

Vernon Local Immigration Partnerships Council

Quarterly Activity Report

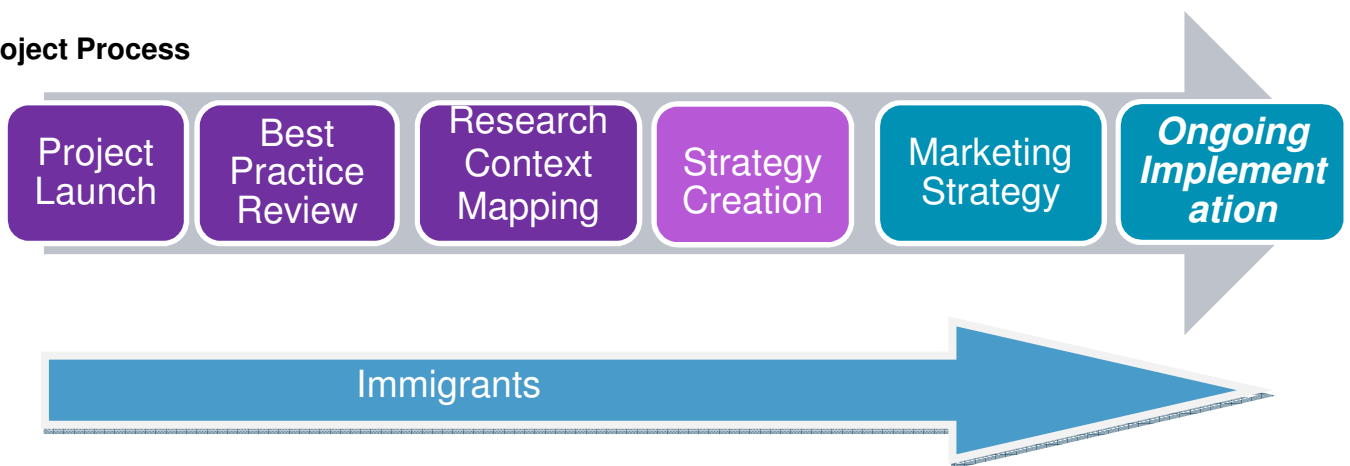
April-June 2015

A. Project Overview

The goal of this project is to develop an *Immigration and Settlement Strategy* by March 2016 to attract and retain immigrants to Vernon. There is an understanding that immigrants provide important cultural diversity to local communities as well as skills, investment and an entrepreneurial spirit that will help offset Canada's aging demographic and declining birth rate, and fuel economic growth.

The Local Immigration Partnerships Council was formed to engage a wide variety of community stakeholders in further developing partnerships and capacity to support the integration of new immigrants. Social Planning Council for the North Okanagan is the project's host agency. Funding has been provided by Citizenship and Immigration Canada.

B. Project Process



C. Quarterly Highlights

1. Local Labor Market & Investment Workshop: Urban Matters presented federal, provincial and local labor market and investment trends. Members of the community were invited to attend. The complete report is available here: <http://www.socialplanning.ca/strategy.html> Key highlights were:
 - Both the federal and provincial governments have targeted geographic and industry areas. One Vernon could potentially align with is agri-foods.
 - There are some 400,000 small businesses in B.C., with 70% owned by baby boomers. Only 10% of those have succession plans in place.
 - Vernon is characterized by relatively low employment participation; an affordable work force; limited clusters and key industries.
 - In the Okanagan, the service producing employment sector represents over 75% of employment. Current population growth and migration levels are not expected to satisfy forecast labor market demand in the Thompson Okanagan over the next 6 years. Both immigrants and new labor market entrants are important potential additions to the labor force supply.
 - Skill gaps and mismatches (underutilization) are a significant cost to the BC economy.

Observations from participants included:

- The immigration strategy should fit within the broader community strategy. There is a need to consult regionally when formulating the immigration strategy, as the ability to compete globally is important.

- It is important to build on what we do well, identify key employment sectors, and support those immigrants (and others) who are already in the community.
 - Opportunities may exist to attract secondary migration to smaller locations such as Vernon after initial immigration to the larger Canadian centers.
 - Affordable, suitable housing is an important factor in attracting/retaining immigrants.
2. Immigrant Perspectives Workshop June 9: Surveys, focus groups and one-on-one interviews with immigrants to Vernon were used to collect information about the community through the lens of the immigrant.
- Canada on average receives 250,000 immigrants per year, representing 1% of the population. Two thirds are economic class and their dependents. The larger Canadian cities are generally the first point of entry.
 - 85% of immigrants to Canada become citizens of Canada.
 - 62% of immigrants surveyed in Vernon had friends and family leave Vernon, primarily due to a lack of economic opportunities, but also because of a lack of social lifestyle and family.

Top reasons for coming to Vernon	%	Vernon's Top-Ranking Community Characteristics	Rank/5.0
Jobs & career opportunities	54%	Safe place for family life	4.1
Friends & family	54%	Availability/access to school	4.0
Positive attitudes towards newcomers	31%	Transparent system of Justice & Policing	3.9
Access to recreation facilities & opportunities	31%	Range of services sensitive to newcomers	3.6
Safe place for family life	31%	Presence of family & friends	3.5
Health care	23%		

3. Strategy Development: LIPC representatives prioritized four key characteristics to be developed in a vision statement: **diverse, collaborative, welcoming and opportunities**. Areas of focus for attracting, welcoming and retaining immigrants were identified as: **Economic Opportunities, Social Inclusion, Quality of Life/Healthy Community** and **Organizational Buy-In** (from all participants involved in implementing the immigration strategy).
4. Community Presentations: Multicultural Meet Ups: Two community presentations featuring Ukraine and Philippines were hosted in partnership with the Vernon Library. The public were invited to experience “A Taste of” each country as seen through the eyes of Canadians who travelled there, and Vernon residents who emigrated from the country. Evidence of the influences each culture has had (such as the World War I East European internment camp located on the W.L. Seaton school grounds) related those perspectives and experiences back to the local community. Urban Matters sponsored the events.

D. Next Quarterly Meeting Date for the Local Immigration Partnerships Council:

Sept 23 2015 Quarterly LIPC Meeting 10-12 am
 3rd Floor Boardroom Community Futures 3105 33rd Street