



RURAL
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**RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ENHANCING THE
IMMIGRATION EXPERIENCE IN THE RURAL WEST:
LESSONS FROM RESEARCH, POLICY AND PRACTICE**

Working Paper 2005-11

October 6, 2005



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Rural Development Institute, Brandon University

Brandon University established the Rural Development Institute in 1989 as an academic research centre and a leading source of information on issues affecting rural communities in Western Canada and elsewhere.



RDI functions as a not-for-profit research and development organization designed to promote, facilitate, coordinate, initiate and conduct multi-disciplinary academic and applied research on rural issues. The Institute provides an interface between academic research efforts and the community by acting as a conduit of rural research information and by facilitating community involvement in rural development. RDI projects are characterized by cooperative and collaborative efforts of multi-stakeholders.

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Brandon University
Brandon, Manitoba R7A 6A9
Canada

By:
Ray Silvius & Robert C Annis
Rural Development Institute, Brandon University

1.0- Introduction

Though a disproportionately high number of immigrants coming to Canada end up in the major metropolitan centers, immigration clearly remains a crucial issue for rural Canada, including the Rural West, as well-informed and innovative immigration programs and policies have the potential to lend to rural economic strength and cultural vitality. The injection of people and their skills into areas that are struggling to retain current residents may serve as a crucial facet of wider strategies to combat the demographic challenges facing rural communities in the West. Successfully attracting and retaining immigrants can be a key component of a rural community's economic development strategy, and viable, realistic and sustainable efforts to this end are increasingly on the radar of rural development practitioners.

Indeed, increased efforts towards the regionalization of immigration, wherein immigrants settle and remain in larger numbers in more destinations across Canada, suggest a growing understanding of the need to spread the fruits of immigration beyond major metropolitan centres. Innovative immigration programs and practices developed in or targeting rural areas in the West, therefore, may be found, yet these exist in an isolated fashion with little set recourse to information sharing and collaboration to learn from them.

Given the challenges faced by rural communities in attracting and retaining immigrants, the noticeable impact and visibility of immigrant populations in rural communities and the comparative lack of debate on rural immigration issues vis-à-vis those of urban centers, success in such initiatives requires a concerted effort towards building the necessary strategies, knowledge and mechanisms. An appropriate knowledge base, adequate human and material resources at local, provincial and national levels, and a further linking of rural communities in Western Canada to national and provincial decision-making on immigration policy are required to ensure that opportunities are commensurate with rural needs and realities.

This paper is directed towards policy makers, researchers and community practitioners located and with an interest in the Rural West. Our concern is how best to ensure that immigration can contribute to growing communities and rural prosperity in the West. This can only be addressed with consideration of the multi-level needs and motivations of all parties involved in immigration processes. We therefore argue in this paper for a more comprehensive understanding of the process of immigration to rural Canada, beginning with a "bottom-up" approach that focuses on the impediments and difficulties faced at the individual (immigrant) and community level and the need to link communities to national and provincial policy mechanisms.

To do so, we will attempt to articulate and delineate what it means to enhance the rural immigration experience by sketching the multiple levels on which it is played out, as well as examine the key issues and questions surrounding efforts to attract and retain immigrants in rural areas. Secondly, we will attempt to address rural immigration issues and challenges by developing and forwarding a collaborative approach to rural immigration and identifying pressing research and knowledge needs. Lastly, we provide a series of recommendations for moving forward on a western rural immigration research/policy/community framework.

In acknowledging the complexities of the immigration experience and the wider associated challenges faced by immigrants, rural communities, provinces and the country as a whole, this work further emphasizes the need for uniquely rural solutions on matters of immigration and stresses that collaboration between actors in the realms of research, policy and practice is required to effectively navigate through the numerous challenges. Furthermore, we hope that this effort to clarify some of the critical issues surrounding immigration and rural Canada will inform policy, instigate further appropriate research endeavours and offer insight to communities already undertaking or considering immigrant attraction and settlement initiatives.

To accomplish these tasks, this work will build on proceedings of the Canadian Rural Revitalization Foundation (CRRF) and the Rural Development Institute's (RDI) National Rural Think Tank 2005- Immigration and Rural Canada: Research and Practice, held in Brandon, Manitoba on April 28, 2005. The Think Tank was developed as a national level event that brought fifty invited participants representing the areas of policy, research and community from across Canada to clarify the issues surrounding, and strengthen the coordinated capacity and synergy with regards to, the theme of rural immigration. A full final report of the event may also be found on RDI's website - <http://www.brandonu.ca/rdi>. Though a national level event, the CRRF-RDI National Rural Think Tank yielded recommendations, observations and opportunities that speak directly to the challenges faced by the Rural West.

Furthermore, this paper will draw from findings of the Manitoba Rural Immigration Community Case Studies, a project of Manitoba Labour and Immigration. Sponsored by Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC), these case studies were undertaken to investigate four diverse community/regional rural immigration experiences in Manitoba and expose innovative practices, lessons learned and further considerations for communities wishing to develop strategies for immigrant attraction, settlement and retention. Individual community case studies, as well as a summary of lessons, challenges and responses learned from the project are available on RDI's website- <http://www.brandonu.ca/rdi>.

2.0 Conceptualizing the Rural Immigration Experience

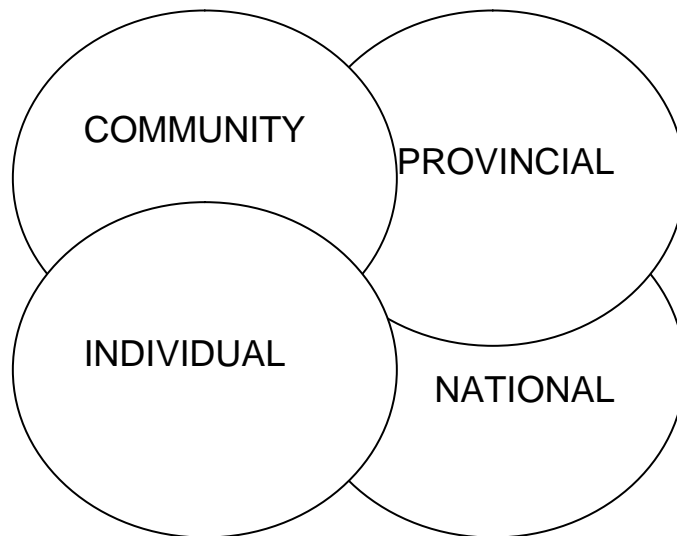
The immigration phenomenon is one that involves and affects multiple actors and brings with it innumerable potential complexities and scenarios. The objectives of any one actor both exist in relation to and are dependent on the satisfaction of those of another. For example, immigration initiatives undertaken for the purposes of community economic development bring with them a need to address wider immigrant needs concerning language, culture, religion, social integration, community services finances and family dynamics. Giving due attention to the dynamics of interaction and multiple levels on which immigration occurs will lead to a more comprehensive understanding of the elements required for a successful rural immigration experience, an appreciation of the complexity, nuance and diverse range of needs and objectives and, ultimately, the capacity for more informed decision making.

The following pages primarily address the experiences and needs of the individual and community in an effort to formulate an approach to rural immigration from the bottom-up. Beyond our immediate focus, national and provincial trends, mechanisms and priorities are perhaps best dealt with exhaustively in another forum; however, this paper considers these spheres of activity insofar as responsiveness of national/ provincial policy mechanisms may be improved to address and accommodate issues, priorities and needs “on the ground”. Not included here is a debate on the finer points of “higher-order” questions, such as national quotas, regionalization strategies, security matters, preferred immigrant countries of origin, humanitarian obligations, long-term demographic considerations, etc. Our concern is how the experiences of rural communities and immigrants can better inform provincial and national policy and contribute to successful immigration initiatives.

Spheres of the Rural Canadian Immigration Experience

For our purposes, we will conceive of the rural immigration experience as individual or numerous acts of immigrants moving to rural areas and the related impact on the multiple levels and associated actors engaged in the process. Importantly, a successful immigration experience entails a high level of satisfaction for all parties involved – the individual (immigrant), community and larger political units (provinces and nation) – and is enabled by the contributions and decisions made at each level. The existence of reciprocal relations and mutual reliance among these actors suggests that considering the needs and desired outcomes in isolation on any level invariably results in an unbalanced perspective, compromising outcomes, the quality of experience, and the overall success of initiatives.

Figure 1- Spheres of the Rural Canadian Immigration Experience



It is important to approach these spheres not as layers of increasing or diminishing importance, but rather as multiple stakeholders with equal, complimentary and sometimes competing interests, whose individual experience, needs and motivations must be addressed simultaneous to and in conjunction with others for a successful larger rural immigration initiative. Specific regional attempts to increase immigration must navigate through and include all levels when formulating a strategy, paying heed to the needs, motivations and degree of satisfaction of each. The following are sketches of the needs, objectives and contributions of each level in the context of rural immigration. By no means exhaustive, these sketches are provided to display the usefulness of a wider consideration of needs and motivations in rural immigration initiatives.

Individual (Immigrant)

Immigrants can have multiple motivations for relocating to rural areas, including seeking employment, farmland, or business opportunities, safety/security, opportunities for children, a rural lifestyle and associated quality of life and connection to family and similar cultural/linguistic/religious community. Their needs are diverse, and successful efforts at retention must take all into consideration, including suitable employment, language and additional training, recognition of credentials and employment experience, a receptive community and social interaction, housing, access to community services, access to appropriate information for informed decisions, a wider cultural/religious/linguistic community and safe guide entry mechanisms. Similarly, their contributions to community life are diverse: labour, participation in community life, demand for goods and services, cultural diversity, population (tax base), critical support for other newcomers, connection to overseas communities, ideas and innovation.

Community

Communities bare a large degree of responsibility for attracting and retaining immigrants. Communities consider and initiate immigration initiatives to maintain/increase

population, address human resource needs, contribute to the tax base, stimulate demand for goods and services, encourage business development and facilitate farm and/or business succession. Communities offer employment and business opportunities, a wide range of settlement services, safety and security and cultural/recreational services to new arrivals.

Province

Increasing and diversifying immigrant destinations can assist provinces maintain or increase population in rural areas and serve as a component of regional development strategies. Provinces facilitate the movement of new arrivals to rural regions through regionalization strategies and support to communities for settlement and retention efforts. Through this, provinces remain responsive to the needs of both immigrants and the wider community. Provinces develop the policy framework and processing capacity that act as enablers of rural immigration, including mechanisms such as Provincial Nominee Programs (PNPs), agreements articulated between a province and federal counterparts that grant greater provincial control over immigration.

Nation

National level immigration priorities are established to satisfy long-term needs in the areas of population and labour force, as well as realizing humanitarian commitments and strengthening cultural vitality and diversity. Immigration contributes to long-term and immediate national economic growth, and national level legal and policy frameworks and processing capabilities enable immigration. A national commitment to regionalization encourages the dispersal of immigrants beyond high-attraction areas. Articulating Provincial Nominee Programs with individual provinces further facilitates the attraction and retention of immigrants in rural communities. Social cohesion and security issues factor in at the national level, as well.

Impediments and Challenges Associated with Rural Immigration Initiatives

Rural realities make for particular challenges and impediments to successful immigration initiatives; greater cognizance of these on all levels will make for stronger research, policy and practice on the matter. As previously stated, this paper is concerned primarily with the challenges and needs of rural communities and the immigrants themselves arriving through rural immigration initiatives, and as such the following impediments and challenges listed will exhibit a similar focus.

Willingness

A prerequisite to any successful immigration initiative is the community's willingness to engage in the process. Communities must display an adequate desire to explore immigration as a component of a development plan based on an assessment of needs and appropriateness, rather than having immigration "forced" upon them. Reconciling community interest and the objectives of regional immigration strategies, therefore, can prove challenging.

Capacity

A lack of community capacity is detrimental to immigration initiatives. Small centres struggle to provide the human, monetary and infrastructural resources required to develop the information, tools and processes for successful immigrant attraction and retention. As any new addition to a community, immigrants bring with them the need for medical, educational and social services, though often with additional needs for linguistic and cultural compatibility. Lower linguistic, cultural and religious absorption capacity in smaller communities may first hamper attraction efforts and later contribute to out-migration to larger centers.

Questions of affordability and feasibility render immigration initiatives difficult for many communities; provincial capacity is an associated factor, as provincial mechanisms to support communities require a considerable investment of time and resources. A commitment on the part of diverse community stakeholders towards both initial strategic planning and consistent re-engagement with the questions arising from immigration is required, though considerations of time and resources can render this difficult.

Social Cohesion

Immigrants may have difficulty integrating in smaller communities with greater ethnic, religious and linguistic homogeneity, and rural immigration initiatives can be compromised when some members of a community misunderstand the immigration process and immigrants themselves. Immigration initiatives may be seen as unfairly preferential to newcomers, particularly if pre-existing inhabitants feel excluded from opportunities in the community development process or perceive (if wrongly) disproportionately high levels of support to immigrants. Communities often must make a concerted effort to ensure successful relationships between long-term residents and new arrivals.

Information/Expectations

Due to a lack of appropriate information or its inaccessibility, rural communities experience difficulties when attempting to make informed decisions about immigration initiatives. The unavailability of settlement models that are appropriately rural in focus means that communities may have to commit unnecessarily large expenditures of financial and human resources to initiate immigration programs. Furthermore, community preparedness is compromised by incomplete information concerning arrivals and the uncertainty over waiting and relocation times inherent in the immigration procedure. Optimistic talk of an immigration option may lead to unrealistic expectations of the extent and impact of an immigration initiative and detract attention from the larger demographic and economic issues faced in rural areas.

New arrivals to Canada have insufficient knowledge of rural communities and associated rural opportunities due to a lack of accessible community profiles, information on services/amenities, employment, etc. Small centres often suffer from inaccurate and unflattering depictions in mainstream media, lessening the possibility that rural areas will be viewed as destinations of choice. Immigration officers and personnel influential in informing immigrants' decision on where to settle are likely to have less knowledge of and experience in rural settings. All of the above serve to lessen exposure and attractiveness of the "rural option" to immigrants, meaning that rural destinations are

hardly considered by immigrants or that expectations are not commensurate with rural realities and opportunities.

Dynamics of Attraction

Due to the reality of and necessity for immigrant mobility rights, rural communities face challenges in attracting and retaining immigrants, particularly given the strong pull that major metropolitan areas have historically had on immigrants. Rural communities are therefore forced to compete with other attractive, more established immigrant destinations while being unable to offer certain aspects of life that larger centres can (larger linguistic/cultural/religious community, certain amenities, employment diversification) and having their attractive qualities misunderstood. Rural communities may find themselves in the peculiar situation of having to cooperate with themselves on regional immigration initiatives, wherein they share resources and are packaged as part of a regional marketing message, while ultimately competing amongst themselves as the final destination of choice for immigrants.

Employment/Entrepreneurship

Underemployment of immigrants and an underutilization of their skills is a persistent issue. This dilemma is exacerbated in rural contexts in which fewer employment options are available and employment relevant to one's field potentially more difficult to find. Related language concerns may be more apparent in rural areas with fewer opportunities for an immigrant to work in his/her first language. Immigration policy may not adequately reflect labour market realities and needs of rural communities, with, for example, high investment/savings requirements and exhibited preferences for high-skill labour.

Adequate employment for all family members is often difficult to find in rural areas. Ensuring immigrant job seekers and entrepreneurs have access to similar opportunities as the established population is a challenge; furthermore, immigrants may have considerable difficulty building necessary business networks in small communities. Communities may experience difficulties in maintaining an adequately supportive environment for immigrant job seekers and entrepreneurs, and immigrants are often not fully aware of employment expectations, availability, and issues surrounding credentials recognition. The latter proves immensely frustrating for immigrants and, along with impediments to finding satisfying employment, provides an impetus for out-migration from smaller communities.

Isolation

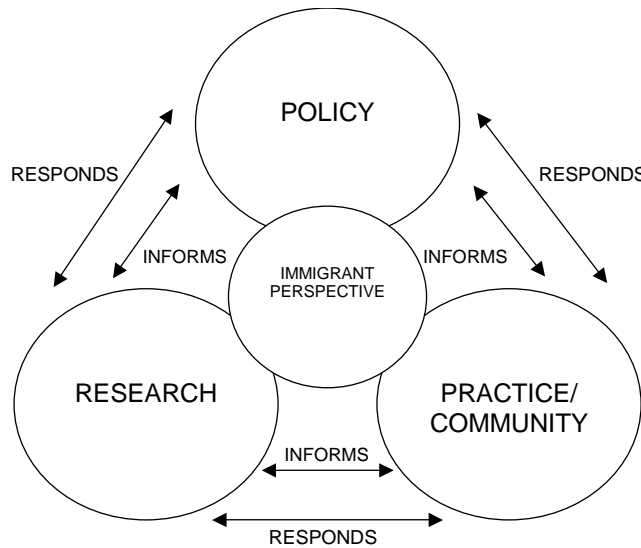
Immigrants have diverse motivations, seeking to and having the ability to integrate into a wider community to varying degrees. In all cases, however, immigrants may experience isolation if they are detached from a larger ethnic, linguistic or religious community, or if they experience greater difficulties connecting with the wider community. Those members of the family not employed or attending school, in many cases women, may be particularly vulnerable.

3.0 Addressing Rural Immigration Issues and Challenges: The Role of Research, Policy and Practice

Addressing the particular issues and challenges facing rural communities in attracting and retaining immigrants requires the efforts of many. The responsibility, and indeed, the capacity to enhance the immigration experience are beyond the sole purview of any one government agency, community organization or new arrival. The complexity of the rural immigration experience necessitate that collaborative efforts on the part of research, policy and practice are required. Active contributions and collaborative efforts from numerous actors in these fields can ensure that: 1) communities are fully-informed and prepared when initiating immigration initiatives; 2) efficient allocation and sharing of intellectual and human resources is realized; and 3) on the ground expertise is fully utilized and considered.

The following model represents the interconnectivity of the realms of research, policy and practice on the matter of rural immigration and the importance of incorporating an immigrant perspective throughout.

Figure 2- A Collaborative Approach to Rural Immigration



Research and Collaboration in the West

One can witness this emerging understanding of the need for research endeavours and collaborative efforts that address the unique challenges and opportunities offers for both western Canada and its rural areas. The Canada West Foundation has released in recent years numerous pieces that address the issue of immigration from a Western perspective. The Government of British Columbia has recently completed eight community based projects as part of its Regional Immigration Initiative, in which it seeks to increase the

capacity of communities and regions outside the Greater Vancouver area to utilize immigration as a tool to support socio-economic development. In Manitoba, LIM, in continuing to develop the province's ambitious immigration strategy, of which a considerable component is a regional immigration initiative, recently partnered with RDI to develop the Manitoba Rural Immigration Community Case Studies. Though each dealing with research questions developed to address particular geographic areas, such developments increase the broad stock of knowledge on the immigration experience in the West and may be used to further inform the initiatives undertaken by policymakers, researchers and additional communities.

Identified Research/Knowledge Needs

Admittedly, the current state of research and knowledge surrounding recent immigration efforts in rural communities is insufficient to gauge long-term patterns, preferences and effects associated with immigration to rural areas. Targeted research that more fully explores rural immigration processes and procedures, as well as the experiences of immigrants in rural areas, can inform both policy and practice on the matter and contribute to the success of rural immigration initiatives. Though presented as identified research and knowledge needs, the following are not the sole purview of research as such, but rather benefit from collaborative efforts by research, policy and practice to determine how best to approach questions and effectively utilize findings to enhance immigration policy and procedures.

Attraction and Retention

- *Explore and research knowledge gaps concerning the experience of immigrants in rural areas.* Do we really know where immigrants go in rural areas? Why do they go and what keeps them there?
- *Research the experiences of immigrants in urban areas.* Are there lessons to be learned for rural areas? Are there better fits in rural areas for immigrants, particularly those experiencing difficulty in an urban environment?
- *Examine links between urban and rural areas.* Can immigrants be “poached” from larger communities?
- *Examine resettlement experiences, including the phenomenon of second wave immigration and immigrant mobility within Canada.* Why do immigrants move? Why do they leave rural areas? Do they exhibit tendencies similar to the overall Canadian population?
- *Examine the social and economic impacts on immigrants living in rural areas.* Do immigrants make economic sacrifices to live in rural areas? Do immigrants integrate well into small towns in the long term?
- *Develop a profile of immigrants most likely to move and stay in rural areas.* How can this assist strategizing around promotion and targeted recruitment?
- *Similarly, develop profiles of small communities that have been successful with immigration initiatives.* What are the characteristics of rural communities in which immigration is successful and a contributing element to community development?

- *Explore potential links with international students.* What are the needs of international students and where might they fit best in a rural employment and social environment?

- *Examine impressions of rural Canada.* What images of rural Canada do immigrants have? How might these be linked with a marketing message? Are (potential) immigrants cognizant of the range of services available in rural Canada or transposing images of rural poverty from other experiences overseas? What do immigration officers from Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) know about rural Canada and what message are they conveying to immigrants?
- *Examine intergenerational migration trends.* Do children in immigrant families who settle in rural Canada stay, or are they reproducing patterns of rural out migration?
- *Determine attitudes of potential targeted immigrants to inform immigration strategies* (e.g. if Germans focus on geography, build an appropriate message that communicates area's strength and speaks to this).
- *Examine the role of immigration consultants.* How does their activity affect community immigration initiatives?
- *Research what are the minimum service levels required to attract and retain immigrants.* Do immigrants require immediate proximity to services in order to settle, or are they willing to commute to larger nearby centres?

Policy

- *Identify issues of rural decline, lack of capacity and impact on immigration.* Immigrants are not a panacea for combating rural decline but part of an integrated strategy. Therefore, what should rural areas' expectations be for immigration?
- *Investigate CIC policy and its relevance to rural areas.* Does it meet the needs of Canadians in smaller centres and rural areas?
- *Conduct comparative research on rural immigration policy in other countries.*

Community Services / Supports / Tools

- *Evaluate the success of 'tool kits' developed for small centres and rural areas.*
- *Conduct a comparative study and evaluation of existing programs and strategies for rural immigration.*
- *Determine whether the needs of recent immigrants are being met in rural communities and to what extent communities remain engaged with immigrants after arrival.*

Employment and Business Development

- *Research into the structural barriers that impede efforts to meet labour and human resource needs through immigration.* How can human resource needs across the country inform immigration strategy?
- *Determine whether rural employment capacity accommodates the needs of multiple family members.* What is the impact of rural economies/employment on immigrant families?
- *Research Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SME)* to determine: how many are started by immigrants; by refugees; and how many Canadians this employs.

- *Research wage and position mobility of immigrants over time.*
- *Investigate what is required to attract immigrant entrepreneurs to rural Canada.*
- *Assess the economic impact of immigrants in rural communities: economic growth, business development, wage increase/stagnation.*
- *Research catchment area around urban and rural non-adjacent areas and the economic interdependencies between urban and rural.*

Social / Cultural Cohesion

- *Explore the cultural dynamic of rural communities receiving immigrants. What is required to reconcile values and interests of immigrant, Canadian and rural cultures?*
- *Research level of satisfaction of non-immigrants in communities receiving immigrants. Are rural communities welcoming communities for immigrants? Can all communities be receptive to immigrants?*
- *Examine how women are impacted when immigrating to rural Canada. Are adequate support systems available?*
- *Investigate the role and importance of extended families in immigration. Do they assist in preserving cultural values, combating isolation or enhancing settlement in rural areas?*
- *Explore the role of churches and other religious institutions in the arrival, settlement, retention and integration of immigrants in rural communities.*

4.0 Moving Forward on Rural Immigration Agenda: Recommendations and Opportunities for Action

The following recommendations and opportunities for action are detailed here with the belief that they can significantly benefit rural immigration initiatives. They build upon lessons learned in both the CRRF-RDI National Rural Think Tank 2005 and the Manitoba Rural Immigration Community Case Studies. In some cases, they appear to be more the purview of government/policy, research or community/practice, though in keeping with the message developed throughout this paper, several recommendations are presented as best addressed by a collaborative effort on the part of policy, research and practice.

Government/Policy

Meeting the needs of the Rural West

Immigration policy must be investigated with a “rural lens”. This may include conducting a critical review of current federal and provincial immigration policies to determine whether they meet the needs of rural Canada and the West. Policy makers should actively seek greater rural input into immigration policy formation, as well as ensure that the national immigration framework is flexible enough to deal with diverse immigration needs, including those of rural areas and other areas not typically considered as choice destinations. Immigration officials need to continue to prioritize immigration regionalization initiatives while accounting for diverse needs and interests of rural communities.

Supporting communities

Provinces must offer support to enable communities to identify needs and opportunities and conduct pre-immigration work in communities. Provinces can similarly play a vital role in linking their smaller communities to potential immigrants by actively promoting them abroad.

Employment Issues

Governments need to offer leadership in combating employment issues faced by immigrants. One possible solution is to develop bridge programs for immigrants who have no need for Employment Insurance/Social Assistance, but substantial issues surrounding credentials recognition. Furthermore, government agencies can develop a pilot project allowing temporary workers to become immigrants to rural areas.

Governmental stakeholders

Governments must promote inter-agency cooperation to successfully address the social, economic and cultural complexities of rural immigration

Research

Research, immigration and rural issues

Rural immigration needs to be normalized and promoted as a serious area of inquiry for Canadian researchers. For example, rural immigration can be promoted as an ongoing

focus of Statistics Canada and CIC. Research bodies may develop a large-scale research initiative on rural immigration involving appropriate expertise. For example, the New Rural Economy could adopt the immigration theme. Multiple researchers could investigate the feasibility/appropriateness of a rural component for Metropolis, a research initiative that focuses on issues and questions related to immigration, or the development of a similar entity expressly for purposes of rural immigration.

Organization and presentation of research

Interested research bodies must develop means and mechanisms to appropriately organize and disseminate the results of new research and initiatives related to rural immigration issues. Furthermore, they must make already existing knowledge on the theme more accessible, including a further sharing of findings to inform and connect appropriate and interested researchers to the theme. Interested researchers should be encouraged to follow up on the numerous knowledge needs identified in this and other documents.

Practice/Community

Planning

Communities must give serious consideration of opportunities and limitations of immigration within the context of overarching rural opportunities and challenges. This involves prioritizing strategic and effective long-term planning and determining how immigration can be realistically used to combat long-term demographic change and related issues such as business, farm and government succession and service provision.

Increasing community capacity and knowledge base

Communities must develop local leadership/expertise on the matter of immigration and develop and disseminate local knowledge and expertise on matter of immigration. They are similarly encouraged to strengthen coordinated capacity and mechanisms to facilitate the organization and sharing of relevant rural immigration resources and experiences, as well as to explore appropriate grounds for co-operation on immigration initiatives.

Those pursuing immigration strategies must further consider how existing rural programs, services and infrastructure may be utilized in immigration pursuits, build on and expanding these to cater to immigration needs as opposed to developing them anew. Communities that have witnessed arrivals will benefit from effectively capturing the social contribution of new immigrants, particular how such individuals can ease the burden of transition and settlement of other new arrivals.

Practitioners must continue to promote immigration as a reasonable consideration for rural development, developing the appropriate knowledge resources to seriously debate the matter. Communities must recognize the need for and develop “safe guide entities” to care for and guide new immigrants to ensure they are treated well in their rural destinations. Those engaged in immigration initiatives must offer leadership to ensure major stakeholders and the wider community have accurate understanding of immigrant motivations and their valuable contributions to community economic, social and cultural life.

Exposing potential immigrants to rural communities, rural opportunities

Communities must continue to facilitate immigrants' access to local programs, information and opportunities, both after arrival and previous to arrival. Some communities may have the opportunity to develop and capitalize on tourism initiatives, generating interest in resettling by first attracting international tourists. This can involve attaching tourists to their area, as through the purchase of a home, facilitating exploratory visits of potential immigrants and develop exploratory visits and rural homestay programs for international students. Communities can build on the international and inter-provincial networks of existing residents, immigrants and otherwise, to pursue potential new arrivals.

Collaborative Efforts and the Policy/Research/Practice Interface

Strengthening collaboration

All interested parties can encourage further discussion and dissemination of lessons, practices, and tools, as well as the establishment of working groups on the matter of rural immigration. This includes encouraging the sharing of federal and provincial policy developments, research expertise and community needs and successes. Furthermore, appropriate venues, supports and mechanisms that channel dialogue, discussion and developments on rural immigration into successful practice on the theme must be developed.

A wide range of rural stakeholders must be encouraged in discussions and decision-making processes surrounding rural immigration. Rural needs and opportunities in the area of immigration must be linked with proper personnel, inside or outside of affected communities; greater access to governmental personnel and research expertise is required to inform community decisions, lessening the costly and time consuming need to begin anew with each individual immigration initiative. Multiple parties need to promote research for building local expertise on immigration processes and determining effective community based planning.

Rural immigration initiatives must be integrated with the inclusion of non-governmental organizations, business development and governmental levels. "Front line" people from rural areas can actively contribute in policy development on immigration; therefore, rural communities and governance bodies must be engaged in the process. Greater communication between CIC, provincial immigration personnel and rural communities must be established. Such considerations will help to ensure that the infrastructure of immigration is commensurate with rural needs, realities and opportunities. To further inform research, policy and practice on the matter of rural immigration, all parties are encouraged to access experienced immigrants who have already faced obstacles settling in Canada in general and rural Canada in particular.

Community capacity

Urban-based immigration settlement agencies and rural areas should be further linked to promote the sharing of knowledge and expertise, with such agencies being sensitized to rural needs and realities. All levels must collaborate to encourage and support community "self-promotion" for immigrant attraction, including the development of a web presence for smaller communities.

Ethical/humanitarian challenges

All initiatives will be strengthened when involved actors remain cognizant of the related ethical/humanitarian challenges associated with immigration and promote open dialogue and discussion to this end. A concerted effort is required to effectively address the issue of family reunification, as this both affects immigrants and their families themselves and contributes to outmigration.

Entrepreneurship and employment

Coordinated efforts can assist in stimulating immigrant entrepreneurship in rural areas, including promoting a stronger rural element to international trade missions, providing greater opportunity and incentive for immigrant entrepreneurs to settle in rural areas, investigating what opportunities exist to bring knowledge-based industries into communities and strengthening and utilizing networks to attract immigrant entrepreneurs to rural areas.

Employment issues similarly require a collaborative effort and multilevel response. Research, policy and personal can collaborate to develop and disseminate an inventory of accreditation pilot projects and lessons learned from these. All levels must continue to address the multiple issues surrounding credentials recognition; further economic and social investment in training and an allocation of resources for credential recognition is required. Appropriate and timely research on labour market issues should inform immigration policy.

Rural re-imagining, increasing profile of Rural West

In order for the Rural West to be seriously considered as an immigrant destination, predominant (and often unflattering) perceptions of rurality in general and the Rural West in particular must be challenged. A coordinated effort of policy/research/practice towards rural re-imagining and increasing the profile of rural Canada is required, directing a more positive message of rural to all Canadians, landed immigrants and prospective immigrants. Highlighting prosperous and vibrant areas in the Rural West in appropriate venues will broaden the messages and images of Canada received by prospective immigrants. This can involve marketing the quality of life rural areas offer, including quality education systems, community safety and cohesiveness and low costs of living. Furthermore, a collaborative effort is required to accurately assess and portray the relevant opportunities for immigrants in smaller communities and ensure that immigrants and potential immigrants understand the level of services in rural areas.

Promotion of immigration

Similarly, communities in the Rural West must be encouraged to have a more positive and accurate view of immigration. Increasing the profile of immigration and encouraging a balanced perspective in national and regional media and exclusively rural outlets can assist in this. Pro-immigration communities should be encouraged to champion the benefits of immigration. All parties can work to develop education programs and appropriate language to mitigate community feelings of competing interests vis-à-vis immigrant population.

Knowledge Promotion

Continued promotion of knowledge and learning on the matter of rural immigration is required. Revisiting topics of rural immigration in an event similar to the Think Tank can help determine progress on the matter while ensuring recent and relevant developments in all fields are recognized. Researchers could apply for a Community University Research Alliance (CURA) - Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) grant in partnership with rural immigration partners and CIC to examine the issue of rural immigration. The creation and dissemination of rural retention strategies/successes is required. Planning events with more specific focus on issues associated with rural immigration will advance knowledge on the theme. Suggested examples for topics may include:

- opening small communities to immigrants
- immigrant youth
- population strategy for Canada
- partnerships with aboriginal communities for immigration initiatives
- immigrant women's experiences in rural communities
- international students as potential immigrants to rural Canada
- rural entrepreneurship and immigration
- capacity building/leadership in rural communities
- rural clusters
- role of university as rural/regional outreach centers
- rural industry linkages to urban knowledge economy
- further identifying the topics that are specific to rural communities and immigration

5.0 - Conclusion

We believe that many of the observations contained in the preceding pages may prove helpful for communities, practitioners, policy-makers and researchers engaging with the issue of rural immigration. Positively, rural immigration in general and its associated challenges and opportunities have landed on the radar of such groups and wider swaths of the general public. We further encourage greater coordinated action to ensure the balancing of perspective of affected and interested parties. Open dialogue and mutual recognition of needs and contributions on the part of all parties involved in the rural immigration experience will lead to greater success. Finally, we encourage further consideration of the themes and concepts developed in this paper, particularly coordinated research that can shed new light on recent immigration initiatives through the examination of wider impacts and long-term developments.

RDI ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Scott Grills, Chair
Brandon University
Brandon, MB

Mona Cornock
Manitoba Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives
Brandon, MB

Larry Flynn
Public Health Agency of Canada
Winnipeg, MB

Reg Helwer
Shur-Gro Farm Services
Brandon, MB

Ben Maendel
Baker Hutterite Colony
MacGregor, MB

Jonathon Maendel
Baker Hutterite Colony
MacGregor, MB

Darell Pack
Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada
Winnipeg, MB

W.J. (Bill) Pugh
Meyers Norris Penny
Brandon, MB

Fran Racher
Brandon University
Brandon, MB

Doug Ramsey
Brandon University
Brandon, MB

Peter Reimer
Manitoba Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives
Winnipeg, MB

Frank Thomas
Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce
Brandon, MB

Larry Wark
MTS Communications Inc.
Brandon, MB

Jeff Williams
Brandon University
Brandon, MB

Dion Wiseman
Brandon University
Brandon, MB

Robert Annis, Director
RDI, Brandon University
Brandon, MB

The role of the RDI Advisory Committee is to provide general advice and direction to the Institute on matters of rural concern. On a semi-annual basis the Committee meets to share information about issues of mutual interest in rural Manitoba and foster linkages with the constituencies they represent.