Provincial Immigration in Transition: Building Talent for Atlantic Canada

PLENARY SESSION PROCEEDINGS SUMMARY

(October 16, 2026)

Overview

This plenary session brought together senior government officials from three Atlantic provincial governments who discussed how Atlantic Canadian provinces are navigating a shifting federal policy landscape characterized by reduced temporary and permanent resident targets. Speakers from Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Newfoundland and Labrador discussed moving away from open, first-come, first-served application intake toward strategic, priority-based Expression of Interest (EOI) systems.[1] The regional focus has decisively pivoted from candidate attraction to long-term settlement, pre-arranged employment, and retention to maximize the economic impact of limited immigration spaces.

Complementing these provincial strategies, the Halifax Partnership detailed its grassroots economic actions, emphasizing how local programs actively bridge the gap between regional employers and newcomer talent. By leveraging employer feedback channels, targeted networking events, and dedicated initiatives like the Connector Program, they illustrated a practical framework for converting municipal growth targets into sustainable local employment outcomes.

Provincial Comparison

Vector	Nova Scotia	New Brunswick	Newfoundland & Labrador
Annual Allocation Capacity	5,709 spaces (Facing 10K+ EOI inventory backlog)	4,920 spaces (Reduced from 5,500 in 2024)	~6,500 total ITAs issued since EOI launch
In-Province Talent Focus	93% of nominations support local TR-to-PR transitions	93% of allocations support local TR-to-PR transitions	Priority placed on retention over attraction
Pre-Arranged Employment	Priority given to targeted shortage occupations	97% of Principal Applicants hold local job offers	Demand-driven selection via employer alignment
International Graduate Integration	Focused heavily on applied sciences and healthcare	42% of total allocation spaces dedicated to graduates	Study and Stay NL yields an 84%+ retention rate

[1] Although the government of Prince Edward Island was not present at the event, they stated that “PEI’s situation and perspective remain aligned with our Atlantic provincials”. They also affirmed their support for immigration research (Email from Teressa Tu, PEI government, October 13, 2026).

Target Sector Priorities	Healthcare, physicians, skilled trades, education	Direct economic and employer-led matching	Skilled workers, graduates, and entrepreneurs
System Framework	Streamlined from 10 streams down to 4; formalized EOI	Joint PNP and Atlantic Immigration Program pathway	Launched priority EOI in Feb 2025 to end backlog

Detailed Presentations

1. Nova Scotia Perspective: Strategic Selection in a Constrained Environment

- **Federal Policy Shifts (Slide 2 / Slide 5):** Federal target restrictions introduced in 2025 have shifted the focus toward sustainable growth, making strategic execution of allocation slots vital.
- **Supply vs. Demand Discrepancy (Slide 2 / Slide 5):** An acute imbalance exists with an inventory backlog of over 10,000 Expressions of Interest (EOIs) vying for a limited allocation of 5,709 spaces.
- **TR-to-PR Streamlining (Slide 2 / Slide 5):** Policy intensely prioritizes domestic retention, allocating 93% of nominations/endorsements to transition temporary residents already living and working in Nova Scotia into permanent residents.
- **Labour Shortage Prioritization (Slide 2, 3 / Slide 5, 6):** Limited spaces are filtered strictly into sectors with chronic shortages: healthcare (including physicians), skilled trades, education, and applied sciences.
- **Program Modernization (Slide 3 / Slide 6):** To foster transparency, Nova Scotia modernized its immigration landscape by formalizing the EOI framework and streamlining the NSNP from 10 streams down to four.

2. New Brunswick Perspective: Managing Allocation Contractions

- **Cap Adjustments (Slide 4):** Confronting localized impacts of changing federal restrictions, New Brunswick's combined PNP and AIP capacity contracted from 5,500 spaces down to 4,920 year-over-year.
- **Domestic Transition Invariance (Slide 4):** Parallel to regional sister programs, the province leans heavily on local talent pools, maintaining a highly stable 93% of allocations for TR-to-PR pathways (moving from 94% previously).
- **Pre-Arranged Employment Gains (Slide 4):** Near-total economic calibration has been achieved, with the proportion of principal applicants arriving or staying with a pre-arranged job climbing to 97% (up from 92%).
- **Graduate Pipeline Stability (Slide 4):** The percentage of allocations explicitly supporting international graduates held locked step year-over-year at 42%.

3. Newfoundland and Labrador Perspective: Driving Growth via Retention

- **Sustained Growth Milestones (Slide 2):** The provincial population hit 552,462 residents, registering six sequential years of expansion fueled strictly by international migration.

- **System Overhaul (Slide 2):** Due to demand heavily outstripping baseline delivery in 2024, a priority-based EOI system was activated in February 2025, generating ~6,500 Invitations to Apply (ITAs) since launch.
- **Canada-Leading Retention (Slide 4):** One-year retention tracking for the NLPNP jumped dramatically to 78.2% for the 2022 admission cohort, marking an 17.9-point increase and the largest single gain nationwide.
- **Student Preservation Initiatives (Slide 4):** Despite a 23.5% slump in international enrollment at Memorial University in Autumn 2025, the Study and Stay NL platform successfully retains 84%+ of its alumni one year post-graduation.
- **Social & Economic Integration (Slide 5):** A collaborative Newcomer Retention Survey with the NL Statistics Agency verified that 94% of newcomers remain in NL and 97% describe the province as a welcoming environment, citing community safety and employment availability as prime anchor factors.

4. Regional Alignment & Municipal Economic Goals

(Source Document: Halifax Partnership Deck)

- **Municipal Targets (Slide 14):** Local adjustments tie directly into Halifax's 5-Year Strategic Goals to systematically scale the city's population to 525,000 and swell the labor pool to 310,000 by 2027.
- **Grassroots Implementation (Slide 15):** The Halifax Partnership outlines operational tactics to safely anchor newcomers, activating specialized employer feedback channels, Global Talent Stream supports, and peer networking ecosystems like Connector Clubs to maximize retention.

Core Plenary Takeaways

- Strategic Shift: Atlantic Canada has fully transitioned from an open recruitment model to a highly restricted, occupation-targeted selection matrix.
- Rural Integration: Provinces are actively redirecting immigration policy to stimulate sustainable economic growth in rural and regional communities.
- Retention Over Attraction: Long-term economic survival relies on evidence-based investments in language, employment, and community integration to prevent newcomer out-migration to other provinces.