

Addressing Nova Scotia's Demographic Challenges

A report prepared for the
Nova Scotia Association of Regional Development Authorities
Union of Nova Scotia Municipalities
Nova Scotia Chambers of Commerce

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Foreword

Population issues have been a priority in policy circles and in Nova Scotia communities for several years. With increasing youth out-migration, low immigrant retention rates, and an aging population, it is imperative that communities work together to reduce the impact of these trends on our way of life.

In the spring of 2008, the Union of Nova Scotia Municipalities (UNSM), the Nova Scotia Association of Regional Development Authorities (NSARDA) and the Nova Scotia Chambers of Commerce (NSCoC) formed a committee to address these population issues in a meaningful and collaborative way. This committee was tasked with hosting a public forum and developing strategies to address repopulation across the Province.

The group hosted the first Population Forum in February 2010 in Wolfville, Nova Scotia. This event marked one of the first times municipal, business and economic development leaders gathered collectively to learn about our shared challenges and brainstorm strategies to combat these issues. The three partner organizations agreed there was a need and grassroots interest to host a second Population Forum. The purpose of this follow-up forum, held in April 2011 in Truro, was to discuss collaborative strategies to tackle local concerns.

A key component of the second phase of this project was to commission the following report. "Addressing Nova Scotia's Demographic Challenges" compiles best practices and successful strategies for repopulation that have been successful in communities provincially, nationally and globally. There is still much work to be done to address the looming population crisis, but collectively we can build a stronger Nova Scotia. For more information on local initiatives or to get involved please contact one of the partner organizations.

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Executive Summary

Nova Scotia's population is declining and aging. These conditions present a threat to the province's economic viability. An aging population, low fertility rates and a lack of immigration have all resulted in population decline, particularly noticeable in rural and non-metro communities. Increasing demands for labour in Alberta has resulted in the out-migration of working-age youth from rural parts of Nova Scotia. In a province that has historically struggled with high levels of unemployment, the expectation that Nova Scotia will run out of available labour within the next decade presents confounding challenges. In order to cultivate the population of Nova Scotia, communities must develop strategies around best practices to attract, engage and retain a diverse range of residents.

On February 10th, 2010, the Union of Nova Scotia Municipalities (UNSM), the Nova Scotia Chambers of Commerce and the Nova Scotia Association of Regional Development Authorities (NSARDA) partnered to host a forum to identify local solutions for population challenges across the province. The Population Forum was a vital first step in sharing ideas for action and determining how the three organisations might collaborate to advance these strategies. As part of a continued commitment to tackling repopulation in Nova Scotia, the following report has been prepared which examines local, national and international repopulation strategies for the purpose of identifying a shortlist of best practices and action-oriented solutions.

DEMOGRAPHIC SNAPSHOT

Seniors. Nova Scotia currently has the oldest population in Canada, with approximately 15.4 percent of residents over the age of 65 (Department of Seniors, 2009). Recent reports have estimated that the number of seniors in Nova Scotia will increase by over 70 percent by 2026 – growing from 128,000 in 2001 to 218,000 in 2026 (McNiven et al., 2006). By 2034, the senior population of Nova Scotia will increase to 263,400 – representing an increase of 107 percent over a 33-year period. When compared to regional and rural municipalities, towns have the highest proportion of senior residents.

In order to meet the challenges of a rapidly aging population, governments, institutions, businesses, and communities must adapt to boost the productivity of the working-age population to ensure sufficient economic growth. The Province has already seen a trend towards employing senior workers. Between 2001 and 2006, the number of seniors participating in the workforce increased by 60 percent (Department of Seniors, 2009). This prolonged participation in the workforce of older workers interested in continued employment may be due to economic circumstances that require older people to take paid work after retirement, or due to the desire to retain an active lifestyle.

Youth. While the population of seniors in Nova Scotia is expected to rise dramatically in the next two decades, youth population (5 to 19 years of age) is expected to decline by 21.8 percent. Similarly, the 20 to 24 age group is expected to decrease from 6.6 percent of the total population in 2009 to 4.9 percent in 2034 (Government of NS, 2010). Over the last decade, economic decline and unemployment in rural areas of Nova Scotia have contributed to accelerated out-migration of working-age youth. Moreover, cutbacks in government services have resulted in fewer recreational, employment, and educational resources for teenagers in rural communities. As a result, many students are eager to move to urban centres upon graduation from high school.

It has been observed that youth who have a stake in their community before they leave are the youth who are more likely to return to rural careers. Youth need to play an integral part in the planning, decision-making and leadership for actions and initiatives that affect them. Rather than making decisions on behalf of youth, the key role for municipal governments in attraction and retention strategies should focus on working collaboratively with youth and supporting the youth perspective. Youth Councils – like the one in Parrsboro, Nova Scotia – provide opportunities for young people to participate in government decision-making, develop self-confidence and contribute to the community.

International Students. Atlantic Canada's universities have become increasingly competitive in their recruitment and enrolment strategies for bolstering student populations. This has resulted in the growth rate of the number of students from other Canadian provinces and from other countries outpacing the growth rate of students from within Atlantic Canada at many institutions (Siddiq, et al., 2009). Between 1996 and 2005, the annual inflows of international students coming to the Atlantic Provinces doubled, from 1,500 to 3,000 (Metropolis, 2008).

Recruiting international students as potential immigrants to Nova Scotia would help offset the province's demographic challenge. Nova Scotia attracts over 10 percent of the international student population in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2009). The average age of the international student population is 22 years old, which is in the range of the declining youth cohort in Nova Scotia (Siddiq, et al., 2009). Over two-thirds of international students have full fluency in English or French. Further, many of these students will graduate with some Canadian work experience. These qualifications make international students an ideal target group for reversing demographic trends in Nova Scotia. The province's colleges and universities, in cooperation with surrounding municipalities, could become more active in encouraging international students to immigrate and become permanent residents after graduation.

Immigrants. It has been suggested that the recruitment and retention of skilled immigrants and foreign workers may help reverse negative demographic trends and fill labour shortages in Canada. In 2009, Nova Scotia welcomed 2,424 immigrants, representing a 10 percent decrease from the previous year (CIC, Facts and Figures, 2010). Working age immigrants in Nova Scotia tend to be highly educated, with over 55 percent holding bachelors degrees or higher (NS-OIM, 2006).

In order to facilitate the integration of immigrants in Nova Scotia, barriers to settlement – including the complexity of the immigration process, difficulties establishing foreign credentials, and workplace discrimination – must be addressed. There is a need to develop more inclusive, welcoming communities if the province continues to look towards immigration as a way to boost the economy and reverse demographic trends. However, several demographic experts warn that provinces should not overstate the contribution that immigration can make to demographic turnaround. McNiven (2009) suggests that the increases in immigration necessary to offset or even significantly reduce the effects of low-birth rates, rural outmigration and an aging workforce are unrealistic, particularly for a province that currently attracts less than 1 percent of Canada's new immigrants.

LOCAL AND PROVINCIAL STRATEGIES IN NOVA SCOTIA

Seniors. Adopting age-friendly community initiatives is a preventative and proactive approach to meeting the challenges and opportunities of population aging. The Government of Nova Scotia has

implemented several initiatives to promote the development of age-friendly communities, including the Age-Friendly Communities Committee – a partnership between the Department of Seniors and the UNSM – to examine ways of promoting age-friendly communities throughout Nova Scotia. The Department of Seniors has also produced in-depth research on aging in rural and remote communities, and offers various resources and funding programs for municipalities to support the development and implementation of age-friendly initiatives. Funding is available for a range of initiatives, including: improving accessibility, training for workforce re-entry and enhancing health and recreation services.

Youth. The Nova Scotia Youth Secretariat works to increase awareness of the needs and aspirations of youth and to increase support and services required by youth to make a successful transition to adulthood. The Youth Secretariat places particular emphasis on supporting initiatives of the Government of Nova Scotia by providing continued advice and recommendations to government on youth issues and government programs and services that respond to those and other issues. The Youth Secretariat also ensures that the government has access to information and recommendations that are built on research, analysis and input from youth stakeholders. The Secretariat works closely with HeartWood, an organisation that helps communities strengthen their youth engagement.

As stated by HeartWood, “engaging youth in decision-making processes helps governments make decisions that are more responsive and appropriate to youth needs and interests”. As such, youth councils provide valuable opportunities for youth representation in the community. Youth Councils are typically associated with an organisation or a government to which they advise and provide input towards recommendations around issues affecting young people. The benefits of youth representation are apparent – youth best understand their own experiences, needs, and interactions with local environments and their community.

University Students. In 2009, the Province of Nova Scotia introduced a new Graduate Retention Rebate as an incentive for recent post-secondary graduates to work and live in Nova Scotia. Under this program, students graduating after 2009 are eligible to reduce their Nova Scotia income taxes by a maximum of \$2,500 per year in the year of graduation and in each of the next five years to a maximum of \$15,000 over the six-year period. In addition, international students are able to work in Canada following graduation through the Government of Canada Post-Graduation Work Permit (CIC, 2008a). The permit allows international students to obtain employment for up to three years, with no restrictions on the type of employment or location within Canada. The program is specifically designed to provide international students with work experience, which may lead to more students applying for permanent residence, either through a provincial nominee program stream or the Canadian Experience Class.

Immigrants. In 2005, the Province of Nova Scotia developed the Nova Scotia Immigration Strategy, outlining the goals and objectives that will set the stage for a broad range of activities over the next five years. The Strategy highlights the important role of Regional Development Authorities (RDAs) in providing leadership and coordination for regional and community growth. While there is a strong tendency for provincial nominees to settle in Halifax, the Nova Scotia Nominee Program (NSNP) provides several opportunities for greater population distribution across the province. The inclusion of the “Community Identified Stream” under the NSNP recognises that community networks can play an important role in attracting, selecting and retaining new immigrants.

The Office of Immigration provides funding to community organisations, public or non-government organisations and language schools to assist in providing services to increase the participation of immigrants in the workforce. There is also funding available for services that facilitate successful integration and long-term residency of immigrants in Nova Scotia. Settlement services in Nova Scotia – such as Immigrant Settlement & Integration Services (ISIS), the Colchester Immigration Partnership, and the Regional Immigration Navigator Program – have been essential in aiding immigrants in settlement, language training, employment, and business through a variety of programs.

INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES

In the wider socio-economic context, developed countries are looking to attract foreign skilled labour to supplement their rapidly decreasing and aging populations. The following section examines aging, out-migration and depopulation trends and challenges in Japan, Australia, and the United States.

Japan – Silver Industries. It has been estimated that the senior population in Japan will rise to 26 percent of the whole population by 2015 and will increase to 35.7 percent by 2050, making Japan the oldest country in the world. The trend amongst seniors in Japan has been towards “active aging”, driven by the recognised benefits of healthy living, and the willingness and financial stability to function independently in older age. Attitudes towards “active aging” have given rise to industries called “silver markets” (Usui, 2011). The present senior population is more financially stable than previous generations creating a valuable consumer market, particularly in real estate and recreation industries. According to Nitta (2006), spending on home renovation in 2005 was highest among the 65–69 age group, spending twice as much as homeowners in the 55–59 age group. International businesses have reinvented their products and services to capitalise on the consumer power of the Japanese senior population.

Ellsworth, Kansas – Welcome Home. In the 1990s, rural communities began offering free residential land as a strategy for attracting new residents and increasing economic development. By 2006, 20 small towns in Kansas had established free land programs. In November 2010, the Population Forum Committee conducted an interview with a representative from the Smoky Hill Development Corporation (SHDC) in Ellsworth County, Kansas. The interview provided background and context for the “Welcome Home Plan” free land program in Ellsworth County, and provided an update on the success of the strategy since its installation in 2003.

Boasting free residential lots, a home financing program, and a down payment assistance program (DAP), the “Welcome Home Plan” was a huge promotional opportunity for Ellsworth County. Advertising and national news features attracted hundreds of interested people to the county. While many were unable to afford a new house, several families liked the region and decided to purchase an existing residence under the DAP. Despite Ellsworth’s success, free land programs have had mixed results in other small Kansas towns. Realistically, people are attracted to better opportunities and are likely unwilling to relocate to a rural town that offers few amenities and employment prospects. The SHDC emphasises that much of their success has been due to first-rate amenities and sectors that were experiencing labour shortages. Once jobs run out, it may be difficult for the “Welcome Home Program” to continue attracting new residents to the County.

Michigan – Muskegon 25. When the unemployment rate rose from 13.9% to 14.9% between June and July of 2010, Muskegon County, Michigan made a bold move to stimulate hiring by offering what has been described as “the most comprehensive development incentive packages in the United States” (Valley, 2010; Michigan Economic Development, 2011). The plan, Muskegon 25, offers free industrial property, tax waivers, and reduced water and sewer rates to companies that commit to the creation new full-time jobs in Muskegon.

Since Muskegon 25 began in August of 2010, there have been 40 serious inquires (Holmes-Greeley, 2011). Muskegon officials believe that if jobs are created, the program will have been worth the investment. However, as Muskegon 25 continues to receive attention from businesses and media outlets, City officials have quickly found Muskegon at a disadvantage compared to competing communities that have begun advertising attractive incentives such as free rent, up-front cash, and free buildings to attract businesses. Accordingly, there is a need to improve the practice of offering incentives and developing regional partnerships in order to restrain inter-jurisdictional competition. A consideration of these factors is vital to minimise the risk of giving away more than what can be gained by attracting new business.

South Australia – Regionalising Immigration. According to national immigration authorities, Australia will have 200,000 more jobs than people to fill them in five years’ time. International students have been identified as a target population for immigration, providing economic stimulus to rural areas and adding to the cultural diversity of rural Australia. Immigration policies have been used to encourage foreign graduates from Australian institutions to apply for long-term employment and permanent residency. State Specific Regional Migration (SSRM) schemes allow employers in low population areas of Australia to fill skilled positions with foreign workers on a permanent basis where they cannot fill the vacancies from the Australian labour market.

The use of SSRM in South Australia suggests that regional immigration schemes can have considerable impact on population growth. South Australia’s annual rate of population growth more than doubled between 2001 and 2006 (Hugo, 2010). The Australian Government is working closely with state, territory and municipal governments, and regional authorities to provide regional migration programmes that support development and help supply the needs of employers. These programmes are designed to address the special circumstances of rural Australia by assisting businesses in identifying labour shortages and improving employer awareness of the SSRM. The demographic trends seen in South Australia represent a small but noteworthy shift in the settlement patterns of immigrants. What has been demonstrated in South Australia is that “it is possible for governments to shape not only who migrates but where they settle” (Hugo, 2010).

REPOPULATING RURAL CANADA – REGIONALISATION STRATEGIES

In the Prairie Provinces, targeted immigration strategies have contributed to substantial population growth in rural regions. For example, the City of Winkler, Manitoba has experienced significant population growth since the late 1990s, mostly due to immigration through the Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program. Statistics Canada (Community Profiles, 2006) indicates that between 2001 and 2006, Winkler’s population grew 14.6 percent from 7,943 to 9,106. Similar trends have been experienced in Steinbach, Manitoba and Tisdale, Saskatchewan.

The success of these targeted immigration strategies is based on maintaining clear lines of communication between all levels of governments, local businesses, community organisations, and citizens. These initiatives began as a response to a need from the business community for labour, which led to negotiations with the federal and provincial governments for increases in immigration. It is important to highlight that these initiatives received strong endorsement and support from their respective communities. Winkler, Steinbach and Tisdale all built their attraction strategies on existing social, cultural and linguistic strengths, thus recognising the importance of targeting immigrants that will feel at home from the moment they arrive.

Despite these successes there are still a number of challenges. For example, Steinbach has been struggling with a shortage of affordable housing to accommodate new immigrants. In addition, creating infrastructure in small, rural towns to provide the necessary language training, cultural opportunities and employment support training can be expensive, requiring significant capital and human resource investments from volunteers and community groups to fill these gaps. The diverse needs of immigrants, suggest that even with certain strengths of an area, there is no simple approach to immigration, and immigration processes need consistent evaluation and public engagement to ensure success.

WELCOMING & INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES

The concept “welcoming community” has been used widely by governments, consultants, and most other parties with an interest in newcomer settlement and retention. Welcoming communities represents a collective commitment to fostering a culture of inclusiveness – “until newcomers feel that they belong and that their skills are being used, there is no inclusion” (Ashworth, 2008). However, inclusiveness does not just extend to newcomers, as established residents of the community – aboriginal people, seniors, youth, and people with disabilities, etc. – also need to feel as though they are welcome and valued in their own communities.

The concept of “Welcoming Communities” has been used as a framework for addressing population decline and integration in several provinces and municipalities throughout the country. At the provincial level, governments and provincial associations have been working with stakeholders to identify strategic priorities, conduct analyses, and shape policy guidance around issues of labour needs and population decline. Many provinces have dedicated research and funding bodies that support a variety of welcoming communities initiatives. At the local level, municipal governments in Canada – including many in Nova Scotia – have played a vital role in the creation and implementation of programs that foster diversity and inclusiveness.

Mixed Solutions: Developing a Regional Repopulation Strategy

Faced with a number of economic and demographic challenges, in 2006 the Cumberland Regional Economic Development Association (CREDA) commissioned a repopulation strategy and action plan for the county, with specific emphasis on the attraction and retention of youth (ages 15 to 24) and immigrants (Bruce & Zwicker, 2006). A committee was selected to work with Mount Allison University’s Rural and Small Town Programme (RSTP) to advise and guide the development of the project. The Repopulation Strategy was developed around the existing economic and labour force development plans previously established by CREDA and other associations throughout the County.

The RSTP recognises that several of the recommended actions are likely to overlap and work together to address repopulation. Employment opportunities are crucial for attracting and retaining youth and immigrants; however, this requires information dissemination and incentives such as support services, housing, and social connections to have a profound long-term effect. The Repopulation Strategy emphasises that developing a “welcoming community” mindset is a key factor to successfully integrating and retaining newcomers in rural communities. Bruce (2007) defines a welcoming community as “one where there is strong support for contributions, challenges and diversity offered by immigrants (both in and outside of the workplace), an engaged voluntary sector to provide ongoing support to newcomers, quality local infrastructure to accommodate new residents, and the provision of effective settlement services in coordination with the provincial government”.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NOVA SCOTIA COMMUNITIES

1.0. Develop a Repopulation Plan with the following elements:

1.1. Look beyond immigration as a long-term solution to repopulation. Although policies such as NSNP emphasise the importance of immigration to Nova Scotia, the province still exhibits a comparative economic disadvantage when it comes to the attraction and retention of immigrants. Strategies to address repopulation should be expanded beyond immigration to include the attraction, retention and repatriation of youth, university students, and seniors. There are many overlapping challenges facing these groups that would benefit from a comprehensive repopulation strategy.

1.2. Identify the unique opportunities, challenges, capabilities and possibilities offered by your community. Community Asset Mapping is an effective tool for understanding the capacity and resources that exists in a community. The long-term development of a community rests on its ability to uncover and build on the strengths of its people, institutions, and informal organisations.

1.2.1. Build relationships between stakeholders. This involves providing opportunities for emerging leaders to have an active voice in long-term strategies for the community. A strategy for addressing repopulation should include representation from all stakeholder groups with an interest in improving the demographic situation currently facing the community.

1.2.2. Encourage information sharing between stakeholders and regions. Communicating best practices and actionable solutions is a key part to the success of province-wide repopulation. Embracing information sharing can help avoid ‘reinventing the wheel’, and more quickly enact new initiatives that can help enhance Welcoming & Inclusive Communities.

1.3. Institutionalise Welcoming & Inclusive Communities in long-term planning. While the term “welcoming” is a concept often applied to the acceptance of immigrants, “inclusiveness” does not just extend to newcomers, as established residents of the community also need to feel as though they are welcome and valued in their own communities. By institutionalising this mindset in long-term planning, a community is taking concrete action that supports inclusion and equity across economic, political, social and cultural dimensions.

1.3.1. Develop a Welcoming and Inclusive Community Strategy. Local challenges require local solutions. Municipalities, businesses, and RDAs are uniquely poised to assist communities in

addressing repopulation challenges. As part of a continuing commitment, it is recommended that the UNSM, NSARDA and the Nova Scotia Chambers of Commerce undertake the development of a toolkit that will offer strategies and approaches that can be adapted to the unique needs of individual municipalities.

2.0. Attracting Residents and Businesses to Rural Nova Scotia

2.1. Work with local businesses and employers to determine labour force gaps and potential demographic groups for recruitment. Jobs are the key to attracting people to a community. Local businesses must evaluate current and future labour shortages and consider the education, skills and experience of the workforce that will be needed to meet those demands. It is essential to link labour needs to education and training opportunities to ensure that the next cohort of youth will have the skills required to fill impending labour shortages. Educational institutions will have an important role in communicating future career trends and the training required to make youth employable.

2.1.2. Partner with universities and colleges in the region to develop strategies to attract recent university graduates. Nova Scotia has a disproportionately large number of universities and colleges for a province of its size. Targeted strategies may be able to facilitate migration to regions of Nova Scotia that are suffering from labour shortages and population decline; however, this requires greater communication between educational institutions, governments, and businesses to ensure that opportunities are being promoted to students.

2.2. Work with employers to focus on job creation and hiring practices that will facilitate the entry of youth, seniors, and immigrants into the workforce. It is evident that few businesses are preparing themselves appropriately for demographic shifts in the labour force, representing both a challenge and an opportunity for governments and businesses throughout the province. A challenge for employers, but also a potential opportunity, will lie in developing and implementing employment schemes that will enhance the productivity of youth, immigrants, and older workers.

2.3. Leverage provincial and federal programs to address labour shortages. The federal and provincial governments play an important role in leading an effective repopulation strategy for Nova Scotia. There are several strategies and programs that are in place that are specifically designed to support communities in attracting skilled labour. Following the lead of communities such as Winkler, Manitoba, programs such as the Nova Scotia Provincial Nominee and the Post-Graduate Work Permit can be used to target skilled workers in specific sectors. Many of these programs are employer-driven, emphasizing the need to include local businesses in strategies for repopulation.

2.4. Consider new, innovative opportunities for entrepreneurship. From a business perspective, the growth in the number of senior households over time, combined with a continued rise in their spending power, may lead to increased expenditures for certain categories of goods and services. Market-based research points to significant business opportunities within individual sectors, including healthcare, leisure, recreation, and technology. An aging population can offer companies significant opportunities to enter relatively new markets.

2.5. *Consider offering incentives to attract new business development and residents to the community.* Free land, tax exemptions and cash bonuses are just a few of the incentives that have been successful in attracting new business to small towns in the United States. While such incentive programs are aggressive and potentially high-risk, they send a positive signal about a municipality's business environment and the media attention surrounding incentive packages provides a chance to promote the community's quality of life. Any type of incentive plan should be carefully assessed and piloted before full investment is considered.

3.0. Encouraging People to Stay

3.1. *Confront issues of affordable housing.* For communities that are serious about attracting and retaining new people, providing affordable housing will be a significant factor of success. The vast majority of new university graduates and immigrants earn reasonable incomes and can afford to pay a reasonable amount for housing. They are in the market for affordable but not low-income housing. There is also a need for affordable transitional housing for seniors who wish to maintain an active, independent lifestyle. Housing research produced in Southern Manitoba suggests that whether a community faces an aging population, a spike in industry activity or an increased number of immigrants, a solution to every housing challenge is possible when confronted head-on.

3.2. *Develop solutions to public transportation challenges.* The lack of investment in transportation services in rural and small communities will have a significant impact on their ability to attract new workers and hold on to existing residents. The challenge for rural and small municipalities is characterized by a combination of low population densities and large distances between towns. In addition, given the aging population of Nova Scotia, there will be a significant demographic swing in the primary users of public transit. However, there appears to be a gap between the transportation needs of rural seniors and the services available or provided to them.

3.3. *Apply/request for federal and provincial funding for capacity building and infrastructure improvements.* Several federal and provincial programs provide grants to municipalities for capacity building initiatives and infrastructure improvements. Several funding and grant programs have been outlined in this report, though there are many others that can be accessed to help fund projects.

3.4. *Identify opportunities for increasing volunteerism.* The most successful welcoming and inclusive communities initiatives are based on a strong network of volunteers. Where a service gap has been identified, communities must be ready to take advantage of the volunteer skills available to them. Incentives such as volunteer credit hours in high school help inspire such values amongst the younger generation. The established immigrant population represents a valuable pool of volunteers who already understand the needs of newcomers. Finally, the health benefits of volunteering in senior years have been widely documented.

3.4. *Engage youth in decision-making on issues and programs for young people.* Youth are the best sources of information when looking to understand and address issues that are most relevant to them. Creating opportunities to engage youth in decision-making on issues that are important to them will help project rural Nova Scotia as an attractive place to live for young people and encourage them to stay in the long term.

3.5. Combat negative perceptions that may lead to discrimination. Awareness and sensitivity training should not be limited to race relations and gender. Youth and seniors also face discrimination and unmerited stereotypes that create barriers to employment, social, and democratic engagement. Perceptions about age need to change if communities expect to address impending labour shortages to any degree of success.

3.6. Promote the rural lifestyle. Small, rural towns in Nova Scotia have a lot to offer and identifying community strengths and assets is a key step in the development of a repopulation strategy. In order to attract new residents, these benefits must be promoted to a wide audience.

3.7. Don't give up! Continue to move forward on the strength of a trial and error approach to finding a solution to demographic challenges. There is no “magic bullet” solution and the strategies identified in this report will not help address all of the issues facing Nova Scotia in isolation. Addressing these issues will require a mixed approach and with continued population decline and impending labour shortages predicted in the next two decades, the cost of inaction now may be high.

Addressing Nova Scotia's Demographic Challenges

Introduction

Rural Challenges in Nova Scotia

Nova Scotia's population is declining and aging. These conditions present a serious threat to the province's economic viability. Youth out-migration, lack of immigration, an aging population and low fertility rates have all resulted in population decline, particularly noticeable in rural and non-metro communities. Increasing demands for labour in Alberta has resulted in the out-migration of working-age residents from Nova Scotia, and the rest of Atlantic Canada. Population decline is also exacerbated by within-provincial migration trends. Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) has experienced urbanisation trends with an 8.3 percent increase in population between 1996 and 2005. Counties within a 90 minute commute from downtown Halifax have also experienced stable or slight population growth. On the other hand, distant counties have experienced decline ranging from 1.7 percent in Yarmouth to over 17 percent in Guysborough (CanMac Economics, 2006). The migration of families from urban communities to nearby rural communities is based on the perception that quality of life is better and there is still reasonable access to services in urban centres (Bruce, 2007). CanMac Economics (2006) predicts that by 2026, HRM will represent nearly half of population of Nova Scotia. When the surrounding counties of Lunenburg, Kings, Hants, and Colchester are included in the forecast, they represent almost 70 percent of the province's population.

In a province that has historically struggled with high levels of unemployment, the expectation that Nova Scotia will run out of available labour within the next decade presents confounding challenges. McNiven & Foster (2009) suggest that there are three generic ways to address population decline and the impending labour shortage. The first solution is to increase the population, by raising the birth rate or by increasing migration from other provinces and immigration from abroad. The second is to increase labour productivity by improving business practices and processes, and increasing the skills and education levels of the workforce. Finally, it is suggested that efforts should be put towards increasing the labour force participation rate by discouraging early retirement and encouraging workers to remain in the labour force in their senior years. However, McNiven & Foster (2009) stress that in isolation, these solutions may not be enough to address the serious challenges facing Nova Scotia. For example, birth rates and immigration rates would have to occur at far beyond traditional levels to reverse current population trends. In addition, it is not easy to alter ingrained business and hiring practices.

It is suggested that a mixture of these approaches might be more practical, but it would involve a rethinking of federal, provincial, and municipal government policies related not only to work and the workforce, but also to education, housing, and transportation, among others. Addressing rural Nova Scotia's population and labour challenges will require a mixed solution. In order to cultivate the population of Nova Scotia, communities must develop strategies around best practices to attract, engage and retain a diverse range of residents – including youth, seniors, university graduates and immigrants.

Population Forum

On February 10th, 2010, The Union of Nova Scotia Municipalities (UNSM), the Nova Scotia

Chambers of Commerce and the Nova Scotia Association of Regional Development Authorities (NSARDA) partnered to host a forum to identify local solutions for population challenges across the province. The Population Forum was a vital first step in sharing ideas for action and determining how the three organizations might collaborate to advance these strategies. Demographic experts, and indeed, many attendees at the Forum, are uncomfortable describing Nova Scotia's looming worker shortages and population decline as a crisis. But while Nova Scotia's declining and aging population may not spell a pending catastrophe for the province's economic future, economists, business leaders and demographers say that significant action must be taken now if Nova Scotians are to enjoy a vibrant and prosperous future. More than a dozen media outlets from across the province covered Population Forum, linking Nova Scotians with vital information about our demographic reality. The Forum marked one of the first times that municipal leaders, business people and economic developers have gathered to listen to presentations by population and workforce experts, and brainstorm solutions to the challenges we collectively face.

The Forum highlighted ideas, solutions, and experiences from over 100 municipal leaders, economic developers, and business owners across four key themes:

1. Workforce availability
2. Attraction, retention and repatriation
3. Roles of federal and provincial governments
4. Roles of municipalities, businesses and RDAs

The Current Report

As part of a commitment to tackling repopulation in Nova Scotia, UNSM, NSARDA, and the NS Chambers of Commerce have prepared the following report which examines local, national and international repopulation strategies for the purpose of identifying a shortlist of best practices and action-oriented solutions. The objectives of the following report are to:

1. Investigate the challenges facing rural Nova Scotia in the attraction and inclusion of immigrants, minority groups, seniors and youth
2. Outline and review existing programs, services and policies that address population challenges
3. Review best practices nationally and internationally that address population challenges in rural communities
4. Recommend potential strategies that foster “welcoming communities” as it relates to the attraction, retention and integration of new residents to Nova Scotia
5. Promote a collaborative multidisciplinary alliance of community partners (RDAs, municipalities, universities, businesses, etc.) to develop, test, and implement strategies to address population decline

The information presented in this report comes from an extensive literature review that included academic articles, government reports, and publications from a range of community organisations and research networks. In addition, interviews were conducted with selected program administrators in cases where additional information was required and could not be obtained through a literature search. Given the vast scope of this project, it was not feasible to include all strategies, programs and initiatives related to population decline in Nova Scotia and other regions of Canada. Those that are presented in the

following report were chosen due to their success, recognition and availability of comprehensive, balanced information. There are many prospects for expanding the research presented in this report in future studies and projects.

The report is organised into eight sections. The first section provides a demographic snapshot of the demographic groups that have been chosen as the focus of this report based on the ideas and solutions expressed at the 2010 Population Forum. It provides statistical information and key demographic characteristics of Nova Scotia's senior, youth, and immigrant populations in order to provide insight into the overarching issues related to population challenges and shortages in the province. The three sections that follow provide a review of provincial, national and international policies, programs and services designed to specifically address repopulation. Featured in these sections are case studies of successful repopulation strategies, and other related initiatives that have been implemented in Nova Scotia, Manitoba, Japan, Australia and the United States of America. Section 5 introduces the concept of "Welcoming and Inclusive Communities" – defined as a collective effort to create a place where individuals feel valued and included – which has been used as a framework for addressing population decline and integration in several provinces throughout Canada. Section 6 provides an in-depth summary of a local example of a mixed approach to addressing the repopulation challenge in Nova Scotia. Finally, the last section of the report provides recommendations for strategies and best practices that will work to strengthen capacity to respond and overcome population decline and labour shortages.

Demographic Profiles

Seniors

Nova Scotia currently has the oldest population in Canada, with approximately 15.4 percent of residents over the age of 65 (Department of Seniors, 2009). Recent reports have estimated that the number of seniors in Nova Scotia will increase by over 70 percent by 2026 – growing from 128,000 in 2001 to 218,000 in 2026 (McNiven et al., 2006). By 2034, the senior population of Nova Scotia will increase to 263,400 – representing an increase of 107 percent over a 33-year period. When compared to regional and rural municipalities, towns have the highest proportion of senior residents (Department of Seniors, 2009).

In order to meet the challenges of a rapidly aging population, government departments, institutions, businesses, and communities must adapt to boost the productivity of the working-age population to ensure sufficient economic growth. Certain sectors in Nova Scotia, such as education and health care, are susceptible to workforce losses due to the particularly high number of employees reaching retirement age (Department of Seniors, 2005). Low labour force participation rates amongst the senior population further compounds the problem. Nova Scotia is aging the most rapidly of all the Canadian provinces, yet has the strongest trend towards early retirement.

In 2004, the Task Force on Aging Advisory Committee highlighted that seniors need access to quality healthcare and security, while at the same time being afforded opportunities to contribute to society through productive work – both paid and voluntary (Department of Seniors, 2004). The senior population remains a potential source of labour even after they have retired from their job. An aging population will have positive effects on wages and returns to education, encouraging young adults to invest in human capital and older workers to offer a larger participation to the labour market (Merette, 2009). Moreover, the recruitment and retention of older workers will “promote human dignity and independence and will help prevent financial hardships that many seniors, especially women, would otherwise face” (Department of Seniors, 2005). The Task Force reported that the rate of economic hardship among senior women is a serious concern. In 1999, of the 7,000 seniors below the low-income cut-off, 85 percent were women living by themselves.

The Province has already seen a trend towards employing senior workers. Between 2001 and 2006, the number of seniors participating in the workforce increased by 60 percent (Department of Seniors, 2009). This prolonged participation in the workforce of older workers interested in continued employment may be due to economic circumstances that require older people to take paid work after

“Nova Scotia can be first with innovation and exploring new ways of doing things to accommodate a growing senior population in Nova Scotia”

– *Darrell Dexter, Silver Economy Summit (2010)*

retirement (e.g., financial hardship), or due to the desire to retain an active and independent lifestyle. This phenomenon might become stronger if employers adjust their human resources strategies and allow a greater share of older individuals in their workforce. Market forces should override implicit barriers, such as ageism, to the adoption of these strategies (Merette, 2009). Encouraging workers to stay in the labour force can be achieved by eliminating early retirement incentives and mandatory retirement ages. The Nova Scotia Government eliminated mandatory retirement in July 2009.

Migration and Aging in Place. Aging in Place refers to the “diverse range of programs and housing options needed to ensure seniors maintain personal dignity and functional independence in their homes, neighbourhoods, and communities for as long as possible” (Department of Seniors, 2005). Aging in place is more common in “service-rich communities” where seniors have access to a wide range of both formal and informal support services. Two major challenges to aging in place have been identified as particularly problematic in rural areas of Nova Scotia: first, the increasing need for family, friends, and community members to provide care will require more healthcare support and resources. Additionally, the out-migration of younger residents has led to a decreasing number of family members available to provide homecare, intensifying the need for paid and volunteer care providers. In line with these issues, Davenport, Rathwell, & Rosenberg (2009) suggest that there are three main drivers of migration unique to the senior population in Atlantic Canada: retirement, social support, and institutionalisation. The primary motivation for migration is the desire to live closer to formal support services such as retirement housing, home care, hospitals, pharmacies, recreational facilities, and transportation. A secondary motivator is the need to be closer to family and informal support services.

The out-migration of youth from rural to urban areas has had a profound impact on the senior population. While the migration of rural youth is not a new trend in Atlantic Canada, Davenport et al. (2009) suggests that the current generation of migrant youth is unique as it is largely driven by the limited employment and educational opportunities available in rural areas. As youth leave pursue urban opportunities, parents are left without family support, resulting in an increasing number of seniors eventually migrating towards urban centres to be closer to their families.

Youth

While the population of seniors in Nova Scotia is expected to rise dramatically in the next two decades, youth population (5 to 19 years of age) is expected to decline by 21.8 percent. In 1995, 23.7 percent of the population was under 19 years and it has been estimated that this proportion could drop below 18 percent by 2034. Similarly, the 20 to 24 age group is expected to decrease from 6.6 percent of the total population in 2009 to 4.9 percent in 2034 (NS Community Counts, 2010).

Over the last decade, economic decline and unemployment in rural areas of Nova Scotia have contributed to accelerated out-migration of youth (aged 15-34). According to the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC), out-of-province migration is more common in Atlantic Canada than anywhere else in the country (2010). It is generally observed that well-educated, highly skilled youth are more likely to pursue higher paying employment opportunities in other provinces such as Ontario and Alberta. Youth who lack education and training, while more likely to stay in Atlantic Canada, are prone to move from rural to urban areas. Cutbacks in government services have resulted in fewer recreational, employment,

and educational resources for young teenagers (aged 13-15) in rural communities. As a result, many students are eager to move to urban centres upon graduation from high school.

Several youth attraction and retention strategies have focused on two activities – those which will discourage youth from moving away, and those which will encourage youth to return after receiving post-secondary education (Bruce & Zwicker, 2006). More recently, research and practice has shifted from attracting and retaining youth to engaging youth. Specifically, communities are developing programs that will better prepare young people to return home to pursue rural careers. It has been observed that youth who have a stake in their community before they leave are the youth who are more likely to return to rural careers (The Ontario Rural Council, 2007). The research conducted in rural Ontario suggests that youth are the best sources to tap when looking to understand and address youth issues. Youth need to play an integral part in the planning, decision-making and leadership for actions and initiatives that affect them. Therefore, rather than making decisions on behalf of youth, the key role for municipal governments in youth attraction and retention strategies should focus on working collaboratively with youth and supporting the youth perspective at the municipal planning level. This is an integral part of successful initiatives. The Ontario Rural Council emphasises that a lack of support from municipal government is a significant barrier to moving youth initiatives forward.

International Students

Atlantic Canada's universities have become increasingly competitive in their recruitment and enrolment strategies for bolstering student populations. This has resulted in the growth rate of the number of students from other Canadian provinces and from other countries outpacing the growth rate of students from within Atlantic Canada at many institutions (Siddiq, et al., 2009). Between 1996 and 2005, the annual inflows of international students coming to the Atlantic Provinces doubled, from 1,500 to 3,000 (Metropolis, 2008). The focus on recruiting students from outside Atlantic Canada has been largely driven by a projected decline of the university age population in the region (Gardner Pinfold, 2006). In Nova Scotia, it has been projected that the university-age population will decline by 29.8 percent from approximately 73,000 in 2001 to 51,000 by 2026 (McNiven, 2008).

Sustained economic growth requires a well-educated and productive workforce. Recruiting international students as potential immigrants to Nova Scotia would help offset the province's demographic challenge. Nova Scotia attracts over 10 percent of the international student population in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2009). In 2008, more than 8,000 international students from 160 countries were studying in universities in Atlantic Canada, half of these in Nova Scotia

“The fact that [international students] are already living in and are familiar with the region, that they will earn well-recognized Canadian credentials, and that they may already have gained some Canadian work experience makes them an obvious and highly desirable group from which to recruit new permanent residents”

– *Murphy and deFinney (2008)*

universities. The average age of the international student population is 22 years old, which is in the range of the declining youth cohort in Nova Scotia (Siddiq, et al., 2010). Two-thirds of international students have full fluency in English, while approximately 7 percent report fluency in French. Nearly 70 percent of international students are studying towards bachelors degrees in science, engineering, business, and humanities (Siddiq, et al., 2009). Further, many of these students will graduate with some Canadian work experience. These qualifications make international students an ideal target group for increasing immigration and reversing demographic trends in Nova Scotia.

In 2008, Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC, 2008) reported that approximately 39.5 percent of all international students in Canada made the transition to foreign worker after graduation, while another 15.6 percent of foreign students made the transition to permanent resident, indicating that a significant number of international students become immigrants to Canada. With the introduction of the Post-Graduate Work Permit in 2008, a program designed to provide international students with work experience in Canada, it is projected that more international students would choose to stay and work or become permanent residents. However, McNiven cautions that there are social barriers that can make it difficult for many international students to transition into the labour force after graduation. For example, international students do not have the same family and social networks that domestic graduates often rely on to facilitate their transition into the labour after graduation.

International students represent a young, educated pool of potential immigrants who are not only able, but also are willing to work in Nova Scotia. A recent study found that approximately 40 percent of international students in Atlantic Canada report the intention to stay and work in the region after graduation (Siddiq et al., 2010). There appear to be opportunities to improve the retention rate for international students who demonstrate an interest in staying in Nova Scotia after graduation. The Province's disproportionately large number of universities, in cooperation with surrounding municipalities, could become more active in encouraging international students to immigrate and become permanent residents after graduation.

“In a few short years, given our aging population, Canadians who leave school for the workplace will only offset the number of retirements. Immigration will therefore be a key source of labour force growth in the future”

– *Citizenship & Immigration Canada*
(2007)

Immigrants

It has been suggested that the recruitment and retention of skilled immigrants and foreign workers may help reverse negative demographic trends in Canada. Higher immigration can also meet specific labour shortages and can help mitigate the imminent slowing of the country's workforce. The Government of Canada has recently stated that labour force growth in Canada will depend on the country's ability to attract “the world's best and brightest” (CIC, 2010).

In 2009, Nova Scotia welcomed 2,424 immigrants, representing a 10 percent decrease from the previous year (CIC, 2010). Approximately 75 percent of new immigrants to the province settle in Halifax. The majority arrive under the Economic Class immigration category as entrepreneurs, skilled workers, or provincial nominees. Working age immigrants in

Nova Scotia tend to be highly educated, with over 35 percent holding bachelors degrees and an additional 20 percent with masters degrees or higher (NS-OIM, 2006). Eighteen percent hold college or trade certifications. Akbari suggests that this is due to the fact that Atlantic provinces are more likely to see immigrants who have been targeted for specific professional jobs, than immigrants who simply choose this part of Canada for a new life (CBC, 2011). In addition, immigrants on average tend to be younger than the resident population of Nova Scotia.

While the number of new immigrants to the region has decreased over the last decade, recent data on immigrant retention has been increasingly optimistic. 2006 figures from Statistics Canada suggest that of the recent immigrants who have arrived in Atlantic Canada in the last five years, approximately 65 percent have chosen to remain in the region. This is a marked improvement from 2001 data which demonstrated that only half of the immigrants who arrived in the Atlantic provinces in the previous five years were still in the region (CBC, 2011). Immigration experts advise that if the province wishes to attract and retain a higher number of new immigrants, communities must be open to adopting new strategies that will foster multiculturalism and diversity. A case study of immigration in Colchester County found that recent immigrants perceived several barriers to settlement, including the complexity of the immigration process, difficulties establishing foreign credentials, discrimination, and problems finding work in the region (Flint, 2007). Clearly, there is a need to develop more inclusive, welcoming communities if the province continues to look towards immigration as a way to boost the economy and reverse demographic trends.

Banerjee & Robson (2009) warn that provinces should not overstate the contribution that immigration can make to workforce growth and demographic turnaround. McNiven & Foster (2009) suggest that the increases in immigration necessary to offset or even significantly reduce the effects of low-birth rates, rural outmigration and an aging workforce are unrealistic, particularly for a province that currently attracts less than 1 percent of Canada's new immigrants.

Nova Scotia – Local and Provincial Strategies

Seniors

Adopting age-friendly community initiatives is a preventative and proactive approach to meeting the challenges and opportunities of population aging. The Government of Nova Scotia has implemented several initiatives to promote the development of age-friendly communities, including the Age-Friendly Communities Committee – a collaborative partnership between the Department of Seniors and the Union of Nova Scotia Municipalities – to examine ways of promoting age-friendly communities throughout Nova Scotia. The committee represents a commitment by both parties to collaborate to support the coordinated implementation of age-friendly initiatives across the province of Nova Scotia. The following section outlines Nova Scotia's Strategy for Positive Aging, research on aging in rural and remote communities, and various resources and funding sources for municipalities to support the implementation of age-friendly initiatives.

Strategy for Positive Aging in Nova Scotia

In 2005, the Department of Seniors produced the Strategy for Positive Aging in Nova Scotia – a guide for developing senior-friendly communities. The concept of positive aging refers to “the idea that aging is a lifelong process, whereby positive attitudes toward aging can encourage the ongoing participation of seniors in the community.” The Strategy aims to provide actions that are cross-sectoral, ignoring the boundaries that exist between each level of government, business, not-for-profit organisations, and community groups to provide a shared vision for the province as a whole. The insights and experiences of more than 1,000 Nova Scotians representing organisations, all levels of government, and individuals, were considered in the development of the strategy. Outlined in the Positive Aging Strategy are basic principles and societal actions that aim to address goals that must be achieved collectively in order to realise the vision of a senior-friendly community. It is recommended that Nova Scotia government departments, municipal governments, communities, and other organisations use the Strategy as a framework for identifying priorities and developing action plans relevant to their individual situations.

Rural and Remote Communities Initiative

In 2008, the Nova Scotia Centre on Aging, in collaboration with the Nova Scotia Department of Seniors, the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) and FPT Ministers Responsible for Seniors Forum, released a report presenting findings from the Age-Friendly Rural/Remote Communities Initiative. The project was modeled after the World Health Organization (WHO) Global Age-Friendly Cities project carried out in late 2006 and early 2007. The overall objectives of the Initiative were to explore and assess the social and physical environment of each community in terms of age-friendliness, and to elicit suggestions from participants regarding what makes communities age friendly. Information was collected from focus groups, caregivers, and individuals from 17 small communities in Guysborough County. The report found that seniors in Guysborough County face several barriers when it comes to maintaining an age-friendly community, the most significant being a lack of transportation, health care accessibility, and a lack of housing options.

While Guysborough County offers a wide variety of opportunities for social participation, a lack of transportation prevents many seniors – particularly those in more rural areas – from engaging in social activities and by extension, has a negative impact on emotional health and wellbeing. Seniors themselves, as well as family members, frequently volunteer to provide transportation to and from social events, though express concerns about the rising cost of gas and the dangers associated with night-time and winter driving. Moreover, there are questions as to whether some seniors should still be allowed to drive their own vehicles. Seniors comment on the lack of housing options in Guysborough County, noting that there is a lack of affordable transitional housing for seniors who wish to adjust between independent living and going into a nursing home facility. The few seniors' apartments that do exist are undersized for younger seniors who still maintain a high level of independence and tend to have more material comforts than their older counterparts. Additionally, many housing facilities are inaccessible to older seniors with physical limitations.

Those who participated in the study had several recommendations for filling service gaps in transportation and housing in rural and remote areas. Suggestions for improving transportation included a government-subsidised shuttle, and a volunteer-organised call centre that could arrange for transportation services. It was further suggested that the promotion of volunteer services would encourage many youth to engage with the senior community. Participants also had several suggestions regarding how to improve the housing situation in their area. Some called for the construction of larger, two-bedroom seniors' apartments to “suit the lifestyle of younger seniors” who are used to a more independent lifestyle than their older counterparts. Again, the importance of goodwill and volunteerism was emphasised, as many seniors emphasised that family support and willingness of neighbours to reach out and help were essential factors for home care and maintenance.

The Age-Friendly Rural/Remote Communities Initiative (Department of Seniors, 2008) highlights that despite the challenges of living in rural and remote areas of Nova Scotia, the benefits of a rural lifestyle – which includes the support of neighbours, friends and family – are “strong enough to outweigh the benefits that might be gained by moving closer to urban areas.”

Resources and Funding Initiatives for Seniors

Grant Programs. The Department of Seniors provides grants to municipalities and non-profit organisations for projects that advance the goals of age-friendly communities and positive aging. Age-Friendly Communities grants are awarded to municipalities for projects that help communities support older people so they can live in a secure environment, enjoy good health, and continue to participate fully in society. Grants are for up to \$5,000 and fund up to 50 percent of project costs. Positive Aging Fund grants help non-profit community organizations carry out projects that support the goals of the Strategy for Positive Aging: celebrating seniors, financial security, health and well-being, maximizing independence, housing options, transportation, respecting diversity, employment and life transitions, and supportive communities. Grants are awarded up to \$10,000, and may fund up to 100 percent of the project costs. Various departments of the Government of Nova Scotia also provides grants for projects that align with Nova Scotia's Elder Abuse Strategy, the Literary and Learning Initiative, recreation and health priorities, and accessibility improvements to capital infrastructure. Information about grants and programs can be found in the Department of Seniors annual Programs for Positive Aging publication.

Employment Programs. The Targeted Initiative for Older Workers (TIOW), is a federal-provincial partnership that provides information and resources to help older workers re-enter or remain in the workforce. Funded under TIOW, the Department of Labour and Advanced Education works in partnership with community-based organisations to develop and deliver Age Advantage Plus programs. The organisations plan, design and implement projects that respond to the needs of older workers and the community. The program is specifically targeted towards small towns and communities. Municipalities greater than 250,000 are not eligible for funding, though smaller communities that fall within the Halifax Regional Municipality may be eligible as long as they meet the program criteria. As part of the funding guidelines for the TIOW, projects must take place in communities that are affected by downsizing, closures, or significant unemployment due to involuntary displacement. Projects should ideally concentrate on employer engagement, where employers act as active participants in the project development and delivery. In addition, projects should provide a skills training component that will enable participants to evolve with their jobs and adapt to workplace change.

Youth

Nova Scotia Youth Secretariat

The purpose of the Youth Secretariat is to increase awareness of the needs and aspirations of youth and to increase support and services required by youth to make a successful transition to adulthood. The Youth Secretariat places particular emphasis on supporting initiatives of the Government of Nova Scotia by providing continued advice and recommendations to government on youth issues and government programs and services that respond to those and other issues. The Youth Secretariat also ensures that the government has access to information and recommendations that are built on research, analysis and input from youth stakeholders.

In collaboration with the HeartWood Centre for Community Youth Development, the Youth Secretariat has published a series of resources on youth inclusion. These resources highlight strategies for involving youth in the planning, decision making, and program delivery in all areas of community development. Through meaningful inclusion, youth develop an increased sense of belonging to their communities, and gain valuable leadership experience. There is a need to foster working relationships between adults and youth. As adults become confident about young people's abilities, and provide them with greater roles in planning and decision making, youth develop valuable skills that will lead to future employment and entrepreneurial goals. When youth's strengths, abilities, and perspectives are added to those of adults, more effective community development strategies result (Nova Scotia Youth Secretariat, 2008).

The Secretariat administers the *Youth Engagement Grant Program* for organisations, local governments and communities wanting to meaningfully engage young people in the essential tasks, processes, responsibilities and ownership of these entities. Funding does not typically exceed \$5,000 and is available for organisational and community capacity building. The focus is on initiatives that seek to increase the ability of organisations and communities to engage young people in their governance and operations. To be eligible for funding, initiatives must be informed or led by young people. Activities may include support for organisational structuring or restructuring to increase youth involvement in governance, and training and learning initiatives that support youth inclusion.

Community Youth Development Framework

HeartWood is a charitable organisation founded in Nova Scotia in 1989 to offer outdoor and environmental programs for youth. It has grown into a leading organisation in Canada helping communities strengthen their youth engagement. Renamed the *Circle of Awesomeness* by youth participants, the Heartwood Community Youth Development Framework identifies a set of tools and resources that have been found to be essential to youth and community development in Nova Scotia. The Framework is intended for application when working with groups of young people, young adults, and adults within a given community or organisation. This framework represents the voices and experiences of young people and supportive adults describing what works best for youth engagement in a community. The Framework is adaptable to fit the specific needs or desired outcomes that define an individual community. HeartWood emphasises that “by adapting the Framework to address local community assets, needs and circumstances, youth can be engaged in community building activity in sustainable and successful ways” (Heartwood, n.d.).

The HeartWood Centre also provides several tools and resources to help organisations and municipalities enhance youth engagement efforts in their communities. These resources cover several areas for youth engagement, including: best practices for running youth centres, participatory action research for understanding youth issues, community asset mapping, encouraging youth participation in governance, and handbooks for developing recreational infrastructure for youth.

“[Youth council members] despite their young age, take a serious approach to the tasks at hand, contributing intelligent questions and insights that are well thought out”

- *Town of Parrsboro, 2011.*

Youth Town Councils

A Youth Council is a formal “board” that provides representation for youth in the community. Youth Councils are typically associated with an organisation or a government to which they advise and provide input towards recommendations around issues affecting young people. In addition to informing government or organisations, Youth Council members may also act upon issues of importance to them (The Ontario Rural Council, 2008). The benefits of youth representation are apparent – youth best understand their own experiences, needs, and interactions with local environments and their community. As stated by HeartWood, “engaging youth in decision-making processes helps governments make decisions that are more responsive and appropriate to youth needs and interests” (HeartWood, n.d.).

Parrsboro. The Parrsboro Youth Town Council is a smaller version of the Town’s regular council, and “despite their young age, take a serious approach to the tasks at hand, contributing intelligent questions and insights that are well thought out” (Town of Parrsboro, 2011). The members of the Youth Council represent students from Grade 7 through Grade 12. As elected officials, the aim is for the Youth Council to build an understanding of key youth issues and act to improve conditions. The Youth Council provides the opportunities for youth to participate in government decision-making, to

develop their self-confidence and contribute to the community. The objectives of the Parrsboro Youth Town Council are:

1. To act as a voice for youth in Parrsboro – represent youth on various issues on town committees as well as through organized events and other opportunities where a youth perspective is needed.
2. To be an active, visible organization – promote youth and the council, as well as effect change through positive actions and contributions to the community.
3. To unite – bring together youth; creating opportunity for the various groups to communicate to a greater degree and to be aware of one another. The Council strives to achieve unification and a mutual understanding and respect among youth.

HeartWood suggests that there will be increasing expectations for municipal governments and youth-serving organisations to integrate youth representation in decision-making. Youth Councils are being developed in Springhill, Truro, and Cumberland County.

Youth Associations and Centres

Youth Centres provide services to young people in the community. These centres typically have staff, infrastructure and equipment for youth. It is generally considered best practice for the services of a youth centre to be designed and delivered based on the input of the youth involved. Youth-led associations are often activity-based, such as theatre troupes, volunteer groups and environmental groups. The structure of a youth centre or youth-led association can differ depending on the situation and needs of those involved. The common element is that they are created for youth, by youth (The Ontario Rural Council, 2008).

Eastern Communities Youth Association (ECYA). Based in the Town of Canso, the ECYA is a volunteer organisation that works to ensure youth are exposed to the recreational, social, and cultural opportunities that are usually only available in urban centres. With a very strong partnership with the Strait Regional School Board and the local schools, programming is often offered within the school system to ensure all youth have access. Most after-school activities and youth events are open to any interested youth, and programming is usually offered at no cost. ECYA has a Youth Council that advises the activities of association and provide youth representation on the volunteer Board of Directors. The ECYA also operates a full time Youth Centre, offering a place where youth in the community can gather and enjoy a fun, safe environment outside of school hours.

ECYA is known at a national level and has gone on to present to other communities about their organisation and youth programming. In 2009, the ECYA was awarded the Celebrating Communities Award in Youth Leadership Excellence. The Town of Canso and Eastern Guysborough County, including the ECYA and youth centre, were awarded Lieutenant Governor's Community Spirit Award in 2010.

Youth Retention & Attraction

Similarly, the Cumberland Regional Economic Development Association is currently seeking new opportunities for youth through training programs in the Cumberland region. In April of 2005, Cumberland launched the Youth Employment Retention Strategy which identified possible actions for encouraging youth to remain or return to the County (CBDC, 2005). The Cumberland Regional

Economic Development Agency (CREDA) has taken action on three of the following strategies to address youth retention, employment needs, and immigration through the development of a comprehensive Regional Repopulation Strategy. This strategy is highlighted in greater detail in Section 6 of this report.

Youth Retention. The first strategy is to devise a plan for repatriation and retention of youth to Cumberland County. The plan is comprehensive and includes methods for contacting youth who have out-migrated, fostering relationships between students and industry, endorsing local employers, and promoting the quality of life in Cumberland.

Addressing Employment Needs. Given the aging population in Nova Scotia, there will be a need to focus on healthcare, and having trained professionals in all regions across the province. It is important that youth be made aware of the shift in careers that will be available in Cumberland County in the near future. Understanding these shifts will enable youth to attain the education and experience needed to fill the employment gaps in the region.

Repopulation. With population declining at a dramatic rate, there will be a need to consider strategies for repopulation. CREDA suggests that there are two ways to repopulate the region. The first is providing young people monetary incentives to repopulate Cumberland County. Governments would have to be on board with, and be willing to implement this approach. The second proposed strategy for repopulation is to work with provincial and federal governments to bring more immigrants to the County. This would require ensuring that the necessary support systems are in place for new immigrants and their families.

University Students

Domestic Students

In 2009, the Province of Nova Scotia introduced a new Graduate Retention Rebate as an incentive for recent post-secondary graduates to work and live in Nova Scotia. The new rebate program replaced the Graduate Tax Credit that was available for individuals who graduated in 2006, 2007 and 2008. Under the new Graduate Retention Rebate, students graduating after 2009 are eligible to reduce their Nova Scotia income taxes by a maximum of \$2,500 per year in the year of graduation and in each of the next five years to a maximum of \$15,000 over the six-year period (previously \$1,000 to \$2,000 per year under the Graduate Tax Credit). For individuals graduating with a college diploma or certificate in 2009 and after, the Graduate Retention Rebate provides a tax credit worth up to \$1,250 per year, totaling a maximum of \$7,500 over a period of six years. The Graduate Retention Rebate is not restricted to those who graduated from Nova Scotia universities and colleges. The rebate is offered to graduates from any institution recognised under the Canada Student Financial Assistance Act, including universities, colleges, schools and institutes across Canada and some international locations.

In the 2011 Budget, the Province of Nova Scotia announced a debt cap scheme for alleviating some of the financial burden faced by university graduates. A debt cap of \$28,560 will be phased in incrementally over the next four years and will apply only to new loans taken out and will take effect upon the successful completion of a student's program of study. The program is only available to Nova

Scotia students, including those studying outside the province. Students from outside Nova Scotia who are studying in the province are not eligible. At the same time, however, the government is raising tuition fees by three percent in each of the next three years. It has been argued that a cap on tuition fees would do more to support university students than tax rebates and debt caps.

Nova Scotia faces fierce competition for new graduates from other provinces. Relocating to Ontario and Alberta tends to be an attractive option for new graduates due to greater employment opportunities and perceived higher salaries. Moreover, other provinces such as New Brunswick, Saskatchewan and Manitoba also offer tax incentives of up to \$25,000 over a period of several years (Di Matteo, 2010). These provinces have recognised the need to attract out-of-province graduates to help meet labour market demands and further increase human capital. However, no publicised research indicates that these programs have been successful in achieving increased retention. Results of the National Graduates Survey (NGS) indicate that in Manitoba and New Brunswick there has been no changes in retention rates of graduates in these province despite these governments' collective spending of roughly \$100 million towards graduate retention programs (ANSSA, 2010). According to the Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission, the former Nova Scotia Graduate Tax Credit "appears to offer little motivation for students to live [in Nova Scotia]" with just 1 percent of graduates surveyed citing it as a main reason for seeking employment in the region. This may be attributed to the fact that many graduates do not pay taxes until years after graduation so there is limited direct benefit. Graduates are not likely to give up significantly larger annual salaries in another province to benefit from a \$1,000 or \$2,000 tax credit in Nova Scotia (CCPA, 2010).

"Graduate Retention Programs are designed to fight the brain drain to other provinces. By offering incentives to new graduates, provincial governments want to retain highly educated people or encourage those who have left to return. This also builds a better tax base for future years once they are more established in their careers".

- *As cited in Di Matteo (2010)*

International Students

The Government of Nova Scotia has made an effort to retain international students through an agreement with Citizenship and Immigration Canada that allows international students to work off campus for up to 20 hours per week while studying and 40 hours per week during summer season. In addition, international students are able to work in Canada following graduation through the Government of Canada Post-Graduation Work Permit (CIC, 2008a). The permit allows international students to obtain an open work permit under the Program, with no restrictions on the type of employment and no requirement for a job offer. In addition, the duration of the work permit has been extended up to three years across the country. Previously, the work permits only allowed international students to work for one or two years, depending on location. The program is specifically designed to provide international students with work experience in Canada, which may lead to more students

applying for permanent residence, either through a provincial nominee program stream or the Canadian Experience Class.

The Nova Scotia Nominee Program includes an International Graduate stream specifically aimed to help Nova Scotia employers hire and retain recent international graduates (NS-OIM, 2011). This stream targets international graduates who are already living and working in the province and intend to establish permanent residency in Nova Scotia. To qualify, the international graduate must have a guaranteed, full-time, permanent job offer from a Nova Scotia employer and be employed in that position for at least three consecutive months before submitting an application to the NSNP. The program assesses applicants on a case-by-case basis and only considers certain types of jobs and occupations that align with provincial priorities, which may change as skill shortages are identified or met by permanent residents or Canadian citizens.

While it is clear that the Government of Nova Scotia has recognised the importance of attracting and retaining university graduates, there are several improvements that ought to be made to the current system. According to the Alliance of Nova Scotia Student Associations (ANSSA) the provincial government needs to develop a retention plan that rests on more than just tax incentives. It has been suggested that Nova Scotia examine the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador's 41-point Youth Retention and Attraction Strategy, which was developed with a 19-member youth advisory panel and supported by the local student federation. The strategy includes an International Graduate Retention Incentive for international students who choose to stay and work in Newfoundland and Labrador, though the incentive falls within a broader strategy of youth retention that prioritises student debt reduction, increasing access to quality jobs, opportunities for professional development and information on further educational opportunities and services. The province also emphasises the needs for recruitment and retention initiatives in rural communities and works in conjunction with the Rural Secretariat and regional representatives to identify opportunities for fostering economic development that supports an attractive rural lifestyle. ANSSA (2010) suggests that retention strategies in Nova Scotia should involve collaboration with the youth such strategies would seek to retain. Moreover, such strategies should target regions of Nova Scotia that are suffering the most from labour shortages and outmigration, particularly rural municipalities that have less exposure to the Province's several universities.

Immigrants

Nova Scotia Immigration Strategy

In 2004, the Government of Nova Scotia released *A Framework for Immigration*, a discussion paper outlining the demographic, economic, and social benefits associated with increasing immigration rates to the province. Results of province-wide consultations show broad-based support for the direction provided by the framework. Building upon this framework, the Government developed the *Nova Scotia Immigration Strategy* in 2005, outlining the goals and objectives that will set the stage for a broad range of activities over the next five years. This strategy was developed with the involvement of many sectors, including business, labour, professional organisations, ethnic and religious groups, immigrant settlement agencies, immigrants and members of the public.

In line with this strategy, the province established the Office of Immigration, consolidating all provincial immigration activities into a single government location. In addition, the Government of Nova Scotia adopted the following immigration policy statement:

“Nova Scotia welcomes and embraces immigrants, recognizing the important contributions they make to our social, economic, and cultural fabric. The Government of Nova Scotia will take a lead role in engaging and working with partners to attract, integrate, and retain immigrants”. – NS Immigration Strategy, 2005

The Strategy also emphasises that each community in Nova Scotia has different needs and thus will require unique strategies for addressing these needs. The Strategy highlights the important role of Regional Development Authorities (RDAs) in providing leadership and coordination for regional and community growth. The Office of Immigration has been continuously working with RDAs to help facilitate the development of regionalised immigration strategies in response to local challenges and opportunities. The Nova Scotia Immigration Strategy encourages communities to take the lead in developing their own immigration objectives through focusing on four key strategic directions:

1. Supporting a welcoming community by educating Nova Scotians about the contributions that immigrants can make to our future social, cultural, and economic prosperity
2. Attracting immigrants by actively marketing and promoting Nova Scotia as an immigration destination
3. Integrating immigrants into daily life by providing the settlement services necessary to help them live, work, and learn in Nova Scotia
4. Retaining immigrants by creating conditions that allow them to make Nova Scotia their permanent home.

Nova Scotia's primary goal is to improve the attraction and retention of immigrants to the province. The Strategy set a target to attract 3,600 newcomers to Nova Scotia each year, striking a balance across the various economic and humanitarian immigration streams. Further, the Strategy targeted a 70 per cent retention rate for the 2006–2011 census period. According to 2010 data, the province has fallen just short of the targets set in 2005. Between 2004 and 2006, the number of new immigrants arriving in Nova Scotia increased: 1,770 in 2004 to 2,580 in 2006 (NSOIM, 2010). The Nova Scotia Nominee Program (NSNP) has contributed to this increase as more than 850 permanent residents (including family members) arriving in Nova Scotia in 2006 were selected through the NSNP. In 2009, Nova Scotia welcomed 2,424 new immigrants, an 8.9 per cent decline from 2008 (partially due to changes in the NSNP). While it appears that the province has had success in increasing the number of newcomers to the region, whether or not it has achieved its goal retention rate of 70 per cent has not been specified by the Office of Immigration. However, Professor Ather Akbari of Saint Mary's University has suggested that immigrant retention in the Atlantic Provinces has increased from 54 per cent in 2001 to approximately 65 per cent in 2006 (CBC, 2011).

In April 2011, the Government of Nova Scotia released a new immigration strategy, establishing a target of 7,200 new immigrants by 2020, or double what the province had aimed to achieve in the previous iteration of the strategy. This goal will be supported by \$790, 000 in additional funding for immigration programs, and will continue to target a 70 per cent retention rate.

Nova Scotia Nominee Program (NSNP)

The purpose of the Canada-Nova Scotia Agreement on Provincial Nominees (signed in August, 2002) is to increase the economic benefits of immigration to Nova Scotia, based on industrial and economic priorities and labour market conditions. The NSNP offers a quicker entry into Canada for qualified workers and experienced entrepreneurs who wish to settle in Nova Scotia and become permanent residents of Canada. The NSNP is open to qualified business people, skilled workers, and other immigrants who can contribute to meeting the labour market and economic needs of the province. The program is managed by the Nova Scotia Office of Immigration in partnership with Citizenship and Immigration Canada. Individuals nominated by the province, together with their spouse/partner and dependent children, are eligible to apply for a permanent resident visa from Citizenship and Immigration Canada under the federal Economic Class known as the Provincial Nominee Class.

A person who chooses to apply through the NSNP categories must meet the criteria set by the province for nomination. Within the NSNP, there are several streams, some of which are 'employer-driven', requiring applicants to have guaranteed, full-time, permanent job offer in Nova Scotia from an employer before submitting an application to the NSNP (NS-OIM, 2011).

1. **Agri-Food Sector** stream is aimed at immigrants interested in agri-food primary production or value-added production. The stream gives the opportunity to strengthen rural communities by creating jobs and growing the economy by bringing agricultural skills to Nova Scotia. The Agri-Food Sector pilot is a joint venture between the Office of Immigration and the Nova Scotia Department of Agriculture.
2. **Skilled Worker** stream helps employers hire workers whose skills may be in limited supply in the province. Often, employers are unable to find Canadian citizens or permanent residents with the needed skills. The stream helps employers recruit and retain immigrant workers with the required skills for these positions. This stream is employer driven. The NSNP will only consider certain types of jobs and occupations to approve for nomination.
3. **Family Business Worker** stream helps employers in hiring workers who are close relatives and also have the required skills for positions that they may have been unable to fill with a permanent resident or Canadian citizen. This stream is employer-driven. The worker must have a guaranteed, permanent job offer from an employer who is a close relative and who owns an established business in Nova Scotia.
4. **International Graduate** stream, as previously mentioned, targets international graduates who are living and working in the province and intend to establish their careers in Nova Scotia. This stream is employer-driven.
5. **Non-Dependent Child of Nova Scotia Nominees** stream is aimed at selecting individuals who are the non-dependent children of immigrants who were nominated under the NSNP. The applicant must plan to live in Nova Scotia permanently, be employable and be able to contribute to the labour market and economy of Nova Scotia.
6. **Community Identified** stream is aimed at selecting individuals who have long established connections to a Nova Scotia community, wish to live there permanently, and are employable and can contribute to the labour market and economy of that specific community. This stream is community-driven. The applicant must have a Letter of Identification from an organization mandated by the Office of Immigration before submitting an application to the NSNP.

A preliminary review of the NSNP suggests that the program has been successful in attracting new immigrants. The Office of Immigration began operating the NSNP in 2003 and provincial nominees began arriving in Nova Scotia in 2004. Latest figures from 2010 indicate that since the first year of operation, the province has welcomed 3,852 new immigrants through the NSNP, contributing to as much as an 86.8 percent increase in annual immigration to Nova Scotia. This number includes both principal applicants and dependents (NS-OIM, 2010). The program has also been successful at attracting younger, highly-educated workers to the province. The average age of provincial nominees landing from 2004–2009 is 30, with approximately 42 percent of all provincial nominees under the age of 25. Eighty-two percent of nominee principal applicants had some form of post-secondary education or above. However, consistent with other immigrant groups (and non-immigrant groups) the large majority of provincial nominees are settling in Halifax Regional Municipality. Seventy-nine percent of provincial nominees are settling in Halifax County. The county with the second largest number of provincial nominees is Cape Breton County, with only 2.8 percent of all nominees in the province.

The inclusion of the “Community Identified Stream” under the NSNP is an explicit recognition that community networks can play an important role in attracting, selecting and retaining new immigrants.

- Akbari & Sun (2006)

While there is a strong tendency for provincial nominees to settle in Halifax, the NSNP provides several opportunities for greater population distribution across the province. Akbari & Sun (2006) suggest that the inclusion of the “Community Identified Stream” under the NSNP is an explicit recognition that community networks can play an important role in attracting, selecting and retaining new immigrants. Every RDA can recommend nominees who will add social or economic value to their community based on their own criteria suited to business plan outcomes and development goals. Thus, there is potential for a greater role for municipalities and RDAs in targeting skilled immigrants to their regions. For example, the Pictou Regional Development Agency has worked in association with the Nova Scotia Association of Regional Development Authorities (NSARDA) to promote immigration to rural Nova Scotia. Promotion has been done through the development of a website that provides information about the benefits of a rural lifestyle and the business and employment opportunities that are available in regions across the province. The website directs visitors interested in learning about the process of immigration to information provided by the Office of Immigration.

Funding Programs

Labour Market Funding Program. The Office of Immigration’s Labour Market Funding Program assists organisations in the provision of services to increase the participation of immigrants in the workforce, enhance the quality of skills development programs available to immigrants, facilitate upward workforce mobility for immigrants and provide the information necessary for them to make informed labour market choices. This program is funded under the Canada-Nova Scotia Labour Market

Agreement (LMA) supported by the Government of Canada and the Province of Nova Scotia. Under this agreement, the Government of Canada will provide annual funding to the Province of Nova Scotia from 2008 to 2014 for programs and services for low-skilled employed workers and unemployed Nova Scotians who are not eligible to participate in EI-based programming. The objectives of the LMA are to increase the participation of Nova Scotians in the workforce, to enhance the quality of skills development programs available to Nova Scotians, and to help facilitate workforce mobility and provide the information necessary to make informed labour market choices.

Under the LMA, immigrants have been identified as a targeted population group who may benefit from skills development program interventions. Immigrants are twice as likely as Canadian-born workers to have a low income, and even though recent immigrants have higher education levels than their Canadian counterparts, they earn only about 60 percent of what Canadian born workers make. LMA-funded programs are available to immigrants with higher levels of education and work experience who are employed in low-skilled occupations because their credentials are not recognized in Nova Scotia or language barriers prevent employment in their chosen field. The Labour Market Funding Program accepts applications from established not-for-profit community organisations, registered charities, or other public or non-governmental organisations (e.g., regional development authorities). There are five broad intervention types that eligible for program funding:

1. Employment services
2. Skills development and upgrading
3. Work experience
4. Combined skill development and work experience
5. Workplace-Based Skill Development and Training for Employed Client

Settlement Funding Program. The Nova Scotia Office of Immigration's (NSOI) Settlement Funding Program assists community organizations, other public or non-governmental organizations, and language schools to provide services that facilitate successful integration and long-term residency of immigrants in Nova Scotia. Like the LMA, applications to the NSOI must be from an established non-profit community organisation, charity, or other public or non-governmental organisation. There are five eligible themes under the NSOI:

1. Orientation
2. Language and Skills
3. Labour Market Access
4. Welcoming Communities
5. Research and Planning

Settlement Services in Nova Scotia

Immigrant Settlement & Integration Services (ISIS) was created by the merger of Halifax Immigrant Learning Centre (HILC, established in 1988) and Metropolitan Immigrant Settlement Association (MISA, established in 1980). Over the years, HILC and MISA have aided immigrants in settlement, language training, employment, and business through a variety of programs. The two organisations merged in December of 2009 to create enhanced services for clients. ISIS receives continuing funding from various provincial and federal government departments. In addition, ISIS

delivers several of the current Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) settlement programs, including the Refugee Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP) and Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC).

ISIS intake workers assess the needs of immigrants on a case-by-case basis in order to provide personalised information and a settlement plan based on language and settlement needs (ISIS, 2011). Immigrants are referred to programs and services at ISIS and in the community, which focus on three key areas:

1. **Language Training:** Language Counsellors are available to identify language goals and recommend training programs to meet a client's needs. ISIS offers on-site language training as well as distance and online programs.
2. **Pre-employment:** Employment Specialists work with clients to help identify career goals and suggest appropriate programs. Employment Specialists also help clients develop and revise resumes and cover letters, determine pathways to licensure, and learn more about and practice job search and interview skills. For example, for immigrants who work in occupations which require a license, certificate or registration to practice, ISIS has developed profession-specific flowcharts that outline the steps necessary to achieve licensure in various occupations.
3. **Business Development:** Business Counsellors help clients identify the supports and training required to grow businesses in Nova Scotia. ISIS offers business related training on-site as well as online.

ISIS has been actively engaged in developing innovative approaches to providing services and supports for immigrants and businesses outside of Halifax Regional Municipality. ISIS offers distance and online English as a Second Language (ESL) and employment services to immigrants in small centres around Nova Scotia. Online learning provides a range of programs, including: communication skills, pre-employment skills, on the job language, businesses development, Canadian culture, and ESL literacy teacher training. Online learning also provides a medium for peer interaction, with timely feedback and follow-up from the online learning staff.

Colchester Immigration Partnership. The Colchester Regional Development Agency (CoRDA) Immigration Partnership is a volunteer committee that has been active in the region since 2003. Many of the Partnership's volunteers are immigrants themselves who have first hand experience with the process of settling in a new community. Awarded in 2005 for "Excellence in Community Development", the Partnership provides a wide range of settlement supports to newcomers. Volunteers make welcoming visits, introduce newcomers to members of the community, familiarise them with community resources and amenities and provide voluntary interpretation and language training (provided by the Colchester Adult Learning Association). The Partnership also offers a Cross-Cultural Awareness Program designed to support front-line service providers such as hospitals, banks, and municipal officers through cultural sensitivity training. CoRDA has also published the Colchester Newcomers Guide, outlining valuable information on education, childcare, employment, housing, banking, and recreation services and facilities in the region (CoRDA, 2010).

Regional Immigration Navigator Program. Antigonish, the Strait-Highlands, and Guysborough County have taken great strides towards providing a wide-range of regional settlement services through the continued support of the Regional Immigration Navigator Program. The Program is delivered

through the partnership of three RDA's. The regions share a Regional Immigration Navigator who provides settlement services to newcomers in the counties. The Program has led to the launch of several successful initiatives to support the settlement of new residents. A Relocation and Settlement Guide was designed with immigrants in mind but has also been a valuable resource for people moving here from other parts of Canada and even former residents. It was developed in response to requests from newcomers and organisations for more information on the process of settlement. A series of welcoming community workshops have been held around the quad county region, focusing on: Hiring Temporary Foreign Workers, the Nova Scotia Nominee Program and the International Graduate Stream, Newcomers in Business, as well as Cross Cultural Communication for Healthcare Providers and Service Providers. In addition, Welcome Kits have been assembled and distributed throughout the quad counties. In 2010, the program received 235 inquiries from new residents and stakeholders. In total, 774 points of contact have been made – 124 more than the previous year (ARDA, 2011).

International Perspectives

In the wider socio-economic context, developed countries are looking to attract foreign skilled labour to supplement their rapidly decreasing and aging populations. The following section examines aging, out-migration and depopulation trends and challenges in Japan, Australia, and the United States.

Aging Populations: Initiatives from Japan

Driving Demographic Forces in Japan

It has been estimated that the senior population in Japan will rise to 26 percent of the whole population by 2015 and will increase to 35.7 percent by 2050, making Japan the oldest country in the world. The trend amongst seniors in Japan has been towards “active aging”, driven by the recognised benefits of a healthy lifestyle, and the willingness and financial stability to function independently in old age (Usui, 2011). The most recent "Annual Report on the Aging Society," issued by the Japanese Cabinet Office, indicates that the employment rate of people over the age of 60 is rising. This trend seems to have been caused by the fact that an increasing number of people are continuing to work into their senior years through the extension of the mandatory retirement age or re-employment. Seniors are also becoming more active. According to the report, “compared with 30 years ago the time available for sports has increased by 14 minutes [per day] for 60-to-64-year-olds, 16 minutes for 65-to-69-year-olds, 9 minutes for 70-or-older, and is 2-3 times as large for people in their 60s, which reflects how healthy and active elderly people are” (Japanese Cabinet Office, 2009).

Increasing numbers of seniors in Japan are opting for the sophistication and stimulation of contemporary life, and are in the market to purchase accommodations that are ‘barrier-free’ and wheelchair ready. As a result, the need for both privately owned and government-subsidised adult living facilities has increased dramatically. According to data collected by the Japanese Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, a total of 26,000 Japanese seniors lived in 349 privately owned nursing homes in 2000. By July 2004, these numbers had increased to 52,500 residents living in 990 assisted living facilities (as cited in PR Newswire, 2010). The Japanese government responded to this need for new living arrangements for seniors when it introduced the Long-Term Care Insurance (LTCI) in 2003. In

addition, the Government of Japan now provides subsidies to cover much of the remodeling costs, including the remodeling of disabled-access toilets and the installation of banisters, nonslip guides, and ramps.

Attitudes towards “active aging” have given rise to business and industries called “silver markets” (Usui, 2011). The present senior population is more financially stable than previous generations creating a valuable consumer market, particularly in the real estate and recreation industries. According to Nitta (2006), spending on housing and home renovation in 2005 was highest among the 65–69 age group, spending twice as much as Japanese homeowners in the 55–59 age group. International brands and businesses have also experienced the consumer power of the Japanese senior population. According to a recent news report, seniors are now the fastest growing group of new members at health clubs in Japan. Curves, the largest American fitness franchise in the world, has plans to open 2,000 clubs in Japan within the next five years. With roughly 60 percent of its 250,000 members over the age of 50, Curves Japan has been offering fitness regimens developed exclusively for seniors. In addition, group exercise programs offer a valuable social component.

Rural Japan has faced a unique set of challenges that has required new strategies for the provision of support services for seniors. Excessive out-migration of youth has led to rural areas being much “older” than the national population of Japan, with nearly a quarter of the population over the age of 65. A dwindling workforce in the face of an aging population has led municipal authorities to rethink their local economic development strategies. Rural towns in Hokkaido, the northernmost island of Japan, have adopted two emerging strategies: community-based social care and strategic relocation (Murakami, Gilroy & Atterton, 2009).

Kuriyama, Japan. Approximately one-third of the population of Hokkaido reside in the capital city of Sapporo while another four-fifths of the population are scattered throughout rural areas that make up the majority of the island (Murakami, et al., 2009). The town of Kuriyama, located close to Sapporo and other large cities, has faced significant population decline and aging with nearly 30 percent of the population over the age of 65. In 1992, an inter-sectoral committee composed of health, housing, agriculture, policy and public relations experts concluded that addressing the needs of the growing senior population would require a bottom-up, person-centred service plan for service provision. According to the town’s mayor, the vision for senior care services ensures that “every single person feels that they live in a big family here in the town of Kuriyama”.

“Every single person feels that they live in a big family here in the town of Kuriyama”.

- *Murakami, et al.*
(2009)

Since 1995, the physical infrastructure of the town has been improved with the result that there is a barrier-free train station and bus terminal, public toilets, benches, automatic / sliding doors and level entry into high street shops, by using various measures and regeneration grants from the Central Government. The public bus services using easy-access vehicles began in 1998, and the association of local shops began an at-home shopping and free delivery service for those who cannot access the town centre. In 1999, a community group launched the idea of a community currency, the ‘Kurin’, to promote community participation, volunteerism and inter-generational activities in the town (Tada, et al., 2008).

Community Network, established in April 2003 as a not-for-profit organisation, is in charge of managing the community currency system (Marukami, Atterton & Gilroy, 2008). This has the potential to supplement voluntary-based care services and to build volunteer experience amongst the youth population.

Nanporo, Japan. Given the considerable difficulty associated with providing adequate services and support for seniors residing in remote regions, Nanporo, a town in Sorachi region of Hokkaido, developed a housing strategy that focused on the provision of a central network of accommodations and services for older people. Recognising the increasing needs of the aging population, and the growth of single person senior households, the town developed a 'silver' housing project in 2001, consisting of social housing for older people who live independently without care support. These accommodations were built around existing centrally-located facilities, allowing for easy access to Nanporo's hospitals, dentist, and care service centres (including day care and home care service station). A total of 84 senior households were re-housed by the government by 2003. The new housing facilities are one or two storey apartments built to barrier free standards.

Challenges and Opportunities

An aging population affects several key aspects of developed and emerging economies, including retirement systems, labour markets, and public spending, with spillovers in the dynamics of consumption and production of goods and services. The Japanese experience suggests that the growing senior population presents several social and economic opportunities. Seniors are a non-traditional supply of labour and enhancing services for seniors may provide greater opportunities for volunteerism amongst youth and other community members, as well as new opportunities for business.

From a business perspective, the growth in the number of older households over time, combined with a continued rise in their spending power, may lead to increasing expenditure for certain categories of goods and service. Market-based research points to significant business opportunities within individual sectors, including healthcare, leisure, recreation, and technology (Llewellyn & Chaix-Viras, 2008). A growing senior population will have the ability to influence the sales of existing businesses that promote the concepts of "independent living" and "aging in place" (e.g., home delivery, online shopping). Furthermore, an aging population can offer companies significant opportunities to enter relatively new markets, such as adult medical nutrition, anti-aging cosmetics, and premium alcoholic beverages.

From a scan of over 600 recent headlines in international newspapers, Namura International suggests that global "aging" concerns tend to focus on health or beauty aspects: comparatively few are about the implications for labour and business (as cited in Llewellyn & Chaix-Viras, 2008). It is evident that few companies are preparing themselves appropriately, representing both a challenge and an opportunity for governments and businesses around the world. A major challenge for employers, but also a major potential opportunity, will lie in developing and implementing training schemes that enhance the performance of the older workers who will, inevitably, form an increasing proportion of the workforce. Those that best analyse the situation and its implications and then implement the best policies and practices stand to prosper.

Free Land Incentives: United States of America

Ellsworth, Kansas

Small towns in the Great Plains have been struggling with rural out-migration since the early 20th century. Following World War I, increased mechanisation and productivity in the agricultural sector made it increasingly difficult to retain the youth population in farming communities (Lu & Paull, 2007). As a result, widespread population decline has led to increasing labour shortages, an aging populace, and the consolidation and closure of several schools and churches. Towns in the Great Plains have tried a number of different approaches to reversing depopulation trends with limited success. In the 1990s, rural communities began offering free residential land as a strategy for attracting new residents and increasing economic development. By 2006, 20 small towns in Kansas had established free land programs.

In November 2010, the Population Forum Committee conducted an interview with a representative from the Smoky Hill Development Corporation in Ellsworth County, Kansas. The interview provided background and context for the “Welcome Home Plan” free land program in Ellsworth County, and provided an update on the success of the strategy since its installation in 2003.

Ellsworth County covers approximately 716 square miles in central Kansas and has a population of 6170; with approximately 57 percent of county residents reside in rural areas (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Ellsworth County Economic Development Incorporated put the “Welcome Home Plan” in place in response to declining enrolments in county schools. The program is multifaceted, offering not only free residential lots to new residents, but alternatively offers the Down payment Assistance Program (DAP) to families who enrol their children in the school district. Furthermore, lenders and bankers in Ellsworth County offer a home financing plan to help alleviate some of the costs of building of a new home.

Free Residential Lots. Free residential building lots are available for new or current residents willing to build a new house within two years of signing a contract. Applications for a free lot must include a pre-approval letter from the applicant’s lender. Under the caveats of the free land contract, approved applicants are required to sign with a contractor within 6 months and begin new construction on the land within 12 months. Residents are expected to establish occupancy within 24 months. Since 2005, 9 houses have been built on free lots, many through local building contractors (though there is no contractual requirement to hire local builders). While none of the houses were built by residents from outside the community, the new housing developments attracted newcomers who eventually purchased residences in Ellsworth.

Home Financing Program. The lenders and bankers of Ellsworth County have agreed to apply the value of the free lot received towards the down payment on the home you will build on said lot. This assistance is available to new county residents and current county residents. Additionally, the county lenders and bankers will waive all fees normally charged by the bank associated with financing the construction of a new home or the purchase of an existing home in Ellsworth County.

Down payment Assistance Program (DAP). The DAP offers up to \$3000 per year (for up to three years) towards a new home to families who enroll children the school district for a three year commitment. In 2006, it was reported that the \$15,000 to \$17,000 budget allocation for the DAP had

been entirely expended every year since inception, with 26 families participating in the program since 2003 (Lu & Paull, 2006). The impact of the DAP has been significant, to date bringing in an additional \$650,000 in state funding to the school district. In addition, many teachers took advantage of the program and filled many of the existing labour shortages in the school district.

The “Welcome Home Plan” was a huge promotional opportunity for Ellsworth County. Advertising and national news features attracted hundreds of interested people to the county. While many were unable to afford a new house, several families liked the region and decided to purchase an existing residence under the DAP. Looking towards retention of youth in Ellsworth County, several schools have begun hosting “Opportunity Days” to promote the employment opportunities and benefits associated with rural living – the key message being that smaller towns can offer the same opportunities as urban centres.

“Opportunity Days” promote the employment opportunities and benefits associated with rural living – the key message being that smaller towns can offer the same opportunities as urban centres.

Despite early success, the “Welcome Home Plan” has not been without detractors. Ellsworth residents and councillors were initially unconvinced, believing that there was more benefit associated with selling undeveloped land rather than giving it away for free. Originators of land giveaway assure that once the public was informed of the cost of up-keeping unused land, the idea gained more support. Unused land does not generate any revenue; whereas building a house on it means that taxes can be collected.

More recently, critics have argued that offering land is not enough to attract residents to rural areas. County populations are still declining, and for half the towns participating in free land programs in Kansas, early expectations were unmet. According to the Smoky Hill Development Corporation, Ellsworth County has fared much better than other rural regions of Kansas. Ellsworth’s population has declined by 5.3 percent since 2003. In comparison, the neighbouring Lincoln County has seen a 13 percent decrease in population in the same period (US Census Bureau, 2010). Despite investing heavily in property for free land development, Lincoln County has failed to draw new residents in the six years since the program’s establishment in 2003 (Bauer, 2010). This is in stark contrast to the City of Marquette in McPherson County, which has seen tremendous success with the Free Building Lot program. Since 2000, the population of Marquette has grown from 542 to nearly 682 (US Census Bureau; City of Marquette, 2011).

Clearly, free land programs have had mixed results. Bauer (2010) suggests that some towns are simply “too far from ‘big city’ trimmings or job choices”. Realistically, people are attracted to better opportunities and are likely unwilling to relocate to a rural town that offers few employment prospects. The Smoky Hill Development Corporation emphasises that much of their success has been due to first-rate amenities such as sports complexes, shopping centres, and blue-ribbon schools. Furthermore, new residents in Ellsworth County were able to secure jobs in sectors that were experiencing labour shortages. Once these jobs run out, it may be difficult for the “Welcome Home Program” to continue attracting new residents to the County.

Muskegon 25

When the unemployment rate rose from 13.9 percent to 14.9 percent between June and July of 2010, Muskegon County, Michigan (population of 174,344 according to the 2008 US Census Bureau) made a bold move to stimulate hiring by offering what has been described as “the most comprehensive development incentive packages in the United States” (Valley, 2010; Michigan Economic Development, 2011). The plan, Muskegon 25, offers free industrial property, waivers on state, local property or Income taxes, and reduced water and sewer rates to companies that commit to the creation new full-time jobs in Muskegon. Companies guaranteeing the creation of 25 jobs are eligible to receive five free acres of industrial park land in either the city or Dalton Township. From there, 50 jobs will be eligible for 12 acres of free land, 75 jobs for 20 acres and 100 jobs for 30 acres. Muskegon 25 also gives local economic developers a chance to promote the community’s quality of life. The program highlights the recreational opportunities of Lake Michigan and inland lakes and rivers, along with a thriving cultural community (Alexander, 2010). Qualified businesses will also receive a free boat slip or season hockey tickets for the local area.

Since Muskegon 25 began in August of 2010, there have been 40 serious inquires, a significant improvement over when the land was for sale at \$17,500 to \$30,000 an acre at the and there were no inquiries (Holmes-Greeley, 2011). Muskegon officials believe that if jobs are created, the program will have been worth the investment. However, as Muskegon 25 continues to receive attention from businesses and media outlets, local economic developers are finding themselves in competition from neighbouring counties in Michigan and other states. City officials and local economic developers have found Muskegon at a disadvantage compared to other communities that have begun advertising attractive incentives such as free rent, up-front cash, and free buildings to attract businesses.

Offering competitive incentives is borne out of a desire to send a positive signal about a municipality’s business environment, making it almost impossible for surrounding municipalities to resist the urge to offer greater incentives (Ellis & Rogers, 2000). Once municipalities start to aggressively compete for firms, a bidding war is inevitable and there is an increased likelihood that poor deals will result. At this point, municipalities are being forced not only to compete but also to give away the entire value of attracting new business. Given the inevitability of the competition between places, analysis about how to negotiate a good business deal is vital. Municipalities have very little room for error when offering incentives and the risk to taxpayers can be very high. Even when an incentive program is successful at attracting new business, often the best outcome for a municipality may be to break even (Ellis & Rogers, 2000). Accordingly, economic development agencies and governments should concentrate on improving the practice of offering incentives, and developing regional partnerships in order to restrain inter-jurisdictional competition. A consideration of these factors is vital to minimise the risk of giving away more than what a region stands to gain by attracting new business.

International Students & Immigration: South Australia

By the end of the twentieth century, the median age of Australian farmers had reached 50 years. The aging of this population, exacerbated by migration of young people from rural Australia to urban centres, has been a major demographic trend over the past century (Australian Government, 2008). According to national immigration authorities, Australia will have 200,000 more jobs than people to fill

them in five years' time. International students have been identified as a target population for immigration, providing economic stimulus to rural areas and adding to the cultural diversity and dynamism of regional Australia (FECCA, 2010). As a result, Australia has increased efforts over the past decade to attract students from specific countries in Asia by organising national recruitment events, waiving tuition fees for international graduate students, and revising immigration legislation for post-graduate students.

Australia is one of the world's major destinations of these students and in proportion to its native university students, Australia has the highest ratio of foreign students of any nation. High foreign enrolments can be attributed to a number of strategies adopted by governments and educational institutions. For example, Australian universities have reversed their stance on differential tuition fees, opting to take a more aggressive approach towards international student recruitment by introducing tuition waivers for graduate and post-doctoral students from other countries¹. This drastic action was taken in response to the need for more international students to help fill research gaps and improve the quality and quantity of post-graduate research in Australia (Lebihan, 2007). The Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations has stated that fee waivers will likely become a trend as universities worldwide compete in the international student market; a sharp contrast to the previous attitude of universities trying to attract the maximum number of international students paying differential fees to boost revenues (Maslen, 2008).

Immigration policies in Australia have been used to encourage foreign graduates from Australian institutions to apply for long-term employment and permanent residency. In 1998, Australia amended its point-based immigration system to allocate additional points for graduates of Australian universities. By the start of 2002, international students represented nearly half of all visas issued under Australia's General Skilled Migration categories (Birrell & Perry, 2009). Within the skilled migrant categories, it is the Employer Nominated and Regional Migration program that the highest rate of settlement occurs. These are cases where people have entered as foreign students or temporary workers and worked for an employer who has subsequently nominated them for permanent residence (Withers & Powell, 2003). Since 2003, the Australian government has been awarding an additional five points to skilled applicants who have studied in rural regions or low population growth areas under immigration schemes aimed to "attract young, skilled, English speaking migrants to areas of Australia where they are most needed" (Australian Government, 2003).

State Specific Regional Migration² (SSRM) schemes are currently at a key point in Australia. There is a strong commitment of several state governments and the federal government to increase the number of permanent settlement visas issued under these schemes (Hugo, 2004). Moreover, the Labor opposition has committed to developing measures to ensure that at least 45 percent of Australia's new settlers go to rural and regional areas (Australian Labor Party, 2003). This policy direction partly served to direct immigrants away from Sydney where increased levels of immigration were perceived to be contributing to environmental concerns, increased housing costs, and overcrowding (Withers & Powell, 2003). These visas also allow Australian employers in regional or low population areas of Australia to fill skilled positions with non-Australian citizens/permanent residents on a permanent basis where they cannot fill the skilled vacancies from the Australian Labour Market.

¹ Undergraduate international students pay full fees for all courses and are not subsidised by government.

² In the Australian literature, the term "regional" is synonymous with "rural"

A study of the use of SSRM in South Australia's population suggests that regional immigration schemes can have considerable impact on population growth. In the early 1970s, residents in the state of South Australia accounted for approximately 9.2 percent of the total national population. By the early 2000s, this percentage had declined to less than 8 percent. As a result, the South Australian government developed a Population Policy that emphasised the need for increasing immigration to the state (Local Government Association of South Australia, 2003). In addition, several state-initiative strategies were implemented, such as the creation of "Education Adelaide", an agency charged with increasing the State's share of foreign students. The agency actively promotes Adelaide (the State's only metropolitan city) as a centre of quality education and facilitates the transition for international students who choose to live, study and work in Adelaide (Education Adelaide, 2011). Further, the use of SSRM to attract new immigrants has been strongly lobbied in South Australia, arguably more so than any other Australian state (Hugo, 2008).

According to data from the Department of Immigration and Citizenship, South Australia's annual rate of population growth more than doubled between 2001 and 2006, exceeding 1 percent per annum for the first time since the early 1980s (Hugo, 2008). However, the data also indicates that South Australia experiences a significant net migration loss due to interstate migration. Thus, immigrant retention is an important target of the State's population policy. It is critical that it is underpinned by adequate planning and funding for rural development. Some immigrants who initially settle in regional and rural areas are not obtaining adequate support and settlement services. After a brief period in a rural location, immigrants move to urban areas where they find that better services to address the challenges of settlement (FECCA, 2010). The Australian Government is working closely with state, territory and municipal governments, and regional authorities to provide regional migration programmes that support regional development and help supply the skill needs of regional employers. These programmes are designed to address the special circumstances of regional Australia by assisting businesses in identifying labour shortages and improving employer awareness of the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs and SSRM.

The demographic trends seen in South Australia represent a small but noteworthy shift in the first-point-of-settlement patterns of immigrants to Australia. However, given the propensity towards interstate migration over time, it remains to be seen whether immigration schemes will lead to sustained and long-lasting demographic changes. To an important extent, sustainability will depend on whether regional businesses will continue offering job opportunities to new immigrants in order to fill labour shortages. This is critical, and schemes like SSRM will not succeed unless there are a sufficient number of employment opportunities with appropriate remuneration available in regional areas (Hugo, 2008). In addition, State and rural governments must strive to provide adequate settlement services and amenities to ensure immigrant retention. According to Hugo (2008), what has been demonstrated in South Australia is that "it is possible for governments to shape not only who migrates but where they settle".

Repopulating Rural Canada

Encouraging Regionalisation

Less than 20 percent of the Canadian population live in towns with a population of 10,000 or less. Between 2001 and 2006, the population of rural and small towns grew by only 1 percent –well below the national average of 5.4 percent (Statistics Canada, 2008). The little growth that has occurred in rural Canada has been in towns located within proximity to urban centres, or “metro-adjacent”. In Nova Scotia, this trend has been seen in the growth of Halifax Regional Municipality and surrounding municipalities. The out-migration of youth and seniors from rural areas has contributed to growth in urban centres, as they seek greater access to employment opportunities, education, and healthcare. Immigration has been the focus of federal and provincial strategies to sustain population growth “because of its connection to demographic adaptation, economic development, labour force shortages and the globalization of the economy” (Bruce, 2007). However, like most other demographic groups in Canada, immigrants to Canada tend to prefer urban cities. Data from Statistics Canada demonstrates that recent and new immigrant groups who arrived between 1981 and 2001 make up less than 2 percent of Canada’s rural region population, but represent over 13 percent of the urban population (as cited in Bruce, 2007).

These migration trends suggest that there is a need for a targeted immigration strategy that addresses challenges related to both attraction and retention of people to rural and small towns. Frideres (2006) highlights that there are many reasons why Canada needs to consider regionalisation of immigration: 1) it can produce a better distribution of immigrants across the country, 2) it will revitalise certain areas and help immigrants find suitable employment, 3) it will equalise the inequities between immigrants and Canadian-born, 4) it will facilitate the integration of immigrants, and 5) it will add to the democratic principles of Canadian political participation. The roles and responsibilities for developing and implementing an effective regionalisation of immigration initiative are shared among a broad spectrum of governmental and non-governmental stakeholders (Garcea, 2003). All levels of government have a stake in the regionalisation of immigration. Therefore, the regionalisation of immigration cannot be left entirely to the federal government; the provincial and municipal governments must also assume key roles and responsibilities.

The following section examines cases of smaller municipalities that have attracted relatively higher numbers of immigrants through provincial and federal immigration programs. These cases document the strategies and success factors that could be considered in Nova Scotia and may be applied to the youth and senior demographic.

Manitoba

Winkler, Manitoba. Located approximately 120 kilometres south of Winnipeg, the City of Winkler has experienced significant population growth since the late 1990s, mostly due to immigration. In 1997, the City of Winkler and Chamber of Commerce identified the need to utilise immigration to address the community’s labour shortage. Job offers were sought and community members with connections in Germany identified individuals and families who would be a good fit and encouraged

them to apply to immigrate. However, those who applied were unable to realise federal points requirements. At the same time, The Government of Manitoba was in the process of negotiating with their federal counterparts the framework of what was to eventually become the Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program (MPNP). In discussions with the City of Winkler, the Province considered the prospect of developing a pilot initiative that would allow fifty families to settle in the Winkler area. In what became the “Winkler Initiative,” immigrants could arrive based on their meeting provincial selection criteria, with the province assuming responsibility for care after arrival (Silvius, 2005a).

The MPNP agreement was signed in 1998 and the “Winkler Initiative” provided the critical mass needed to establish a community for other prospective immigrants. Predominant groups of new immigrants were Russian-Germans who were attracted to the German linguistic and religious history offered in Winkler, and the familiar geography of Russia and other parts of the former Soviet Union. In 1999, Winkler welcomed 226 new immigrants. By 2004 the number of new arrivals doubled to 465 (Manitoba Labour and Immigration, 2005). In the period between 2003 and 2007, over 3,000 people immigrated to Winkler, with 90 percent arriving as provincial nominees. Statistics Canada (Community Profiles, 2006) indicates that between 2001 and 2006, Winkler’s population grew 14.6 percent from 7,943 to 9,106.

A number of important factors have contributed to Winkler’s success in both attracting and retaining immigrants. The Winkler area already had strong religious, cultural, linguistic and geographic similarities to the people that were being targeted and immigrated to the area, such as Russian-German immigrants. With support from community stakeholders and both municipal and provincial governments, settlement services were adapted from other regions of Manitoba for use in a rural setting. The settlement services office – funded by the Chamber of Commerce and provincial government – provides new immigrants with information on language training, health care, housing, and education services in Winkler and the surrounding area. The Rural Development Institute acknowledges the City of Winkler as “the original generator of contemporary rural immigration in Manitoba” (Silvius, 2005a). The Winkler example stresses the importance of stakeholder participation, interaction, and commitment from both the public and businesses sectors, as well as the role of community organisations and networks in the provision of settlement services for new immigrants.

Steinbach, Manitoba. Similar to the City of Winkler, Steinbach’s immigration phenomenon emerged out of a process that was initially employer and consultant driven. Larger businesses in need of employment contacted the Government of Manitoba to determine how labour shortages could be met through immigration. The result was the arrival of a considerable number of Mennonites from Germany, Russia, Mexico, Central and South America, as the resident population of Steinbach is largely Mennonite. In 1999, Steinbach received 126 new immigrants. Between 2001 and 2006, the Steinbach’s population grew by 19.9 percent (Silvius, 2005b). This drastic increase in numbers necessitated a coordinated community response for the provision of appropriate supports.

In 1999 the Chamber of Commerce became the centre for managing the settlement program due to funding stipulations that a non-profit entity was required for management and delivery. Steinbach’s City Council and Chamber of Commerce have since developed and managed a settlement program, entitled the Steinbach and District Immigration Settlement Program (SISP). SISP offers key services for immigrant settlement and orientation needs, information packages, youth programming and programs for women. The Province provides funding to support some of these activities, but a great deal of

volunteer time and in-kind support are provided by local organisations and residents. Flexibility in programming, partnering and tapping into community and volunteer resources remains essential to meet growing and often unpredictable language needs. Like Winkler, the example of Steinbach demonstrates the role of strong leadership from and co-operation amongst government, business and social services in facilitating the successful arrival and settlement of immigrants.

Saskatchewan

Tisdale, Saskatchewan. The established Ukrainian community in Saskatchewan has provided the province with opportunities to assist with immigration from that country, as a cultural and language connections have helped facilitate the settlement process for Ukrainian immigrants arriving in the province. Immigrant attraction efforts in the communities of Engfeld, Regina, Saskatoon, Swift Current, Tisdale and other towns in Saskatchewan, have lead to the settlement of over 100 Ukrainian families since immigration started increasing rapidly in the 1990s (Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce, 2008). Many of these immigration initiatives have been led by local businesses seeking additional sources of skilled labour. Northern Steel Industries, a metal fabrication company in the community of Tisdale decided to recruit from the Ukraine, in addition to regular recruitment activities, as the company had been facing increasing difficulty in recruiting qualified production staff from Canada.

According to the company's human resources manger, "There just aren't enough people that are in the trades and a good many of them go to the oil patch and the kind of wages no other business can compete with" (as cited in Pruden, 2006). Perhaps more importantly the community was willing to support the company in attracting skilled immigrants from Ukraine (Saskatchewan Agrivision Corporation, 2006).

Northern Steel Industries utilised the Saskatchewan Immigrant Nominee Program [SINP] and made several recruitment trips to Ukraine with the support of the Canadian and Ukrainian governments. Thirty-two qualified employees and their families immigrated to the region between 2005 and 2006 (Saskatchewan Agrivision Corporation, 2006). Northern Steel Industries has an objective of recruiting and retaining 50 workers from the Ukraine, which would create a critical mass for a local Ukrainian community. Given the initial success of the Northern Steels Industries' recruitment initiative, The Town of Tisdale in cooperation with surrounding communities and participating businesses, are aggressively working on improving the services of the region with the aim of attracting and retaining more people to work and live in the area. For example, an innovative loan program offered through the Tisdale branch of Cornerstone Credit Union has allowed new immigrants to be eligible for a mortgage and loan based on financial potential rather than credit history. This is unlike most bank programs that require applicants to be Canadian citizens or permanent residents (Hill, 2008). The key lesson, which has been reinforced within the community of Tisdale, is that economic survival is up to the community. If there

The key lesson, which has been reinforced within the community of Tisdale, is that economic survival is up to the community. If there are economic and social changes that must be made, local leaders must be willing to address these changes directly.

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Considerations for Nova Scotia

The success of targeted immigration strategies in Manitoba and Saskatchewan have been the result of a number of factors that were fostered in a coordinated way that involved clear lines of communication between all levels of governments, community organisations, and citizens. The initiatives outlined in this section began as a response to a need from the business community for labour, which lead to negotiations with the federal and provincial governments for increases in immigration. It is important to highlight that these initiatives received strong endorsement and support from their respective communities. Winkler, Steinbach and Tisdale all built their attraction strategies on existing social, cultural and linguistic strengths. Winkler and Steinbach already had strong religious, cultural, linguistic and geographic similarities to the people that were being targeted and immigrated to this area, such as Russian-German immigrants. Similarly, Tisdale had an existing Ukrainian community and chose to focus on the recruitment of Ukrainian immigrants. These strategies recognise the importance of targeting immigrants that will feel at home when they arrive. This means recognising the existing religious, cultural, linguistic and geographic attributes of the area and matching those with immigrant groups that are being targeted.

These three cases also demonstrate that community support and acceptance into the community is absolutely critical to retaining new immigrants and can be just as important as job quality. Immigrant support services in Winkler, Steinbach and Tisdale occurred from a variety of sources, including church groups, immigration consultants, personal networks, schools, and volunteer-driven settlement services. Despite these successes, there are still a number of challenges. Carter et al. (2008) state that the integration of immigration policy with support from other policy sectors has not always happened. For example, Steinbach has been struggling with a shortage of affordable housing to accommodate new immigrants. In addition, creating infrastructure in small, rural towns to provide the necessary language training, cultural opportunities and employment support training can be expensive, requiring significant capital and human resource investments from volunteers and community groups to fill these gaps. It is not always realistic without the critical mass necessary to make the delivery of such services cost-effective.

The diverse needs of immigrants, suggest that even with certain strengths of an area, there is no simple approach to immigration, and immigration processes need consistent evaluation and public engagement to ensure success. Though the challenges associated with immigration may seem daunting, it is essential for communities to continue to move forward on the strength of a trial and error approach to finding solutions to population decline and labour shortages.

Welcoming Communities Initiatives

Settlement and Retention

The term “welcoming community” has been used widely by governments, consultants, and most other parties with an interest in newcomer settlement and retention. Esses et al., (2010) states that in addition to referring to a specific community seeking to attract and retain immigrants, the term has become synonymous with a focused policy approach. Welcoming communities represents a collective commitment to fostering a culture of inclusiveness – “until newcomers feel that they belong and that their skills are being used, there is no inclusion” (Ashworth, 2008). However, inclusiveness does not just extend to newcomers, as established residents of the community – aboriginal people, seniors, youth, and people with disabilities, etc. – also need to feel as though they are welcome and valued in their own communities.

“Until newcomers feel that they belong and that their skills are being used, there is no inclusion”

- *Ashworth (2008)*

The concept of “welcoming communities” has been used as a framework for addressing population decline and integration in several provinces and municipalities throughout the country. At the provincial level, governments and provincial associations have been working with stakeholders to identify strategic priorities, conduct analyses, and shape policy guidance around issues of labour needs and population decline. Many provinces have dedicated research and funding bodies that support a variety of welcoming communities initiatives. At the municipal level, municipal governments in Canada have played a vital role in the creation and implementation of programs that foster diversity and inclusiveness. The Association of Urban Municipalities of Alberta suggests that municipalities that demonstrate their commitment to creating a welcoming community – “by taking concrete action that supports inclusion and equity across economic, political, social and cultural dimensions” – will have the best chance of attracting and retaining people in the community.

The following section presents several initiatives that, while largely focused on immigrant settlement and retention, provide examples of innovative strategies that other provincial and municipal governments have undertaken to meet the challenge of developing welcoming and inclusive communities for all residents.

National Initiatives

In 2006, Citizenship and Immigration Canada launched the Welcoming Communities Initiative in support of the Government of Canada’s “larger effort to leverage the benefits of Canada’s diversity by reducing discriminatory barriers”. Through the program, Canadian organisations, community groups, municipalities, and educational institutions were able to receive funding towards projects that “promote the strengthened participation of new immigrants in civil society and foster more inclusive and

welcoming communities for new immigrants”. Projects that were eligible for funding ranged from communication materials, training modules, workshops, mentoring programs, research, and outreach activities.

Funded under CIC’s Welcoming Communities Initiative, the Research Resource Division for Refugees at Carleton University created an online inventory of resources on racism and anti-racism in Canada. The “Building Capacity for Newcomers” inventory was created as a resource for service providers in helping new immigrants and refugees “settle, adapt, and integrate into Canadian society, as well as for other organizations and individuals who are involved in the broader anti-racism work and/or in welcoming newcomers to their local communities” (Building Capacity for Welcoming Communities, 2007). It is emphasised that the inventory may not be exhaustive of all resources in Canada, though it is expandable. The creators of the inventory encourage users to submit additional resources for inclusion. The current inventory includes 220 resources organised into 12 categories of existing resources on racism and anti-racism in Canada:

1. Historical evolution of racism and anti-racism in Canada
2. Attitudes held by “mainstream” Canadians towards people of immigrant and/or “visible minority” background
3. Racial profiling
4. Economic barriers, including non-recognition of international credentials, skills, and experience
5. Ethno-cultural community profiles
6. Immigrants’ contribution to Canada
7. Community capacity building
8. Cross-cultural understanding
9. Anti-racism education
10. Good practices for inclusive communities, including programs and services
11. Anti-racism policies by all three levels of government
12. Legal framework and legislation concerning human rights, equity, and related issues.

Also funded by CIC is Changing the Canvas, an initiative of the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC, n.d.) that aspires to share the real-life stories and experiences of immigrants in the workforce. According to the CLC, “these stories remind us that real people live behind the statistics about racism, barriers to employment, chronic poverty, and failures with how Canada recognises foreign credentials or prior learning assessments”. The initiative is built around three components: stories, research, and education. The initiative’s website hosts over 30 immigrant stories documented by young media producers and artists from across Canada. Research and education activities include the development of new workshops and course material regarding challenges faced by immigrant workers in joining and integrating into the Canadian workforce, participatory research, and partnership building between agencies that work with immigrants on issues related to workforce integration and racism.

“These stories remind us that real people live behind the statistics about racism, barriers to employment, chronic poverty, and failures with how Canada recognises foreign credentials or prior learning assessments”.

- *Canadian Labour Congress*

Provincial Initiatives

Ontario. Founded in 2009, the Welcoming Communities Initiative (WCI) represents a collaborative multidisciplinary alliance of university and community partners designed to develop, test, and implement strategies to attract and include immigrants and minorities in small- and medium-sized cities across Ontario. First funded through a Social Science and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) Community-University Research Alliance grant, the WCI has expanded to include a range of government institutions, community organisations, and academics. The WCI's research interests cover a wide range of topics such as: workplace integration; civic engagement and identity; policy and program development; newcomer attraction and retention; and institutional development, particularly at the municipal level and the not-for-profit sector. The WCI also supports Local Immigration Partnerships (LIP), an initiative of CIC and the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration. LIP helps communities develop immigration-focused strategies that coordinate new and existing services in order to facilitate successful immigrant settlement and integration. As of March 2010, 34 communities have established Immigration Councils and LIP Strategic Plans (CIC Community Connections, 2010).

Manitoba. Welcoming Communities Manitoba (WCM) focuses on supporting projects and resources that address discrimination, foster intercultural communication and connections, and increase the public's knowledge on the economic and social benefits of immigration and diversity. Supported by CIC's Welcoming Communities Initiative, WCM provides one-time funding to non-profit organisations, settlement and adult language service providers, educational institutions, businesses, and municipal governments, with projects that support goals of the initiative. Funded projects have included "Call it Home", a museum program focused on Manitoba's immigration history and the contributions of Manitoba's aboriginal community; and "Many Voices, One World", a school program aimed at connecting Canadian-born students with refugee and immigrant students through the storytelling.

Alberta. The Welcoming and Inclusive Communities initiative is a partnership between the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association (AUMA), the Alberta Human Rights Commission and the Human Rights and Citizenship branch of Alberta Culture and the Government of Alberta. The initiative works with municipalities to help build and support a provincial network of welcoming and inclusive communities as a means to facilitate the sharing of best practices and capacity-building opportunities. The AUMA emphasises that "municipal governments, in partnership with other orders of government and local and national groups, have an important role to play in combating racism and creating welcoming and inclusive communities, as they function at the most practical level, and are the most closely involved in the lives of their citizens."

As part of the Welcoming and Inclusive Communities Initiative, the AUMA has published a toolkit designed to assist municipalities in Alberta to reduce racism and discrimination and encourage social inclusion. The Toolkit offers strategies, approaches, and policies that can be adapted to the unique needs of individual municipalities, allowing for municipal governments to incorporate the diversity of residents and the resulting implications into overall governance, planning and service delivery. The strategies outlined in the Toolkit are linked to several other AUMA resources, including the Affordable Housing Toolkit, the Guide to Municipal Sustainable Planning, and the Citizen Engagement Toolkit. Combined, these resources form a strong knowledge base to assist municipalities to govern and provide service across a wide range of resident needs.

Nova Scotia. In its 2005 Immigration Strategy, the Nova Scotia Office of Immigration emphasised the need to foster welcoming communities throughout the province. This strategic direction focused on increasing awareness about the benefits of immigration and supporting multiculturalism to further promote Nova Scotia as an inclusive and welcoming destination for immigrants. The Immigration Strategy outlined several actionable items for supporting welcoming communities that are centred around embracing diversity and increasing education. For example, it emphasised the need to promote diversity and cultural competency training in workplaces, unions, communities, and schools. The Strategy also highlighted plans to work with the Department of Tourism, Culture and Heritage on the development and implementation of a multiculturalism strategy for Nova Scotia.

The Office of Immigration also works closely with various ethno-cultural associations and research groups throughout the province to support their settlement efforts for welcoming recent immigrants. In April of 2010, the Nova Scotia Office of Immigration and the Atlantic Metropolis Centre hosted the *Small Welcoming Communities and Newcomers in Atlantic Canada* symposium. The focus of the symposium was on the concept of welcoming communities in relation to the attraction and retention of immigrants in Nova Scotia from the perspective of federal, provincial and municipal governments, non-governmental organizations and the private sector. Another symposium was held in March of 2011.

Local Initiatives

Red Deer, Alberta. In 2006, the City of Red Deer and Red Deer College partnered to research innovative approaches to facilitating the integration of newcomers. Emphasis was placed on evaluating the policies and practices that fostered “welcoming and inclusive communities”. A total of 326 international newcomers and service providers were surveyed to gain insight into the extent which they felt welcomed by the City of Red Deer and Red Deer College. While feedback from respondents was mostly positive, researchers were able to put forward several recommendations for building stronger inclusive communities.

The research found that several newcomers were interested in becoming more involved in civic engagement and to express their needs to municipal government. It was recommended that municipal government officials actively engage with ethno-cultural groups and help them feel apart of civic society (City of Red Deer, 2007). It was also recommended that the City should facilitate the provision of adequate, affordable housing for newcomers. Increasing property prices and decreased rental vacancies were found to be significant barriers to immigrant attraction and retention. The City of Red Deer and Red Deer College continue to work collaboratively to develop coordinated English language training, cross-cultural education, and community orientation sessions for newcomers. The institutions are also working towards expanding their partnership to include other levels of government and community stakeholders to further explore and pursue welcoming community initiatives.

London, Ontario. While engaging community diversity has been at the forefront of issues in the City of London, there has been a growing need to clarify the definition of diversity – and coming to some sort of agreement what stakeholders should be included, and how it should be approached. In 2002, a recommendation was brought to City Council, supporting the inclusion of the word “diversity” in the title of its Advisory Committee (originally established in 1988) to include concepts of race, ethnicity, class, gender, age, religion, sexual orientation, and disability. The London Diversity and Race

Relations Advisory Committee (LDRRAC) reports to the municipal council, through the Community and Neighbourhoods Committee. The appointment of the LDRRAC's nine voting members is concurrent with the municipal council's term of office. The mandate of the LDRRAC, set out by council, is as follows:

“A committee of individuals, appointed by City Council, to provide leadership on matters related to diversity, inclusivity, equity and the elimination of discrimination in the City of London.”

The LDRRAC works to promote ongoing city-wide activities that promote and advance London as a welcoming and inclusive community (2007). Being formally identified with a broader “diversity component” has enhanced the Committee’s ability to speak and act upon inclusive measures and, most importantly, work collaboratively within the municipal and community environment. For example, a member of the local Ontarians With Disabilities chapter sits on the Committee as a representative of Londoners with disabilities. The LDRRAC also supports activities that celebrate the contributions of seniors; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender perspectives; interfaith agencies; and youth mentorship. The Race Relations Policy and the Diversity Policy were two significant undertakings of the LDRRAC. These policies apply to the City of London and its affiliated organisations.

The LDRRAC suggests that a significant challenge for municipalities to consider regards the concept of “welcoming and inclusive communities” and how diversity issues should be defined and approached. For example, if there is a prevailing consensus that diversity must be “managed”, then certain actions will be taken and promoted. If, on the other hand, there is an interest in “celebrating” and “welcoming diversity,” then this interpretation demands a different sort of engagement with elected officials, administration and community organizations (LDRRAC, 2007). Differing interpretations of what diversity means can lead to significant challenges and miscommunication. Clarifying the definition of diversity can be a huge factor in building strength, in moving forward collaboratively and in establishing effective systems of communication between all stakeholders that make inclusiveness a reality for communities.

Pictou, Nova Scotia. In 2009, The Pictou Regional Development Agency (PRDA) and the Pictou County United Way held a series of discussions to explore the welcoming environment of region. Based on conversations with recent immigrants to Pictou County, staff and volunteers from PRDA and the United Way held a Welcoming Community Workshop in order to gather input towards the development of a Welcoming & Inclusive Community Strategy. The strategy, released in December of 2009, not only identifies actions that will remove barriers, create opportunities and attract diversity to Pictou County, but also identifies the community partners who would be best suited to lead and collaborate on various welcoming activities (Smith & Ferris, 2009). The Strategy’s actions fall into four categories:

1. Education and Advocacy – building consensus around the issue and raising awareness through communication
2. Integrated Communication – facilitating the accessibility and delivery of information on programs, services and opportunities in the region
3. Settlement Services – ensuring that newcomers can find and access opportunities, programs and services, while addressing any gaps that become apparent
4. Leadership – gaining support from the community, politicians, organisations and local businesses.

Pictou County's economic development agency is currently developing a 3-year labour force recruitment and retention initiative focused on immigrants and youth that will likely complement many of the actions highlighted in the Welcoming & Inclusive Community Strategy.

Colchester County, Nova Scotia. In "Growing Colchester Regional Economic Plan, 2005-2010", the Colchester Regional Development Authority (CoRDA) made a commitment to influence economic growth in the region through "increasing the population while reducing the percentage of people unemployed and under-employed who live or work in Colchester" (CoRDA, 2005). The plan consisted of four key imperatives for accomplishing this goal: supporting existing businesses; recruiting new businesses, creating new enterprises, and fostering dynamic and welcoming communities. Since the development of the regional economic plan, CoRDA has been working with youth and expatriates and other partner agencies to increase training and development opportunities for unemployed or under-employed adults. CoRDA has partnered with the Department of Education and the Nova Scotia Community College to host student career programs at various locations across the region. These programs are aimed at providing youth and parents with better information and better tools about the educational, employment and entrepreneurial opportunities that exist in Colchester (CoRDA, 2009).

However, CoRDA recognises that while the recruitment and retention of young people is an important area of focus for the region, there is still a need to attract new skills and new people in order to attract investment and to grow the population. As a result, CoRDA's strategy for supporting welcoming communities focuses on the role of employers in facilitating the decision to immigrate to Colchester County. CoRDA's 2009 Progress Report indicates that many local businesses taken on the role of "regional ambassadors", providing tours of their facilities and invaluable information regarding employment opportunities. The report states that maintaining a welcoming and inclusive business community can be accomplished by encouraging local business owners to accept resumes and meet with newcomers, even when they are not currently advertising positions. Through these actions, "employers are sending a positive message about a vibrant and growing Colchester economy" (CoRDA, 2010b).

Colchester has been successful in attracting and welcoming immigrants to the region since the "Growing Colchester" plan was implemented in 2005. CoRDA's new immigrant client numbers have doubled between 2010 and 2011, largely due to targeting marketing in the United Kingdom, a critical mass of existing immigrants, and the one-on-one services offered through the partnership (CoRDA, 2010a). The region also benefits from domestic and international student recruitment through the Nova Scotia Agricultural College, which is likely to increase with the recent introduction of the new Agri-Food Stream of the Nova Scotia Provincial Nominee program. CoRDA's 2010-2015 Economic Plan continues to foster relationships between the business community and the youth and immigrants of Colchester County (CoRDA, 2010c).

Mixed Solutions

Regional Repopulation Strategy (CREDA)

Faced with a number of economic and demographic challenges, in 2006 the Cumberland Regional Economic Development Association (CREDA) commissioned a repopulation strategy and action plan for the county, with specific emphasis on the attraction and retention of youth (ages 15 to 24) and immigrants (Bruce & Zwicker, 2006). A committee was selected to work with Mount Allison University's Rural and Small Town Programme (RSTP) to advise and guide the development of the project. The Repopulation Strategy was developed around the existing economic development and labour force development plans that had been previously established by CREDA and other associations throughout Cumberland County. The project was completed in six phases:

1. Establishment of a county-wide working committee on population issues
2. Assessment of economic development and labour force development needs and economic opportunities
3. Youth retention and attraction
 - a. Review previous literature and data which identify youth issues
 - b. Assessment of available services for youth (e.g., health, education, and social)
 - c. Youth focus groups conducted at each County high school
 - d. Interviews conducted with high school administrators about alumni services and programs
4. Immigration Strategy
 - a. Creation of an inventory of existing cultural groups and services in the county, as well as identification of service gaps
 - b. Review of the provincial Immigration Strategy and its various programs in terms of relevance to the county
 - c. Presentation by the provincial Office of Immigration to explain the options and programs offered
 - d. Identification of potential for school-based cultural awareness programs
5. Case studies of successful repopulation strategies
6. Strategy and Action Plan Report.

Through extensive literature reviews, analyses of existing services and opportunities, interviews with school administrators, and focus groups with high school students and a range of county residents, several recommendations and actions were developed. In addition, the RSTP developed summaries of successful repopulation strategies from four other rural communities to determine the key elements for developing and implementing successful attraction and retention initiatives.

Youth Retention and Attraction. In 2005, Cumberland County released the Youth Retention Strategy, highlighting the issue of out-migration due to education and employment opportunities in urban centres. The 2006 Repopulation Strategy found that while youth leave rural areas for a variety of reasons, many had a high opinion of Cumberland County stating that the region touts a lower cost of living than urban cities, and would be a good place to raise a family. However, without suitable

employment opportunities and affordable housing options, the advantages of rural living would not be enough to entice youth to return. In addition, focus group participants expressed concerns surrounding the promotion of rural towns as “retirement communities”. Participants expressed that the Province could do more to promote a more youthful environment in rural areas.

Recommended actions for youth retention featured in the Repopulation Strategy centred around expanding information on career options and opportunities available to high school students. For example, encouraging high school Guidance Counsellors to communicate with students regarding career choices and post-secondary options and having this information available online would expose students to options they may not have considered previously. Similarly, it was suggested that including more local businesses at school career fairs might provide youth with options closer to home. Additional areas for development included the creation of a database that would allow for communication with youth after high school, to alert them of local employment opportunities and events taking place in the county. Further, it was suggested that the creation of a Youth Town Council could give youth a more active presence in Cumberland County.

Many of the actions for youth retention support the plans for attracting more youth to Cumberland County. In addition to exposing local youth to career options available locally, schools can begin educating youth on entrepreneurship and business planning – encouraging them to start new businesses or take over existing businesses. Using the database of high school graduates, alumni can be surveyed to help determine their reasons for leaving the region and the factors that may encourage them to return.

Immigration. Like youth focus groups, community focus groups were held throughout Cumberland County to focus on three immigration areas: the positive characteristics of community living, the needs of newcomers arriving to the community, and the specific groups to attract to the community. While focus group participants in most municipalities recognised the importance and value of increasing immigration in the region, some participants questioned the need for expanding the population and others felt that repopulation efforts should be focused on bringing back residents who had moved away. It was suggested that communities should determine whether there is adequate physical infrastructure and support services available to meet the needs of a growing population before becoming too invested in attracting new residents to the region. Focus group participants also stressed that rural areas tend to be more resistant to change, requiring education about cultural diversity and demographic trends to create a more welcoming community for newcomers.

The Repopulation Strategy suggests that there is a lack of cultural diversity and cultural awareness across communities in Cumberland County. While communities tend to be friendly and supportive of newcomers, there are limited multicultural activities, ethnic food options, and English as a Second Language (ESL) training programs offered in communities. As a result, the Strategy put forth two primary recommendations for expanding cultural awareness and educational opportunities for both local residents and newcomers. First, the establishment of a multicultural organisation for Cumberland County would help raise cultural awareness by creating a social space where residents and newcomers can learn about other cultures. Additionally, information about Canada’s rural demographic challenge and the known benefits of immigration would likely alleviate criticism from residents who may feel that newcomers are “taking jobs from local people”.

The Strategy also highlighted several recommendations for expanding settlement services in Cumberland County, beginning with the creation of “settlement teams” that would play an initial point-of-contact for assisting new immigrants upon arrival. It is believed that providing settlement supports, particularly in rural communities, will help reduce feelings of social isolation amongst newly arrived immigrant families. To further develop settlement initiatives, evaluative information should be collected from recent immigrants (those who have arrived in the last six months) to gauge a better understanding of their settlement experiences and the effectiveness of settlement service delivery.

Social Support. Affordable housing and family services were identified as key supports in the attraction and retention of both immigrants and youth. It was suggested that working with municipalities and private building contractors to develop a variety of appropriate and affordable housing options would help attract young professionals, families, and immigrants to the area. Similarly, private-public partnerships could also address ways to provide affordable daycare options and Family Resource Centres for young families – increasing interaction between families as well as providing the support necessary to help parents return to full-time employment.

Infrastructure. Many youth participants and local residents emphasised that in order to attract and retain people in the region, the physical infrastructure must be enhanced. Recommended actions for addressing infrastructure needs included: clean up and removal of derelict properties, better access roads in rural areas, and expansion and promotion of high-speed Internet.

The RSTP recognises that several of the recommended actions are likely to overlap and work together to address repopulation. Employment opportunities are crucial for attracting and retaining youth and immigrants; however, this requires information dissemination and incentives such as support services, housing, and social connections to have a profound long-term effect. The Repopulation Strategy emphasises that developing a “welcoming community” mindset is a key factor to successfully integrating and retaining newcomers in rural communities. Bruce (2007) defines a welcoming community as “one where there is strong support for contributions, challenges and diversity offered by immigrants (both in and outside of the workplace), an engaged voluntary sector to provide ongoing support to newcomers, quality local infrastructure (housing, schools, etc.) to accommodate new residents, and the provision of effective settlement services in coordination with the provincial government”.

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- Bruce (2007), *Mount Allison University's Rural and Small Town Programme*

Recommendations for Nova Scotia Communities

1.0. Develop a Repopulation Plan with the following elements:

1.1. Look beyond immigration as a long-term solution to repopulation

Although policies such as Provincial Nominee Programs emphasise the importance of immigration to Nova Scotia, the province still exhibits a comparative economic disadvantage when it comes to the attraction and retention of immigrants. Strategies to address repopulation should be expanded beyond immigration to include the attraction, retention and repatriation of youth, university students (both domestic and international) seniors, and former residents. There are many overlapping challenges facing these groups that would benefit from a comprehensive repopulation strategy. Issues around housing, transportation, and employment are common challenges across these demographic groups.

1.2. Community Asset Mapping: Identify the unique opportunities, challenges, capabilities and possibilities offered by your community

Community Asset Mapping is an effective tool for understanding the capacity and resources that exists in a community – even those with small populations experiencing an economic downturn. The long-term development of a community rests on its ability to uncover and build on the strengths and assets of its people, institutions, and informal organisations. The community must also be upfront in evaluating the reasons for youth and immigration out-migration. This means that actions must be taken to identify the local residents, emerging leaders, local institutions, informal community and neighborhood organisations, and existing community leaders who are committed to building a more vibrant community.

1.2.1. Build relationships between stakeholders

This involves providing opportunities for emerging leaders to have an active voice in long-term economic development strategies for the community. Any strategy for addressing repopulation should include representation from all stakeholder groups with an interest in improving the demographic situation currently facing the community. The inclusion of a wide-range of stakeholders will guide the community in developing a shared vision for the future. This requires active communication and discussion to identify which priority issues need to be addressed. Stakeholder groups may include (among others):

- Community residents
- Seniors, youth, and immigrant-serving organisations
- Local business owners/employers
- Local NGO's
- Universities, colleges, and schools
- Provincial and municipal government departments
- Regional Development Agencies (RDAs)

1.2.2. Encourage information sharing between stakeholders and regions

Fostering an active dialogue between stakeholders begins with information sharing. Communicating best practices and actionable solutions is a key part to the success of province-wide repopulation. It is important for municipalities that are new to the development of strategies for repopulation to learn from the experiences of other communities. It is much easier and more effective to learn from the mistakes and successes of others. Embracing the sharing of best practices can help avoid 'reinventing the wheel', and more quickly enact new programs, services and initiatives that can help enhance Welcoming & Inclusive Communities.

1.3. Institutionalise Welcoming & Inclusive Communities in long-term planning

Developing a “welcoming and inclusive community” mindset within the community is a key factor to successfully attracting and retaining residents. While the term “welcoming” is a concept often applied to the acceptance of immigrants, “inclusiveness” does not just extend to newcomers, as established residents of the community – aboriginal people, seniors, youth, and people with disabilities, etc. – also need to feel as though they are welcome and valued in their own communities. By institutionalising a “welcoming and inclusive community” mindset in long-term planning, a community is taking concrete action that supports inclusion and equity across economic, political, social and cultural dimensions.

1.3.1. Develop a Welcoming & Inclusive Community Strategy for your community based on the goals set out in the community's long-term plan

Local challenges require local solutions. Municipalities, businesses, and the RDAs are uniquely poised to assist communities in addressing repopulation challenges through the development of a Welcoming and Inclusive Community Toolkit for Nova Scotia municipalities. It is recommended that the UNSM, NSARDA and the Nova Scotia Chambers of Commerce undertake the development of a toolkit that will offer strategies, approaches, and policies that can be adapted to the unique needs of individual municipalities. This will allow for municipal governments to incorporate the diversity of residents and economic needs into their overall governance, planning and service delivery.

2.0. Attracting Residents and Businesses to Rural Nova Scotia

2.1. Work with local businesses and employers to determine labour force gaps and potential demographic groups for recruitment

Jobs are the key to attracting people to a community. Local businesses must evaluate current and future labour shortages and consider the education, skills and experience of the workforce that will be needed to meet those demands. It is essential to link labour needs to education and training opportunities to ensure that the next cohort of youth will have the skills required to fill impending labour shortages. Educational institutions will have an important role to play in communicating future career trends and the training required to make youth employable. For example, given the aging population in Nova Scotia, there will be a need to focus on healthcare in all regions across the

province. Communicating this career shift will enable youth to attain the education and experience needed to fill impending employment gaps in the healthcare sector.

2.1.2. Partner with universities and colleges in the region to develop strategies to attract recent university graduates

Nova Scotia has a disproportionately large number of universities and colleges for a province of its size. Targeted attraction and retention strategies may be able to facilitate migration to regions of Nova Scotia that are suffering the most from labour shortages and population decline; however, this requires greater communication between educational institutions, governments, and local businesses to ensure that opportunities are being promoted to students. Career fairs, recruitment campaigns, and internships are possible pilot projects for attracting students and promoting local employment opportunities.

2.2. Work with employers to focus on job creation, recruitment and hiring practices that will facilitate the entry of youth, seniors, and immigrants into the workforce

It is evident that businesses are challenged to prepare themselves appropriately for demographic shifts in the labour force, representing both a challenge and an opportunity for governments and businesses throughout the province. A major challenge for employers, but also a potential opportunity, will lie in developing and implementing employment schemes that will enhance the performance and productivity of youth, immigrants, and older workers. This will require breaking down a number of stereotypes that currently exist about these demographic groups and tailoring the work environment to suit the needs of a diverse workforce. Businesses that best analyse the situation and its implications and then implement the best policies and practices stand to prosper.

2.3. Leverage provincial and federal programs to address labour shortages in your community

The federal and provincial governments play an important role in leading an effective repopulation strategy for Nova Scotia. There are several strategies and programs that are in place that are specifically designed to support communities in attracting skilled labour. Following the lead of communities such as Winkler, Manitoba, programs such as the Nova Scotia Provincial Nominee and the Post-Graduate Work Permit can be used to target skilled workers in specific sectors. In addition, university students from Nova Scotia and other provinces may be enticed to stay and work in the province when informed of the benefits offered by the Graduate Tax Rebate. Many of these programs are employer-driven, emphasizing the need to include and inform local businesses in strategies for repopulation.

2.4. Think outside the box – consider new, innovative opportunities for entrepreneurship based on the strengths of your community

From a business perspective, the growth in the number of older households over time, combined with a continued rise in their spending power, may lead to increased expenditures for certain categories of goods and services. Market-based research points to significant business opportunities within individual sectors, including healthcare, leisure, recreation, and technology (Llewellyn & Chaix-Viras, 2008). A growing senior population will have the ability to influence the sales of existing

businesses that promote the concepts of “independent living” and “aging in place”. An aging population can offer companies significant opportunities to enter relatively new markets.

2.5. Consider offering incentives to attract new business development and residents to the community

Free land, tax exemptions and cash bonuses are just a few of the incentives that have been successful in attracting new business to small towns in the United States. While such incentive programs are aggressive and potentially high-risk, they send a positive signal about a municipality’s business environment and the media attention surrounding incentive packages provides a chance to promote the community’s quality of life. Residential incentive plans – such as Ellsworth’s Down payment Assistance Plan (DAP) – provide young families who enrol children in the local school district with assistance in purchasing a new home. The impact of plans like the DAP have been significant in stabilising school enrolment numbers and attracting new residents to the area. Any type of incentive plan should be carefully assessed and piloted on a small scale before full investment is considered.

3.0. Encouraging People to Stay

3.1. Confront issues of affordable housing

For communities that are serious about attracting and retaining new people, providing affordable housing will be a significant factor of success. The vast majority of new university graduates and immigrants earn reasonable incomes and can afford to pay a reasonable amount for housing. They are in the market for affordable but not low-income housing. For new residents, the greatest need for affordable housing occurs in the first one to two years of settlement. During this time there is often a need for modestly priced rental housing – a scarce commodity in many small communities. There is also a need for affordable transitional housing for seniors who wish to maintain an active, independent lifestyle. The few seniors’ apartments that do exist are undersized for younger seniors who still maintain a high level of self-sufficiency. Additionally, many housing facilities are inaccessible to older seniors with physical limitations. The Rural Development Institute at Brandon University in Manitoba has recently begun work on assessing the housing situation in Southern Manitoba in response to increased immigration to the area. From the research produced thus far, Cosgrove (2010) suggests that whether a community faces an aging population, a spike in industry activity or an increased number of immigrants, a solution to every housing challenge is possible when confronted head-on.

3.2. Develop solutions to public transportation challenges

The lack of investment in transportation services in rural and small communities will have a significant impact on their ability to grow, attract new workers, and hold on to existing residents. The challenge for rural and small municipalities is characterized by a combination of low population densities and large distances between towns. In addition, given the aging population of Nova Scotia, there will be a significant demographic swing in the primary users of public transit services. However, there appears to be a disconnect between the transportation needs of rural older people and the services available or provided to them, especially in the context of those who no longer wish to

drive or are no longer licensed. In Nova Scotia, Kings Transit Authority operates a public transit service funded by the County of Kings and the towns of Berwick, Kentville and Wolfville. Kings County is also serviced by Kings Para-Transit, a transit system for seniors, residents with disabilities, and others in need. Several municipalities have also been successful in filling transit needs through volunteer services or 'semi-formal transportation networks'. In the Strait Area Region, Strait Area Transit – a non-profit charitable organisation – offers an affordable, alternative mode of transportation in the area.

3.3. Apply/request for federal and provincial funding for capacity building and infrastructure improvements

Several federal and provincial programs provide grants to municipalities for capacity building initiatives and infrastructure improvements. For example, Service Nova Scotia and Municipal Relations administers the Accessible Transportation Assistance Program (ATAP), which provides funding to community and public transit organisations across the province. Several funding and grant programs have been outlined in this report, though there are many others that can be accessed to help community fund projects. Meeting capacity and infrastructure needs are essential for developing a Welcoming and Inclusive Community – one that ensures the housing, recreation, and transportation needs of all demographic groups are fulfilled.

3.4. Identify opportunities for increasing volunteerism

The most successful welcoming and inclusive communities initiatives are based on a strong network of volunteers. Where a service gap has been identified, communities must be ready to take advantage of the volunteer skills available to them. Youth are primed to take part in volunteerism. Incentives such as volunteer credit hours in high school help instill such values amongst the younger generation. The established immigrant population represents a valuable pool of volunteers who already understand the needs and settlement challenges of newcomers. Municipalities like Colchester and Steinbach, Manitoba have built the success of their immigrant settlement programs on their existing immigrant communities. Finally, the health benefits of volunteering in senior years have been widely documented. Older volunteers experience fewer health issues with advancing age and report diminishing symptoms for existing health conditions. Moreover, both seniors and youth receive more benefits from volunteering when they are involved in intergenerational programs.

3.4. Engage youth in decision-making on issues and programs for young people in the community

Youth are the best sources of information when looking to understand and address issues that are most relevant to them. Creating opportunities to engage youth in decision-making on issues that are important to them will help project rural Nova Scotia as an attractive place to live for young people and encourage them to stay in the long term. There are several ways that municipalities can include youth in decision-making processes. Municipal governments can form youth advisory committees or youth town councils (like in Parrsboro) so that youth can become part of the consultative process. Governments can also establish a policy to retain a youth council in order to develop an ongoing consultative process.

3.5. Combat negative perceptions that may lead to discrimination

Awareness and sensitivity training should not be limited to race relations and gender. Youth and seniors also face discrimination and unmerited stereotypes that create barriers to employment, social,

and democratic engagement (e.g., youth are lazy; seniors are frail). Perceptions about age need to change if communities expect to address impending labour shortages to any degree of success. Education is the key to reversing attitudes and perceptions that may lead to discrimination.

3.6. Promote the rural lifestyle

Small, rural towns in Nova Scotia have a lot to offer; identifying community strengths and assets is a key step in the development of a repopulation strategy. In order to attract new residents, these benefits must be promoted to a wide audience. This starts at the local level with encouraging youth to return to their communities after pursuing educational opportunities. Events like “Opportunity Days” in Ellsworth, Kansas have been successful in introducing youth to the benefits of rural life with an emphasis on the message that smaller towns can offer the same opportunities as urban centres. Other ways to promote the benefits of rural living amongst youth can be through social media, which has been found to be an effective way of engaging youth in democratic decision-making. More aggressive promotional initiatives have been successful in Winkler and Steinbach, Manitoba where consultants actively promote employment opportunities and German cultural connections to potential recruits in Germany. Similarly, Colchester County has seen a great deal of success from targeted marketing in the United Kingdom.

3.7. Don't give up!

Continue to move forward on the strength of a trial and error approach to finding a solution to demographic challenges. There is no “magic bullet” solution and the strategies identified in this report will not help address all of the issues facing Nova Scotia in isolation. Addressing these issues will require a mixed approach. With continued population decline and impending labour shortages predicted in the next two decades, the cost of inaction may be very high.

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