



Building Capacity and Knowledge among Rural Communities, Community-Based Organizations, and Policy Makers for a Welcoming Community



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As many rural, northern, and rural regional centres are exploring immigration as an option to address local challenges and opportunities such as labour shortages and re-population strategies, the need for welcoming community strategies is pivotal. Welcoming community strategies are essential in rural, northern, and rural regional centres to build competitive regions. Unfortunately, the majority of communities in Canada do not have the partnerships nor the capacities to develop multi-sector partnerships to effectively discuss, design, and implement welcoming community strategies. The *Exploring Welcoming Communities* project will build multi-sector partnerships among community leaders, community-based organizations, three levels of government, and industry to discuss, design, and implement welcoming community strategies.

In the past five years, Brandon and southwestern Manitoba have received significant increases in the number of immigrant arrivals. The catalysts for this influx of immigrants to the region include labour market factors such as expanding industries and labour shortages. The expansion of operations at industries such as Maple Leaf Foods and Hytech/Springhill Farms has resulted in the need to adjust recruiting and hiring practices to extend employee searches beyond the local and provincial labour pool to overseas countries. New arrivals, together with the ability to re-unite family members through the Provincial Nominee Program, will result in more than 5,000 new immigrants to the region between 2002 and 2011. As rural, northern, and rural-regional centers continue to receive and attract immigrants, communities and their citizens need to be engaged in discussions on what it means to be a welcoming community. Working together in a multi-sector collaboration can build partnerships and increase capacity and knowledge, which will in turn result in an improved quality of life for all residents.

Understanding the communities' ability to absorb and support newcomers is a key concern. From a community development perspective, provincial and federal policies and programmes directly impact the ability to effectively plan at the local level. Through provincial and local partnerships, a community-based approach to planning for the arrival and settlement of immigrants will support rural economic development. Although economic factors have traditionally influenced immigration policies and strategies, with the majority of immigrants settling in large metropolitan centres such as Vancouver, Toronto and Montréal, there may be opportunity to influence settlement patterns and retention rates by focusing policies and programmes on social supports thereby increasing the attractiveness of rural and small communities.

Key activities of the project will include:

- Building a multi-sector collaboration and partnership among community leaders, community-based organizations, three levels of government, and industry
- Determining characteristics of a welcoming rural, northern, or rural-region center
- Creating an inventory of welcoming community tools and resources from across Canada and internationally
- Creating a tool to benchmark the welcoming community progress
- Facilitate a participatory evaluation reflect lessons learned through the process
- Disseminating findings, results, and lessons learned

For further information please visit www.brandonu.ca/rdi