



## 2025 Learning Exchange Summary

### National Connector Program Learning Exchange: September 22-23, 2025

In September, the Connector Community came together for two days of learning, sharing best practices, solutions, and knowledge, while celebrating our collective work and impact. The following summary captures key discussions and highlights the most important takeaways from each session.

#### Session #1: NCP Marketing Plan Overview

**Presenter:** Social Media and Communications Coordinator (Sarah Boutzis)

Sarah Boutzis, Social Media and Communications Coordinator at Halifax Partnership, presented the updated National Connector Program (NCP) Marketing Plan. She shared how she will support NCP communities with their marketing needs and initiatives throughout the year. The overall focus of the plan is on increasing visibility, engagement, and participation across communities.

Presentation slides are available on the [NCP Members portal](#) under “Learning Exchange 2025.”

#### ❖ **Communication Methods for Successfully Attracting New Connectors and Connectees:**

- Capitalizing on the “Fear of Missing Out” (FOMO)
- Word-of-mouth promotion
- Sharing success stories through diverse channels and formats
- Leveraging LinkedIn as a professional networking tool
- Using presentations and storytelling across various platforms

#### ❖ **Biggest Marketing Challenges Faced Locally:**

- Limited marketing budgets
- Lack of IT opportunities in some regions, resulting in fewer job opportunities and fewer potential Connectors

#### ❖ **Why Promotion of the NCP Matters**

- **Increased Visibility:** Improves awareness and strengthens the overall impact of the program.
- **Economic and Social Context:** Shifting sentiments make this program more important than ever.
- **Reinforcing Value:** Helps communicate the need for and value of the Connector Program within communities.

## ❖ Overall Marketing Goals for 2025-2026 Fiscal Year

- Increase awareness of the program.
- Support communities with their marketing needs.
- Amplify and celebrate successes and achievements across the larger NCP community.
- Increase the overall impact of the program.
- Strengthen engagement and visibility.

## ❖ Marketing Methods:

### 1) Organic Promotion

- **Social Media:** Analyze channel performance; create and share content calendar samples; provide Canva graphics and visual templates; incorporate more photos to maximize engagement.
- **Content Repurposing:** Create monthly roundup posts highlighting the number of new Connectors and Connectees, supported by photos.
- **Website Updates:** Ensure websites are current and include timely, relevant information.
- **Blog Posts & SEO:** New focus on AI search and SEO, including keyword usage for improved visibility in search and AI-generated summaries

### 2) Community Promotion

- **Networking Sessions:** NCP will host four networking sessions this year to engage Connectors and Connectees across communities.
- **Community Events:** Equip teams with promotional materials to use at events to attract future Connectors and Connectees
- **Testimonial Toolkit:** NCP will provide a toolkit to simplify the collection of success stories that can be used in multiple promotional formats.
- **Connectors as Influencers:** Encourage existing Connectors to share their experiences and promote the value of the program to attract new participants.

### 3) Paid Promotion

NCP will develop a national marketing campaign that communities can use as content to promote the program locally. Messaging will focus on the importance of immigrant employment and attachment to the Canadian labour market. Further details will be shared in the future.

## ❖ Discussion Question 1

**What is a one-line core message you would use to market the Connector Program?**

- “Connections matter. Connect better.”
- “Sell the program as you would a product.”

- “Connect today for opportunities tomorrow.”
- “Sometimes it’s more important to know who you know.”

## ❖ Discussion Question 2

**If you had an additional \$1,000 dedicated to promoting the Connector Program, what marketing activity would you invest in, and why?**

- Appreciating Connectors by hosting podcast sessions that showcase the benefits of the program. While promotional videos exist for Connectees, similar content is lacking for Connectors.
- Focusing on Connectees and success stories to stimulate interest while highlighting the Connectors who made these outcomes possible.
- Sharing stories about new graduates or immigrants, including their challenges and successes, and how the program positively impacted their experience in Halifax and across Atlantic Canada.
- Highlighting journeys where Connectees become Connectors and go on to support others in similar situations.
- Showcasing a broader range of program benefits beyond traditional success outcomes for Connectors and Connectees.

## **Session #2: NCP Promotion (Locally & Nationally)**

### **Tools, Testimonials, and Success Stories**

This session was delivered using a “Flipchart World Café” format. Participants were divided into four groups, with each group addressing one of the four discussion questions outlined below.

#### **Q1: Raising Awareness of Connector Program as a National Initiative:**

**How can we increase awareness within local communities that the Connector Program is a national initiative? What new promotional approaches could enhance visibility and credibility at both local and national levels? What tools or resources are needed?**

- Cross-community promotions, including partnerships with national organizations seeking to connect with new communities across Canada.
- Leveraging Canadian pride and immigration data to counter stereotypes and reinforce positive narratives.
- Engaging local radio and national news outlets to increase credibility.
- Strengthening credibility through consistent messaging across all Connector communities.
- Building connections across programs and sharing influential data and insights with peers
- Developing graphics, posters, and visual assets (e.g., maps or regional lists) to highlight program reach across different regions.

- Encouraging collaboration across programs and regions.
- Creating a shared database or contact list for Program Coordinators and Managers.
- Tagging NCP and partner communities on social media and reposting NCP content.
- Increasing outreach to local businesses, community leaders, and organizations to raise awareness of the program.

## **Q2: Reviewing Local Marketing Initiatives:**

**Which marketing initiatives implemented over the past year were most effective? What would you do differently this year, and what tools or resources would help improve impact?**

### **What Worked Well:**

- Using active Connectors as influencers to encourage new participants to sign up.
- Leveraging organic channels, particularly LinkedIn, to promote the program.
- Using HubSpot for lead generation, lifecycle mapping, and client relationship management.
- Support from in-house marketing teams for job fairs, newcomer events, and women-focused initiatives.
- Leveraging the power of testimonials to attract both Connectors and Connectees.
- Word-of-mouth promotion, including bringing Connectees and Connectors together at shared events.
- Speed networking sessions and informal pop-up coffee chats.
- “Connector of the Year” recognition featured in a quarterly magazine in Prince Edward Island, profiling a Connector in a 2–3-page story distributed to more than 1,500 businesses.
- Quarterly events and interviews featuring Connectors.
- Connecting Connectors and Connectees at events to capture success stories from both perspectives.

### **Challenges:**

- Reluctance from some Connectors to actively participate in outreach and networking activities.
- Hesitancy among Connectors to be publicly profiled.
- Audience fatigue due to repetitive marketing content
- Changes in immigration policies, resulting in some Connectors focusing primarily on PR sponsorship or engaging with Connectees without immigration status.
- Retention challenges due to Connectors limited time capacity

### **Suggestions for Improvement:**

- Engaging cultural associations to identify and recruit new potential Connectors.
- Leveraging automation to support lead management and follow-up.

- Measuring and communicating networking as a direct pathway to employment, helping both Connectors and Connectees better understand the value of relationship-building.
- Developing a simple, clear, and concise marketing plan to increase outreach and consistency.

### **Q3: Strengthening Connection and National Belonging:**

**How can we create engaging opportunities that strengthen relationships within the Connector community and reinforce a sense of national belonging? If a shared national content calendar were developed, what themes or topics should it include?**

- Introducing Super Connector certificates to recognize outstanding contributions.
- Highlighting Super Connectors at both national and local levels through social media and newsletters.
- Partnering with HR departments to promote the program within workplaces and professional networks.
- Sharing Connectee stories to showcase impact and outcomes through different mediums.
- Collaborating with small businesses to create cross-platform opportunities connecting Connectees to employers.
- Identifying and addressing barriers to engaging businesses through facilitated discussions.
- Engaging corporations to highlight different divisions and departments and demonstrate how the program supports equitable recruitment.
- Increasing national collaboration and alignment between local and national program efforts.

### **Q4: Amplifying Success Stories and Testimonials:**

**How are success stories and testimonials currently being shared within communities? What new channels, formats, or tools could help amplify these stories nationally?**

- Connector appreciation initiatives to share personal stories and contributions.
- Recording videos that follow Connectees as they transition into Connectors, illustrating the full program journey and impact.
- LinkedIn identified as the primary platform, with discussions on expanding to additional channels.
- Facebook posts noted for achieving broader reach in some communities.
- Sharing stories through newsletters (e.g., Chambers of Commerce), which have generated stronger engagement and more targeted audiences. (e.g., Fredericton)
- Leveraging partner networks and their platforms to promote the program.
- Collaborating with public libraries to promote the program through library staff and community spaces.
- Presenting local success stories to cultural organizations to highlight community champions.
- Promoting job placements through social media posts focused on Connectee outcomes.

- Encouraging Connectors and Connectees to share stories in their own voices to increase organic reach, supported by templates, draft content, and graphics.
- Displaying success stories in high-traffic public spaces such as airports, malls, shopping centres, and institutions.
- Developing a Connector Calendar featuring one Connector per province, positioned as a national contest to support both local and national promotion.
- Leveraging non-traditional local media platforms (e.g., Halifax Noise) to amplify reach.
- Focusing storytelling on the process and journey, not just final outcomes.
- Creating short commercial-style videos explaining how the program works through real stories.
- Exploring opportunities for Connectors to sponsor advertisements to further support promotion.

### **Session #3: Dealing with Difficult Connectees**

This session was delivered through “Case Study Roundtables”, using paired discussions and group sharing. Participants were matched with colleagues from different communities and discussed real-life scenarios involving challenging or difficult Connectees.

Each case study discussion focused on the following questions:

- What was the situation?
- How was it handled?
- What worked, and what did not work?
- If you were in this situation, what would you have done differently?

Participants openly shared challenges, advice, and best practices based on their experiences.

#### **❖ Group A: Setting Clear Expectations from the Start**

Group A emphasized that clearly setting expectations at the beginning of the relationship is critical. Coordinators should communicate that while the program provides valuable networking tools and guidance, it does not guarantee employment. Mutual respect, professionalism, and accountability are essential for both Connectors and Connectees, with Connectees taking responsibility for their own preparation and follow-up.

Key points included:

- The program does not guarantee job placements but offers tools, guidance, and networking support.
- Clear expectations must be established with Connectees at intake.
- A minimum level of dedication and engagement is required for successful connections.
- Best practice is to follow due process and maintain respectful, professional relationships.

- Guidance for Connectees includes; arriving on time, bringing a notebook, engaging in meaningful conversations, and maintaining a professional reputation.
- Connectees must demonstrate commitment to their career development and networking efforts.

### ❖ **Group B: Transparency, Privacy, and Cultural Considerations**

Group B shared insights from a Chamber of Commerce–led initiative supporting business immigrants. A key challenge identified was a lack of transparency from participants who initially registered as job seekers but later expressed interest in entrepreneurship. The group emphasized the importance of clarifying participant goals early and addressing cultural and privacy differences through open communication.

Key points included:

- A business immigration program was launched to support entrepreneurs (Prince Edward Island)
- Some participants were reluctant to provide required information during intake.
- Individuals registering as job seekers later expressed entrepreneurial goals, highlighting the need for clear guidelines and transparency from the outset.
- Service providers shared IRCC informational posters to clarify program expectations.
- Collection of basic personal information is necessary for effective program delivery.
- Cultural differences related to privacy require explanation of Canadian norms and expectations.
- Financial concerns and trust issues could be addressed by requesting official letters from funders or agencies where feasible.
- Developing communication strategies that build trust and credibility was identified as essential.

### ❖ **Group C: Managing Unrealistic Expectations and Professional Boundaries**

Group C discussed cases involving Connectees with unrealistic expectations or aggressive behaviour during meetings. Participants reiterated that Connectors are facilitators, not recruiters, and that boundaries must be clearly communicated to protect the professionalism of both parties.

Key points included:

- A motivated Connectee requested meetings with CEOs of major technology companies. (High ambition was paired with unrealistic expectations)
- Despite being connected, the Connectee continued to make additional demands.
- During meetings, the Connectee displayed pushy and aggressive behaviour.
- The Connector expressed dissatisfaction with the interaction.

- Connectees must understand that individuals they meet are not obligated to provide employment.
- Excessive eagerness may signal a focus on outcomes rather than the networking process.
- The role of the Connector must be clearly explained to prevent unrealistic expectations.

#### ❖ **Group D: Emotional Boundaries and Appropriate Referrals**

Group D focused on the emotional and psychological challenges many newcomers bring to the program. While empathy is important, participants emphasized that Connectors are not therapists. In such cases, referrals to appropriate community or mental health services are necessary. Clear boundaries help prevent role confusion and protect both participants and coordinators.

Key points included:

- Preset expectations are a common challenge.
- Newcomers often carry emotional and psychological stress that can affect program interactions.
- Some clients expect psychological counselling from Connectors.
- Connectors are not mental health professionals and coordinators should refer clients to appropriate support services.
- Relationship conflicts can be difficult to manage without clear role boundaries.
- It is important to clearly distinguish the program's scope from consultancy or counselling services.

#### ❖ **Group E: Orientation, Intake, and Managing Expectations**

Group E reinforced the importance of honesty and transparency in managing expectations. Coordinators should be clear about what the program can and cannot offer and ensure that Connectees with immigration-related concerns are referred to appropriate legal services. Orientation sessions and pre-arrival meetings were suggested to improve understanding of Canadian workplace culture and professional norms.

Key points included:

- Setting realistic expectations with Connectees from the outset
- Providing honest guidance rather than unrealistic optimism or promises
- Referring Connectees to legal service organizations for immigration-related concerns
- Clarifying that Connectors are not immigration advisors but mentors and guides supporting professional integration.
- Being transparent during intake meetings about the program's scope and limitations
- Beginning intake meetings with questions such as, "What do you expect from this program?"

- Managing the impact of word-of-mouth misinformation that can distort the program’s purpose.
- Offering orientation sessions to establish boundaries and explain workplace norms and safety expectations.
- Conducting pre-arrival sessions for newcomers to discuss Canadian workplace culture and employer expectations honestly.

### **Key Takeaway:**

Across all groups, there was strong consensus that **clear communication, structured intake processes, early boundary-setting, and realistic expectation management** are essential to building trust and maintaining productive, respectful relationships between Connectors, Connectees, and coordinators.

## **Session #4: Connectee Engagement and Matchmaking**

This session was conducted using a “Carousel Conversations” format with rotating discussion stations. Participants rotated in small groups across four flipchart stations, each focused on a key stage of the Connectee journey: **Preparation, Matchmaking, Follow-Up, and Innovation.**

### **1. Preparation**

#### **Discussion Questions:**

- How do you set expectations with Connectees from the start?
- What tools or resources help Connectees feel “match-ready”?
- How do you manage Connectees who are not yet ready to be matched?

#### **Suggested Actions:**

- Assign three LinkedIn Learning sessions for Connectees to complete in advance.
- Clearly outline the program and repeat key details at multiple stages using different communication formats.
- Assign preparatory tasks and additional work, such as resume improvements.
- Manage expectations by clearly outlining what to expect at each stage of the process.
- Postpone Connector meetings until required preparation is completed.
- Use a pre-intake checklist to identify critical readiness factors and clearly communicate expectations, including Canadian workplace culture, using an honest and open tone.
- Provide resources to Connectees who are not yet prepared and invite them to re-engage with the program once ready.
- Advise Connectees to send a thank-you message to Connectors within 24 hours of meetings and to request three referrals at the end of the message.

## 2. Matchmaking

### Discussion Questions:

- What criteria contribute to a strong match (e.g., skills, goals, industry, Connector availability, or preferences)?
- What approaches ensure matches feel meaningful rather than random?
- How do you balance Connectee goals with Connector capacity?

### Practical Tips:

- Build strong familiarity with Connectors and their professional interests.
- Prioritize shared goals and common ground to create meaningful matches.
- Use specialty or sector-specific events to facilitate targeted connections.
- Match based on specific needs, transferable skills, and professional alignment.
- Provide Connectors with preparation resources prior to meetings.
- Leverage LinkedIn and other platforms for outreach and engagement.
- Encourage Connectors to share experiences, advice, and insights.
- Consider individual factors such as profession, industry, circumstances, and preferences.
- Wherever possible, match individuals in similar fields and consider personality fit.
- Set expectations early to ensure there is no pressure placed on Connectors.
- Emphasize preparation by providing Connectees with detailed information about their Connector.
- Hyperlink LinkedIn profiles and encourage the use of AI tools to research organizations and prepare relevant questions.
- Reinforce the importance of first impressions and professional presence.
- Clearly restate program parameters throughout the process
- Verify readiness of both Connectees and Connectors prior to matching
- Conduct due diligence by researching both parties before making a match.

## 3. Follow-Up

### Discussion Questions:

- What does effective follow-up look like for Connectees, Connectors, and coordinators?
- How do you measure the success of a match?
- What role should Connectees play in maintaining momentum?

### Best Practices:

- Encourage Connectees and Connectors to share LinkedIn posts following meetings.
- Use checklists and bulk email updates to streamline follow-up.
- Track and analyze positive posts to measure reach and impact.
- Request regular updates from Connectees and use surveys to gather feedback.

- Capture and document feedback consistently to identify challenges and improve future matches.
- Maintain a primary focus on Connectees, with periodic check-ins with Connectors as needed.
- Recognize and thank Connectors regularly (e.g., monthly)
- Emphasize the importance of timelines to ensure timely follow-up.
- Send reminders and toolkits to Connectees to support successful Connector meetings.

#### 4. Innovation

##### Discussion Questions:

- What is the most common challenge in Connectee engagement?
- How can preparation and follow-up be reimaged to increase program impact?
- Are there new approaches—such as digital tools, peer mentoring, or group onboarding—that could strengthen the process?

##### Key Ideas:

- Improve facilitation of Connector expectations to create a smoother engagement process.
- Strengthen understanding by:
  - Clearly defining program parameters
  - Communicating expected outcomes and explaining why certain strategies are effective.
- Introduce verification tools, including:
  - Google Forms or quizzes to confirm learning.
  - “Networking 101” videos paired with short quizzes as part of orientation.
- Enhance post-program support by providing resources to help participants succeed after completing the program.
- Create LinkedIn groups for highly engaged Connectors and Connectees to support peer networking (e.g., IGNITE NB has begun piloting this approach)
- Use HubSpot pipelines to track participants and move them through program stages.
- Tag new connections within LinkedIn groups to increase engagement and visibility.
- Address challenges such as lack of self-confidence or non-responsiveness, often linked to negative experiences or misinformation.

#### **Session #5: Connector Appreciation Circles - “Big Shoes” Moments**

Coordinators (You all) are the heartbeat of the Connector Program, making the work happen behind the scenes. Every meaningful match and every success story are made possible through their dedication, effort, and commitment.



This session focused on recognizing and celebrating moments when Coordinators had to “step into big shoes”- times when their roles stretched them, challenged them, or required them to rise beyond what they may have initially expected. Participants reflected on these defining moments and shared what continues to motivate them in their work.

The session also provided space for peer recognition, with participants offering thoughtful and affirming words to describe their colleagues and acknowledge the impact they have across the Connector community. Here are some key adjectives participants used to appreciate each other:

Ameera Faridi: Strategic, Inspiring, resilient, and Network Ninja

Dave Thomas: Genuine, supportive, encourager, and grounded.

Joseph Gallant: Generous, Encourager, supportive, influential, BIG heart.

Kateryna Omelianchenko: Dogget, ambitious, trailblazer, passionate, and persistent.

Afreen Sayyed: Passionate, genuine, authentic, trail blazer, reliable, supportive.

Robyn Webb: Visionary, pioneer, changemaker, community builder

Ali Siadat: Inspiring, courageous, diligent, and kind-hearted

Jude Ikeme: Result-driven, man of few words, thoughtful, and pathfinder

Sarah Boutzis: Brave, courageous, forward-looking, ambitious, and unique.

Shivani Adhana: Courageous, people-magnet, inspiring, magnanimous, brave, authentic

Nausheen Ali: Dedicated, optimistic, driven, persistent, passionate, community builder, perspicacious, best boss.

Kateryna (Kate) Kazemyrchyk: Lovable, friendly, genuine, brave, network ninja

Alida Campbell: Brave, bold, community builder, pathfinder

## **Session #6: New Tracking System Update**

**Presenter:** Dennis Cotreau, Director of Product Management, MindSea

The National Connector Program (NCP) is currently developing a new tracking system intended for use across all Connector communities. During this session, a representative from MindSea delivered an initial demonstration of the proposed system. Participants also engaged in discussion around their current tracking and reporting practices related to Connectors,



Connectees, and matches, highlighting what is working well and identifying areas for improvement.

Outlined below are the key questions and insights that emerged from the discussion.

#### ❖ **Data Import Capabilities**

##### **Can the new system import data from platforms such as HubSpot?**

The new tracking system will support data imports from HubSpot, enhancing reporting capabilities and enabling the development of a more effective matching process. However, the system will not integrate directly with HubSpot, nor will it support bi-directional data synchronization.

#### ❖ **Matching Algorithm**

##### **How will the system support matching between Connectors and Connectees?**

A core feature of the system is its ability to support matching based on criteria such as skills, experience, and industry sectors. The platform will identify relevant keywords within Connector and Connectee profiles and generate suggested matches accordingly. These automated suggestions are intended to support coordinators, with all matches remaining subject to human review to ensure relevance and quality.

The system will also allow resumes to be uploaded for record-keeping and verification purposes. This functionality is expected to streamline the match–connect–refer workflow but might not reduce reliance on manual searches across external platforms such as LinkedIn.

At this stage, the system does not use artificial intelligence for matching. Instead, it refines structured and unstructured data to generate informed match suggestions.

#### ❖ **Coordinator Management**

Coordinators will be able to manually assign Connectees to specific recruiters or coordinators and manage participant caseloads directly within the system.

#### ❖ **Automated Email Functionality**

Participants expressed interest in automated email capabilities, including reminders sent directly from the platform. While the system will be able to flag Connectors and Connectees for key stages such as intake, matching, and follow-up, automated email functionality is not included in the current phase of development.

## ❖ Reporting Features

The system will support customizable entry dates and status updates (e.g., matched, pending, employed) to strengthen reporting accuracy and enhance program monitoring.

### **Additional Notes and Next Steps:**

The tracking system is currently in the development phase and is being designed as a simple, effective tool to improve workflows and increase productivity across Connector communities. The points outlined above reflect key questions and ideas raised during the Learning Exchange discussion. Ongoing updates will be shared with the community as development progresses.

Training on how to use the system will be provided by NCP as needed.

### **Some Key Themes Highlighted by Participants:**

Beyond the system demonstration itself, participants emphasized a strong need for:

- Improved data collection.
- More efficient and user-friendly reporting.
- Reduced manual administrative work.

## **Session #7: Labour Market Trends and Mindset Shifts**

**Presenter:** Robyn Webb, Executive Director, National Connector Program

Robyn delivered a brief presentation on current labour market trends, highlighting recent shifts and their implications for Connector communities across Canada. The discussion explored how evolving labour market conditions and policy changes are shaping the context in which the National Connector Program (NCP) operates, and why adaptability is increasingly critical.

### **Key points from the presentation included:**

- Emerging trends related to anti-immigration sentiment and broader changes to immigration policy at the federal level.
- The importance of promoting positive, accurate messaging about immigrants through the Connector Program.
- A reduction in international student numbers due to federal funding cuts and policy changes.
- The need for the Connector Program to remain adaptable and responsive to external changes at both provincial and federal levels.
- The importance of focusing on relevance and responsiveness rather than becoming overwhelmed by external factors beyond program control.

## Skilled Trades Pilot: Nova Scotia

The session also highlighted the adoption of a Skilled Trades stream within Nova Scotia Connector communities, identified as a high-demand sector in the province. This pilot program includes:

- A direct pathway into skilled trades careers from high school for students and youth
- Delivery in partnership with the Province of Nova Scotia's **Graduate into Skilled Trades Career Program (GiSTC)**

This initiative was identified as a strong example of how NCP has remained relevant, sustainable, and resilient in response to ongoing labour market and policy changes.

## Shifting Realities Across Communities:

This session focused less on tactical approaches and more on how the world of work is changing and what those changes mean for the Connector Program.

Participants across communities shared common observations and agreed that the labour market is:

- More competitive
- More unstable
- More confusing for newcomers

There was consensus that:

- Traditional job search methods are no longer sufficient on their own.
- Networking has become more essential now, rather than optional.

## Mindset Gaps Identified

Participants acknowledged that many Connectees arrive with outdated assumptions about the hiring process. Examples discussed included:

- Expecting online applications alone to result in interviews.
- Believing strong credentials guarantee employment outcomes.
- Underestimating the role of informal relationships and professional networks

## Program Implications:

Participants emphasized that the Connector Program increasingly needs to function as:

- A space for mindset-shifting
- A preparation-focused program

- A form of cultural orientation into how work actually functions in Canada.

Rather than simply:

“Here’s a Connector—good luck.”

Several comments reflected a broader evolution in program purpose, summarized by the following sentiment:

*“We are not only just matching people. We are teaching people how to navigate and survive the Canadian labour market.”*

## **Session #8: Regional Representation: IGNITE LinkedIn Group**

**Presenters:** Ameera Faridi and Afreen Sayyed

In this session, the IGNITE team from New Brunswick delivered a presentation highlighting the Connector Program within their region. They shared success stories, testimonials, program impact, and key events from the past several years, illustrating the program’s growth and outcomes.

The team also discussed their progress to date and introduced a new initiative: a LinkedIn group created specifically for Connectors. This group is intended to strengthen engagement, facilitate networking, and support ongoing collaboration among participants.

The presentation materials are available for access through the [NCP Members portal](#), under “Learning Exchange.”

## **Session #9: Connector Retention and Recognition Strategies**

This session focused on exploring effective approaches to recognizing, retaining, and engaging Connectors. The discussion was structured using the “1-2-4-All” technique, a facilitation method that enables participants to think individually, then discuss ideas in pairs, small groups, and finally as a full group to surface collective insights.

The conversation centered around three key themes:

- Appreciation and recognition practices
- Motivation drivers for new Connectors
- Connector retention and long-term engagement

❖ **Appreciation/Recognition Practices:**

**Key Question: How do you currently appreciate Connectors in your community? What new appreciation and recognition strategies could we implement to make Connectors feel that their time and expertise is valued?**

### **Main Ideas**

- **Connector Appreciation Event:**
  - Awards and gifts, or vouchers.
  - Connectees showcasing themselves.
- **Promote on LinkedIn:**
  - Share stories, posts, and pump-up appreciation events.
- **Focus on Connector needs:**
  - Let Connectors network with each other.
- **Events:**
  - Breakfast event.
  - Holiday reception at Chamber of Commerce.
  - New Connector networking mixer (invite unmatched Connectors).
- **Thank You Cards:**
  - For all Connectors who made connections that year.

### **Ongoing Engagement**

- Use LinkedIn to keep in touch.
- Feature Connectors in organizational magazines/newsletters.
- Connector Signage: Add “I’m a Connector” signature in emails to encourage others to join.
- Promote program with QR codes and easy sign-up.
- Encourage Connectors to share experiences and success stories.
- Validate organizations for having a significant number of employees as Connectors for your community.

### **❖ Motivation drivers for Connectors (New, potential, or existing)**

**Key Question: What are the major motivation drivers for Connectors to join? What makes Connectors want to join, and what discourages them?**

### **Motivation Drivers**

- Giving back to the community and expanding their own network.
- Access to new talent and resources.
- Recognition for community volunteering.
- Sense of value and contribution.
- Networking opportunities:
  - Meet new people.

- Build relationships with other Connectors.
- Professional growth:
  - Exposure to different industries.
  - Learning new skills.
- Social impact:
  - Helping others succeed.
- Word of mouth: Program reputation and peer recommendations.

### **Challenges / Discouragement Factors**

- Overwhelm: Too many requests or unclear expectations.
- Limited industries: Small pool of Connectors.
- Misunderstanding of program commitment.
- Lack of flexibility: In scheduling or participation.
- Bad experience with previous matches.
- Negative attitude or incorrect information.
- Unclear benefits: If Connectors don't see personal value.

### **❖ Connector Retention and long-term engagement**

**Key Question: What makes people feel they belong and want to stay involved in the program?  
How can we ensure long-term engagement of Connectors (especially experienced ones)?**

### **Practical Engagement Strategies**

1. Say hi at events where you meet accidentally.
2. 1:1 check-in from time to time.
3. Send them a newsletter.
4. Keep in touch and always send "Thank you" notes.
5. Post Connector appreciation on LinkedIn.
6. With permission, send an email to HR/CEO praising the Connector.
7. Post notes about Connectors recognized in the community.
8. Feature a "Connector of the Month".
9. Repost posts about matches and thank Connectors.

### **Additional Ideas**

- Respect their time and availability.
- Set boundaries proactively; acknowledge matches may not be perfect.
- Maintain transparency and give Connectors power to choose.
- Make them feel part of something meaningful.
- Invite them to office events or as guest speakers/panelists.
- Show them their value explicitly.
- Offer professional development packages.

- Use experienced Connectors as mentors for new ones.
- Engage with Connectors at their organizational events (e.g., AGMs).

## **Session #10: Connector Engagement Across Canada (National)**

This session used a “Gallery Walk” format to support collaborative idea generation and shared visioning around national Connector engagement. Participants worked in three groups to co-create and explore ideas, rotating through a series of themed questions. Each group contributed their insights at every station, documenting their ideas on chart paper before moving on to the next question. Outlined below are the key discussion questions and ideas generated during the session:

**Q1. What kind of national events, webinars, or activities would help build stronger Connector engagement opportunities? How do we create a national sense of belonging for Connectors while also keeping things local?**

### **Ideas for National Engagement**

- Target national conferences:
  - Metropolis, P2P, CANHEXS to promote the program.
  - Send Connectors to conferences for professional development.
- Connector Boot Camp (virtual).
- National recruitment campaign.
- Build on other communities and strong Connector organizations.
- Networking: Connect across communities if skills aren’t needed locally.
- Digital certification for Connectors.
- Monthly national check-ins with Connectors.
- Connector PD: Find internship sessions or learning opportunities.
- Panel discussions with Connectors (quarterly or biannual).

**Q2. Creative Ideas: If there were no limits (or if you have a magic wand) what bold or creative ideas would you suggest for better Connector engagement and retention across communities?**

### **Creative Ideas**

- **Sessions at AGMs of big organizations:** Showcase the program and engage new + experienced Connectors (e.g., RBC/CRB).
- **Digital Badge for LinkedIn:** Certification or volunteer recognition.
- **Official Certification for Connectors:** Similar to CITP but for Connectors, at national or international level.
- **National Connector Appreciation Event:** Possibly tied to a Governor General Innovation Award. (BIG One)

- **Presence at Career Practitioner Events:** Motivate other communities and bring new Connectors on board.
- **Retreats for Connectors:** Networking, collaboration, and brainstorming.
- **Connector Day:** National celebration with media coverage and ads.
- **Collaboration with loyalty programs:** Offer perks or points for Connectors.

### Some other Recognition & Incentives

- All-expense-paid Connector convention.
- Cash prizes and free trips for top Connectors.
- Dedicated spaces at coffee shops for Connector meetings (with banners and QR codes).
- Connector booths at airports.
- Tim Hortons gift cards for Connectees to treat Connectors.

**Q3. Partners and Employers: Who could be different national partners or employers we could include in engaging Connectors nationally across communities and how can we bring them in? (Think about different associations or networks) (14)**

### Action Steps

- **Identify → Collaborate → Prepare:**
  - Identify key national employers.
  - Reach out to other communities to see who's already on board.
  - Collaborate with them to connect your community.
- **Cultural Partnerships:**
  - Engage organizations with national presence.
  - Avoid assuming they have a national mandate—verify.

### Potential Partners & Associations

- **Employers:**  
Grant Thornton, KPMG, CIBC, Scotiabank, Cox & Palmer, MacInnes Cooper, RBC, TD, BMO, Sobeys.
- **Associations:**  
Canadian Chamber of Commerce, CPHR, CPA, CCDP.
- **Others:**  
CMHA, Universities Canada, CICA.

### Regional Collaboration

- Focus on hiring events and activities to strengthen local engagement.

## **Session #11: Final Debrief: Reflections, Takeaways, and Future Actions**

After two full days of sharing best practices, brainstorming new strategies, and connecting as a national community, this final session provided an opportunity to pause, reflect, and capture key learnings from the Learning Exchange, as well as ideas participants would like to carry forward.

The activity was conducted in pairs. Each participant shared one idea, practice, or insight they were most excited to take back to their community, which was then shared with the full group.

### **❖ Key Reflections and Inspiring Insights**

Participants shared several recurring themes:

- A strong sense of passion and pride in the work being done across communities.
- Recognition that the program's success stems from collective creativity, innovation, shared learning, and the ability to adapt together.
- Acknowledgement that, despite challenges, coordinators remain deeply committed to removing barriers and continuing to do meaningful work in their regions.
- A shared understanding of the value of positioning the Connector Program as a national initiative to increase awareness and attract broader participation.

### **❖ Emerging Ideas and Future Considerations:**

Several ideas were identified for future Learning Exchanges and program development, including:

- A session focused on cultural competency for coordinators.
- One-on-one marketing support sessions, emphasizing simple and consistent core messaging across all communication channels and conversations.
- Personal and professional development sessions for coordinators, exploring roles and impact beyond program metrics and numbers.
- Mental health and wellness sessions for coordinators, addressing stress management, burnout prevention, and navigating challenges or setbacks.
- Conflict resolution strategies focused on relationship management, including setting expectations, managing emotional baggage, avoiding role confusion (e.g., becoming a therapist), recognizing when to seek additional support, and sharing practical approaches and solutions.
- Increased opportunities for innovation through broader sharing of best practices, inclusion of more voices, and shared leadership and responsibility across regions



## **Closing Note of Appreciation**

We extend our sincere gratitude to all coordinators, presenters, and participants who contributed their time, insights, and energy to make this Learning Exchange a meaningful and impactful experience. Your openness, collaboration, and commitment continue to strengthen the Connector Program both locally and nationally.

For those who were unable to attend this year, we hope this summary serves as a valuable resource to capture the key discussions, learnings, and ideas shared. We look forward to building on these insights together and continuing the conversation in the year ahead.