. Over the span of eight weeks learners would learn about and perform a series of tasks related to pre-employment, communication essentials, health and safety, technical and non-technical tasks, reporting and record keeping in agricultural industries in Canada. The course also included a 45-hour practicum experience component, later expanded to 52 hours, which was designed to be completed in two to three weeks in week nine to eleven of the training.

The target audience were newcomers to Canada who may be Permanent Residents or citizens of Canada. Some learners may have had previous work experience in agricultural industries or were seeking alternative career paths. The project also engaged with industry employers and partnered with them for the duration of the project. The partners were enthusiastic in providing curriculum input, as well as engaging graduates in roles at their workplaces. Their participation and enthusiasm was key in ensuring the higher than anticipated rate of success in ensuring graduates gain employment at the conclusion of the program.

### **New Knowledge**

Important insights gained through the project includes the knowledge that a key barrier for newcomers becoming employed in the agricultural, horticultural, landscaping and related job industry is not connecting to employers, and likewise, employers not finding avenues to connect to newcomers looking for work. In fact, there were more positions being offered by employers through this program than there were FARM graduates accepting them.

Newcomers expressed great enthusiasm for the uniqueness of a program focusing on agriculture, horticulture, landscaping and related industries. Participants enjoyed the hands-on emphasis and the practicum. Many also felt that their experience from their previous countries was applicable to employment - an impression they did not have prior to the program.

More broadly, newcomer participants perceived that their social and economic integration benefited through the FARM program. Through their frequent engagement in-class and in-practicum with various participating employers, newcomers felt they increased the extent of their social network in Canada. This is in addition to the natural extension of their networks achieved in becoming familiar with co-participants and classmates, which made the FARM program unique for them. Through the practicum and subsequent offers of employment the participants attributed



progress in their economic integration to the program. A proportion of newcomer participants (53% of those surveyed) also indicated that they would pay for the program if the funding became a barrier to continue.

Businesses were enthusiastic about supporting newcomer employees who are already residents of Alberta. Employers expressed enthusiasm for the program's potential to help with recruitment, an area in which they frequently struggle. The FARM program represented a potential bridge between their industry, which is in frequent need of employees, and newcomers, who are in frequent need of employment.

### **Recommendations for future implementation:**

There are four recommendations for future initiatives that aim to build on the experience of the FARM project: The first is to place more emphasis, as early as during student recruitment, on access to a vehicle for the practicum portion. Since the majority of partners operate in areas that have limited public transportation access, possessing a vehicle facilitates participation in the practicum portion of the program. The second recommendation is to structure the scheduling of the program to align better with partner companies' seasonal operations. In this project's case, the start of the program was aligned to TIES and the funders' fiscal year, which started in April. Several partners expressed that a March start would have been more appropriate, allowing graduates to join the workforce when their business activity was ramping up.

A third recommendation is to ensure the involvement of employers from the outset: during curriculum development onwards, at the interim for tweaks and adjustments, and for final recommendations. This not only rendered much of the technical tasks and activities workplace relevant for practicum hosts, it also ensured a high degree of engagement from the employers. Senior managers, and owners took a stake in the project, with participants becoming familiar with them likewise they getting to know the students.

In terms of the fourth recommendation, it was clear there were two types of FARM participant – those interested in obtaining their first jobs in agricultural and landscaping labour, and those who often with higher degrees and training in agriculture from their previous countries, who are more entrepreneurial in inclination, interested in owning their own farms or agriculturally related business. Valuable next steps would be to explore the viability of offering support to such newcomer entrepreneurs, particularly if this would encourage newcomer migration out of large urban centre into smaller, more regional municipalities.