

**Strengthening our Settlement Vision**

# **The Small Centre Strategy**

The Regional Dispersion & Retention of Immigrants

**Discussion paper developed for  
National Settlement Conference II  
Calgary – October 2-5, 2003**

A collaboration of the Settlement Sector and Governments  
in association with the Voluntary Sector Initiative Project

*The summaries of opinions and interpretations expressed in the VSI working group discussion papers are those of the working group members, either individually or collectively, and do not necessarily reflect the views of CIC, nor do we guarantee the accuracy of the information provided.*



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## **Abstract**

In recognizing the well-documented realities that influence the settlement of Canadian immigrants primarily in major population centres, this discussion paper attempts to develop a framework for a more widespread regional dispersion of immigrants and their retention in the smaller communities. It challenges the communities that seek immigrants to devise and put into operation strategies appropriate to their circumstances. It also suggests ideas for communities to consider.

## **Acknowledgment**

In partnership with the settlement sector and other governments, Citizenship and Immigration Canada has undertaken a project under the Voluntary Sector Initiative to strengthen the capacity of the settlement sector. This project involves two national settlement conferences within three years, connected by working group discussions to develop specific themes. This paper is the outgrowth of a planning meeting held in Toronto in March 2002, involving participants from governments and non-government organizations across Canada. Most had attended the First National Settlement Conference in Kingston, June 2001, and all had volunteered to serve on committees to further its goals. Those who attended the Toronto meeting accepted tasks to be completed in time for the Second National Settlement Conference in Calgary, October 2003. Working Group #2 (Small Centre Strategy) undertook the challenging regime that led to this paper.

As participants discussed the topic of this paper it became evident that there would be a number of earlier opportunities for the sharing of results. Therefore this paper appeared in four draft versions before it was completed in April, 2003. Those drafts were made available to a number of provincial ministries and to the Conference of Immigration Ministers (Winnipeg, October 2002). They were also submitted for workshop review to the Canadian Council for Refugees' Consultation, the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants, the Atlantic Region Association of Immigrant Serving Agencies, the Rural Secretariat—Agriculture Canada, the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages, and the 2003 National Metropolis Conference.

Working Group #2 was co-chaired by Jean-Claude Morin, on behalf of Citizenship and Immigration Canada, and by Bob Godkin on behalf of the settlement sector. Their work, and the work of all the members is gratefully acknowledged. The group's membership reflects a wide geographic representation, and has involved the federal and provincial governments and the settlement sector.

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Appreciation is expressed to the various organizations and offices throughout government and the settlement sectors, that granted the members time to participate in these activities. Finally, to the Joint Planning Committee of the Voluntary Sector Initiative Project, and to Citizenship and Immigration Canada who made this all possible through both committed leadership and generous funding, heartfelt thanks.

# Preface and Methodology

## Objective

The general objective of the National Settlement Conferences of 2001 and 2003 is to enhance the capacity of the settlement sector (both non-government organizations and Citizenship and Immigration Canada) to address relevant policy and program issues.

The particular objective of Working Group #2 has been to explore what can be done to encourage new immigrants, including refugees, to move to and stay in “smaller centres”—that is, those other than Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver.<sup>1</sup>

There has been considerable discussion about what is meant by “smaller centres.” Consensus has agreed that the phrase is not precise. What is clear is there needs to be an element of self-identification by those parts or places of Canada that wish to receive more immigrants. Some entities—such as the entire Province of Manitoba or the City of Kingston—might consider themselves small, even though other communities in search of immigrants regard them as large.

## Several Jurisdictions

Several jurisdictions are involved in any regional dispersion and retention strategy. Some aspects come within the purview and the abilities of the federal government, and some must be dealt with by the self-identifying part or place (the participating community). Within the participating community provincial and municipal jurisdictions may play distinct roles. There may also be roles shared at the local level by school boards, regional training boards, business associations, and labour, trade and professional organizations.

## Short-term Goal

In preparing for the Second National Settlement Conference (Calgary, October 2 - 5, 2003), Working Group #2 tried to find creative approaches to the regional dispersion and retention challenge. As the Calgary conference will have a policy emphasis, the working group hopes that its interim work will be sufficiently complete that its circulation prior to, and presentation in Calgary, could offer information and a perspective for discussing a challenging and timely theme.

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<sup>1</sup> Reports emanating from the Census of 2001 chose to characterize the Calgary - Edmonton corridor as a fourth major population “centre,” although there are communities like Red Deer within it that see themselves as needing and not receiving sufficient numbers of newcomers.

## Structure / Strategy

The working group comprised three sub-groups or committees: Employment, Welcoming Communities, and New Initiatives. There were inevitable topical overlaps among the sub-groups. Therefore, members kept each other informed through communication with the working group's co-chairs, a series of telephone conferences, extensive use of electronic communication, and one face-to-face meeting.

## The Impact of Events

Since this agenda was set in motion, the topic has moved from the wings to the centre of the stage. The federal Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, Hon. Denis Coderre, has spoken about it, the Metropolis Project has focused on it, and there is even a Web site devoted to it under Metropolis aegis.<sup>2</sup> Recently published books that have joined issue with current immigration goals and policies, have caused "regionalization" (a term introduced to condense the phrases describing the topic) to become an important subset of the wider debate. There is by no means unanimous agreement on either goals or tactics. Because of the many and frequent occasions when the topic has come to the fore, to a considerable degree it has been a moving target during the working group's deliberations and the various drafts that have preceded the final version of this paper.

In October 2002, the Federal, Provincial and Territorial Ministers of Immigration met in Winnipeg for the first time in 107 years, to discuss the topic of immigration which is a "shared jurisdiction" under Canada's constitution. After the conference, in a joint press release, the Ministers recognized the importance of a strategy for the regional dispersion of immigrants to Canada. "[A]ttracting immigrants to smaller centres...requires flexible approaches that respond to provincial and territorial priorities. Ministers identified the need to develop broad principles to guide the implementation of regional strategies. They established a working group to guide implementation of the strategies...."<sup>3</sup>

More recently, the 2003 – 2004 federal budget and Immigration Minister Denis Coderre's comments stemming from it, has continued to confirm the government's commitment to the topic. In its *Report on Plans and Priorities for 2003 – 2004*,<sup>4</sup> Citizenship and Immigration Canada affirms "Regional strategies will be developed in partnership with the provinces, the territories and their communities to share the benefits of immigration more evenly across the country."

This paper is therefore not intended to be prescriptive, but offers its ideas as a contribution to debate and planning within a relevant and developing field.

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<sup>2</sup> regionalization@metropolis.net

<sup>3</sup> Press Release 2002 - 35 Winnipeg, October 16, 2002.

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/est-pre/20032004/CI-CI/CI-CI\\_r34\\_e.asp](http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/est-pre/20032004/CI-CI/CI-CI_r34_e.asp)

## Introduction

This paper challenges the negativity that has been directed at attempts to advocate for greater regional dispersion of immigrants. Immigrants have settled successfully in Canada's small centres for decades. However, while this practice has been common, it may need further study.

In one of the few recent publications that acknowledges this reality, a 2002 Citizenship and Immigration Canada publication examined strategies to achieve a more balanced geographic distribution of immigrants. Perhaps predictably, it has reached discouraging conclusions.<sup>5</sup> The report "was commissioned to investigate whether there are reasonable and viable options for dispersing immigrants beyond the three largest metropolitan areas."<sup>6</sup> The main findings of the report were:

There is little evidence to indicate that programs encouraging immigrants and refugees to settle in small cities and towns are likely to be successful, particularly in the long run. This results from the fact that small cities and rural areas have difficulty meeting the two fundamental criteria for successful settlement: 1) employment and education opportunities for an entire household, not just the principal household maintainer(s) and 2) support services for kin and friendship networks of local ethnic/immigrant communities.

There is evidence of stronger possibilities for dispersion to second-tier cities and permanent settlement in locations where a range of employment and education opportunities are offered and where a significant immigrant population exists.<sup>7</sup>

This paper also challenges the conventional wisdom that dispersion strategies should only target "second-tier cities." It asserts that self-identifying small centres should be encouraged and helped if they have the interest and the desire to retain immigrants or attract more immigrants.

Notwithstanding the obvious and documented difficulties, those who have prepared this paper recognize the intense interest in the topic in many smaller centres across Canada. They believe efforts must be made to strengthen Canada in all its regions through a more balanced distribution of immigrants, and that this is essential to the future of our country. They believe in a positive, cooperative approach driven by national and regional stakeholders. They believe that governments at all levels, the settlement sector, and the participating communities, all have roles to play, and that they can make a difference. This paper looks at these roles under three main heads: Employment, Welcoming Communities, and New Initiatives. The ideas offered are not exhaustive, nor are they appropriate to all situations, but they represent practical approaches that have worked or could work for communities of various sizes that want to attract and to retain newcomers.

Finally, in an appendix, this paper offers a framework for a practical "tool box" of ideas and practices for hands-on guidance of participating communities. As in any tool box, every tool will not always be appropriate for every project or situation. But we hope that their variety will contain elements of guidance for any self-identifying small centre.

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<sup>5</sup> Toward a more balanced geographic distribution of immigrants, <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/srr/research/news2.html>

<sup>6</sup> Memorandum 04 03 2002, Ann Ratcliffe, Director General Strategic Policy, Planning and Research, CIC

<sup>7</sup> Ann Ratcliffe, *supra*

# Employment

Arriving immigrants initially decide to move to a particular community for a number of reasons. For refugees, it may be the destination assigned to them by the federal government under its Government Sponsorship program, or it may be the location of their sponsoring group under the Private Sponsorship program. Any immigrant may seek out family, friends, or ethnic / linguistic community, or follow the lure provided by literature, or be attracted by the magnet of the big city. Sometimes, inappropriate or inaccurate information is a factor. The factor that determines an immigrant's first Canadian home may be as simple as the fact that an international flight has taken them there, or it may be as complex as the fact that a Provincial Nominee Program has arranged special access. Or it may also be the prospect of a job.

Whatever the reason newcomers choose to live in their first Canadian community, the most compelling reason for employable, able-bodied adults to stay in a community is acceptable employment. However, only the interrelation of a multitude of factors will keep them in a community, including opportunities for career or educational advancement and their complex relationships with family and the community at large. Still, the primary factor that helps the initial transplanting take root is employment as soon as possible after arrival. For couples, employment of both partners is a factor.

The following areas identify challenges and initiatives to secure satisfactory employment for newcomers. The great importance of employer participation cannot be overstated.

## A Community Employment Database

A usual and unfortunate reality for newcomers is that only about 10 to 15 percent of all available jobs are ever advertised. Participating communities must change this situation and bend every effort to improve upon it by widening the posted list of available jobs, by spreading the news, and by helping newcomers tap into the hidden job market. There are many useful Web sites devoted to the posting of job opportunities, but these have two common limitations: they depend on what they are supplied for posting, and as a rule they are not confined to a "participating community" (which in effect means they can be advertising the competition from other communities). On some Web sites there are even links to other sites.<sup>8</sup>

It could prove useful for participating communities to have one community-focused electronic database and search tool through which potential immigrants could access accurate and current employment information about the community itself, and where the community and its employers can advertise their needs. It might highlight sector shortages and other relevant information. The technology now exists to develop a localized tool in a cost-effective manner. The time seems favourable for such a tool and it might be a good idea for communities with sufficient interest. In addition, federal government cooperation could provide access to existing employment data.

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<sup>8</sup> Canada WorkinfoNet, for example, is a pan-Canadian partnership of 13 Web sites providing visitors and members with job search information, labour market information, job listings, entrepreneurial information, financing options, as well as training and education links.

## **Credentials Recognition / Recognition of Prior Experience**

There is a national log-jam on this topic. It is widely condemned. While everyone agrees that something should be done about the unfairness of the current regime, it has not been a compelling priority for provincial governments (in whose jurisdiction the matter generally lies) reluctant to challenge the many governing bodies of professions and trades. Various government, academic, or NGO-inspired studies have documented the complexities of the problem, and all this paper can do at this juncture is identify the issue.<sup>9</sup>

Any province that successfully resolves this issue will have an immediate advantage in attracting skilled immigrants until others follow suit.<sup>10</sup> This should be an inviting strategy for provinces that have an interest in increasing the number of immigrants.

Community roundtables involving the provincial government, trade and professional governing bodies, and the NGO sector also have an opportunity to raise awareness of the issue, to work for quick recognition of the credentials of newcomers, and to develop strategies to reduce the amount of misinformation confronted by prospective immigrants before they come to Canada.

In the meantime, while we lobby and wait for the impasse to be resolved, there are things that participating communities can do. They can institute mentoring programs, for example. These have a long and successful history within the settlement sector, and have been implemented by some provinces. They are an excellent way to teach recently arrived trades people and professionals about their new home and to give them the information they need to be able to deal with Canadian licensing requirements. Both governments and corporations have used volunteer programs to introduce newcomers to the Canadian workplace; where they are appropriate, they should be introduced with the full cooperation of organized labour.<sup>11</sup> Ontario is one jurisdiction that assesses the prior learning of newcomers; participating communities should be aware of local resources for this assessment and should tell newcomers about them.

## **Eligibility for Government and Community Programs**

Participating communities must remove barriers that keep newcomers from participating in community and local government programs, whether employment related or not. There should be no barriers for immigrants that do not exist for the general population. Real barriers that relate to length of stay, or inadvertent barriers arising from gaps in knowledge, may encourage newcomers to move. Communities should institute proactive reception techniques that acquaint newcomers with available resources and opportunities.

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<sup>9</sup> An industry-NGO collaboration in Manitoba known as “The Blue Sky Group” has developed a workable solution.

<sup>10</sup> On October 3, 2002, the Government of Manitoba announced “Development of a Government-wide Strategy to Address Qualification Recognition of Highly Skilled Immigrants”

<sup>11</sup> Some communities have organized databases for volunteer opportunities.

## **The Role of Unions and Associations**

Unions in the participating community need to share the community's goals for more immigrants (and hence more workers). There must be a shared recognition that community prosperity and new residents are intertwined. Unions and trade and professional associations need to assess their own rules to ensure that there is an openness to the addition of newcomers to their ranks.

## **Workplace Supports**

The participating community should ensure the availability of adult language-training, including opportunities for access to workplace-related instruction in English or French as a Second Language for new workers, and related day care opportunities for their children. This involves a whole-community response, particularly from employers. Language proficiency is an essential part of employment preparation.

## **Income Support and the Work Ethic**

Income support programs for newcomers need to be examined to ensure that they are consistent with goals of self-sufficiency for the immigrant and the family. It makes no more sense to penalize initiative than to encourage dependency. Intelligent assessments of newcomer circumstances, when required, need to be realistic and fair-minded when measured against the over-riding goal of their retention by the community.<sup>12</sup> Rules associated with resettlement assistance programs for government-sponsored refugees, or with local welfare policies, have been seen to be disincentives by many recipients because of the low threshold before deductions are made on their support. Moreover, the time delay, especially where personal earning levels fluctuate from month to month, means that some recipients are without the basic support level for several weeks. Similar problems exist with those receiving "top-up" support. Sometimes it takes a while for a newcomer to develop full-time, independent income, but built-in disincentives in social assistance penalize workers for earning more so that sometimes they actually have less than if they continued to receive support. These issues need to be examined as part of good settlement and retention practice.

## **Cross-cultural Training for Workers and Employers**

With the current sources of Canadian immigration, it is possible that there will be cultural and experiential differences between immigrant newcomers in typical participating communities and others in the workplace. The racism that results in extreme cases inhibits the successful integration of newcomers and makes it less likely that they will stay in the same job or community. Community resources for cross-cultural training should be identified (or developed if they do not exist) and then made available for the workplace. The settlement NGO sector is a frequent source of such expertise.

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<sup>12</sup> When large families immigrated to one community and were not able to be supported by the wages initially earned by the immediately-employed family wage earners, community assistance through the local food bank was provided, understood in the context, and supported as a practical response.

## Employer Participation in Immigration Initiatives

Because employment is such a crucial factor, there are a number of opportunities for employers to participate in initiatives to attract and retain newcomers. The newly developed (and developing) Provincial Nominee Programs (see New Initiatives section, below) may provide creative opportunities for employers in participating communities to offer employment as part of a qualification and selection process, such as is done in Manitoba.<sup>13</sup> This will require collaboration between the provincial government and the participating community's employers.

Another excellent opportunity for converting temporary residents into permanent residents lies in the long-established work-permit program. A cautionary note is in order: the vulnerability of temporary workers must be monitored so that they are not abused and exploited during the time that their mobility is restricted by terms of their temporary permits.

Foreign and international students have limited permission to work in Canada following graduation. Employers can help them become permanent residents as well, subject to the immigration rules that apply to them.<sup>14</sup>

## Self-employment Opportunities

When surveying employment opportunities for newcomers, participating communities should not overlook self-employment. Many immigrants have been or become entrepreneurs or re-established themselves as independent practitioners in a trade or profession.

## Skilled Immigrants

Canada's immigration policy has been referred to as a "labour market strategy," especially as it relates to the classification now called "Economic Immigration." Official advocacy for this policy has usually focused on the need for "skilled" immigrants, without offering a precise definition. Perhaps one can be inferred from the so-called "points system" used in qualifying applicants in this classification. The terminology "skilled" is convenient in that it serves the political need to assuage fears of, or prejudice toward, immigrants in some quarters. But the terminology is troublesome in that it may occasionally be an inadequate means for meeting Canada's labour needs. Some current writing<sup>15</sup> has suggested that developed countries actually need "unskilled" workers, but again this may be limiting and unfortunate terminology.

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<sup>13</sup> The Manitoba provincial government gives priority to those applicants under its Provincial Nominee Program who have both a job lined up and relatives in the province.

<sup>14</sup> The New Brunswick Provincial Nominee Agreement has recently extended a student's right to remain in Canadian employment after graduation, from one year to two, as a pilot project.

<sup>15</sup> *Thinking the Unthinkable (the Immigration Myth Exposed)* by Nigel Harris, 2002, I.B.Taurus & Co Ltd, 6 Salem Road, London W2 4BU; ISBN 1 86064 671

The new Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (2002), as well as recent remarks by Federal Immigration Minister Denis Coderre, reflect a welcome if subtle shift in thinking in this area. The Temporary Worker program has frequently brought to Canada persons with less-sophisticated skills, as has the refugee stream. Participating communities surveying their employment needs should assess the options available through Temporary Worker, Provincial Nominee, and Refugee Sponsorship programs that might not be available through the stricter interpretations of the federal selection processes for economic immigration.

## Welcoming Communities

A welcoming community is obviously an important factor in retaining any newcomer. Beyond employment, the hospitality offered in the new and perhaps very strange environment will have a profound affect on successful settlement and retention. This factor affects all members of the family, whether they are bound for the workplace, school or life at home.

The Canadian Settlement Sector is skilled in this area and has experience and knowledge to offer the wider community as challenges are identified and strategies developed.

The notion of a hospitable community extends beyond a friendly welcome and neighbourly attitudes. It reaches into the fabric of community attributes and available services. The following areas recognize challenges to hospitality and identifies some initiatives that can be undertaken so that newcomers can feel that they have come to a welcoming community.<sup>16</sup>

## Housing

It is becoming increasingly difficult for people with limited financial resources to find acceptable, appropriate and affordable housing in many Canadian communities. This is the situation most immigrants face when they arrive, and their difficulties are compounded by unfamiliarity with the local housing scene and an understanding of how to access it. This is an area where it is crucial for communities to help newcomers with a positive transition, so that they can feel welcomed, safe and happy in their new community. The inevitable uncertainties associated with the early weeks are magnified if housing becomes an issue. This could threaten the successful integration of the newcomers and could make it unlikely that they will stay in the community. Through experience with refugees, settlement agencies are often best equipped to handle this issue. They could be mandated to provide the service to all classes of arriving immigrants.<sup>17</sup>

Newcomers may be able to move into public housing in communities where it exists depending on its current availability. Community housing offers good standards of maintenance despite a low rent structure, plus a number of supportive programs, including community kitchens and play groups, which help immigrants integrate into the community. Public housing authorities should be sensitive to the diversity in family composition and family practices, especially when they define policies on the size of housing allocation and on household composition. Public housing authorities need to develop anti-racism strategies within housing complexes as well as within the corporation.

Settlement agencies and community information centres usually have links to housing information as well as information and links to many community services and community organizations.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> A new handbook on refugee resettlement has been published (October 1, 2002) by UNHCR and the Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture, an Australian NGO. Several Canadians assisted in the development of this book. Entitled "Refugee Resettlement: An International Handbook to Guide Reception and Integration", the handbook is intended as a resource to help in the development of sound programs for integration of resettled refugees. Many of the handbook's suggestions have application to the reception and integration of other classes of immigrants as well. It is available on the Web site, [www.unhcr.ch](http://www.unhcr.ch).

<sup>17</sup> While settlement agencies exist in many participating communities, they have usually been created with the primary goal of assisting in the resettlement of refugees for historic reasons. Their funding may be tied to existing work levels, and their current resources may be insufficient for an expansion of their mandate to include more newcomers. This problem bears addressing so that equitable services can be provided to all. In some participating communities there may be no existing Settlement agency, and the community may therefore need either to create one or to task some compatible agency with the additional duties.

<sup>18</sup> The Lakehead Social Planning Council in Thunder Bay is an example of one such community resource.

## Initial Accommodation

Welcoming communities can become more attractive if they overcome another housing-related issue that often imposes hardship on newcomers. Upon their arrival, “Economic Class”<sup>19</sup> immigrant families must usually seek out and pay for hotel accommodation at market rates. Canada has its own criteria for the amount of money each immigrant family is expected to have when they arrive, and this amount is interpreted flexibly by case-processing officers abroad. The required amounts are generally not large and can be depleted quickly by the high cost of hotel living in Canada. If a community is not able to offer temporary accommodation,<sup>20</sup> it might consider offering subsidies to local hotels so that newcomers will not run out of funds during their initial settlement period.

## Medical Services / Other Social Services

Most arriving immigrants are unlikely to have known anything like the wide range of government-funded services available in Canada. We should not assume that newcomers have a knowledge of these services and their availability. This is another area where community response becomes imperative so that newcomers will not be denied access to services they may need just because they are uninformed. Settlement agencies are best equipped to disseminate this information, but mechanisms may need to be developed to connect newcomers with these agencies.<sup>21</sup> Communities may wish to consider adding a “triage” approach to the initial medical assessments and needs of newcomers, so that selected practitioners may develop the special knowledge and skills needed to deal with situations that are unusual in Canada, and to work with interpreters.<sup>22</sup> This may require additional financial support for community facilities and services.

## Education

Immigrants must acquire the local language if they are to integrate and meet their social needs. This means that welcoming communities must receive and integrate children within the school system. Additional resources may have to be allocated for the instruction of English or French as a Second Language. Some schools with familiarity in receiving newcomer children have successfully instituted “buddy systems” or “Kiddie Host” programs.<sup>23</sup> For best results, arrangements for adult ESL and FSL programs should emphasize continuous open intake and flexible hours, transportation assistance and child care support, as well as a good system for evaluation of prior learning so that students can enter a program at the appropriate level.

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<sup>19</sup> Also includes Provincial Nominee arrivals.

<sup>20</sup> Winnipeg’s International Centre is planning to open one such facility for the inexpensive temporary accommodation of arriving immigrants.

<sup>21</sup> Knowledge of who may be arriving in a participating community, whether from abroad or from within Canada, is not automatic. Privacy issues interpose barriers to full and timely information about arrivals. This is a dilemma that participating communities must address in ways practical to their situation.

<sup>22</sup> The Bridge Community Health Clinic established in Vancouver in 1994 as a collaborative venture, is a good example of an effective initiative.

<sup>23</sup> A manual for one such program (“Ambassador Program”) has been developed by Manitoba Interfaith Immigration Council, 397 Carlton Street, Winnipeg, MB, R3B 2K9

Immigrants who want to enhance their education and skills should have access to facilitated admittance as appropriate, and no barriers such as child care, transportation, and availability of student loans in circumstances where they are available to the general population. Canadians know that learning can be a life-long process, and that there are both formal and informal educational processes; newcomers should be encouraged to understand and adopt this approach.

## **Access to Arts, Cultural, Recreational and Leisure Programs**

Availability of arts, cultural, recreational and leisure programs does not necessarily mean accessibility, for they may be beyond the means of the newcomer. Yet these programs represent a unique integrating opportunity and a normalizing influence that could allow newcomers to become a part of the culture around them. Facilitated access may therefore be necessary to make these programs more available.<sup>24</sup> Accessibility may also mean sensitivity to cultural practices. Municipal governments that fund these programs could require them to provide free admission for a certain number of newcomers. The tickets could be distributed through responsible service-providing organizations and community groups (such as United Way agencies). Most performances play to a partly empty house, and promoters are interested in larger audiences and in developing new audiences. So this becomes a win-win situation.<sup>25</sup>

## **Cross-cultural and Anti-racism Resources**

Welcoming communities should concede that cultural misunderstandings and racism may arise; they should identify resources and put strategies in place to deal with such possibilities. Preventive information and programs are desirable. A number of Canadian communities already have such strategies.<sup>26</sup> Some have adopted anti-racism policies and strategies as a matter of public policy and to affirm their objectives of recognizing and sustaining diverse communities. The conspicuous implementation of these policies by a municipal organization offering services can provide a model for the private sector in the community.

Service-providing organizations in many communities have experience in working cross-culturally and with sensitivity to differing cultural practices. Some police departments have undertaken specialized training. The federal Department of Canadian Heritage is an excellent resource for information and assistance. Participating communities that feel they lack capacity and experience in these areas may also seek out the regional resources available to them. A community need not have all of these things in place before it seeks and invites newcomers; they can be developed once the community is committed.

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<sup>24</sup> The PRO Kids Program (Positive Recreational Opportunities) in Thunder Bay provides subsidized spaces in city-run and other community activities, sports, music and recreational organizations for children of low-income families, and is often accessed by newcomer families.

<sup>25</sup> If this type of program were extended to Social Allowance recipients, there would be less chance of a backlash in some parts of the community that could jeopardize the successful integration and acceptance of newcomers.

<sup>26</sup> Calgary is an example of a city with a community race relations program.

## **Volunteer Support Programs**

One example of a volunteer support program is the Host Program, which began as a federal initiative in the mid-1980s primarily for the benefit of government-assisted refugees. It linked Canadian volunteers with a newcomer family in a relationship of friendship and support. Where the program was properly structured and implemented, it achieved remarkable success. Detailed manuals and volunteer training programs were developed; these materials remain available. Many small communities organize and provide volunteer support in a variety of ways as a natural outgrowth of their community spirit. Welcoming communities could benefit from volunteer support programs for arriving newcomers (whether immigrants or migrating Canadians). Such programs could smooth the integration of new arrivals into the community, and the resulting friendships make it more likely that they will stay. Experience has shown that successful volunteer programs are usually led by paid facilitators.

An additional benefit of a volunteer support program is that it teaches an important Canadian value to newcomers who on occasion come from countries and cultures where the concept of volunteering is not so well understood or differs in significant ways from the common practice in Canada.

## **New Initiatives**

Beyond arrangements for employment and all the attributes of a welcoming community, there are a number of innovative ideas that might be employed to attract immigrants and to retain them for the longer term. Set out below are a number of creative initiatives that are being tried or talked about, as smaller centres seek to stem decline or to add to population.

### **Provincial Nominee Programs**

Some provinces now have the capacity, devolved from Ottawa, to exercise a measure of control over the Economic Immigration stream.<sup>27</sup> By making aggressive use of the Provincial Nominee initiative and staffing its government department appropriately, Manitoba currently accounts for most of the arrivals to Canada under the program. It is a model that would be instructive for others seeking to do the same. Manitoba has successfully attracted thousands of applications under its program, exceeding both its entitlements under negotiated federal arrangements and its capacity to process, despite a sizeable and qualified staff. This has allowed Manitoba to select as a priority applicants with jobs lined up and with family links to the province, thus increasing the likelihood of their retention.

### **The Group-of-Five Concept**

Under the existing Group of Five program (of the Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program), five qualified individuals have long been permitted to sponsor to Canada a refugee or refugee family. The concept has worked well. It has been suggested that this technique could become one aspect of Provincial Nominee Programs where desired by the implementing province. This would have to be negotiated with Ottawa as a component of a province's program.

### **The Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program**

This program is a largely untapped resource for participating communities to attract newcomers. For years, far fewer refugees have arrived in Canada by this route than would be allowed under federal government targets. While there have always been many faith-based organizations with the power to sponsor, the diversity of Sponsorship Agreement Holders (SAH) in Canada has grown significantly in the past five years, with many more SAHs supported by specific ethnocultural communities. The Community Sponsorship Program, a new initiative under the Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program, makes it easier for small organizations to sponsor refugees without having to set up a whole new infrastructure as an SAH.

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<sup>27</sup> Quebec has long had this capacity in significant measure for all aspects of immigration, by separate agreement with Ottawa, and has constructively used its capacity to promote regionalization within the province. Provincial Nominee Programs exist in a number of provinces.

Groups have sponsored the arrival of many refugees into Manitoba. These were primarily “family linked” (that is, nominated by relatives), with a built-in propensity to remain because their family was already established there. This sponsorship has become a significant component of the province’s immigration program. The City of Winnipeg recently joined this initiative, setting up a \$250,000 assurance fund to back faith-based and community groups undertaking the risks of family-linked sponsorships.<sup>28</sup> These concepts are available to be implemented by any smaller centre under existing policies and targets of the federal Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program.

## **Government Sponsorship of Refugees Program**

This program, run by the federal government, brings approximately 7,500 refugees to Canada each year. These are assigned to various centres historically and demonstrably equipped to receive them. Any changes to current allocation procedures in order to benefit self-identifying small centres would require extensive multilateral negotiations. This is a source, however, that participating communities may wish to explore.

## **International Students and Temporary Workers**

While the new Immigration and Refugee Protection Act did not fulfil earlier expectations that International Students and Temporary Workers would be given special access to immigration procedures, it is still too soon in the life of the new legislation to see whether such will develop. This is an area to be monitored and for which future lobbying may be appropriate. It would seem that persons admitted as students or temporary workers, and who therefore remain in a particular locale for some time and develop some roots, might be more likely to stay there if they were later admitted as immigrants. The investment already made in them by the education system or by employers, as the case may be, also makes a compelling case for retaining them in Canada.

Considering again the importance of employment to the attraction and retention of newcomers: the Temporary Worker program brings the employer into the process from the start and provides the essential job ingredient. Safeguards in the program ensure both the existence and the need of the job in the participating community. The practical limitations on the employee’s mobility required by the program, ensures retention in the community. At the same time, these new workers must be safeguarded against abuse and exploitation; if there is a change in the employment conditions, the worker must not automatically lose status. Policies should be changed to allow special access to subsequent immigration procedures by Temporary Workers because the mechanism brings together the essential elements of a successful immigrant attraction and retention program in the participating community.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> The Manitoba Interfaith Immigration Council, which administers the program for the Manitoba Refugee Sponsors, can offer more information.

<sup>29</sup> One creative way to make a Temporary Worker into a permanent resident is to link the program with the Provincial Nominee Program at the appropriate time.

## **Financial Incentives (1)**

Provinces that want to attract and retain newcomers could consider special provincial income tax deductions for those moving in, spread, for example, over three years. This could fairly and advantageously apply to migrating Canadians as well as to immigrants.

## **Financial Incentives (2)**

A stepped refunding of Canadian immigration fees (now paid by the arriving immigrant) by municipal or provincial jurisdiction over three years might have appeal as both an attracting and a retaining strategy. This stratagem could also be applied to travel and moving costs, either refunded gradually in cash or allowed as provincial tax deductions (the least administratively complex option). Of lesser cost to funding governments might be the establishment of revolving loan funds, though these would bring their own administrative costs.

## **Financial Incentives (3)**

Some provinces, by reason of their “have-not” status, receive federal transfer payments. These may find that the annual increment in these payments for each additional resident significantly exceeds (whether in year one or cumulatively over successive years) the costs of settlement—whether those costs are defined in the current manner or expanded by new cost-of-program commitments, as outlined above. There might be a business case for spending on advertising to attract immigrants, for financial incentives to both attract and retain them, and for enhanced settlement services in the welcoming community.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> A cautionary note should be introduced here. The impact of secondary in-migration on settlement agencies needs to be monitored in receiving communities that might not be funded in sufficient measure for the extra client load. Settlement funds are not transfer payments that “move” when the newcomer moves.

## Social Contracts and Alternatives

The concept of “social contracts” was recently introduced by the federal Minister for Citizenship and Immigration, Denis Coderre. During the summer of 2002, he floated the idea that immigrants could contract to settle for a term in designated areas as an additional way of responding to and meeting selection criteria, much in the manner that temporary foreign workers (under the long-established program) are now tied to an area or job by the limitations of their employment-related visa. If people were tied to a designated community for two or three years, many would tend to put down roots in their adopted community and would be more likely to stay. This creative idea, while popular in smaller centres, has been met with some controversy, even characterized as “un-Canadian.” But despite the so-called “mobility rights” guaranteed in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, there seems to be no legal reason not to admit persons on a temporary visa and later to grant them permanent resident status when the visa’s conditions have been fulfilled. It has been pointed out that assessing consequences (like deportation) for failure to comply with the conditions of a visa would result in more problems.<sup>31</sup> A more generous Temporary Worker program, and a smooth process for conversion of visas to permanent residency status, might accomplish the same result without the controversy. Because such a strategy would involve two federal departments, Citizenship and Immigration Canada and Human Resources Development Canada, this would require an over-arching immigration policy.

## Marketing

Marketing a community is tempting in an era of electronic communication, Web sites, and Canadians’ ease of travel to alluring destinations. It should be approached with a degree of caution lest the emissaries be overwhelmed with enquiries and unable to fulfil expectations of those seeking admittance to Canada by whatever means or through whatever door. Target marketing is a more logical option, and should be based upon a full knowledge of Canada’s immigration rules and the community’s ability to have its candidates fall within them. Because retention is also the goal, “truth in advertising” should be watchwords, and employment should be available, along with the key supports already outlined in this paper. Any plan of action that begins by attracting newcomers must culminate in their integration within the fabric of the community, to remain and build a new life.

Where the interest in increasing immigration is driven by specific labour market needs, employer corporations often do their own marketing and promotion to recruit new workers. It is vital that the efforts of receiving communities be part of an overall plan to receive the new immigrants, not only into a corporate workforce but also into their life. The need for labour is not always driven by the industrial or service sectors; it frequently focuses on the more generalized recruitment of professionals and skilled immigrants. Once again this points to the importance of understanding the real employment environment for those arriving with such skills and professional accreditations.

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<sup>31</sup> Concern has also been expressed that if federal dollars for settlement services are finite, regional dispersion of immigrants thus contrived might remove a portion of federal funding from existing agencies that depend on it, especially in the big cities.

## Conclusion

It is vital to recognize that smaller communities, however they choose to describe themselves, that want to receive and retain immigrants can be successful only with the support and collaboration of all stakeholders. Dominating the topics we have discussed (Employment, Welcoming Communities, and New Initiatives) is the need for mutual commitment and effort by all levels of government and the community at large.

Community goals should be defined so that achievements can be evaluated. Plans should always be flexible, because circumstances change. Good policy development must allow for flexibility.

With sufficient will, the resources (tools) can be made available—but an organized effort is also required. Good intentions, or a positive philosophical framework, are obviously important and may be readily available. Although, good intentions will yield little without a coherent plan and a co-ordinating and implementing structure in place, plus strong leadership to make it work.

Political and community leaders, and the structures they lead, may declare their commitment to immigration and community building, but the goal will probably not be attained without a directing mechanism. The forces that have caused most immigrants to end up in a handful of large places will be reined in and refocused only if smaller centres pursue their interests aggressively.

## Recommendations

- That Canada adopt an immigration strategy that will increase the benefits of immigration to all parts of Canada;
- That Federal and Provincial policies recognize and encourage small centre initiatives that express the need and desire to attract new growth and retain existing populations;
- That a “Tool Box” of ideas be developed for the assistance of self-identifying small centres that want to attract and to retain immigrants.

# APPENDIX

## A Tool Box of Ideas

### A Framework

#### Attracting and Retaining Immigrants

(The small centre strategy)

#### 1. Introducing the Tool Box

##### **Purpose**

- Background context
  - Voluntary Sector Initiative/Background Paper
  - Population distribution and the plight of small centres
  - Demographic realities for Canada
  - Current immigration realities and strategies
  - Economic consequences
- Format and components
- How to use and why

#### 2. Building the Foundations

- Importance of community consensus, involving
  - Three levels of government
  - Business community
  - Organized labour, trade and professional associations
  - Community services
  - School boards, educational and training institutions
  - Public opinion
- Strategies for developing consensus
  - Setting objectives and goals in short and longer term
  - Assessing community's receiving context, strengths, weaknesses
  - Understanding the community's demographic realities
  - Sharing and publicizing

- Understanding the immigration context
  - The world context/competition
  - Canada's current immigration priorities and rules
  - Overseas staffing issues and resulting queues
  - Provincial immigration policies, rules, and resources
  - The community's advantages/disadvantages, role
- Getting organized
  - Establishing and legitimizing the immigration function within the community
  - Giving structure and leadership to the function

### 3. The Prime Importance of Employment

- Recognizing the community's employment realities
- Employer involvement in strategies
- A community employment database
- "Skilled" vs "unskilled" immigrants, Temporary Workers, International students
- Credentials recognition issues
- Government and community programs
- The role of unions, trade and professional organizations
- The role of professional organizations and licensing bodies
- Vocational/occupational language development
- New business development and selfemployment

### 4. Attracting Immigrants

- Possibilities using existing programs
  - Economic immigration (skilled, entrepreneur, business)
  - Provincial Nominee Program
  - Family Class
  - Private Sponsorship of Refugees
  - Government Assisted Refugees (& Joint Assistance cases)
  - Temporary Workers/"Social Contracts"
  - International Students
- Enhancing the possibilities
  - Financial incentives**
  - A) Provincial tax deductions
  - B) Progressive refunding of immigration fees
  - C) Provincial tax deductions for moving, relocating expenses

Overseas promotion

- A) Target marketing/employment -related marketing/community-linked ethnic marketing
- B) Web sites
- C) Realistic expectations
- D) “Matching” and “destining”

**Local opportunities**

- A) Facilitating processing
  - B) Encouraging family reunification
  - C) Supporting refugee sponsoring groups
  - D) Working with employers
  - E) Encouraging educational institutions to attract foreign students
- Improving your competitive advantage
  - Lobbying for changes to immigration policies

## 5. The Welcoming Community

- Factors that create hospitable communities
  - Respecting and building diversity
  - Services
  - Policies
  - Education
  - Health
  - Leisure
  - Faith and spirituality
- Initial arrangements
  - Accommodation
  - Interpretation
  - Early orientation
  - Medical/health attention
  - Income sufficiency
  - Family needs
  - Spiritual/faith needs
- Early settlement support
  - Factors affecting adaptation and integration
  - Planning and coordinating orientation and settlement support, post arrival:

- A) Needs assessment
  - i. Basic factors: medical, SIN enrolment
  - ii. Housing
  - iii. Orientation
  - iv. Language training
  - v. Employment
  - vi. Health/medical
  - vii. Education
  - viii. Income support
  - ix. Recreation and leisure
- B) Linking with community
  - i. Services
  - ii. Social
  - iii. Employment networking
  - iv. Faith community
  - v. Ethnocultural community
  - vi. Volunteer opportunities
- Sustaining settlement and integration support
  - Factors to consider after first three months
    - A) Housing
    - B) Language assistance
    - C) Additional orientation
    - D) Medical/health issues
    - E) Economic self-sufficiency/employment
    - F) Education
    - G) Cultural and religious needs
    - H) Wellness and leisure
  - Building ties within the community
    - A) Social and civic participation
    - B) Children
    - C) Elders
    - D) Ethnocultural community development

## 6. Evaluating Success

- What works
- Models

## 7. Bibliography and Resource List, Useful Web sites and Links