



Knowledge Synthesis

ATTRACTING IMMIGRANTS TO RURAL COMMUNITIES

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INTRODUCTION

This knowledge synthesis is part of The Monieson Centre's Knowledge Impact in Society (KIS) Project, a three-year endeavour to connect academic knowledge with economic development needs in Eastern Ontario. The synthesis is an accessible presentation of the latest research on issues affecting rural Eastern Ontario. The knowledge synthesis topics were determined through information gathered at 15 community workshops run in partnership with the Eastern Ontario Community Futures Development Corporation network. The KIS Project is funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. For more information, visit www.easternontarioknowledge.ca.

Immigration is a vital source of rural population sustainability, regional economic development, and cultural vitality.¹ In particular, immigrants can help businesses address labour shortage issues, provide professional services that are in demand (e.g., physicians and other health care professionals), and start new businesses and create jobs as entrepreneurs. An influx of immigrants can also help communities deal with declines in population due to out-migration of youth to urban areas. Historically, however, the distribution of immigrants in Canada has been concentrated in major cities, notably Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver, while smaller rural municipalities have not been as successful in attracting new arrivals.² As such, it is imperative that rural community leaders adopt strategies that attract immigrants to their communities. This Knowledge Synthesis will describe these steps. Also, this synthesis will highlight a case study of one rural community – Winkler, Manitoba – that has been successful in attracting and integrating immigrants into its community.

FORMING A COMMITTEE

A community needs to begin by forming a committee to develop, coordinate, and implement immigration attraction strategies. This committee should include designates from immigrant-serving agencies as well as representatives from key sectors including business, education, health, housing and recreation.³ Each member will serve as a champion for immigration and must be convinced of the value of attracting immigrants and ensuring that the community benefits from immigration.

¹ M. Sorensen, "Rural Immigration in the Prairies: Knowledge Gaps," *Our Diverse Cities* 3 (2007): 121-125.

² T. Carter, M. Morrish, & B. Amoyaw, "Attracting Immigrants to Smaller Urban and Rural Communities: Lessons Learned from the Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program," *International Journal of Migration & Integration* 9 (2008): 161-183.

³ J. Garcea, "Immigration to Smaller Communities in Saskatchewan," *Our Diverse Cities* 3 (2007): 134-139.

MARKETING AND PROMOTING THE COMMUNITY

Community leaders must promote the positive attributes of the community to potential immigrants. Immigrants will choose where to settle based on economic and social strengths that make the community an attractive destination. These strengths needed to be communicated effectively and can be done so in the following ways:

A Community Website for Immigrants

One of the most important initiatives that a community can take on to attract immigrants is the creation of a community website designed specifically for immigrants. A website is the most accessible way to communicate information over great distances. The Government of Ontario has allocated funds for communities to create online resources geared towards immigrants. Examples such as those listed in Appendix A are good resources for community leaders to use when designing a new website.

Visits to the Area

Community leaders can encourage prospective immigrants to visit the area, offering them first-hand knowledge and an accurate impression of what it is like to live in the community. Immigrants' assumptions of rural life may differ dramatically from the reality of many rural communities. During the visits, community leaders should try to communicate the positive experiences of immigrants who have already settled in the area. Positive word-of-mouth from settled immigrants supports the notion that the community is a good place in which to live and work.

Immigrant Networks

Community leaders should try to tap into immigrants' established networks with the area from which they have departed to facilitate information flows to friends and relatives. This can increase the community's visibility overseas across certain networks.

Overseas Events

Some communities have the budget to actually travel to overseas jobs and emigration fairs to promote their area.⁴ While this is an expensive option, it can be effective in recruiting new immigrants from a particular region. At these fairs, it is critical that the kinds of economic opportunities that are available in the community are presented and that prospective immigrants can be put in touch with employers.

Attracting Immigrant Entrepreneurs

Immigrant entrepreneurs are valuable because they can potentially create new jobs and spur economic growth in the community. As such, community leaders must do all they can to profile their community as a good place to start a business. For instance, community leaders can highlight the fact that operating costs might be lower in rural areas compared to urban centres. Community leaders can also provide potential immigrant entrepreneurs with information about the types of services in the area that can help entrepreneurs succeed (e.g., business incubators, professional services).

⁴ Prairie Global Management, *Attracting Immigrants and Newcomers: A Guide for Communities* (Winnipeg: Province of Manitoba, 2008).

CREATING A WELCOMING COMMUNITY

Research indicates that to attract immigrants, it is essential for communities to engage in initiatives that ensure they are “welcoming communities” for new arrivals.⁵ A community that is welcoming and that integrates its immigrants into the community gains a positive reputation and attracts more immigrants to the area. Community leaders can create a welcoming environment in the following ways:

Communicate the Benefits of Immigration

A community’s residents and businesses will be more receptive and welcoming to immigrants if it is recognized that immigrants are beneficial to the community.⁶ Community leaders need to communicate to residents that immigrants are valuable to the economic growth and cultural diversity of a community. As well, negative stereotypes of immigrants need to be fought and opposed. For instance, in North Bay, this has been done effectively through positive portrayals of local immigrants in the media and through a diversity awareness program.⁷

Providing Settlement Services

Community settlement services are essential in helping immigrants to effectively integrate into the community. Some settlement services that communities offer include:⁸

- Information/orientation about life in the community
- Language interpretation
- Information about health care, education, banking, law, shopping, housing, etc.
- Connection to community services (doctors, dentists, schools, etc.)
- Connection to English as a Second Language classes
- Employment assistance

Celebrate Ethnic Heritage in the Community

A community can become more welcoming to immigrants by celebrating ethnic heritage and multiculturalism.⁹ It can do this by increasing efforts to incorporate multicultural celebrations into community events. For example, as part of its Canada Day celebration, Barrhaven held a Multicultural Festival to recognize the different ethnic groups in the area. These kinds of events symbolize to community members that multiculturalism is a valued in the community.

⁵ M. Wulff, T. Carter, R. Vineberg, & S. Ward, “Special Issue: Attracting New Arrivals to Smaller Cities and Rural Communities: Findings from Australia, Canada, and New Zealand,” *International Journal of Migration & Integration* 9 (2008): 119-124.

⁶ *Putting out the Welcome Mat: Why Immigration Matters to Ontario’s Municipalities (Draft)* (Toronto: Association of Municipalities of Ontario, 2008).

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ R. Silviu, “Manitoba Rural Immigration Community Case Studies: Winkler,” Rural Development Institute, Brandon University, Working Paper (2005).

⁹ *Building a More Welcoming & Inclusive Community: How the City of Red Deer and Red Deer College Plan to Work Towards the Inclusivity of International Newcomers to the City* (Red Deer: The City of Red Deer, 2007).

APPLYING TO GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS

Government programs exist that: (1) Facilitate the process of immigration to rural communities and (2) Provide the monetary resources to create programs that attract, integrate, and support immigrants. The following section describes these programs in more detail.

Provincial Nominee Programs

Provincial Nominee Programs (PNP) have proven to be an effective tool for promoting immigration to small communities. A Provincial Nominee Program is an immigration program through which the province nominates foreigners and their families for permanent resident status based on a pre-approved job offer in the province. In Ontario, this program is called Opportunities Ontario. Employers in small communities who are having difficulty finding qualified, skilled workers can apply to this program for the approval of permanent, full-time positions to be filled by foreign nationals. Employers will receive priority processing if they have already tried to recruit Canadian citizens or permanent residents located in Ontario for those positions before applying to the program.¹⁰ To promote immigration in rural areas, community leaders should make local businesses aware of the Provincial Nominee Program and encourage them to apply. For more information about this program, please visit: <http://www.ontarioimmigration.ca/English/PNPabout.asp>

Municipal Immigration Information Online Program

Research suggests that the creation of a community website with current and pertinent information about the community is an excellent way to attract immigrants to the area.¹¹ The Ontario government has a program that provides funding for communities interested in establishing web-based resources for newcomers (Municipal Immigration Information Online Program). The application guide for this program can be found at: <http://www.ontarioimmigration.ca/english/grant.asp>. So far, 21 communities in Ontario have received funding and a sample of these newcomer websites can be found in Appendix A.

Local Immigration Partnerships Program

In 2005, Citizenship and Immigration Canada and Ontario's Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration jointly created the five-year Local Immigration Partnerships program.¹² This program funds communities to develop and implement sustainable solutions for successful integration of immigrants to Ontario. This is a valuable resource for communities working to put immigration on their overall planning agenda and to create social and economic integration initiatives for new immigrants.

Citizenship and Immigration Canada Funding

Rural communities can also look to Citizenship and Immigration Canada for funding to support programs to attract immigrants. For example, in 2007, Citizenship and Immigration Canada provided around \$50,000 to the Evangeline region in Prince Edward Island.¹³ The funding was to be used for a number of

¹⁰ "About Opportunities Ontario," Ontario Immigration, <http://www.ontarioimmigration.ca/English/PNPabout.asp> (Accessed July 31, 2009)

¹¹ Prairie Global Management.

¹² "CIC and MCI CFP: Local Immigration Partnerships," Settlement.org at Work, http://atwork.settlement.org/sys/atwork_library_detail.asp?doc_id=1004478 (Accessed July 31, 2009)

¹³ "Canada's New Government to Help Attract Francophone Immigrants to Rural Prince Edward Island," Citizenship and Immigration Canada, News Release, 12 October 2007, <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/departement/media/releases/2007/2007-10-12c.asp> (Accessed July 31, 2009).

activities including community and school awareness programs, community cultural events, and promotion of the Evangeline communities to immigrants. The main goal of these programs is to attract, welcome, and support immigrants.

The Business Entrepreneur Program

Communities derive great benefit from immigrants who plan on starting their own businesses as entrepreneurs. These immigrants bring creativity and new ideas to the area and help to grow the community's economy. Communities can attract immigrant entrepreneurs through the Business Entrepreneur Program through Citizenship and Immigration Canada. This program attracts business owner operators who will invest in and actively manage businesses in Canada that will contribute to the economy and create jobs. Entrepreneurs must demonstrate business experience and have a minimum net worth of CDN \$300,000.¹⁴

THE CITY OF WINKLER: A CASE STUDY¹⁵

The City of Winkler in Manitoba has been hugely successful in attracting immigrants to grow its local economy and support its human resource needs. Although the community is rural with a population of roughly 8,500, its population grew by approximately 3,325 people between 1999 and 2006 through immigration. Such strong immigration was made possible by a buoyant economy, mostly in the agricultural sector. Additionally, many of the employers who provided jobs in this period made use of the Provincial Nominee Program which began in 1998.

The group of new arrivals in Winkler included predominantly Russian-Germans and Germans. Once a critical mass of new immigrants arrived to Winkler, the new arrivals provided information to other prospective immigrants through word-of-mouth highlighting Winkler as an attractive and desirable place to live. For many Russian-German immigrants, Winkler has offered German linguistic and religious linkages along with the familiar geography of Russia.

To facilitate immigration integration, the Chamber of Commerce formed an Immigration Integration Committee soon after the first group of immigrants arrived. This committee became the main community contact for immigration concerns and took a keen interest in working with the province to facilitate the arrival of immigrants and address their settlement needs. Specifically, Winkler organized settlement and language services through the South Central Settlement and Employment Services (SCSES) and the Pembina Valley Language Education for Adults (PVLEA). A new office of SCSES was opened in November 2004, centralizing settlement, employment, and English as a Second Language services in one location. Additional services offered included providing connections to vital services, offering language interpretation, and providing information about life in Central Manitoba and Canada. Settlement services provided both standardized services as well as ones designed to meet individualized needs.

Of all the services provided, language instruction was regarded as being particularly important. New immigrants' inability to understand and communicate in English was the major limiting factor for

¹⁴ "Entrepreneurs," Citizenship and Immigration Canada,

<http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/immigrate/business/entrepreneurs/index.asp> (Accessed July 31, 2009).

¹⁵ Silvius, "Winkler"; R. Silvius, R. C. Annis, "Reflections on the Rural Immigration Experience in Manitoba's Diverse Rural Communities," *Our Diverse Cities* 3 (2007): 126-133.

effective integration into the community and subsequent employment placement. Accordingly, the Pembina Valley Language Education for Adults (PVLEA) was founded to provide literacy and English as a Second Language classes for new immigrants. Funded by the province of Manitoba, the community language program could accommodate 300 adult students using 15 instructors.

In addition to the settlement services provided by the community, immigrants also found great comfort and support from previously settled immigrants. For instance, the Mennonite Central Committee and Church Elders assisted in immigrant integration, underscoring the important role that religious institutions can play in supporting newcomers. It has been observed that immigrants who have left the community for elsewhere generally did not have a strong affiliation with a church or with other immigrants in the community.

Overall, this case study highlights an example of how a community can attract a large number of new immigrants to its area and integrate them effectively into the community. In particular, a community needs to have employment opportunities available for newcomers and employers need to make use of the Provincial Nominee Program (that also exist in Ontario) to enable immigration. Also, the settlement services described play a pivotal role in integrating newcomers into the community. Last, the existing immigrant community and religious institutions can providing critical support to newcomers.

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APPENDIX A – NEWCOMER WEBSITES

Brantford and the County of Brant

<http://www.newcomerconnections.ca>

London and Middlesex County

<http://www.welcome.london.ca>

Peel Region

<http://www.immigrationpeel.ca>

Sarnia-Lambton

<http://www.liveinlambton.ca/newcomers/portal/Pages/HomePage.aspx>

Sault Ste. Marie

<http://www.discoverthesault.ca/SaultSteMarie>

Timmins

<http://www.immigrationtimmins.ca/en/index.php>

Waterloo Region

<http://www.newwr.ca/Pages/Home.aspx>

Windsor and Essex County

<http://immigration.windsor-essex.info>