

Chapter 19

Economy—Nominating Qualified Immigration Applicants

1.0 MAIN POINTS

The Ministry of the Economy (Ministry) facilitates immigration. It uses the Saskatchewan Immigrant Nominee Program (Program) to recommend the nomination of qualified applicants for permanent immigrant status to the Federal Government.

Since our 2013 audit of the Ministry's processes to nominate qualified immigration applicants to meet the Saskatchewan Immigrant Nominee Program's needs, the Ministry has made progress in implementing our five recommendations. As of March 2016, the Ministry had implemented three of five recommendations.

The Ministry had followed its policies and procedures to document how decisions were reached on eligibility and qualifications of immigrant applicants. It had also established a process to estimate and communicate future processing times for its Program, and updated its policies to reflect its risk-based practice for quality reviews for the Program. The Ministry was working on updating its manual. But it had not yet provided training for staff to assess the feasibility of relocation and settlement plans and business establishment plans for the Entrepreneur Immigration Categories. Due to the complexity of these plans, training and written guidance would help ensure potential immigrants' applications are consistently assessed by staff.

2.0 INTRODUCTION

The Federal Government has the sole authority to grant immigration status to individuals. It has agreements with provinces to help provincial governments in addressing local labour shortages through immigration. The Ministry does not directly participate in recruiting potential immigrants. Rather, it facilitates the immigration process. It works with Saskatchewan employers and potential immigrants to improve the likelihood of the Federal Government accepting a nomination (recommendation).

The Ministry uses the Program to recommend (i.e., nominate) applicants, who qualify under provincially-established criteria, for permanent immigrant status to the Federal Government. According to the Ministry, the Program can provide potential immigrants with an alternate and quicker entry into Canada than federal immigration programs.

In our *2013 Report – Volume 1*, Chapter 12, we concluded that, for the eight-month period ended December 31, 2012, the Ministry of the Economy's Saskatchewan Immigrant Nominee Program operated effectively to nominate qualified immigration applicants to meet the Program's objectives except for the following. It needed to:

- › Provide guidance and training for staff to assess the feasibility of relocation and settlement plans and business establishment plans submitted to the Entrepreneur Immigration Categories of the Saskatchewan Immigrant Nominee Program
- › Document the support (e.g., date, institution, or person contacted) to explain how decisions were reached on eligibility and qualifications of immigration applicants



Update quality review policies to reflect its risk-based practice

We made five recommendations. This chapter describes the results of our first follow-up to assess the Ministry's progress in addressing those recommendations.

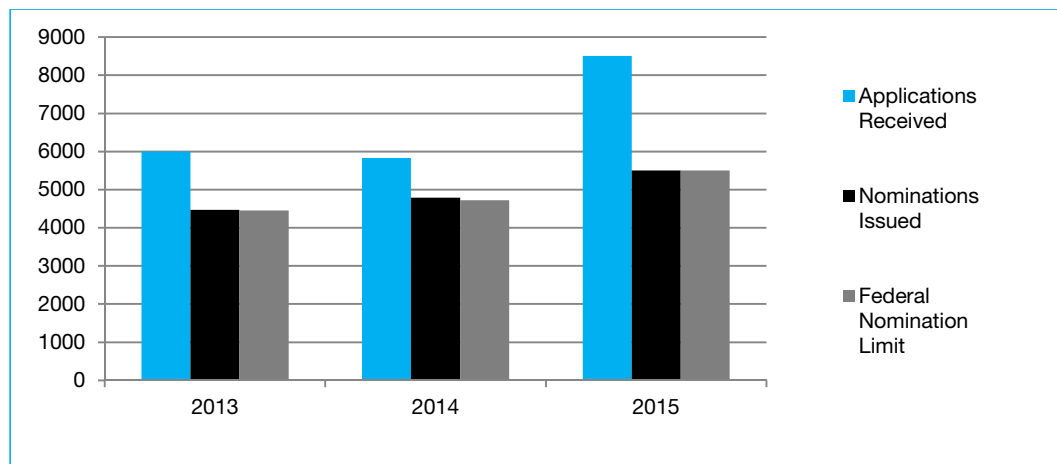
To conduct this review engagement, we followed the standards for assurance engagements published in the *CPA Canada Handbook – Assurance*. To evaluate the Ministry's progress towards meeting our recommendations, we used the relevant criteria from the 2013 audit. The Ministry of the Economy's management agreed with the criteria in the 2013 audit.

We reviewed the Ministry's policies and procedures that relate to nominating qualified immigration applicants. We sampled application files and interviewed Ministry staff.

2.1 Saskatchewan Immigrant Nominee Program Applications

In 2015, the Program received about 8,500 applications. **Figure 1** shows that the Program had received more applications in each of the last three years than the Federal Government allows it to nominate. The Federal Government sets an annual federal nomination limit for Saskatchewan (i.e., 5,500 in 2015).¹

Figure 1 – Applications Received and Nominations by Calendar Year



Source: Ministry of the Economy, March 9, 2016.

3.0 STATUS OF RECOMMENDATIONS

This section sets out each recommendation including the date on which the Standing Committee on Public Accounts agreed to the recommendation, the status of the recommendation at March 15, 2016, and the Ministry's actions up to that date. We found that the Ministry had implemented three of five recommendations.

¹ The Ministry can also remove applications from its inventory by deeming them ineligible, returning them to the applicant as incomplete, or withdrawing the application at the request of an applicant.

3.1 Improved Guidance and Training for Staff Needed

We recommended that the Ministry of the Economy provide guidance for staff to assess the feasibility of relocation and settlement plans and business establishment plans for the Entrepreneur Immigration Categories of the Saskatchewan Immigrant Nominee Program. (2013 Report – Volume 1; Public Accounts Committee agreement December 9, 2013)

Status – Partially Implemented

We recommended that the Ministry of the Economy provide training for staff to assess the feasibility of relocation and settlement plans and business establishment plans for the Entrepreneur Immigration Categories of the Saskatchewan Immigrant Nominee Program. (2013 Report – Volume 1; Public Accounts Committee agreement December 9, 2013)

Status – Not Implemented

We expected the Ministry to establish formal guidance for evaluating entrepreneur category applications according to its established criteria, and provide staff formal training on how to evaluate business establishment plans.

In March 2015, the Ministry announced changes to its Program for the Entrepreneur category. Both the revised and previous criteria require applicants to submit business establishment plans as part of the application process. **Figure 2** briefly describes the revised program criteria, and the criteria previously in place. At March 2016, about four Ministry staff were responsible for evaluating applications in the Entrepreneur category.

At December 2015, the Ministry had about 1,500 entrepreneur applications submitted under the previous program that were not completely processed. The Ministry was processing these applications using the previous program criteria. It was also processing about 50 applications submitted under the revised program.

**Figure 2—Brief Description of Program for Entrepreneur Category**

Entrepreneur – Program Criteria for Applicants Received after March 2015 (revised)	Entrepreneur – Program Criteria for Applicants Received before March 2015 (previous)
<p>Potential applicants submit an expression of interest to the Program; Ministry staff assess the expression of interest against the revised program criteria.</p> <p>Potential applicants who score the highest are invited to submit an application, including a business establishment plan. The applicants that meet program criteria are issued a work permit support letter to accompany an application to the Federal Government for a temporary work permit.^A Once the temporary work permit is received, they can come to Saskatchewan and start their business.</p> <p>Once the business is established and the applicant has met the terms and conditions of the business establishment plan, the Ministry nominates them for permanent immigrant status.</p>	<p>Applicants for the Entrepreneur category were required to submit an application, including relocation and settlement plans and business establishment plans.</p> <p>The Ministry assessed applicants based on their application, and the feasibility of their relocation and settlement plans and business establishment plans.</p> <p>The Ministry nominates applicants based on their score on the points criteria grid for permanent immigrant status.</p>

Source: Adapted from information provided by the Ministry of the Economy.

^AThe applicant must apply to the Federal Government for a temporary work permit, which is for a maximum of four years.

By March 2016, the Ministry had not provided staff with written guidance, or formal training to assess the feasibility of relocation and settlement plans or business establishment plans. This would ensure that these plans are evaluated consistently for the 1,500 applications received under the previous program. Staff continued to receive only on-the-job training while working with experienced staff.

In January 2016, the Ministry started to update its manual for staff based on the revised program criteria. This manual was not finalized or approved by March 2016.

Due to the complexity in relocation and settlement plans and business establishment plans, training and written guidance on how to assess these plans are necessary so that staff are able to evaluate the plans consistently and appropriately.

3.2 Documented Support for Verification of Eligibility and Qualifications of Applicants

We recommended that the Ministry of the Economy follow the Saskatchewan Immigrant Nominee Program policies and procedures that require staff to document the support (e.g., date, institution, or person contacted) to explain how decisions were reached on eligibility and qualifications of immigration applicants.

(2013 Report – Volume 1; Public Accounts Committee agreement December 9, 2013)

Status – Implemented

We expected staff to document verification decisions on qualifications in application files and document the support for the steps taken to verify eligibility and qualifications.

The Ministry's policies and procedures require staff to verify authenticity of the provided application information. They are also required to document, in the applicant's file, the

support to explain their verification decisions on eligibility and qualifications. For the 10 application files from different categories that we tested, we found sufficient documentation of applicants' verification of eligibility and qualifications, and the steps Ministry staff had taken to verify eligibility and qualifications.

3.3 Improved Communication of Future Processing Times

We recommended that the Ministry of the Economy establish a process to estimate and communicate future processing times for the Saskatchewan Immigrant Nominee Program. (2013 Report – Volume 1; Public Accounts Committee partial acceptance² December 9, 2013)

Status – Implemented

We expected the Ministry to establish a process to notify applicants of nomination processing time delays.

As **Figure 1** shows, the number of applications received in 2015 is significantly more than the prior year. Also, the number of applications continues to be more than Saskatchewan's federal nomination limit. This may result in a growing inventory of unprocessed or in-process applications. To enable applicants and employees to make informed decisions about applying for the Saskatchewan Immigrant Nominee Program, they need readily accessible current information.

The Ministry publishes historical average application processing times (updated quarterly) on its website.³ It acknowledges that the historical average processing times may not provide precise estimates of future processing times. In June 2015, the Ministry implemented an online tool within its online application system. Applicants can use this tool to monitor the progress of their application (i.e., stage of the application).

Since May 2013, the Ministry established an annual application intake quota (i.e., the number of applications by category it will accept in a given year). Quarterly, it publishes on its website the number of remaining applications that it will accept in each category per year.

² Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan Twenty-Seventh Legislature, *Standing Committee on Public Accounts Hansard Verbatim Report No. 13 – December 9, 2013*; PAC recommended 'that the Ministry of the Economy provide the necessary information to assist applicants to make informed decisions regarding their application for the Saskatchewan Immigrant Nominee Program', p. 186. We consider PAC's recommendation to be implemented.

³ www.saskatchewan.ca/residents/moving-to-saskatchewan/immigrating-to-saskatchewan/saskatchewan-immigrant-nominee-program/check-application-processing-times-for-sinp (18 March 2016).



3.4 Updated Quality Review Policies

We recommended that the Ministry of the Economy update policies to reflect its risk-based practice for quality reviews to guide staff of the Saskatchewan Immigrant Nominee Program. (2013 Report – Volume 1; Public Accounts Committee agreement December 9, 2013)

Status – Implemented

We expected the Ministry to revise its policy and formally document how it selects files for quality reviews (e.g., audit) of the processed applications.

In May 2014, the Ministry had approved a risk management audit policy. This policy outlines the process for selecting application files for quality reviews. The selection process includes the use of a risk management approach, and selecting files from all application categories both randomly and for specific reasons (targeted) based upon the assessed risk.