



WELCOMING COMMUNITIES INITIATIVE

E- Bulletin October 2009

It is not *where* you are from or where you are going; it is *where* you are *welcome* that makes it home.

Welcoming Communities Initiative – Who We Are

The WCI is a collaborative effort between universities and local stakeholders to promote newcomer inclusion and to help small and medium-sized cities benefit from diversity. To achieve these goals and to capitalize on the proximity of researchers to community organizations and municipal agencies, the project is building a durable research and governance infrastructure. This infrastructure will support policy and best-practice research and will help to forge connections among researchers, local stakeholders and government agencies.

In this issue...

- Introduction to the WCI
- Greetings
- Announcements
 - ❖ Additional Funding
 - ❖ Funding Guidelines and Other Protocols
 - ❖ WCI Member Biographies
 - ❖ Changes in Leadership and Representation
- Progress on WCI Baseline Studies
 - ❖ Inventory and Audit of Local Resources
 - ❖ Service Utilization Research
 - ❖ Mutual Perceptions, Attitudes, and Experiences Research
- WCI Collaboration
- Plans for Local Engagement
- The WCI Website
- Activating the Research Domains
- Policy Updates
 - ❖ CIC's Modernized Settlement Program
 - ❖ COIA
 - ❖ LIPs and The WCI
- WCI Committees

Greetings!

Hello and welcome to the first edition of the Welcoming Communities Initiative E-Bulletin, your source for all news great and small in the WCI! We have many updates to share with you, filling you in with regards to what has been going on in and around the project. Some of these exciting developments will be discussed in the following articles.

The e-bulletin will be sent out on a monthly basis once things really get going, but for now, its distribution will be somewhat intermittent. This is the place for you to share with everyone else involved in the project any new developments, announcements, news items, ongoing work, etc. It will also be made available on our new website, (see below for the Website article). Please be sure to let WCI Project Manager, Tasha Williamson, know about anything that you would like to have included in the upcoming issues. You may email her at wci@uwo.ca.

Announcements

Thank you

We would like to thank the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for the opportunity to pursue this project by providing us with funding through their generous Community-University Research Alliance grant.

Additional Funding

The WCI is happy to announce that members have been applying to various agencies for additional research funding. Two important examples are:

(a) A proposal submitted to Citizenship and Immigration Canada under the Ontario Region's "Call for Proposals for the Welcoming Communities Initiative: CIC's Contribution to Canada's Action Plan Against Racism". A decision is expected this fall.

(b) More recently, a Request for Proposals was issued by the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI), entitled "Making Ontario Home: A Study of Newcomer Settlement Services Uses and Needs." In conjunction with the Toronto Metropolis Centre and one other research group, WCI members submitted a proposal to OCASI. If

successful, the grant would be used to support the WCI's Service Utilization study.

A meeting between OCASI and the research team is reported to have gone well. The team is optimistic about the results.

Funding Guidelines

A protocol is being developed to guide expenditures under the WCI's five-year CURA grant. The guidelines will be of particular interest to domain leaders and members involved in building links to local community organizations. As well, researchers who need seed funding for innovative and collaborative projects will be eligible. The guidelines will be published toward the end of October.

Other important documents that will soon be available ...

... a protocol on partnering with other groups and bodies.

... a protocol on managing conflict of interest and ethics review.

... a document setting out the private and social benefits of membership in the WCI.

WCI Member Biographies

In order to promote our expertise - both as a

collective and as individuals - the WCI website will feature members' bios. These will be paired with a special search function that allows users to "Find an Expert." A template will be used to create a degree of uniformity in the biographical descriptions. The aim is to facilitate the search for an expert.

Changes in Leadership and Representation

Livianna Tossutti (Brock U.) has agreed to become co-leader of the Optimizing Social and Cultural Integration Domain alongside Vicki Esses.

Ravi Pendakur and Dirk DeClercq have stepped down as leaders of the Workplace Integration Domain. Linda Manning (Ottawa U.) and a yet-to-be-determined replacement will be taking over responsibility.

Benson Honig and Margaret Walton-Roberts have bowed out as leaders of their domain, Business and Local Development, as well. The Executive Committee has begun to look for replacements.

Rashmi Luther has been replaced by Adnan Turegun as the university representative for Carleton.

Progress on the Three Baseline Studies

The Ontario Welcoming Communities Initiative features three important baseline studies: an inventory of existing resources and structures; a study of service utilization; and a study of community attitudes. The baseline studies are intended as a resource for the entire WCI constituency, allowing the project to gauge progress across multiple dimensions of integration and inclusion.

Progress on the Inventory and Audit Study

The inventory study is being piloted in Sudbury and Ottawa under the direction of Scott Fisher (Diversity Advisory Panel, City of Greater Sudbury), and Caroline Andrew (Ottawa U). Work will begin this fall as soon as the finishing touches are put on the format.

The study will provide detailed information about the programs, organizations and activities available to immigrants and visible minorities in each of the WCI's communities. As well, the study will explore special structural adaptations for newcomers at the municipal level. This information will establish

a baseline for looking at changes across the five-year study period. Good feedback on the proposed design was provided by university representatives who will be called upon to replicate the Sudbury and Ottawa work once the pilot is complete.

Progress on Service Utilization Research

A second baseline project involves a survey of service utilization by newcomers. Led by Audrey Kobayashi (Queen's U) and Momodou Jeng (City of London), the project will be piloted in Kingston and another site, still to be determined, starting later this year.

Work in Kingston has been facilitated by the project's Local Engagement Committee formed through a partnership between Queen's and recipients of a Local Immigration Partnership (LIP) grant. This builds on a key feature of WCI governance which encourages close and active ties between university researchers and their community partners. Such links afford researchers a wider range of expertise and contacts, while providing communities with valuable information and access to university intellectual resources.

The service utilization study will examine

newcomers' experiences and satisfaction with the services currently in place in Ontario's small and medium-sized cities. The target groups are newcomers who are currently using services, past users and those who, for one reason or another, have never used newcomer services. Critically, the research will distinguish the needs of specific demographic groups, at both province-wide and regional levels.

Policy recommendations should emerge for all levels of government, as well as best practice recommendations for a range of service providers. The study will also benefit service providers who have yet to develop special newcomer practices.

Progress on Mutual Perceptions, Attitudes, and Experiences Research

A third baseline project currently in the works will study the mutual perceptions, attitudes and experiences of immigrants and established members of the community. Led by Vicki Esses (Western), Livianna Tossutti (Brock) and Donna Dasko (Environics), the study will develop a knowledge base about receptivity to immigrants and visible minorities in each of the 14 cities where the WCI is active. Among the

methods that the study plans to use are focus groups, interviews of local opinion leaders, and a standardized survey. Plans for methodology and study implementation are now well underway. Piloting of the focus groups and interviews will commence in London and one other city (to be determined) this fall.

Ultimately, profiles of attitudes and experiences in each city will provide baseline data for tracking changes in response to interventions. Analysis of the key drivers of these attitudes and experiences should point to practical strategies for attenuating negative attitudes and reducing discrimination, thus promoting social inclusion and integration.

WCI pan-Canadian Collaboration

Starting in April, a team from the Ontario Welcoming Communities Initiative, led by Vicki Esses, has been convening with teams holding similar interests to discuss attitudinal research and its application to policy. Members of the group include representatives from the British Columbia, Manitoba and federal governments, as well as researchers from the WCI, the Rural Development Institute, the B.C. Metropolis

Centre, and Environics. What binds the groups is a desire to better understand the key drivers of attitudes and perceptions, including the role played by local opinion leaders, in order to shape more effective policy interventions.

The group is actively pursuing two threads: one focuses on survey questions and data harmonization to promote comparability; the other is exploring how to 'wire-up' existing projects and undertakings.

Consideration is being given to some form of virtual 'observatory'. In the coming months, the group will be reaching out to other research teams across the country with similar interests.

Plans for Local Engagement

In mid-summer, university representatives were asked to prepare local engagement plans for their region. These plans were to outline the development of local community structures able to collaborate with the WCI on research projects (the first of which would be the baseline Local Inventory and Audit study).

To date, six local plans have been produced: Hamilton, Kingston, London, Oshawa, Ottawa

and Sudbury. These will be reviewed by the Local and Domain Engagement Committee in order to share ideas and best practices across communities.

Modest funding has been made available to assist the local development process.

Coming Soon: The WCI Website

The members of the Communications and Web Committee are pleased to announce that a beta version of the WCI website, complete with new logo, will be up and running in November!

The site, relying on open source software and containing both public and members only sections, will incorporate the best features of contemporary design. Special thanks to Linda Manning (Ottawa U.) for her personal help and for making her staff available to work with the WCI to develop the website.

Final programming touches to the site will be provided under an arrangement with the National Association of Friendship Centres (NAFC) in exchange for assistance with a project that the NAFC is currently developing.

The URL domain name for the site is:

welcomingcommunities.org

Once the site is 'live', the Communications and Web Committee will be seeking feedback with a view to improving the site and adapting it to members' needs. The next E-bulletin will announce the site's launch date.

Activating the Research Domains

Research activity and research collaboration in the WCI is expected to increase sharply. Domain leaders have started to contact academic and community colleagues with a view to expanding their research teams. Over the next month, interested researchers will work together to clarify the scope of their chosen domain, identify a preliminary set of research priorities, and indicate how they intend to address key policy and practice concerns. Short strategy papers summarizing these deliberations will be published on the WCI website. From there, the domains will gradually increase their contacts and exchanges with community organizations and government policy officials. They will also begin to work actively to

identify potential sources of financial support.

Policy Updates

CIC's Modernized Settlement Program

Citizenship and Immigration Canada has recently "modernized" the Settlement Program with a view to increasing its responsiveness to newcomers and improving settlement outcomes. The redesigned program also seeks to reduce administrative workload, to stimulate innovation and to give service providers more flexibility in designing and delivering their interventions. The "modernized" Program combines all previous settlement programs - Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada, the Immigrant Settlement & Adaptation Program, and the Host program - into a single, holistic stream aimed at six service domains: needs assessment and referrals, information and awareness, language learning and skills development, employment-related, community connections, and support services. Interventions to address one or more of these domains must achieve a set of outcomes that include: a capacity to make informed decisions;

the possession of language skills and related abilities needed to function effectively; an ability to find jobs commensurate with acquired skills and education; the creation of social and professional networks that engage immigrants and ensure their welcome; and the development of effective delivery systems yielding comparable outcomes.

COIA

The five-year Canada-Ontario Immigration Agreement (COIA) is set to expire in November 2010. It would appear that Ontario intends to pursue full devolution of COIA to the province; however, the federal position has not yet been made clear. Whatever the outcome, it is likely to impact the settlement sector across Ontario and affect all of the settlement programs currently administered by Citizenship and Immigration Canada, including ISAP, HOST and LINC. The renewed or revised agreement will also affect relations between and within governments as responsibilities and coordination structures are realigned. As such, these developments will have implications for the WCI as a whole and, most especially, for the project's community partners. Given its focus, the WCI will want to

position itself so it is able to say something meaningful about the proposed agreement and its implications for newcomers and for small and medium-sized cities.

Local Immigration Partnerships (LIPs) and the WCI

Nearly \$3 million is being allocated to Ontario municipalities and service provider organizations to foster broad-ranging partnerships that will enhance immigrant access to settlement services and jobs, improve coordination of government programs, and help attract immigrants to smaller cities. Participating communities are being encouraged to develop partnership councils that include employers, school boards and local settlement and service agencies, such as health centres and hospitals. Both CIC and the Ontario government are hoping to obtain a community-wide perspective on settlement needs.

From the WCI's perspective, the LIP program offers an ideal opportunity to engage communities. For this reason, university representatives have been encouraged to establish a formal relationship with local LIP organizers whereby researchers and local stakeholders can work together and build trust.

Benefits to the community will include analysis of local needs and capacities (for example, the baseline projects), expert advice, access to student hires, training in research methods and assistance in formulating plans and strategies.

The precise form of the relationship between the WCI and the local partnerships will vary according to locale. (In some instances, the WCI is constituting itself as the research arm of the LIP.) These relationships are expected to evolve through feedback and the application of best practices. Thought is being given to how best to provide feedback in a systematic way, both to individual councils as well as to the Ontario Region of CIC and to Ontario's Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration.

WCI Committees

The WCI's progress is contingent on the work of its committees. The following committees been active in the project's development:

Executive Committee:
Carl Nicholson (Catholic Immigration Centre), Vicki Esses (Western), Caroline Andrew (Ottawa), Reza Shahbazi (New Canadians' Centre of Excellence), Audrey Kobayashi (Queen's).

Communications and Web Committee:
Linda Manning (Ottawa), Vicki Esses (Western), Dawn Zinga (Brock), Bruce Newbold (McMaster), Jenna Hennebry (WLU), Tasha Williamson (Western), Meyer Burstein (Policy and Research Consultant).

Local and Domain Engagement Committee:
Carl Nicholson (Catholic Immigration Centre), Vicki Esses (Western), Aurelie Lacassagne (Laurentian), Caroline Andrew (Ottawa), Audrey Kobayashi (Queen's).

Secretariat Development Committee:
Vicki Esses (Western), Meyer Burstein (Policy and Research Consultant), Aurelie Lacassagne (Laurentian), Caroline Andrew (Ottawa), Dawn Zinga (Brock).

Ethics and Conflict of Interest Committee:
Vic Satzewich (McMaster), Dawn Zinga (Brock).

Governing Council:
The Governing Council is co-chaired by Vicki Esses (University of Western Ontario), and Carl Nicholson (Catholic Immigration Centre, Ottawa).

If you would like to be added to our distribution list, please e-mail Tasha at wci@uwo.ca.