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Express Entry: Top 5 Tips

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On January 1st of this year, the Canadian federal government launched a revamped 'Express Entry' system for economic immigration to Canada. This article outlines the basics of Express Entry and provides our Top Five Tips for potential applicants.

Until the new Express Entry system was unveiled on 1 January 2015, potential economic immigrants to Canada followed a straightforward application process with a predictable outcome. So long as an applicant met the qualifying criteria, included the right documents, and applied before the yearly application quota was met, the application would eventually be approved. This system applied for the Canadian Experience Class (CEC), the Federal Skilled Worker Program (FSWP), the Federal Skilled Trades Program (FSTP), and the Provincial Nominee Program (PNP). Though the wait was often very long, each applicant was ensured an eventual decision on their application.

The new process is more akin to an online dating site: each prospective economic immigrant fills out an online profile. Upon completing the profile, the electronic database will assign a points total based on a 'Comprehensive Ranking System'. Points are awarded for factors such as Canadian work experience, education, and language skills. A profile will remain in the system for up to 12 months.

The Canadian government then periodically picks out the top-ranked profiles from the system and invites them to pay the processing fee and submit a formal application for permanent residence. Eventually, Canadian employers will also be able to access the Express Entry database in search of foreign talent.

To be sure, the new Express Entry system has positive aspects. Once a potential immigrant with a current online profile receives the invitation to apply, the Canadian government has undertaken to process the application within six months—a significant improvement from processing times under the old system. As well, all former occupation-specific quota caps and moratoriums have been eliminated. One of the key intentions of the Express Entry system is to make the Canadian immigration system more responsive to up-to-the-minute labour market needs, which is a worthy goal.

However, the downsides are numerous. An applicant who uploads a profile will never be completely certain of the outcome. A worker or student's temporary status in Canada may expire before they are ever selected. Some applicants will never be selected. The transparency concerns are numerous for a system that can change without notice at any time. At this stage, many computer system glitches remain unresolved.

So what is a potential applicant to do? Here are our Top Five Tips.



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(1) Eligible? Apply Now.

In order to submit your name into the pool, you need to meet basic qualification criteria. The first step is to determine whether your language skills, education, and work experience are sufficient to allow you to apply under one of the economic immigrant categories listed above. It is advisable to create your profile as soon as you are eligible, particularly in these early days when the number of applicants in the system is more limited.

(2) 'LMIA' All the Way

A job offer in Canada is a significant positive factor. Some Canadian job offers are made following a positive Labour Market Impact Assessment (LMIA), while others are not. If you can obtain an LMIA-based job offer, your chances of selection from the pool go up significantly. If this is a potential option in your case, it is very likely worth exploring.

(3) Ensure You Have the Right Documents

Anything you state on your Express Entry profile will eventually need to be backed up with documentation once you are invited to apply. It is essential to have the correct documentation in place before submitting your profile. If you state something that turns out to be false, you risk being found inadmissible for misrepresentation—an offence with very serious consequences. Exercise caution in completing the profile.

(4) Update Your Profile

Once your profile is built, you will know your points total. Since the government publishes the lowest points scores accepted on each draw, you will have a sense of how you measure up, and your likelihood of selection. If your points total is in the low range, there may be steps you can take to increase the total, such as re-taking a language test, or obtaining an LMIA-based job offer. Your profile can always be updated, so these steps may be worth pursuing.

(5) Work with an Experienced Immigration Lawyer

Canadian immigration law professionals have been following the Express Entry developments closely. We can help ensure that your profile is as strong as possible, and can recommend ways to make it stronger. The assistance of a skilled representative can help avoid processing delays, avoid other pitfalls, and increase your prospects for successful immigration to Canada.

We would be happy to speak to you about economic immigration to Canada. Please contact us to set up a consultation appointment.

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