

WESTERN NEWS

Research award promotes diverse communities

By Communications Staff

Hoping to generate population renewal, boost economies, fill labour needs, and slow population decline, researchers and community leaders across Ontario are gearing up to conduct policy- and practice-related research on how best to promote welcoming and sustainable communities in small- and medium-sized cities and towns across the province.

The new Welcoming Communities Initiative, led by psychology professor Victoria Esses at The University of Western Ontario and co-investigators at institutions across the province, will test and implement strategies for creating and sustaining communities in which all members feel comfortable and valued. By so doing, they hope to increase community attraction and inclusion in measurable ways.

The project was awarded \$1 million by the Community-University Research Alliance program from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), and partners 16 Ontario universities with local leaders and community organizations, municipal governments, school boards, and provincial and federal leaders.

The universities involved include: Brock University, Carleton University, Huron University College, Lakehead University, Laurentian University, McMaster University, Queen's University, Trent University, Université du Québec en Outaouais, University of Guelph, University of Ontario Institute of Technology, University of Ottawa, University of Waterloo, The University of Western Ontario, University of Windsor, and Wilfrid Laurier University.

"The growth, vitality and quality of life of small- and medium-sized cities depends on their ability to attract and accommodate the ethnic and religious diversity provided by new immigrants and the increasing second and third generations" says Esses.

"This initiative is especially timely given the recent release by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities of a report on Immigration and Diversity in Canadian Cities and Communities," adds Esses. "The report highlights the fact that smaller communities are undergoing profound changes and urgently need to develop strategies to meet the social and economic challenges arising from growing diversity."

The Welcoming Communities Initiative is designed to help communities meet these challenges by developing evidence-based strategies for optimizing service provision by municipalities and volunteer organizations, for overcoming barriers to social and political cohesion, and for promoting positive, inclusive community trajectories.

Expected outcomes include training modules for municipal and community service providers, policy briefs for government officials, educational curricula, and toolkits to help community organizations, employers, and local institutions.

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