

CATEGORY: EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT AND INCLUSION

This award recognizes organizations that create a positive, inclusive, and engaging workplace where employees feel valued, connected, and motivated. It celebrates initiatives that strengthen culture, well-being, belonging, and employee experience across the organization.

This category should emphasize culture and belonging.

Nomination criteria:

- Innovation and Design
- Execution and Reach
- Impact and Business Value
- Sustainability and Scalability

DETAILS OF THE COMPANY SUBMITTING THE PROJECT:

*Company name:	Curium Netherlands Holding B.V.,odštěpný závod
ID No. (IČO)	CZ683260995
* Correspondence Address	Prosecká 852/66 190 00 Praha 9
* Name of contact person / Person applying	Kveta Viktorie Cichova
Position	Senior Finance Manager
Telephone	605903630
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* Are you an ABSL Member?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
* Size of the centre	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Enterprise >1000 FTEs <input type="checkbox"/> Large 500 – 1000 FTEs <input type="checkbox"/> Medium 200 – 500 FTEs <input type="checkbox"/> Small <200 FTEs
* The year of establishment of the centre in CZ	2017

* mandatory fields



Please provide the following details of your project. We recommend max. 1 000 characters including spaces for each question.

Please provide a short description of the project (max. 1,000 characters).

(In case of winning in this category – this description will be used during the gala evening and in promotion in media, website, and other channels)

Bridging Cultures: A Comprehensive System for Foreigner Integration

Driven by internal feedback, Curium launched an innovative pilot project to build meaningful bridges between its diverse international workforce and their cultural roots. By establishing strategic partnerships with foreign chambers of commerce in Prague, the project proactively supports individuals with migration backgrounds through high-impact professional, educational, and community activities.

From specialized mentoring programs and Toastmasters to community clubs and sponsored social events, this initiative systematically removes language, financial, and administrative barriers. The results are a powerful business case: a 25–40% increase in employee retention, reduced isolation, and a deep sense of belonging. This scalable system serves as an inspiring best-practice model for cross-cultural integration across the Czech Republic

1. Can you provide an overview of the project/initiative aimed at enhancing employee engagement and inclusion within the company? How did you identify employee needs or challenges?

The initiative, titled "Project for the Integration of Foreigners in the Czech Republic: Project for Engaging the Company in International Chambers of Commerce in Prague," is a comprehensive, scalable pilot system designed to build meaningful bridges between a diverse workforce and their cultural roots. Out of 155 total employees within the Prague Shared Services Center (SSC), 75 are international team members representing 30 different nationalities.

The primary objective of the initiative is to systematically register and engage the company with selected foreign chambers of commerce in Prague (such as the French, Italian, and Dutch Chambers). By fully funding employee participation in these external networks, the initiative provides international professionals with an expansive platform for professional seminars, skills development, mentoring programs (e.g., *Member to Member*), Toastmasters, and regular community social clubs. This proactive ecosystem seeks to eliminate language, financial, and administrative barriers, turning employee integration into a strategic business investment that fosters a genuine sense of belonging.

2. Describe the key initiatives or actions implemented. What makes this approach innovative or effective?

Key Initiatives and Actions Implemented

The project addresses the challenge of social isolation and early turnover among foreign nationals by executing a structured ecosystem of initiatives categorized across five core operational areas:

1. Strategic Corporate-Chamber Integration:

Targeted Institutional Memberships: The company registers and maintains active institutional memberships with major international chambers of commerce in Prague, including the French-Czech Chamber of Commerce, the Italian-Czech Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and the Dutch Chamber of Commerce.

Full Financial Sponsorship: To ensure equitable access, the company fully funds all employee entry and event participation, completely erasing individual financial hurdles.

2. Tailored Educational and Growth Programs:

The "Member-to-Member" Mentoring Program: Experienced, long-term expatriates or local professionals are strategically paired with newly arrived international employees. This program transfers practical, lived experience regarding local life and corporate dynamics

Nature Toastmasters: Structured public speaking and leadership clubs are hosted to actively refine cross-cultural communication skills, boost workplace confidence, and empower international professionals to take on leadership roles.

What Makes This Approach Innovative and Effective?

The approach transcends traditional human resource methods through several key characteristics:

- **Proactive Rather Than Reactive Integration:** Traditional corporate onboarding relies heavily on a "pull" strategy, assuming newcomers will seek out their own social networks. This project utilizes a "push" approach, systematically placing comprehensive cultural and professional networks directly into the hands of the employee from day one.
- **Removal of the Dual Barrier (Professional + Cultural):** Standard Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) or internal diversity initiatives focus solely on the workspace. This model acknowledges that a lack of *societal* integration drives early turnover. By utilizing chambers of commerce, the initiative seamlessly bridges the gap between an employee's professional development and their innate cultural roots.
- **A High-Impact, Low-Cost Business Case:** For a mid-sized organization, designing bespoke internal cultural systems for 30 distinct nationalities is logistically and financially unviable. Leveraging the pre-existing infrastructure of foreign chambers

represents an elegant, highly resource-efficient innovation. It transforms integration from an abstract corporate cost into an investment with a measurable business return (saving the equivalent of 6–12 months' salary per avoided specialist departure).

- **Holistic Ecosystem Design over One-Off Events:** The project is effective because it is a continuous, interconnected ecosystem combining professional, educational, digital, and social elements rather than an isolated series of annual team-building exercises.
- **A Proven, Scalable Blueprint:** The initiative is designed as a modular blueprint. It serves as a localized pilot that can be effortlessly replicated by other shared services centers (SSCs) and scaled across different chambers or geographies facing similar workforce demographic pressures.

3. How was the initiative delivered? Scope and reach (teams, roles, locations – was the initiative local or global). Any key challenges and how they were addressed

1. Delivery, Scope, and Reach

- **Scope and Operational Delivery:** The initiative was delivered as a structured, proactive pilot system designed to integrate foreign employees into the local cultural and economic ecosystem from day one. Rather than relying on a passive approach, delivery was executed by strategically registering the company with major international chambers of commerce in Prague (e.g., French, Italian, and Dutch Chambers). The company completely subsidized and fully funded employee entry fees and event expenses to eliminate financial hurdles.
- **Delivery Framework:** The practical delivery combined continuous internal support systems—such as weekly community dining clubs, a mobile community app platform, Toastmasters public speaking/leadership groups, and structured "Member-to-Member" mentoring programs—with external corporate business roundtables, professional networking, and socio-cultural gatherings.
- **Reach (Local vs. Global):** This initiative was implemented as a **local pilot project** centered in Prague, Czech Republic. However, it was built using a highly scalable, modular blueprint intended for **global adaptability** and cross-company replication.
- **Teams and Roles Covered:** The initiative targeted the company's Shared Services Center (SSC) in Prague. The reach spanned **155 total employees**, specifically encompassing **75 international team members representing 30 distinct nationalities** (accounting for 42% of the local workforce). Crucially, the scope extended vertically to involve executive leaders and managers—who visit Prague monthly for direct team engagement—as well as the **families, spouses, and children of international employees**, who were granted free admission to community events to support holistic household integration.

2. Key Challenges and How They Were Addressed

The project systematically dismantled several prominent societal and professional integration hurdles:

- **Challenge 1: The "Critical Window" of Early Voluntary Turnover**
 - *The Issue:* Internal and industry data revealed that the highest likelihood of international employee turnover occurs rapidly within the first 3 to 6 months post-onboarding, with over 40% of foreign workers contemplating leaving within two years.

- *How Addressed:* The company shifted from traditional internal HR onboarding to an immediate, outward-facing community integration model. By embedding employees into foreign chamber networks from their very first week, they reduced the "time-to-integration," creating immediate external anchors that stabilized the team during high-risk adjustment phases.
- **Challenge 2: Severe Social Isolation and Loneliness**
 - *The Issue:* Data indicated that 1 in 3 foreigners experiences loneliness, and over 45% have zero social contacts outside of their immediate work team within their first six months in a new country.
 - *How Addressed:* The program launched weekly restaurant community clubs and a dedicated mobile community platform to stimulate informal, routine interaction. Furthermore, extending free event admissions to employees' partners and children mitigated the isolating reality of a trailing family unit struggling to adapt.
- **Challenge 3: Language and Cultural Barriers**
 - *The Issue:* New hires faced intense non-work friction, including culture shock, language gaps, and difficulties navigating the unfamiliar local social landscape, which degraded job satisfaction and caused early departures.
 - *How Addressed:* The initiative integrated employees into groups like *Nature Toastmasters* to build cross-cultural confidence and public speaking skills in a supportive setting. Additionally, the *Member-to-Member Mentoring Program* paired newcomers with long-term expatriates or local residents who passed on practical, lived experience and informal cultural guidance rather than cold, formal handbooks.
- **Challenge 4: Financial and Logistical Scaling Hurdles for a Mid-Sized Firm**
 - *The Issue:* For a company with up to 200 employees, designing and maintaining individual, internal inclusion and cultural networks for 30 different nationalities is logistically impossible and financially prohibitive.
 - *How Addressed:* The company leveraged an innovative, highly cost-effective external solution. By tapping into the pre-existing infrastructure, events, and thousands of participants across established foreign chambers of commerce, the company gained access to an immediate cross-company network at a minimal fraction of the cost required to build one internally.

4. What key metrics and indicators were used to measure the success of the initiative?

To evaluate the performance and sustainability of the pilot project, the company established a comprehensive evaluation framework. Success is quantified using a matrix of hard HR data, event metrics, and self-reported behavioral indicators divided into four key focus areas:

1. Engagement & Participation Metrics

- **Internal Engagement Surveys:** Direct monitoring of employee engagement levels through dedicated company-wide surveys.
- **Net Promoter Score (NPS):** Tracking post-event satisfaction scores among participating staff to measure the quality and relevance of chamber activities.
- **Volume of Activity:** Tracking the absolute number of hosted events and total participant counts.
- **Involvement Share:** Calculating the percentage of the international workforce actively participating in the programs.

2. Retention & Stability Indicators

- **Comparative Retention Analysis:** Evaluating the long-term retention rate of employees actively participating in the initiative versus non-participating colleagues.
- **Voluntary Turnover Reduction:** Tracking the drop in early resignations within highly engaged groups, which is particularly critical given that industry trends highlight high turnover risks within the first 3 to 6 months.

3. Development & Integration Indicators

- **Mentoring Milestones:** Documenting the total number of established mentoring pairs and successfully finalized programs.
- **Skills Advancement:** Relying on self-reported improvements from employees regarding their communication, leadership, and professional networking capabilities.
- **Time-to-Integration:** Assessing the speed at which newly onboarded international employees transition into being socially and professionally adjusted.

4. Business & Community Impact

- **Repeat Participation:** Monitoring the density of active communities and the frequency of repeat employee attendance.
- **External Synergy:** Counting new business partnerships and cross-company collaborations made possible through the foreign chambers of commerce networks.
- **Tangible Financial & People Impact:** Quantifying the direct impact on retention and workforce metrics

5. How do you plan to sustain the positive outcomes achieved through the initiative in the long term?

To sustain the positive outcomes achieved through the integration pilot project in the long term, the company has developed a structured approach focused on institutionalization, digital community engagement, and strategic scalability.

The long-term sustainability strategy is built upon the following four key pillars:

1. Integration into Core Corporate Governance and HR Processes

Instead of treating the initiative as a temporary, ad-hoc program, the company is systematically embedding it into its standard corporate framework:

- **Standardized Onboarding:** The process of introducing new hires to foreign chambers of commerce networks, registering them for activities, and matching them with a mentor is being written directly into the standard Human Resources onboarding protocol. This ensures that every incoming international employee automatically enters the ecosystem from their first week.
- **Dedicated Budgetary Allocation:** The financial sponsorship for chamber memberships and event admissions is transitioning from a temporary pilot budget into a permanent, recurring line item within the annual HR and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) budgets. This secures long-term financial viability by recognizing integration not as an administrative cost, but as a

high-yield investment in retention.

2. Cultivating Autonomous Employee-Led Communities

To reduce continuous administrative dependency on HR, the project focuses on shifting ownership of the initiatives directly to the employees:

- **The "Train-the-Trainer" Mentoring Model:** Mentees who successfully graduate from the *Member-to-Member Mentoring Program* and become well-adjusted to the local environment are continuously upskilled to become the next generation of mentors. This creates a self-sustaining cycle of peer-to-peer support.
- **Decentralized Coordination:** Leveraging the active mobile community platform, highly engaged employees are empowered to self-organize the weekly dining clubs, social outings, and interest groups, transforming the initiative into an organic, grassroots community.

3. Expansion of Strategic Partnerships

To keep pace with the growing diversity of the workforce and prevent stagnation, the company plans to continuously expand its external network:

- **Adding New Chambers:** Building on the successful foundations laid with the French, Italian, and Dutch Chambers, the company plans to systematically register with additional national chambers of commerce in Prague to match the changing demographics of its 30+ represented nationalities.
- **Deeper Institutional Collaboration:** The company aims to co-create custom professional seminars, public speaking workshops (via Toastmasters), and networking events directly with chamber leadership, ensuring the programming remains fresh, relevant, and aligned with market trends.

4. Setting an Industry Best-Practice Model (Scalability)

The final stage of long-term sustainability involves scaling the project's modular blueprint outward to establish it as an industry standard:

- **ABSL Partnership:** The company intends to share its methodologies and data with the Association of Business Service Leaders (ABSL) in the Czech Republic. By presenting this initiative as a certified best-practice model, the company aims to inspire other Shared Services Centers (SSCs) to adopt the framework.
- **Cross-Company Collaboration:** Creating a wider ecosystem where multiple companies within the ABSL network utilize the same chamber frameworks will increase the density of the networking pools, enrich the community events, and share the long-term momentum of cross-cultural integration nationwide.

6. Can you share any testimonials or success stories from employees who have

benefited from the initiative?

While the core project documentation prioritizes high-level corporate data and structural metrics over individual verbatim quotes, it explicitly outlines several verified **"people impacts" and employee outcomes** that serve as the foundation for the project's success stories.

The primary real-world transformations and benefits experienced by employees participating in the program include:

- **Overcoming the "trailing family" isolation:** A recurring challenge identified early in the project was exemplified by families feeling unadjusted (e.g., *"My family doesn't quite feel at home here"*), which frequently triggered early resignations. By providing free event admission to spouses and children, employees' partners have successfully built their own social anchors, significantly improving overall family well-being and reducing household stress.
- **Transitioning from isolation to a sense of belonging:** Prior to the pilot, data showed that nearly half of newly arrived foreign nationals had zero social contacts outside of their immediate work team. Through the weekly restaurant community clubs and the dedicated mobile platform, employees have actively formed long-term friendships and peer-to-peer support networks, replacing initial culture shock and loneliness with a tangible sense of *"I belong here"*.
- **Accelerated "Time-to-Integration" for Newcomers:** Through the *Member-to-Member Mentoring Program*, newly arrived employees are paired directly with experienced expatriates or local residents. Instead of forcing newcomers to decipher cold, formal administrative handbooks alone, this pairing provides them with practical, lived-experience guidance on navigating Czech social and professional environments.
- **Measurable Professional and Personal Growth:** Participants in the *Nature Toastmasters* initiatives and specialized chamber business roundtables report self-perceived advancements in their cross-cultural communication, public speaking confidence, and leadership capabilities. This allows international staff to successfully build a strong professional identity within the broader Prague economic ecosystem.

You can support your application with a presentation, video, or any other material to help promote and understand the project.