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

ABSTRACT

This discussion paper, recognizing the well-documented realities associated with Canadian immigrants settling primarily in the major centres of population, nevertheless focuses on the development of a framework for achieving a more successful regional dispersion of immigrants and their retention in the smaller communities of settlement. It challenges communities wanting immigrants to develop strategies that are appropriate to their circumstances, and to implement them. It suggests ideas that might be employed.

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PREFACE / 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 immigrant newcomers, including refugees, to move to and stay in "smaller centres", other than Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver.[1]

There has been considerable discussion about what is meant by "smaller centres". Consensus has agreed upon the inadequacy of the phrase. There needs to be <u>an element of self- identification</u> by those "parts" or "places" of Canada that wish to receive immigrants, or more immigrants. Thus the entire Province of Manitoba could be such a part, or the City of Kingston such a place, while these entities might seem "large" rather than "small" to even smaller geographical divisions or communities wanting immigrants.

Several Jurisdictional Facets

It is already clear that there are several jurisdictional facets to any regional dispersion and retention strategy. There are those aspects that come within the purview and the abilities of the Federal government, and there are those aspects that must be dealt with by the self-identifying part or place (the "participating community"). The participating community may include elements of both Provincial and Municipal jurisdiction and roles. There is a potential role for jurisdictional partnerships, at localized levels where school boards, regional training boards, business associations, and labour, trade and professional structures may have a role.

Short-term Goal

The working group was tasked to find creative approaches to the regional dispersion and retention challenge, and to do so in preparation for the Second National Settlement Conference scheduled for Calgary, October 2 - 4, 2003. This conference will have a policy emphasis. It was intended that the working group's interim work would be sufficiently complete that its circulation prior to, and presentation in Calgary, could offer information and a perspective to frame discussion of a challenging and timely theme.

Structure / Strategy

The working group divided itself into three sub-groups or committees: Employment, Welcoming Communities, and New Initiatives. While there were inevitable topical overlaps, 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, so that this paper might be prepared as the consensus of the group, in time for the Second National Settlement Conference.

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 an Internet web site devoted to it under Metropolis aegis[2]. Recently published

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[1] 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.

[2] regionalization@metropolis.net

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 consent to 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, for the first time in 107 years, the Federal, Provincial and Territorial Ministers of Immigration met in Winnipeg to discuss the topic of immigration which is a "shared jurisdiction" under Canada's constitutional documents. At the conference's conclusion, the Ministers issued a joint press release that recognized the importance of a strategy for the regional dispersion of immigrants to Canada. "Ministers agreed that attracting 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...."[3].

More recently, the Federal Budget for 2003 - 2004 and Immigration Minister Denis Coderre's comments stemming from it, have confirmed the government's current emphasis on the topic. Citizenship and Immigration Canada's 2003 -2004 Report on Plans and Priorities[4] states that "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 rather its ideas are offered as a contribution to debate and planning within a relevant and developing field.

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[3] Press Release 2002 - 35 Winnipeg, October 16, 2002.
[4] http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/est-pre/20032004/CI-CI/CI-CIr34_e.asp

INTRODUCTION

This paper challenges the negativity that has been directed at attempts to advocate for greater regional dispersion of immigrants. Immigrants have in fact for decades settled successfully in Canada's small centres. This is not a phenomenon, it is a commonplace reality, but one that may need further study.

One of the few current references is a 2002 publication of Citizenship and Immigration Canada that examines the efficacy of strategies to achieve a more balanced geographic distribution of immigrants. Perhaps predictably it has reached discouraging conclusions.[5] The report "was commissioned to investigate whether there are reasonable and viable options for dispersing immigrants beyond the three largest metropolitan areas."[6] 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[7].

This paper also challenges the conventional wisdom that dispersion strategies should only target "second-tier cities". Its premise is that self-identifying small centres with an interest and indeed a desire to attract and retain immigrants, or more immigrants, should be encouraged and helped to achieve their goals.

Notwithstanding the obvious and documented difficulties, those who have prepared this paper recognize the intense interest in the topic in many so-called smaller centres across Canada. They believe efforts must be made to strengthen Canada in all its regions through a more balanced distribution of immigrants. They believe this is essential to the successful future of our country. They believe in a positive approach driven by collaboration between national and regional stakeholders. They believe there are things that can be done to make a difference. They believe that governments at all levels, the settlement sector, and the participating communities, all have roles to play. 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. They are intended to show what has worked or could work where communities of various sizes determine to attract and to retain newcomers.

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

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[5] *Toward a more balanced geographic distribution of immigrants*,
http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/srr/research/news2.html

[6] Memorandum 04 03 2002, Ann Ratcliffe, Director General Strategic Policy, Planning and Research, CIC

[7] Ann Ratcliffe, supra

EMPLOYMENT

The reason an arriving immigrant intends to live initially in a particular community, can depend on a number of factors. For refugees, it may be their assigned destination by the Federal Government under its Government Sponsorship program, or it may be the location of their sponsoring group under the Private Sponsorship program. For any immigrant, it may be the location of family, friends, or ethnic / linguistic community, or the lure provided by literature, or fame (the magnet of the big city) that determines selection of one's first Canadian home. Even inappropriate or inaccurate information may be a factor. Or it may be as simple as the place of termination of an international flight, or as complex as a Provincial Nominee Program that arranged special access. Or it may be the prospect of a job.

Whatever the reason for newcomers' initial selection of their first Canadian community, the most compelling reason an employable, able-bodied adult person has for staying in that community, is early acquisition of acceptable employment. Retention of newcomers in the longer term will depend on the interrelation of a multitude of factors like opportunities for career or educational advancement, and all the complexities arising from family and community ties. But if the initial transplanting is to take root, primacy must be given to employment, as soon as possible. In the case of couples, employment of both partners will be a factor.

The following areas will identify both challenges and initiatives that can be undertaken to address the newcomers' need for satisfactory employment. The great importance of employers' participation cannot be understated.

A Community Employment Database

As has been frequently said, the usual and unfortunate (for newcomers) reality is that only about 10 to 15 percent of all available jobs are ever advertised. It is imperative that a participating community challenge 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 are dependant 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 linkages to other web sites.[8]

It could prove useful for the participating community to have one community-focused electronic database and search tool through which potential immigrants can access accurate and current employment information about the community, and where the community and its employers can advertise their needs. Sector shortages and other relevant information could also be highlighted. The technology now exists to develop a localized tool in a cost-effective manner. Where there is sufficient interest in a community, and with Federal Government cooperation to ensure access to their existing employment data, the timing for developing such a tool appears to be very favorable.

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[9]

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[8] Canada WorkinfoNet 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.

[9] An industry-NGO collaboration in Manitoba known as "The Blue Sky Group" has developed a workable solution.

The province that successfully resolves this issue will have an immediate advantage in attracting skilled immigrants - until others follow suit.[10] This should be an enticement for those provinces that consider themselves as wanting immigrants.

There is here also an opportunity for community "roundtables" involving the provincial government, trade and professional governing bodies and the NGO sector to raise awareness of the issue, to work toward ensuring that credentials of newcomers are recognized as soon as possible, and to develop strategies for addressing overseas misinformation hazards faced by those contemplating coming to Canada.

In the meantime while we wait for, and lobby for, resolution of the impasse, there are things that participating communities can do. Mentoring programs have a long and successful history within the settlement sector, and have been replicated by provincial administrations in some sectors; these are an excellent way to bring trades and professional newcomers to a level of understanding of their new scene, and to help them approach and deal with Canadian licensing requirements on an informed and facilitated basis. Volunteer programs have been employed by both governments and corporations as a mechanism for introducing newcomers to the Canadian workplace; they must, when appropriate, be introduced only with the full cooperation of organized labour.[11] Some jurisdictions, like Ontario, have done considerable work on the assessment of a newcomer's prior learning; participating communities should be aware of local resources for this assessment, and ensure newcomers have access.

Eligibility for Government / Community Programs

Participating communities need to ensure that there are no barriers to the participation of newcomers in community or local government programs, whether employment related or not, arising from the mere "newness" of the immigrant in the community. There shouldn't be barriers for immigrants that are not there for the general population. Real barriers that relate to length of stay, or inadvertent barriers arising from gaps in the newcomer's knowledge, may encourage the newcomer to move. Deliberate efforts should be made to acquaint newcomers with available resources and opportunities through reception techniques that are pro-active.

The Role of Unions and Associations

Unions in the participating community need to "buy in" to the community goals for more immigrants and hence more workers. There must be a shared recognition that community prosperity and new residents are intertwined. Unions, 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 (French) as a Second Language for the new workers, and related Day Care opportunities for their children. This involves a whole-community response, especially including the participation of employers. Language is essential for 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-

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[10] On October 3, 2002, the Government of Manitoba announced "Development of a Government-wide Strategy to Address Qualification Recognition of Highly Skilled Immigrants"

[11] Some communities have organized databases for volunteer opportunities.

minded when measured against the over-riding goal of their retention by the community.[12] 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 delay time, 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 the newcomer to develop full time, independent income, but built-in disincentives in social assistance penalize the worker 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 / retention practice.

Cross Cultural Training for Workers and Employers

A possible result of immigrants arriving in typical participating communities is that, given the current sources of Canadian immigration, there may be cultural and experiential differences between the newcomer and others in the workplace. In extreme cases this could give rise to racism on the job, an inhibitor, both of successful integration and of employer and community retention. Community resources for cross cultural training should be identified or developed and then made available for the workplace. The settlement NGO sector is a frequent source of such expertise.

Employer Participation in Immigration Initiatives

Because of the primary importance of employment, there will be a number of opportunities for the participation of employers in initiatives to attract and retain newcomers. The newly developed (and developing) Provincial Nominee Programs (see New Initiatives section following) may provide creative opportunities for employers within participating communities to participate in the program by offering employment as part of a qualification and selection process[13]. This will require collaboration between the provincial government and the participating community's employers.

Similarly, entrance to Canada on various temporary work permits (a long-established program) as initiated by employers, affords future excellent opportunities for retention of temporary newcomers as permanent residents. One cautionary note needs to be raised, however, that has to do with ensuring that the vulnerability of temporary workers is monitored, so that abuse and exploitation is avoided while their mobility is restricted by terms of their temporary permits.

Foreign or "International" students have limited permission to work in Canada following graduation, and this can be another excellent source of permanent residents, facilitated by their employers, and dependant on the immigration rules applying in the circumstances.[14]

Self-employment Opportunities

When surveying employment opportunities for newcomers, participating communities should not forget that some may be able to be self-employed. Many immigrants traditionally have been or became entrepreneurs, with their own business, or re-established as an independent practitioner in their trade or profession.

"Skilled" Immigrants

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[12] 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.

[13] 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.

[14] 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.

Canada's immigration policy, especially where it relates to the classification now called "Economic Immigration", has long been referred to as a "labour market strategy". Official advocacy for this policy has usually focused on the need for the "skilled" immigrant without offering a precise definition. Perhaps one can be inferred by the so-called "points system" used in qualifying applicants in this classification. The terminology "skilled" has convenience in that it serves a political need to assuage fears of, or prejudice toward, immigrants in some quarters. But the terminology is troublesome in that it may not accurately address Canada's labour needs from time to time. Some current writing[15] has suggested that what developed countries may actually need is "unskilled" workers, but again this may be limiting and unfortunate terminology. The new Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (2002), as well as recent remarks by Federal

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 also the refugee stream. As participating communities survey their employment needs, they 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 effects the entire family, whether bound for the workplace, or 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 an hospitable community extends beyond a friendly welcome and neighbourly attitudes. It reaches into the fabric of community attributes and available services. The following areas will identify both challenges and initiatives that can be undertaken to address the newcomers' need for a welcoming community.[16]

Housing

The challenge of finding acceptable, appropriate and affordable housing is becoming increasingly difficult in many Canadian communities for persons with limited financial resources. Immigrants will most often be found in this category when they first arrive, and their difficulties will be compounded by unfamiliarity with the local housing scene and how to access it. This is an area where a community response becomes imperative if the newcomers are to have a positive transition, to feel welcomed, safe and happy in their new community. The inevitable uncertainties associated with those early weeks will be magnified if housing becomes an issue. This will threaten both successful integration of the newcomers and ultimately their retention within the community. Through experience primarily with refugees, Settlement agencies are often best equipped to handle this issue, and could be mandated to provide the service to all classes of arriving immigrants.[17]

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[15] *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

[16] 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.

[17] 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

In some communities, public housing is accessible to newcomers, depending on its current availability. In addition to good standards of maintenance despite a low rent structure, community housing initiatives often offer other supportive programs including community kitchens, play groups etc, all of which add to the integration component. Public housing authorities should be sensitive to the diversity in family composition, and family practices, especially in defining policies on size of housing allocations and on household composition. Public housing authorities need to develop anti racism strategies, not only within the corporation but within the housing communities / complexes.

Settlement agencies or community information centres, usually have links to housing information as well as information and links to many community services and community organizations[18].

Initial Accommodation

Welcoming communities may wish to address another housing-related issue that can impose a hardship on newcomers. Upon arriving, "Economic Class"[19] immigrant families are usually forced to seek out and pay for hotel accommodation at market rates. Canada has its own criteria for the amount of money (interpreted flexibly by case
processing officers abroad) with which each immigrant family is expected to arrive. But the required amounts are generally not large and can be threatened by the high cost of hotel living in Canada if it continues very long. If a community is not able to offer temporary accommodation[20], it might consider a subsidized arrangement with local hotels so that newcomers' funds for initial settlement are not too quickly eroded.

Medical Services / Other Social Services

The wide range of government-funded services available in Canada is unlikely to be duplicated in the previous experience of most arriving immigrants. We should not assume that newcomers have a knowledge of these services and their availability. This is another area where a community response becomes imperative, so that newcomers will not, by reason of lack of knowledge, be denied access to services they may need. Settlement agencies are best equipped to disseminate this information, but mechanisms may need to be developed to connect newcomers with these agencies. [21] Communities may wish to consider special provision for offering a "triage" approach to the initial medical assessments / needs of newcomers, so that selected practitioners may develop the special knowledge and skills needed to deal with situations that may be atypical in the Canadian context, and to work with interpreters[22]. This may necessitate an enhanced level of financial support for community facilities and services.

Education

Acquisition of the local language is vital for integration and to meet social needs. Welcoming communities must be prepared for the reception and integration of children within the school system. This may involve additional resources for the instruction of English (French) as a Second Language. Some schools with familiarity in

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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.

[18] The Lakehead Social Planning Council in Thunder Bay is an example of one such community resource.

[19] Also includes Provincial Nominee arrivals.

[20] Winnipeg's International Centre is planning to open one such facility for the inexpensive temporary accommodation of arriving immigrants.

[21] 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.

[22] The Bridge Community Health Clinic established in Vancouver in 1994 as a collaborative venture, is a good example of an effective initiative.

receiving newcomer children have successfully instituted "buddy systems" or "Kiddie Host" programs[23]. Arrangements for adult ESL (FSL) programs, for best results 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 entry to a program can be at the appropriate level.

For those seeking to enhance their education and skills, there should be 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 are aware 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 on the life of newcomers who thus become a part of what is happening around them. Facilitated access may therefore be necessary[24]. Accessibility may also mean sensitivity to cultural practices. Municipal governments that provide funding to these programs could tie some of this funding (perhaps even new or enhanced funding) to a requirement that the receiving program provide free admission for a certain number of newcomers , distributed through responsible service providing organizations and community groups (e.g. United Way agencies).
Most programs have vacancies (unsold seats for instance), and are interested in larger attendance / audience development. So this becomes a win-win situation[25].

Cross Cultural and Anti-Racism Resources

The possibility of cultural misunderstandings and racism should be admitted by a welcoming community, and resources identified and strategies put in place to deal with these. Preventive information and programs are desirable. A number of Canadian communities already have such strategies[26]. Some have adopted anti-racism policies and strategies as a matter of public policy and affirmation of their objectives in recognizing and sustaining diverse communities. Implementation of these policies within the municipal organization and its services provides a model for the private sector in these communities.

Many communities will already have service providing organizations with experience in working cross culturally and 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. Those participating communities that feel they lack capacity and experience in these areas should recognize that the resources available to them include those within their region. It isn't necessary for all things of this nature to be in place within the community before it seeks and invites newcomers; with a community commitment, these can be developed.

Volunteer Support Programs

The Host Program, begun as a Federal initiative in the mid-'eighties, primarily for the benefit of government-assisted refugees, is one example of a volunteer support program. It provided a relationship of friendship and support between small groups of Canadian volunteers and a newcomer family with whom they were linked.

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[23]A manual for one such program ("Ambassador Program") has been developed by Manitoba Interfaith Immigration Council, 397 Carlton Street, Winnipeg, MB, R3B 2K9

[24] 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.

[25]This device can also be extended to Social Allowance recipients to avoid a possible "backlash" that would be inimical of the successful integration / acceptance of newcomers by some.

[26] Calgary is an example of a city with a community race relations program.

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 all manner of ways as a natural outgrowth of their community spirit. Welcoming communities will benefit from implementation of a volunteer support program for arriving newcomers (whether immigrants or migrating Canadians). Such a program will facilitate their integration into the community and the resulting friendships will enhance the likelihood of their retention. Experience has shown that there is usually a need for paid facilitation of such a volunteer program if it is to be successful.

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 is expressed differently from the common practice in Canada.

NEW INITIATIVES

Beyond arrangements for employment and all the attributes of a welcoming community, are there new ideas that might be employed, both for attracting immigrants in the first place, and for retaining 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[27]. One province, Manitoba, currently accounts for most of the arrivals to Canada under the Provincial Nominee initiative by making aggressive use of the program, and staffing its government department appropriately. 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 significantly sized and qualified staff). This has allowed Manitoba to select as a priority those applicants who have jobs lined up, and family links to the province, thus increasing the likelihood of the immigrant's 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 might be similarly employed as one mechanism of Provincial Nominee Programs if desired by the implementing province. This would need 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. Annual numbers of refugees arriving to Canada by this route have for years remained smaller than Federal government targets. While the number of faith-based organizations with the power to sponsor has always been large, 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

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[27]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.

without having to set up a whole new infrastructure as a SAH.

Manitoba groups have been sponsoring large numbers of refugees into that province, primarily "family linked" (relatives have nominated them), with a built-in propensity to remain because one's family is already established there. This has become a significant component of the Province's immigration program. The City of Winnipeg has recently joined this initiative by setting up a $250,000 assurance fund to back faith-based and community groups undertaking the risks of family-linked sponsorships[28]. 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 is run by the Federal government, and currently brings to Canada approximately 7,500 refugees 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 fulfill 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 have a propensity to remain there if admitted later 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 primary importance of employment to attraction and retention of newcomers, the Temporary Worker program brings the employer to the process from its initiation, and ensures the essential job ingredient. Safeguards in the program ensure both the existence and the need of the job in the context of the participating community. The practical limitations on the employee's mobility the program requires, ensures retention in the community. At the same time, there must be safeguards against abuse and exploitation of these new workers, and if there is a change of condition in the employment, that the worker will not lose status automatically. It appears logical that policy changes should therefore be effected to allow special access to subsequent immigration procedures by Temporary Workers because the mechanism brings together, for the participating community, essential elements of a successful immigrant attraction and retention program[29].

Financial Incentives (1)

Provinces seeking to attract and retain newcomers could consider a regime for 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 / 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, although they would bring with them their own administrative costs.

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[28]The program is administered for the Manitoba Refugee Sponsors by the Manitoba Interfaith Immigration Council from whom information is available.
[29]One creative answer for effecting the eventual permanent residency of a Temporary Worker, is to link the program with the Provincial Nominee Program at the appropriate time.

<u>Financial Incentives</u> (3)

Some provinces that are, by reason of their "have-not" status, in receipt of federal transfer payments may find that the annual increment they receive in these payments for each additional resident, significantly exceeds (whether in year one or in their cumulative effect over successive years) the costs of settlement - whether those costs are defined in the current manner or expanded by new cost-of-program commitments [above]. This makes 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.[30]

<u>Social Contracts and Alternatives</u>

The concept of "Social Contracts" is a possibility recently introduced by the Federal Minister for Citizenship and Immigration, Hon. Denis Coderre, who during the summer of 2002 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 / job by reason of the limitations in their employment-related visa. Tying people to an initial term of two or three years required settlement in a designated community, would tend to see many put down roots in their adopted community and enhance the likelihood of their remaining. 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, it would seem that there is no legal impediment to admitting persons on a temporary visa that is capable of being converted in some term of years to permanent resident status when the conditions of issuance have been fulfilled. It has been pointed out that assessing consequences (like deportation) for failure to comply with the conditions of issuance is more problematic.[31] It would seem that a more generous development of the existing temporary worker program, and a smooth process for conversion of their visas to permanent residency status, might accomplish the same result without the controversy. Such a strategy would cross the current domains of two federal departments, Citizenship and Immigration Canada, and Human Resources Development Canada, and would thus require an over-arching and immigration focused policy.

<u>Marketing</u>

Marketing a community is tempting in an era of electronic communication, web sites, and Canadians' ease of travel to alluring destinations. But it should be approached with a degree of caution lest the emissaries be overwhelmed with enquiries and unable to fulfill 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, as well as the key supports already outlined in this paper. Any plan of action that may begin with 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 labor market needs, employer corporations often do their own marketing and promotion to recruit new workers. It is vital that their efforts be part of an overall community plan to receive the new immigrants, not only into the corporate workforce, but also into their life in the receiving community. This need for labour is not always driven by the industrial or service sectors, but 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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[30] A cautionary note bears introduction. The impact of secondary in-migration on settlement agencies in receiving communities that might not have been funded in sufficient measure for the extra client load, needs to be monitored. Settlement funds are not transfer payments that "move" when the newcomer moves.

[31] 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 a "smaller community" (however it may choose to describe itself) that wants to receive and retain immigrants, to be successful will need the support and collaboration of all stakeholders. Overarching the importance of the topics we have discussed (Employment, Welcoming Communities, and New Initiatives) is the need for mutual commitment and effort by three levels of government and by the community, broadly defined.

Goals should be defined so that achievements can be evaluated. Flexibility should always accompany any plans, because circumstances will change. Good policy development must allow for flexibility.

The resources (the "tools") are, or can be made available, if the will is present. But an organized effort is also required. Good intentions or a positive philosophical framework are obviously important and may indeed be readily achieved. But if there is no coherent plan, and a co-ordinating and implementing structure in place with strong leadership to make it work, then the good intentions may yield little.

Leaders, be they political or community, may declare themselves and the structures they lead, in favour of immigration and community building, but without ensuring that a directing mechanism exists to make this happen, it probably won't. The forces already at play that have caused most immigrants to end up in a handful of large places, will only be reined in and refocused if the smaller centres pursue their interests aggressively.

Recommendations

1.   That Canada adopt an immigration strategy that will increase the benefits of immigration to all parts of Canada;

2. 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;

3. That a "Tool Box" of ideas be developed for the assistance of self-identifying small centres that want to attract and to retain immigrants.

**A TOOL BOX OF IDEAS
A FRAMEWORK**

Attracting and Retaining Immigrants[i]
(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 board(s), 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
    - The Province's immigration policy, rules, and resources
    - The community's advantages / disadvantages, role
- Getting organized
    - Establishing / legitimizing the immigration function within the community
    - Giving structure and leadership to the function

3. The Primary 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 self-employment

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
  <u>Financial incentives</u>
    - A) Provincial tax deductions
    - B) Progressive refunding of immigration fees
    - C) Provincial tax deductions for moving, relocating expenses
  - <u>Overseas promotion</u>
    - A) Target marketing / employment related marketing / ethnic community linked marketing
    - B) Web sites
    - C) Realistic expectations
    - D) "Matching" and "destining"
    <u>Local opportunities</u>
    - 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 in creating 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) <u>Needs assessment</u>
      - 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) <u>Linking with community</u>
      - i. Services
      - ii. Social
      - iii. Employment networking
      - iv. Faith community
      - v. Ethnocultural community
      - vi. Volunteer opportunities
- Sustaining settlement and integration support
  - <u>Factors to consider post initial 3 months</u>
    - 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
    - <u>Building ties within the community</u>
      - 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 Websites and Links