

# Retention Strategies for Smaller Communities

Promising Ideas from the  
'Newcomer Engagement:  
Building Social Capital in Rural Communities' Project

A project sponsored by Rural Ontario Institute



# Overview

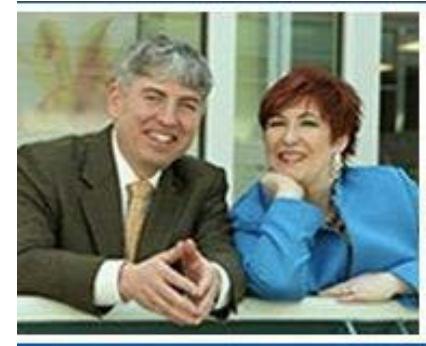
- Project introduction
  - ROI, project context and our community research team
  - ‘Newcomer’ and social capital
  - Our community partners
  - Where we are and where we’re going
- Preliminary Research and Potential Early Findings
- Community Engagement: A promising approach for smaller communities
- References



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# Measuring Rural Community Vitality

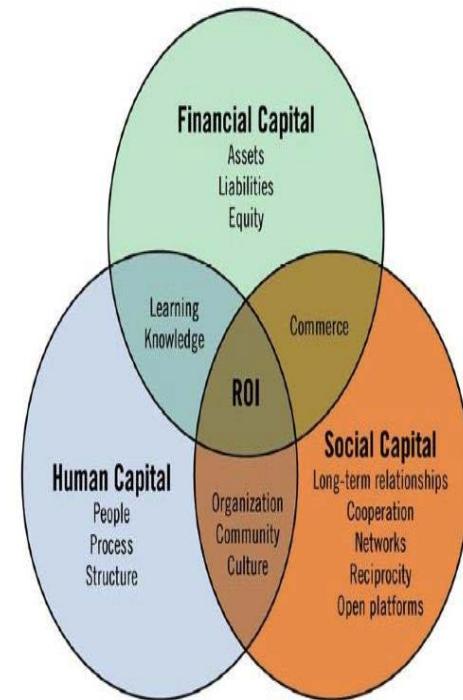


PLATINUM LEADERSHIP  
BUSINESS ALIGNMENT MODEL®



# 'Newcomer' and social capital

- 'Newcomer' = any one new to community in last five years
  - Not exclusive or specific to immigrants
  - So far, much discussion on immigrant newcomer experience in rural communities; expect trend to continue
- Exploring newcomer engagement as a means of building social capital in rural communities
- Social capital
  - Networks/webs of relationships in communities; support cooperation, collaboration and reciprocity; add distinct value to communities



Social Capital is one of the three major business catalysts

# Our Community Partners

We are grateful to the three rural counties and communities who have agreed to partner with ROI and participate in this project:

- Dufferin County (Orngeville)
- Huron County (Bayfield)
- Northumberland County (Cobourg)



# Where we are and where we're going

Prepare

Research

Report

Launch

- Case study approach using document review, key informant interviews, group discussions, observation
- Initial contact and preliminary interviews conducted
- Customized approach for each community – what will work best to capture their community's unique context and experience
- Early findings largely from literature review and preliminary environmental scan
- Intensive fieldwork in the communities in next two months
- Wrap up January 2017
- Outputs – Toolkit of resources, incl. comprehensive summary report, individual case study of each community, and video case studies for each community

# Preliminary Research and Potential Early Findings

- Literature review, preliminary environmental scan, initial key informant interviews
- A key to retaining immigrants in rural communities is to address systemic barriers, including:
  - Transportation
  - Affordable and appropriate housing
  - Language
  - Supply of suitable employment
  - Cultural amenities
  - Settlement and long term supports and services
  - Local schools
  - Wider host community

# Preliminary Research and Potential Early Findings

Ideas for removing/reducing systemic barriers:

- Transportation
  - E.g., developing public transit options, volunteer driver networks
- Affordable and appropriate housing
  - E.g., employer provided housing, employer partnering with agencies to help locate housing, municipalities collaborating with developers (and employers) to support housing needs
- Language
  - E.g., translation services, partnering to offer ESL classes

# Preliminary Research and Potential Early Findings cont'd.

- Supply of suitable employment – most important factor in immigrant retention in rural communities
  - E.g., recruiting immigrants as entrepreneurs, supporting employer searches for labour and talent, long term economic diversification
- Cultural amenities – another key component for retention
  - E.g., inviting and empowering local community leaders, especially cultural and religious leaders, facilitating relationship building between immigrants, cultural communities and host community

# Preliminary Research and Potential Early Findings cont'd.

- Settlement and long-term supports and services
  - E.g., Volunteer networks, tapping into existing ethno-cultural communities, regular consultation with local agencies and individuals providing support, role of municipalities, community and employers
- Local schools
  - E.g., encouraging teacher support, parental orientation, regular communication between municipality and schools
- Wider host community
  - E.g., intentional community outreach, involvement in community activities, messaging about value of immigrants, multicultural festivals

# Preliminary Research and Potential Early Findings cont'd.

- Emerging themes include:
  - Importance of intentional outreach
  - Building relationships and partnerships
  - Community participation and community leadership
  - Building bridges between host community and immigrants
  - Encouraging flexible programming and supports
  - Community planning
  - Understanding diversity and complexity of needs

# Community Engagement: A Promising Approach for Smaller Communities

- Suggest community engagement may be a promising approach for retaining immigrants
- Community engagement: “the process of working collaboratively with groups of people affiliated by geographic proximity, special interests, or similar situations with respect to issues affecting their wellbeing” (CDC/ATSDR Committee on Community Engagement, 1997)
  - Supports collaborative partnerships and relationship-building between community members, organizations and government; shared planning and inclusive decision-making; and authentic participation and empowerment of community members

# Community Engagement: A Promising Approach cont'd.

- Some principles of effective community engagement:
  - Be clear about the purpose and goals of engagement and who to engage
  - Know your community and its perception of engagement
  - Reach out – build relationships, trust, value partnerships and their contributions, create ways to mobilize the community
  - Be 'of the community' – shared leadership & empowerment belong to all
  - Be a partner – create opportunities for mutual cooperation and responsibility
  - Recognize and respect the diversity of your community
  - Mobilize and build on community assets and strengths
  - Be flexible
  - Agree on indicators, outcomes and measures of success ... at the start!
  - Expect to engage, re-engage, and re-engage again
  - Be planful – establish a time horizon, budget, resource allocation, champions, etc. for ongoing engagement
  - Know this is a journey, an ongoing, intentional process

# References

In addition to key informant interviews and background documents provided by participating communities, we wish to highlight the following sources in our research:

- Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. (2011). *Community Immigrant Retention in Rural Ontario Toolkit*.
- Russell et al. (2008). *The Active Community Engagement Continuum*. The ACQUIRE Project.
- Tamarack Institute. (2011.) *Principles of Community Engagement*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.
- Tamarack Institute. (2015). *Community Engagement: The Next Generation* workbook.
- Wiginton, L.K. (2013). *Canada's Decentralized Immigration Policy Through a Local Lens: How small communities are attracting and welcoming immigrants*. Rural Development Institute, Brandon University.

# Thank you!

