Conference on Northern and Small Communities

March 1-2, 2011
North Bay, Ontario

Final Report

INTRODUCTION

The Conference on Northern and Small Communities was organized by the Welcoming Communities Initiative (WCI) and the North Bay and District Multicultural Centre (NBDMC). It took place on March 1-2, 2011 in North Bay, Ontario. It was preceded by a complementary one-day event that was hosted by the Conference Board of Canada and the City of North Bay; the two events were thematically linked, and attendees could participate in both. At their event, the Conference Board presented a set of indicators, which were developed in-house and described the features of a welcoming community with the focus on smaller communities as destinations of choice for immigrants and Canadians alike. Eight Northern and smaller centres across Ontario were included in the Conference Board's event; they were: North Bay, Timmins, Sudbury, Sault Ste Marie, Thunder Bay, Kenora, Huron County, and Chatham.

Following this, the Northern and Small Communities Conference attracted more than 70 participants. The invitees included municipal officials, coordinators from the Local Immigration Partnerships (LIPs), service providers, academic researchers including several from northern and smaller communities, officials from key stakeholder organizations, and representatives from federal and provincial government agencies including FedNor, Citizenship and Immigration Canada, Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, and the Rural Secretariat.   The Francophone network, Réseau de soutien à l'immigration francophone pour le Nord de l'Ontario, was also represented.

Generous support for the Northern and Small Communities Conference was provided by Citizenship and Immigration Canada—Ontario Region, FedNor, the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration, the Welcoming Communities Initiative, the City of North Bay, the North Bay and District Multicultural Centre and the Canadian Youth Business Foundation.

CONFERENCE OBJECTIVES

The genesis for the conference was a meeting between representatives from a number of Northern Ontario communities and members of the WCI, which took place at the WCI-LIP conference in Ottawa in October 2010. From this meeting emerged an idea for an event that would focus on Northern and smaller communities' LIP strategies and action plans and explore how best to support them analytically. With this in mind, the following objectives were established for the conference:

1. To identify crucial issues associated with four inter-connected themes: (a) economic development; (b) attraction, retention, and branding (including Francophone recruitment and integration); (c) civic engagement and sports and recreation; and (d) the adaptation of mainstream services;
2. To set the stage for a series of high-priority studies by the WCI to help communities elaborate their LIP plans;
3. To identify potential pilot sites for implementing various studies; and
4. To help develop a cadre of researchers and graduate students, especially from Northern colleges and universities, who are interested in undertaking research to benefit Northern and smaller centres.

The overall goal was the development of a set of tangible ideas for advancing a select number of key policy and practice priorities in each of the four thematic areas. These would help structure the WCI's research program (see www.welcomingcommunities.ca) and ensure its relevance to the concerns of Northern and smaller centres. In addition, the exchange of ideas would inform the policies and programs of federal departments, provincial ministries, municipalities, and community organizations.

Through this conference and future events, the WCI and its community partners hope to establish a shared strategic platform that will help Northern and small centres reap the benefits of migration. This platform will be supported by research that focuses on pragmatic concerns and promising practices.

A conference program is included in an appendix to this report, and our summary of the event is divided into two parts. In the first, we report on the discussions emerging from the conference's four plenary sessions. In the second, we provide summative conclusions from the conference's four breakout sessions. In each case, these are divided according to the conference's four themes and include some of the key ideas, examples, and suggestions contributed by participants.

OBSERVATIONS FROM THE PLENARY SESSIONS

There were four plenary sessions, and these were designed to elicit information from a broad range of experts and stakeholders on the four major conference themes. To this end, each session involved an initial, stage-setting presentation followed by a moderated discussion involving panelists with widely different perspectives. Audience involvement was encouraged at the end of each session, with the aim of provoking dialogue and mutual learning. This was consistent with the formative nature of the conference.

Economic Development

- Population decline is one of the key drivers of the North's interest in immigration. Northern Ontario's population grew steadily until 1961, when it experienced a brief jump between 1961 and 1971. After that, population growth has been very slow.
- While investors were once the focus of economic development strategies, this is no longer the case. Now the emphasis is on *people* and human capital rather than on pure financial capital. The theory is that if human capital is present, financial capital will follow in the form of investors and employers. New economic development strategies target talent, creativity, skills, knowledge, and social capital.
- In the North, human capital can be imported or cultivated through the in-migration of newcomers from other regions of the country, natural increase through the birth of children, investments in Aboriginal peoples, and the attraction of immigrants from other countries.
- Immigrants may be attracted by an area's geography, its quality of life, its culture, the education system, and job opportunities. They are also likely to look at the extent to which the community is a site of creativity. This is because creative people are attracted to creative places.
- Of course, the community must also be welcoming. This does not necessarily mean the creation of new businesses to serve new populations. Rather, it may mean making adjustments to existing businesses or revitalizing and redeveloping the downtown core.
- Importantly, businesses, industries, and communities must work together to foster a warm welcome and contribute to economic development. The Community Futures program is a good example of this type of collaboration. This initiative brings together businesses, citizens, and various stakeholders to respond to issues facing their community.
- Moreover, in a number of Northern communities, the social and the economic have been closely tied with settlement agencies growing in tandem with the in-flux of immigrant workers. For this reason, and in contrast with many other regions, immigration in the North is often conceived of in economic terms, rather than as a social issue. Nonetheless, immigration involves a number of players who must be engaged and encouraged to work together; the LIPs have played an important role in this regard.
- That being said, we must think more broadly about the role that immigrants can play in the economy. Immigrants are often thought of only as *employees*, but they are often *employers* as well. Bridging, training, and mentoring programs for immigrant employers form additional avenues that should be considered.

Attraction, Retention, and Branding

- Attraction, retention, and branding are emerging areas of interest. We must think about the kinds of policies that are needed, the sorts of relationships that should be fostered, and the kind of information that is required to facilitate this. Areas of focus could include marketing and awareness initiatives that target employers, the public, students and immigrants; technologies and tools that can facilitate attraction and retention, such as social media, radio, television, and in-person ambassadors; committees, partnerships, and settlement organizations and

institutions that play a role; and programs that communities can take advantage of to position themselves as attractive and welcoming to newcomers.

- There is an appetite for change. Communities are looking attract new residents, but this is a complex area with many different moving parts, and these players need to be brought together.
- We can look to Manitoba as one example. Similar to the LIPs, Manitoba had a vision, which was to increase the share of immigrants that it received. To support this vision, they aimed for: immigration that responded to the province's economic objectives and labour market realities; adjustments to services so that they would meet new needs; a contribution to the province's cultural diversity; support for the development of rural areas; and measures to maintain and foster the province's Francophone communities. They set a target of attracting 10,000 immigrants per year, and over a 10-year period, Manitoba more than tripled its intake.
- Although the federal government played an important guiding role, mayors, local councilors, Chambers of Commerce, and the service sector implemented, executed, and communicated the integral role that immigration can play. Here, visioning, goal-setting, leadership, communication, locally responsive policies, and tailored programs were all central.
- Communities should look at how they can use existing immigration programs to meet their needs. This might include taking advantage of Provincial Nominee Programs, the Temporary Foreign Worker program, or attracting international students and retaining them via the Canadian Experience Class. This requires working with universities, colleges, and the business sector and cultivating champions.
- When an innovative program is developed, share it! Attending conferences, holding workshops, developing toolkits, and going to international fairs are ways to let stakeholders and immigrants know what you are doing to attract newcomers to your community.
- In spite of the range and breadth of activity, however, there are still a number of disconnects in the immigration field, including those between the national and international dimensions, federal and provincial governments, and local stakeholders and others. These disconnects must be addressed if communities are to develop the machinery needed to attract and retain newcomers.
- Complicating this is a lack of knowledge about Northern Ontario, a lack of a critical mass, and intense competition for new talent, skills, knowledge, and businesses. Communities thus need to market themselves not only as "nice," but as good places to do business. This marketing must be targeted: focus on your community's particular strengths and align these with external niches.

Civic Engagement and Sports and Recreation

- Although jobs may attract newcomers to communities, it is often culture, the arts, heritage, and the "creative economy" that keep them there. These features interface with economic development and are an important component of welcoming and retaining talent. As one panelist put it, culture is a starburst that touches on the environment, the economy, and the social, human side of cities.

- In a similar vein, it was suggested that while having a job is important, if you do not have a voice in the development of public policy or the direction that your community is taking, you are unlikely to feel as though you have a stake. As such, political and civic engagement are important, and this might include voting, running for office, volunteering, philanthropy, and participating in civil society. These activities generate social capital – networks, in other words – and research suggests that this is an important driver of economic activity.

- Unfortunately, however, newcomers and visible minorities are numerically under-represented in elected office, and they tend not to vote at the same rate as other Canadians; the Chinese and Black communities are particularly marginalized in this respect. More positively, newcomers do tend to donate more to charity than other Canadians, but their rates of voluntarism are lower, particularly in sports and the social service sector. Most of this research has been conducted at the national level or in larger cities, however, and we need to know more about engagement in small- and medium-sized centres.

- Nonetheless, there are best practices that communities can emulate. For example, Edmonton has experimented with a model in which multicultural brokers visit newcomers and minorities in their own homes to talk about public policy; this is a means of overcoming individuals' discomfort or lack of familiarity with traditional "town halls." Edmonton also has a community partnership program that targets newer immigrant communities and helps them apply for funding to develop public spaces. Edmonton and Vancouver are also engaging in outreach with newer immigrant organizations with grant applications being a particular area of focus. In Toronto, there is a regional champions program that partners young women with female councilors. Similarly, there are organizations that offer training to immigrants and minorities interested in running for public office. Elections BC, meanwhile, is engaging young immigrants and minorities to serve as interpreters at polling booths. Any of these programs could be scaled up or down depending on the size of the community.

- We can also look to work that has been done through the Francophone network, which has a linguistically situated, community-centred mandate. This requires collaboration, however. For example, the LIPs and the Francophone network can work together to facilitate linguistically sensitive services that would encourage diverse immigration and the engagement of the French and English communities.

- Further best practices can be found in the area of sports and recreation. Here, we can look at the Newcomer On the Move program, which works to increase the opportunities that young newcomer girls have to "get off the bleachers and onto the field." It has three parts: understanding the barriers that young newcomer girls face in sports and recreation, discussing the kinds of activities they would prefer to engage in, and disseminating this information to other communities so that they can develop responsive sports and recreation programs. Among the components that have been instrumental in the success of the program are: partnerships; communicating with participants about their preferences; direct and targeted participant recruitment; liaison with parents; mentoring; and providing transportation.

- It was emphasized that programs cannot be "one size fits all." Communities must consider the range of ways in which newcomers and minorities want to participate, be engaged, and be a part of the collective voice of the community.

Adaptation of Mainstream Services

- Although discussions about immigration tend to focus on governments, businesses, schools, and universities, the provision of settlement services is a central piece of the puzzle. This may include the adaptation of existing services, the creation of new services, and even overseas orientation programs that begin prior to immigrants' arrival in Canada. The goal in all cases is to facilitate integration and meet the needs of newcomers. These needs may be different for each immigrant and must be assessed. Importantly, immigrants should be involved in this process; they should feel responsible for their integration and be a part of creating their settlement plan.
- At the same time, however, service providers – particularly those who typically provide mainstream services – must be sensitive to the needs of newcomers; if they are not, we are likely to see "referral bounce back" whereby immigrants are referred to a particular agency and that organization is not able to provide them with what they need. This requires awareness, but also evaluation so that we know whether services are appropriate and responsive.
- Word-of-mouth is important. When newcomers are supported and satisfied with the services they receive, this encourages additional immigration. Service adaptation is thus a relatively cost-effective tool for attraction and retention.
- The LIPs have been an important vehicle for planning and coordinating service delivery, but they must involve all of the key players. Among those who must play a role are federal, provincial and municipal governments, employers, business councils, Chambers of Commerce, labour unions, local service providers, umbrella organizations such as the United Way or Social Planning Council, researchers, and the media.
- Universities can also play an important role, although this has not been fully exploited in part because there have not always been mechanisms for communication with the community. In London, a monthly advisory committee has been set up; it includes representatives from the university, the municipality, and the service sector. This allows the community to signal its research needs, and often, these are taken up by faculty or graduate students. These partnerships are also a way for researchers to indicate whether data exist on a particular issue, or if this a research gap that should be addressed.
- With the influx of international students, universities also serve in some respects as a service provider and an arena for newcomers' integration. In a 2006 study at Algoma University, international students suggested that newcomers be made aware of available services early on, that student satisfaction be tracked, that efforts be made to translate academic terms into a glossary to facilitate understanding, and that activities that expose newcomers to diverse cultural experiences be encouraged. Sensitivity training for staff was also recommended. On-campus English-as-a-Second-Language programs, a home-stay program that matches international students and community members, engagement with community organizations, and diversity forums have all been successful.

- In Northern communities where there is more limited contact with diversity, there are sometimes misunderstandings. For example, international students do not necessarily want international-only events, but instead want to engage with "mainstream society," and this is not always recognized. Discrimination remains a challenge, particularly when newcomers and minorities are engaging with front-line workers and staff in stores.
- We can look at cities in the United States that have experienced dramatic increases in immigration. Many of these cities had limited funding, poor social infrastructure, and some degree of hostility or discomfort with the in-flux of newcomers. In all cases, however, there was a coalition of partners interested in addressing the challenges and capitalizing on the opportunities that immigration and diversity can present.
- The mainstream organizations were aware of the need to respond to the community's changing demographics, but they found it difficult to collect information about the newcomer communities that would allow them to adapt their services. They were also not familiar with the ways in which services were delivered in the immigrants' countries of origin, and this created misunderstandings as well as a perception that mainstream services were simply not responsive. Complicating this was some resistance to change, given that newcomers only comprised a portion of the population that the organizations were expected to serve.
- Interaction between mainstream service providers and immigrant communities – often facilitated by external partners – helped to facilitate learning and trust. The media played an important role here. Employers also introduced a number of innovative programs, including on-site language classes and efforts to employ more than one family member as a means of encouraging retention.
- Collaborating, connecting, and immersing are all important when thinking about how to adapt mainstream services to the needs of newcomers and minorities. Mainstream organizations need to work with other providers, they need to connect with diverse communities, and they need to learn more about the clients that they are serving.

REPORTS FROM THE BREAKOUT SESSIONS

On the second day, the conference shifted from "consumption" to "production." Four breakout sessions took place; these involved panelists from the first day's plenary sessions, as well as interested members of the audience. Breakout groups were tasked with developing a plan for their thematic area that would address the following topics:

1. The main strategic elements that should be the focus and the challenges that might be encountered within the thematic area;
2. Ideas and lessons regarding successful practices that could be emulated;
3. What sectors and agencies need to be part of the solution, including the role that could be played by the Welcoming Communities Initiative, the Local Immigration Partnerships, and other structures, such as Francophone networks; and
4. Potential studies and pilot sites for various initiatives.

The results of the breakout groups' deliberations were reported back in plenary, and they are included below in summary form. It should be noted that in some cases, reaching definitive conclusions was difficult, given the formative nature of the conference and the relatively unexplored terrain of several of the topics that the groups tackled; this is particularly the case for the North where experiences with immigration are more limited. These challenges were further compounded by the broad range of backgrounds and expertise that participants brought to bear, the compressed timeframe, and the general lack of hard evidence regarding effective practices and outcomes. Notwithstanding these obstacles, the conference produced a significant number of serious ideas for research, pilot studies, and evaluations of proposed interventions. The breakout groups also identified important areas for policy makers and program officials to explore. In addition to our summary, a more comprehensive record of the conference is available as a video recording, which will soon be accessible via the WCI's website.

Economic Development

Strategic Directions and Challenges
- Participants focused, in particular, on the need for "made in Northern Ontario" solutions. It was noted that a lot of the research and indicators related to immigration and community attractiveness are not applicable to Northern Ontario. An important strategic direction is to better understand why immigrants choose to come to Northern Ontario and why they opt to stay. Some suggested that shorter commuting times, limited traffic congestion, clean air, and the area's natural beauty are features that make the North particularly attractive, but these are not always captured in existing studies.

Best Practices
- Participants made reference to the Ontario North Economic Development Corporation (ONEDC) which involves the economic development departments of the cities of North Bay, Sudbury, Timmins, Sault Ste. Marie, and Thunder Bay. It has a number of projects in place, and these could be scaled up or down in other municipalities.
- There was also discussion about the Business Immigration Attraction Program, which matches business sellers and business buyers. It is currently offered jointly by the cities of North Bay and Sudbury, but could be undertaken elsewhere or extended to other Northern municipalities. Increasing the involvement of the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) in this program was also viewed as desirable.

Partners
- Participants noted the need to understand usage patterns related to community immigration portals. A key question relates to the use and effectiveness of the portals; in this regard, the WCI and the LIPs could work collaboratively to provide advice on marketing and recruitment strategies, best practices, and new designs
- The WCI could play an important role in highlighting the distinctive features and needs of Northern communities. It could also evaluate the effectiveness of various pilot projects,

including their economic impact and value to employers, and determine their transferability to other communities.

Potential Pilot Projects and Sites

- Participants discussed an idea for a pilot project that would include the hiring of one or two human resources specialists who would work with small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Northern Ontario to help them attract internationally trained workers or immigrant investors. These specialists could also work with the spouses of recruited immigrants to facilitate their entry into the workplace. This would fill a gap in that many SMEs, in contrast to larger employers, do not have human resources departments that can play this role, and specialized knowledge and experience could help attract and retain prospective immigrant employees and business owners. Such a program could potentially be funded through FedNor as a one- to three-year pilot project that would transition into a fee-for-service operation; municipalities could also contribute support.
- A further suggestion related to increasing the connections between Northern Ontario LIPs and those in the Greater Toronto Area. Through this project, LIPs in the GTA could target Toronto-based unemployed or underemployed, internationally trained professionals, and matches or referrals could be made to prospective employers in Northern Ontario.
- An existing OMAFRA project focuses on industry clusters and exchanges between bigger and smaller centres. This program could be expanded with increased ties to immigration and an emphasis on job creation, skilled labour, and immigrant entrepreneurship. Additional components could include analyses of how networks develop; factors that contribute to their sustainability; targeting and marketing strategies to promote their genesis; related investor strategies to attract capital; and how best to capitalize on relational marketing and ethnic ties.
- Finally, participants suggested that research be undertaken on Manitoba's use of the Provincial Nominee Program in an effort to understand its applicability to Northern Ontario communities. It was noted that Manitoba owes much of its success to its targeted use of the PNP, including recruitment, promotion, job matching, and developing overseas partnerships. Many of these initiatives do not require extensive federal involvement and fall under municipal or provincial jurisdiction. Participants recommended a project that would explore what cities can do on their own and what initiatives require the cooperation of other levels of government.

Attraction, Retention, and Branding

Strategic Directions and Challenges

- Participants recommended that municipal involvement be increased, with additional investments in branding and promotion. These efforts should include a central focus that highlights the key features of the municipalities. A series of baseline studies could be useful; they could target individuals who had left the community to better understand push and pull factors.

- There were a number of suggestions to strengthen relations between municipalities and other levels of government. For example, the Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration's strategy for rural settlement does not presently include agency incentives to encourage the movement of immigrants to communities outside of the major census metropolitan areas. It was suggested that the funding formula for settlement agencies include a component that rewards organizations who encourage clients to settle in smaller communities. There was also a recommendation to improve and expand the Provincial Nominee Program to ensure it responds to Northern needs and supports the attraction of Francophone immigrants to rural areas.
- Collaboration with the private sector should be emphasized with the engagement of employers being a key objective. Here, the use of temporary workers could be explored, including how best to retain them. Efforts to stimulate entrepreneurial immigration should be encouraged.
- Funders should be encouraged to relax eligibility criteria related to an organization's designation or standing as a "settlement service provider."

Best Practices
- With respect to encouraging Francophone immigration, participants suggested looking at New Brunswick where one-third of nomination certificates are for French-speaking newcomers.
- Manitoba's efforts to attract and retain newcomers through its Provincial Nominee Program also merit exploration. Manitoba's St. Boniface College also has an international student welcoming program, which Northern colleges should examine.
- Programs that offer internships for international students or to support entrepreneurial start-ups could be emulated; the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corporation is doing some work in this area. In addition, training for entrepreneurs should be examined; programs offered through FedNor's Community Futures Development Corporations may be applicable or transferrable.

Partners
- Participants referred to a broad range of organizations and institutions that should be involved in attraction, retention, and branding efforts. These include colleges and universities; community economic development agencies; municipal governments; school boards; service providers; settlement agencies; Citizenship and Immigration Canada; Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration; Ministry of Colleges, Training and Universities; OMAFRA; Service Canada; and the Local Immigration Partnerships, including the various sectors represented through the LIPS (e.g., law enforcement, healthcare, and employment agencies).
- The WCI was suggested as having an important research role to play.

Potential Pilot Projects and Sites
- A number of ideas for pilot projects were provided. Several related to employment and the labour market, including: referral bonuses for employers who attract newcomers to the community; gaining a better understanding of the success of Manitoba's Provincial Nominee Program and its potential applicability for Northern Ontario; examining immigrant entrepreneurs to understand their decision-making processes and the challenges that they face

when they come to Northern Ontario; and evaluating the retention of international student and temporary foreign worker initiatives in other provinces to determine whether these programs might work in Northern Ontario.

- Participants suggested that we look internationally to regions or industrial areas that mirror the features found in Northern communities. These areas could be targeted in an effort to recruit newcomers who may be more likely to remain in a community if it is similar to the region from which they emigrated.

- There is a need, however, for more information on why newcomers choose particular destinations. We must understand the attributes that are important to immigrants when they choose to move and what factors make them stay. Related to this is a need to understand out-migration and the reasons that immigrants leave a community for another location. Exit interviews would yield useful information, while better connections with established immigrants could result in referrals and chain migration.

- Baseline research on the individuals who are presently in Northern communities is important, as is cultural mapping similar to what has been undertaken in Ottawa. We also need to understand what number of newcomers constitutes a "critical mass" that would encourage retention. Relatedly, we should explore how to take advantage of pre-existing ethnic ties and networks to attract newcomers.

- Finally, although immigration portals were cited as a best practice, there should be additional research on how potential immigrants find information; focus groups and interviews could help target portal content to the areas where newcomers most need assistance.

Civic Engagement and Sports and Recreation

Strategic Directions and Challenges

- This breakout session recommended a four-pronged strategy for enhancing integration and civic engagement. It would include: (1) preliminary research to better understand the state of the art, existing gaps, and potential interventions; (2) opportunities for local engagement in shared activities; (3) systematic efforts to produce a Northern community identity grounded in inclusivity; and (4) strengthening municipal engagement and building an extensive network of local partnerships.

Best Practices

- Participants recommended looking at provinces that have done significant work with rural and small communities to examine how they have encouraged civic engagement. In the west, Manitoba comes to mind, while in the East, there are communities in New Brunswick, including Moncton, which merit exploration.

- Other models that could be adapted to Northern and small communities include: social enterprise models; local enterprise models; European Union practices; and models used by Latin American communities to develop low cost bridging practices.

- We should also look at communities and jurisdictions that have developed non-web-based communication methods; those with hands-on components may offer an additional and important dimension for engagement.

Partners

- Participants suggested enhancing municipal engagement in areas related to civic engagement, including planning, social service provision, economic development, transit, sports and recreation, arts and heritage, community policing, and public health.
- They also recommended establishing partnerships with the business community, the arts community, multicultural agencies, research institutions and Aboriginal and Francophone communities.
- Across the board, participants noted the importance of working collaboratively with other Northern communities and developing a pan-Northern approach.
- The WCI could add value by: defining critical issues and conducting research; finding and disseminating models; creating community-based programs or initiatives that would engage individuals other than the "converted"; and convening meetings using different modes of delivery, including Skype and videoconferencing, which would allow for more frequent and resource-effective interactions.
- The LIPS, meanwhile, can add value through regular and rigorous communication across the partnership; this should be based on a shared agenda, established goals, and outcomes that go beyond mere communication. The LIPs can also develop higher level community champions and create and disseminate tools that provide functional advice and share "best practices."

Potential Pilot Projects and Sites

- Participants suggested research to determine what planning information is needed to develop an effective engagement strategy. They also wondered about the influence of community perceptions on newcomers' sense of inclusion and engagement and how their identities are reflected in the public realm through, for example, public art, welcoming spaces, and a vibrant downtown. Participants suggested that the demographic profile of elected bodies and boards sends a signal to residents about who is included and whose voice matters.
- It was noted that there is a need for a holistic "ecosystem" approach that identifies which connections can be made and how these can be encouraged. In North Bay, for example, seniors are connected with newcomers through the International Cooking Club; this program grew out of the recognition that newcomers tend to miss their extended families, and this club facilitates those types of relationships in a new setting.
- A specific pilot that participants suggested the WCI explore is one that would adapt the TRIEC model to Northern communities in order to build a <u>Northern</u> cultural competencies program.
- When selecting sites for pilot studies, participants suggested that emphasis be placed on community need, overall track record, and evidence of past successes. Joint pilots should be established that would twin larger centres with Northern communities; such an approach would build an "adaptation" component directly into the pilot study.

Suggestions in the area of Adapting Mainstream Organizations

Strategic Directions and Challenges
- Participants in this session defined mainstream organizations as entities that were not expressly established to serve immigrant populations. Nonetheless, it was noted that a growing number of institutions, by virtue of their mandate and mission, are interacting with substantial numbers of immigrants, international students, and temporary foreign workers. For this reason, mainstream organizations must be a focus of any effort to improve service delivery to newcomer populations.

Best Practices
- In the area of education, it was noted that there are a number of after-school mentoring programs in smaller communities in the United States. These involve employers, service organizations, and local school boards and have resulted in successful volunteer bridging programs. Many of these centre around language instruction; there is thus a skills component in addition to positive community-building. Northern communities could emulate these programs.
- Interest was also expressed in exploring a program that is offered by Frontier College in which free ESL instruction is offered by volunteer instructors in Sudbury schools. Attention should be given to childcare, however, as this can serve as a barrier to participation in such programs.

Partners
- Employers, educational institutions, law enforcement agencies, and municipal governments were all cited as key partners.
- More specifically, agencies that mediate between immigrant job-seekers and employers, such as Skills International, should be engaged in an effort to encourage newcomer-friendly practices within employer associations and small and mid-sized enterprises.
- It was noted that the WCI plays an important part by providing a bridge between academia and the community. It allows not only for the development of useful research, but also the application of this research to real-life settings that have a direct impact on the reception and integration of newcomers. This work should be continued, with participants emphasizing the need for carefully-selected, well-matched pilot projects that would yield practical, useful results.

Potential Pilot Projects and Sites
- Education was identified as a priority, and mentoring was viewed as a particularly important intervention. Mentoring can aid students who are struggling with the curriculum or having difficulty adjusting to their new environment. Participants suggested tapping into the pool of newly graduated teachers who could serve as mentors to students.
- Participants suggested that employers be encouraged to become more active in providing services to newcomers and their spouses; this will enhance their ability to recruit and retain workers. Programs could include the provision of advanced language training for skilled workers

- and their spouses or the development of a social integration network, such as North Bay's Newcomers Network.
- The justice system was identified as a potential flashpoint. Participants suggested cross-cultural training with an emphasis on meaningful exercises rather than "token" programs.
- Greater immigrant involvement in mainstream institutions was seen as a potential means of sensitizing these organizations to newcomer needs. Participants suggested targeting the environmental sector, which could engage immigrant youth. Immigrants and visible minorities should also be encouraged to run for elected office, which would bring their voices to these institutions.
- Participants strongly endorsed the importance of change at the municipal level because so many of newcomers' day-to-day activities rely on services provided by local governments. Participants suggested establishing a network of municipalities, which could be led by the Association of Municipalities of Ontario and would facilitate the exchange of "best practices" related to the adaptation of municipal and mainstream services.
- Succession planning is also important. Those who have championed immigration and diversity initiatives in the past are retiring or moving on to other positions; they must be replaced by a new generation of champions so that change can continue.
- On a cautionary note, although the adaptation of mainstream organizations is important, for this strategy to be effective, it must be supported by complementary investments in multicultural associations, with a focus on their networking capacity, media training, and the nurturing of champions.

FINDINGS FROM THE POST-CONFERENCE EVALUATION

To quantify reactions to the conference, the Welcoming Communities Initiative conducted a post-conference evaluation, which probed participants' views about the conference format, the manner in which information was exchanged, and ideas for future activities involving Northern and smaller communities. Roughly two-thirds of conference participants responded to the questionnaire, which yielded a number of suggestions. It should be noted that some participants used the evaluation as an opportunity to evaluate the pre-conference session in addition to the main conference, while others restricted their comments to the latter.

With respect to the conference's value to participants, average assessments were high and consistently above the scale midpoint of 4. This demonstrates overall satisfaction with the conference and its contribution as well as a positive evaluation of the event.

Questions	Average Response (1 - 7 Rating Scale)
To what extent was the conference a learning experience for you?	5.35
To what extent did the conference allow you to form new connections?	5.59
Overall, how useful did you find the conference to be?	5.52

(a) Conference logistics

The most useful aspects of the conference were felt to be:

- Presentations offering concrete information on initiatives in other cities and provincial jurisdictions;
- Opportunities to network with other service providers and with WCI researchers;
- Combining academics with service providers and economic development staff, producing a good combination of perspectives and interesting discussion;
- Small group work (on the final day) where ideas could be developed; and
- Getting all the North together to discuss a pan-Northern Ontario strategy.

Primary suggestions for improvement included:

- Having more time for presentations, questions, and discussion (including roundtable discussions);
- More information sharing from all communities; and
- More opportunities to connect, perhaps through formal networking activities at conferences.

(b) Research and practice suggestions

Participants expressed a desire to learn about promising practices in the following areas:

- Practices aimed at reducing discrimination and improving community receptiveness to newcomers;
- Practices designed to build bridges between newcomers and long-term community residents;
- Alternative ways of utilizing the Provincial Nominee Program;
- Measures to attract newcomers to Northern Ontario, including the use of private sector recruiters;
- Creating partnerships among community service providers; and
- Adaptation of settlement services for delivery by mainstream organizations in the North.

Participants identified a series of important next steps for the WCI and Northern communities:

- Strengthening links between service providers, municipal governments, and WCI academics, particularly in communities that have little LIP experience;
- Testing new strategies and doing research on key Northern community priorities, as well as disseminating research that is useful for service providers and other Northern players;
- Continuing to bring the LIPs together to share their successes and challenges and to learn from one another;
- Establishing a common network for sharing resources (including research) and best practices;
- Developing practical planning and organizational tools for Northern communities to use; and
- Conducting research to assess the effectiveness of marketing tools used by the LIPs.

FINAL WORDS

The Conference on Northern and Small Communities was envisioned as a launch point for information-sharing, collaboration, and further engagement. A particular goal of the conference was to encourage a discussion on immigration that would bring together key partners, while putting the needs of Northern Ontario communities front and centre. In doing so, the conference drew attention to existing best practices and the role that partners are playing, while identifying future directions and strategies that will encourage the attraction and retention of immigrants to Northern Ontario.

The next stage will be to seek a reaction to the report from Conference attendees. Depending on participant and institutional interest and appetite, a number of key priority areas listed in the report could be chosen for more detailed and substantive investigation, including comparative research that incorporates the examples cited during the conference. This comparative research would entail a systematic approach to identifying and evaluating promising practices, beginning with the agencies whose practices were cited as possible candidates for pilot project development. The studies would focus on whether the internal and external factors that contribute to the success of the promising practices could be replicated in Northern and smaller communities. Finally, a series of targeted events could be constructed in order to sharpen up and focus pilot projects and research agendas, along with the methodologies for evaluating them.

CONFERENCE AGENDA

Tuesday, March 1, 2011

8:00–9: 00 am   **Breakfast and Registration**

9:00–9:15 am   **Introduction, Goals for the Meeting**

9:15 –   **Economic Development**
10:30 am   **Presentation to set the stage**
                     Panelists: 4 panelists and moderator

- What are the main challenges?
- What approaches would seem to hold promise?
- What elements (organizations and sectors) would need to be brought together?
- What information/knowledge is needed to mobilize actors and steer the process?

           Speaker: **David Robinson**
                                  Chair Economics Department, Laurentian University

           Moderator: **Don Curry**
                                  Executive Director, North Bay and District Multicultural Centre

           Panelists: 1. OMAFRA perspectives
                                  Art Lawson
                                  Manager, Community Economic Development Unit, Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs

                                  2. Municipal economic development perspective
                                  Marla Tremblay
                                  Economic Development Officer, City of North Bay

                                  3. Employer perspective
                                  Jennifer Hollis
                                  Project Manager, London and Middlesex Immigrant Employment Council

                                  4. Labour market inclusion
                                    Linda Manning
                                  Senior Fellow, Centre on Governance, University of Ottawa
                                  Welcoming Communities Initiative

                                  5. Economic development
                                  Carmen DeMarco
                                  Program Manager Northern Ontario, FedNoR Community Futures Program

10:30–11:00 am **Break**

11:00 am–   **Attraction, Retention and Branding**
12:15 pm   **Presentation to set the stage**
                     Panelists: 4 panelists and moderator

- What are the main challenges?
- What approaches would seem to hold promise?

- What elements (organizations and sectors) would need to be brought together?
- What information/knowledge is needed to mobilize actors and steer the process?

Speaker: **Gerry Clement**
Former Assistant Deputy Minister, Department of Labour and Immigration, Manitoba

Moderator: **Meyer Burstein**
Former Executive Head Metropolis Project and Director-General Strategic Planning, Analysis and Research, Citizenship and Immigration Canada
Welcoming Communities Initiative

Panelists: 1. Francophone immigration recruitment
Peter Duschinsky
Ex-Foreign Service Officer, Citizenship and Immigration Canada, with policy responsibility for Francophone immigration and federal-provincial relations

2. Branding
John Nadeau
Associate Professor Marketing, School of Business, Nipissing University
Welcoming Communities Initiative

3. Perspectives on immigrant processing system
Vic Satzewich
Professor Department of Sociology, McMaster University
Welcoming Communities Initiative

4. Municipal economic development perspective
Paul Finley
Business Development Officer, Greater Sudbury Development Corporation

5. Community portals
Crystal Bresson
Immigration Marketing Coordinator, Timmins Economic Development Corporation

12:30–2:00 pm Lunch

2:00–   <u>**Civic Engagement and Sports and Recreation**</u>
3:15 pm   **Presentation to set the stage**
Panelists: 4 panelists and moderator
- What are the main challenges?
- What approaches would seem to hold promise?
- What elements (organizations and sectors) would need to be brought together?
- What information/knowledge is needed to mobilize actors and steer the process?

Speaker: **Caroline Andrew**
Director, Centre on Governance, University of Ottawa
Welcoming Communities Initiative

Moderator: **Laura-Jane Cote**
LIP Coordinator, North Bay Newcomer Network

Panelists:	1. Municipal representative **Kwende Kefentse** *Cultural Planner, Cultural Development and Initiatives, City of Ottawa*

2. Francophone networks
Mohammed Brihmi
Coordonnateur du Réseau du Nord, Contact interculturel francophone de Sudbury

3. Cultural involvement
Livianna Tossuti
Associate Professor, Department of Political Science
Welcoming Communities Initiative

4. Engagement of women in sports and physical activity
Michelle Cundari
Community Health Promoter, North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit

3:15–3:45 pm   Break

3:45–5:00 pm   Adaptation of Mainstream Services
Presentation to set the stage
Panellists: 4 panelists and moderator
- What are the main challenges?
- What approaches would seem to hold promise?
- What elements (organizations and sectors) would need to be brought together?
- What information/knowledge is needed to mobilize actors and steer the process?

Speaker:	**Jean Seguin** *Director, Citizenship and Immigration Canada, Labour Market Access and Client - Centered Program Policy*
Moderator:	**Scott Clerk** *Project Manager, Kingston Local Immigration Partnership*
Panelists:	1. Lesson from new immigration cities in the U.S. **Brian Ray** *Associate Professor, Department of Geography, University of Ottawa* *Welcoming Communities Initiative*

2. Universities
Victoria M. Esses
Professor, Department of Psychology; and Director, Centre for Research on Migration and Ethnic Relations, University of Western Ontario
Welcoming Communities Initiative

3. Universities
Dawn Elmore
Chair, Diversity Advisory Committee, Algoma University

4. Local Immigration Partnership perspective
Scott Fisher
Project Coordinator, Growth and Development Department, City of Greater Sudbury

Wednesday, March 2, 2011

8:00–8:45 am   **Breakfast**

8:45–9:00 am   **Instructions to panelists and participants**
Participants who were not panel members will be asked to join one of the four panels for the subsequent working session.

9:00–10:30 am **Working Sessions**
Each of the four panels will reconvene on the second day and will be joined by interested conference participants. Before commencing their exercise, panelists will choose a moderator, a notetaker and a rapporteur. The four panels will each be asked to develop a plan that addresses the following questions:

- *What are the main strategic elements on which to focus and what are the principal challenges to implementing the strategies?*
- *Where might we look for lessons and examples of successful practices to emulate?*
- *What stakeholders need to be part of the solution?*
- *What role might the LIPs or other structures play in this process?*
- *What role might the WCI play in this process and what high priority studies should be initiated?*
- *Which communities are well suited to serve as pilot sites?*

10:30–11:00 am **Break**

11:00 am–   **Working Session Reports**
12:00 pm   The conference will reconvene in plenary and each of the four panels will present the high points of their discussion, focusing on the questions they were asked to address.

12:00–12:15 pm **Closing Remarks and Next Steps**