MANITOBA RURAL IMMIGRATION
COMMUNITY CASE STUDIES

Issues in Rural Immigration:
Lessons, Challenges and Responses

RDI Working Paper #2005-9

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Manitoba Rural Immigration Community Case Studies

The information contained in this report is summarized and developed from a series of four case studies of community/regional immigration initiatives in Manitoba. Sponsored by Citizenship and Immigration Canada, these case studies were undertaken with the understanding that the findings from four diverse community/regional experiences with rural immigration in Manitoba can assist in exposing innovative practices, lessons learned and further considerations for communities wishing to develop strategies for immigrant attraction, settlement and retention.

Manitoba Labour and Immigration (LIM) chose four communities/regions on the basis of being instructive with regards to processes and initiatives relating to rural immigration. The four communities/regions involved in the case study process included:

- Parkland Region;
- Portage la Prairie;
- Steinbach; and
- Winkler.

LIM provided contact information for appropriate stakeholders in each community, who via email, phone and/or in person contact, offered input/perspective on community immigration processes. Immigrants from each community/region were also contacted for their perspectives. Interviews and/or focus groups were arranged with immigrants through local contacts. The activities undertaken during the case study process included:

- examining the history and context of immigration within each of the four communities/regions;
- collecting information on existing immigration supports and initiatives;
- gathering immigrants' perspectives on the positive and negative aspects of living in their community/region;
- identifying challenges, responses, recommendations and lessons learned; and
- recommending further potential research for each case study community/region.

The intent in speaking to immigrants was not to gain quantitative data, but rather to seek impressions on their immigration experience that may be informative and instructive both to the communities they reside in and others hoping to develop immigration welcoming, settlement and retention strategies. Despite the relatively small numbers of immigrants successfully contacted, vis-à-vis the overall immigrant population of each area, feedback from immigrants should be seen as valuable for the purposes of gauging potential community strengths and weakness in attracting and retaining immigrants and strategies that may be employed for such initiatives.

It needs to be stressed that the community/regional case studies each offer a snapshot in time, a collection of impressions and commentary on immigration goals, challenges and responses at a particular point on the continuum of attraction, settlement, and retention. As such, findings are historical and impressionistic and meant to prove instructive for further research and policy considerations, facilitate collaboration between communities

and government and initiate contact between communities and immigrants, all for the purposes of strengthening efforts directed towards regional immigration, settlement and retention.

For details about each of the four communities/regions studied during this project, please refer to the individual Manitoba Rural Immigration Community Case Studies for each community/region (these are available by contacting the Rural Development Institute at Brandon University or from their website: www.brandonu.ca/rdi). Resources utilized during the development of the four case studies can be found in the Appendix.

Issues in Rural Immigration: Lessons, Challenges and Responses

During the project, an initial series of working papers of findings was developed in collaboration with personnel from LIM and the communities being studied. This material was then offered during two sessions in Brandon, Manitoba at the end of April:

- to participants at the "Canadian Rural Revitalization Foundation-Rural Development Institute (CRRF-RDI) National Rural Think Tank 2005- Immigration and Rural Canada: Research and Practice"; and

- to Manitoba community representatives attending the "Developing a Community Immigration Strategy" seminar held by RDI and LIM at Manitoba's Rural Forum.

At the latter, representatives from RDI, LIM and the communities involved also presented findings of the study. Further consultation with LIM and the communities in question was sought to develop this document into its present form.

The following lessons, challenges and responses to rural immigration have been developed from the findings in Winkler, Steinbach, Parkland Region and Portage la Prairie. The four communities/regions represent different stages on the "attraction-settlement-retention" continuum and therefore offer a multitude of lessons and practices based on the diversity of challenges and opportunities they have to offer on the theme of rural immigration.

General Lessons, Recommendations and Observations

Though immigrants may trickle in smaller numbers to rural communities, **achieving a critical mass increases the potential for sustained immigration flows and settlement**. Such movements, however, are not without attendant difficulties and are more the result of some planned, strategic intervention than a naturally occurring phenomenon, except perhaps in cases where a community's economic state is strong enough to encourage immigration independent of a concerted community strategy. Significant immigration to a particular rural centre causes spill over effects in surrounding areas.

Identifying and formalizing roles of the people responsible for immigration in a community and determining processes assist in the stages of immigrant arrival, settlement and integration. Rural communities encounter persistent challenges to providing appropriate services for immigrants due to issues of scale, resources and expertise. Connecting immigrants to appropriate service provision is also challenging. Wider immigration streams may lead to gaps in information concerning who is arriving to an area and provide challenges to service provision. Feedback mechanisms are crucial to connect organizations and individuals that have contact with immigrants to those responsible for community integration or program development.

Immigrants benefit immensely from and seek as much information as possible, including that on the general community, contact people, service provision, available employment and wage structure, credential recognition and housing.

Immigration strategies require an eye to long-term settlement and successful integration of new arrivals. Prior to witnessing arrivals, it is best to be proactive in determining and addressing, as much as possible, what are the potential issues in immigrant settlement and integration and the requirements of both the arriving population and community. Though identifying a community's needs and desired outcomes is required in developing a community immigration strategy, it is important to consider all paths to attain such goals. For example, business development can result from the arrival of larger streams of skilled workers in some communities.

Immigrants arrive with complex and varied motivations, expectations, needs and modes of living. This remains important for communities to recognize when considering exploring/utilizing immigration strategies. Many immigrant families have moved to rural areas out of a concern for the security, wellbeing and future prospects of their children. Social isolation may lead to adverse effects on an immigrant's wellbeing, lessen the likelihood of retention and increase the demand for additional services.

Jobs remain crucial in attracting and retaining immigrants. It is important to identify some of the potential challenges around work scenarios for new arrivals: limitations to advancement and finding desired employment due to language and credentials recognition issues, the opportunities of suitable employment in some areas, one or several member(s) of the family being dissatisfied with work prospects and relying on the capacity of a single earner. Also, it is important for a region to consider its absorptive capacity in terms of employment and be clear about what can be offered.

Manitoba's Provincial Nominee Program (PNP) serves as a valuable tool for rural businesses otherwise unable to satisfy their human resource needs, enabling businesses to access skills and knowledge that are difficult to attain in local labour pools. However, the wait between signing a job offer for an immigrant and that individual's arrival is difficult for some businesses.. Also, general streams of immigration have the potential to assist more of an area's businesses than those who specifically use the PNP alone, though issues of community capacity need to be considered.

Communities need to challenge some of the implicit assumptions about their cultural and linguistic capacity prior to initiating an immigration strategy that targets a particular demographic. This involves investigating the extent to which a particular national/linguistic group, if prevalent in the region, remains closely tied to both cultural and language practices. This includes ascertaining to what degree language might be used in a community to facilitate the transition of a targeted immigrant group. It may be that expectations exceed capabilities.

Language affects integration success, and arrivals may be surprised at the extent to which English is required in a community, even when the community contains a significant number who speak their first language.

New arrivals are generally impressed with outreach and volunteer efforts on their behalf by settlement workers, English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers, church communities, neighbours and the community at large. Due to this positive impression, new arrivals often express a willingness to assist other new arrivals.

Personal ties and encounters facilitate stronger linkages, identification and interest with a region. Family, friends, religious communities, overseas contacts, promotional visits and information sessions by government and consultants, as well as community visits can all increase the likelihood of immigration. Furthermore, such connections provide a tangible and accessible "human face" upon and after arrival in the destined community, thus easing the settlement process. Connecting to the wider community, or to one's national, linguistic, cultural or religious community appears to facilitate retention in small towns.

It is important to accurately gauge and understand immigrants' activity in community life and motivations for living in a given community. The extent to which immigrants desire to integrate into community/Canadian life varies considerably. The lack of such a desire should not be construed or interpreted negatively by communities and their inhabitants, as some immigrants may identify strongly with ethnic, religious or cultural sub-communities and networks that lend to a relative degree of autonomy from the wider community.

Challenges and Responses

A.   Developing an Immigration Strategy

CHALLENGE: Attracting immigrants to rural communities

Attracting immigrants to rural communities remains difficult. Canadian statistics display that immigrants overwhelmingly choose to live in Canada's largest cities: 94 percent of immigrants who arrived in Canada in the 1990s were living in Canada's census metropolitan areas (Statistics Canada, 2003).

Response:

Focus on the existing and compelling reasons for many to live in rural settings, including the availability of land, the quality of schools, safe, clean and friendly communities, low cost of living, outdoor recreation opportunities and an overall high quality of life. Motivations in moving to rural areas are often fueled by concerns for the welfare and future prospects of children. Tailoring a message around such motivations and including school division personnel in recruitment and message development is worth exploring.

Accurately convey a message that speaks to a community/region's strengths. The depth/relevance of such a message is enhanced by feedback from immigrants who have already settled.

CHALLENGE: Misinformation and lack of knowledge

Misinformation and a lack of knowledge about a rural area are impediments to recruitment strategies.

Response:

Encourage visits to rural areas/communities by prospective immigrants to allow for first hand knowledge and a visceral response to that area. This may increase the attractiveness of the community/area.

Build recruitment strategies around conveying the positive experiences of immigrants who have already settled in a region. Determine all motivating factors in relation to settling in an area and what aspects of life immigrants enjoy in particular. These may be more subtle and varied than what long time residents may assume to be the predominant drawing features of the region. **Tap into immigrants' established networks** with the area they have departed and facilitate information flows to friends and relatives and thereby increase the new community's visibility overseas across certain networks.

CHALLENGE: Resources

Successfully attracting immigrants, even small numbers, requires significant resources and may present challenges to rural communities. The process required for developing and implementing an immigration strategy may be difficult to sustain.

Response:

Develop and maintain a positive working relationship with Manitoba Labour and Immigration. LIM has displayed considerable willingness to engage communities and discuss their particular immigration needs and the strategies to address these. This remains an attractive and reasonable first step in developing a community immigration strategy, as appropriate information and opportunities can be accessed from the Government of Manitoba for immigration purposes.

Ensure a clear understanding of the programs and supports available, including what materials are accessible and who may be contacted for further assistance. Communities need not enter the process without the knowledge of existing supports and lessons.

Access a broader range of experience and expertise on the matter of immigration so as to allow for more effective utilization of available resources, rather than "reinventing the wheel". Similarly, resource sharing between those involved in immigration processes themselves, as well as with those seeking to develop wider community immigration strategies, is extremely helpful, particularly when strains on time, human and financial resources exist.

Immigration strategies require a champion, a consistent supporter to maintain momentum through the various stages of development and implementation. Serious consideration needs to be paid to the desired outcomes of an immigration strategy and the most suitable organizations/people to initiate, organize and sustain the strategy.

The community or region needs to investigate appropriate fits for arrivals and build on these and existing strengths. Consideration needs to be given to needs/opportunities at both a community and regional level.

CHALLENGE: Diverse needs

Immigrants will bring with them a diversity of needs, many of which cannot be known until arrival and settlement.

Response:

Identify, inform and involve key community stakeholders - politicians, business, education, health, churches, volunteer sector - throughout the development and implementation of immigration strategies. This is crucial for preparing the community to respond to the diverse needs of immigrants.

CHALLENGE: Involving the wider community

Potential grounds for misunderstanding exist when the wider community has little say in the process of immigration.

Response:

Generate and maintain momentum and have the community firmly behind the initiative. Having as much of the community informed about and on board with the process of immigration leads to greater success. It is important to have a positive experience with immigration from the beginning.

Preparing a community in advance for immigration through public consultations and education helps to minimize misunderstandings and misinformation. It remains important to convey clear information about immigration processes (for example, that these are undertaken for the vitality of the community, that immigrants have been invited and welcomed by the community for a specific purpose), as well as to combat the unfortunate criticisms (such as "immigrants steal OUR jobs", "immigrants abuse OUR system", "immigrants drive up housing prices", etc.).

B.   Settlement, Service Provision and Retention

CHALLENGE: Resources and services

For rural communities, it remains challenging to offer services with a sufficient degree of specialization. Programming comparable to that available in larger centers remains difficult to ensure due to challenges in providing human and material resources and complexities around developing and delivering models suitable to rural challenges.

Successfully settling and retaining immigrants, even small numbers, requires significant resources and may present challenges to rural communities, particularly those who do not have a critical mass of immigrants to warrant full time funding and programming.

Response:

Identify existing agencies/people who can provide resources/skills needed for settlement and establishing partnerships with these and other community stakeholders for the delivery of services.

Creatively employ volunteer services to meet settlement needs. However, it should be stressed that this requires substantial human resources to coordinate effectively.

Regional strategies address service gaps and resource shortfalls, though **consistent and reliable organization at a community level** remains critical to a community's success in immigration initiatives.

CHALLENGE: Information gaps

Settlement efforts are hampered by the considerable information gaps between immigrant and community. Such gaps prove extremely frustrating for immigrants.

Response:

Both immigrants and communities benefit from having **one visible, consistent point person/office to organize and distribute information and to access information from**, on the matter of immigration and settlement.

Immigrants benefit immensely from having a reliable "friendly face"/phone number that can be accessed, and considerable benefits to settlement efforts are realized through a general strategy of outreach to new and recent immigrants. All efforts must be made to provide immigrants with appropriate information or access to appropriate information prior to, at and after arrival.

Develop intake procedures and feedback mechanisms to enable settlement efforts. Feedback mechanisms allow the broad community to assist in connecting immigrants to the necessary services/people.

CHALLENGE: Immigrant mobility

Immigrants are highly mobile and inclined to seek out situations that suit their needs.

Response:

Develop retention strategies as a component of wider immigration strategies, with the intent of providing the most positive experience possible for arriving immigrants.

CHALLENGE: Isolation

Isolation remains an issue for many immigrants.

Response:

Provide outreach and attempt to connect immigrants to services and the wider life of the community. Communities must be cognizant of the effects of social isolation in rural communities for immigrants and make efforts to connect those affected to appropriate services.

CHALLENGE: Language

Immigrants arrive with language concerns that may be particularly difficult to satisfy in smaller communities.

Response:

Provide essential services in a foreign language if a critical mass exists.

Rural areas need to be creative to meet all immigrant settlement and integration needs, including language provision. This provision can include offering flexible classes that respond to needs and schedules, employing volunteer resources as tutors or conversation partners to meet diverse English needs and identifying resource people willing to assist with translation and interpretation needs. Making use of time/space efficiencies, such as delivering workplace ESL on site after work, leads to higher numbers using language services.

CHALLENGE: Employment

Though many immigrants have smooth transitions to new workplaces and rewarding employment situations, issues related to employment remain for many new arrivals, including credentials recognition, unmet expectations and language concerns.

Response:

Employers and communities must clearly convey to immigrants before they arrive what jobs are available and what immigrant workers can and cannot do because of language and credentials concerns.

Immigration strategies initiated to meet employment needs must have a broader social component to address issues of education and integration in the community and workplace.

Employers must be aware of potentially divergent impressions around work habits, workplace dynamics and additional needs of immigrant workers.

Developing projects to address issues surrounding credentials recognition and skills, such as the pilot project for immigrant truck drivers in Steinbach, is a positive step.

Program Opportunities and Research Needs for Rural Immigration

In April, the Rural Development Institute, in conjunction with the Canadian Rural Revitalization Foundation (CRRF), held the CRRF-RDI National Rural Think Tank 2005 on the theme of immigration and rural Canada. Fifty researchers, policy personnel and practitioners with an interest in the theme participated. The following is a synopsis of the program opportunities and research needs for rural immigration, derived from the day's sessions.

1- Attraction and Retention

Research Needs

- Explore and research knowledge gaps. Do we really know where immigrants go in rural areas? Why do they go and what keeps them there?
- Research the experiences of immigrants in urban areas. Are there lessons to be learned for rural? Are there better fits in rural for immigrants, particularly those experiencing difficulty in an urban environment?
- Explore links between urban and rural areas and the phenomenon of second wave immigration. Can immigrants be "poached" from larger communities?
- Examine resettlement experiences. Why do immigrants move? Why do they leave rural areas?
- Examine what happens to immigrants socially and economically when they are in rural areas.
- Develop a profile of immigrants most likely to move and stay in rural areas. How can this assist strategizing around promotion and targeted recruitment?
- Explore potential links with international students. What are the needs of international students and where might they fit best in a rural employment and social environment?
- Determine impressions of rural Canada. What images of rural Canada do immigrants have? How might these be linked with a marketing message? Are (potential) immigrants cognizant of the range of services available in rural Canada or transposing images of rural poverty from other experiences overseas? What do immigration officers from Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) know about rural Canada and what message are they conveying to immigrants?
- Examine intergenerational migration trends. Do children in immigrant families who settle in rural Canada stay, or are they reproducing patterns of rural out migration?
- Determine attitudes of potential targeted immigrants to inform immigration strategies (i.e., if Germans focus on geography, build an appropriate message that communicates area's strength and speaks to this).
- Research what are the minimum service levels required to attract and retain immigrants.

Program Opportunities

- Expose international students to rural areas. This may include home stay programs during the early stay of international students.
- Challenge predominant (and often unflattering) perceptions of rural areas. Increase the profile of rural Canada overseas and within Canada. Broaden messages/images of Canada that reach prospective immigrants by highlighting prosperous and vibrant rural areas.
- Develop and capitalize on tourism initiatives. Generate interest in immigration to rural areas through tourism first. Attempt to attach tourists to place in rural areas (i.e., through the purchasing of homes).
- Explore cohort and cluster immigration to rural areas in addition to families and individuals.
- Develop web presence for smaller communities.
- Create an inventory of rural retention strategies/successes.

2- Policy

Research Needs

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

Program Opportunities

- Promote rural immigration as an ongoing focus of Statistics Canada and CIC
- Involve "front line" people from rural areas in policy development on immigration, engaging rural communities and governance bodies.

3- Community Services / Supports / Tools

Research Needs

- Promote research for building local expertise on immigration processes and determining effective community based planning.
- Evaluate the success of 'tool kits' developed for small centres and rural areas.
- Conduct a comparative study and evaluation of existing programs and strategies for rural immigration.
- Determine whether the needs of recent immigrants are being met in rural communities and to what extent communities remain engaged with immigrants after arrival.

Program Opportunities

- Further the link between (urban-based) immigration settlement agencies and rural areas, and sensitize these agencies to rural needs and realities.

- Invest in support to enable communities to identify needs and opportunities and conduce "pre-immigration" work in communities.

- Encourage and support community "self-promotion".

- Develop "safe guide entities" to care for and guide new immigrants, as some have been treated poorly, creating negative images of rural Canada (i.e., receiving misinformation during housing purchases and experiencing difficulties in establishing businesses).

- Encourage provinces to promote communities abroad.

4- Employment and Business Development

Research Needs

- Research into the structural barriers that impede efforts to meet labour and human resource needs through immigration. How can human resource needs across the country inform immigration strategy?

- Determine whether rural employment capacity accommodates the needs of multiple family members. What is the impact of rural economies/employment on immigrant families?

- Research Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SME) to determine: how many are started by immigrants; by refugees; and how many Canadians this employs.

- Research wage and position mobility of immigrants over time.

- Investigate what is required to attract immigrant entrepreneurs to rural Canada.

- Assess the economic impact of immigrants in rural communities: economic growth, business development, wage increase/stagnation.

- Research catchment area around urban and rural non-adjacent areas and the economic interdependencies between urban and rural.

Program Opportunities

- Investigate what opportunities exist to bring knowledge-based industries into communities.

- Develop an inventory of accreditation pilot projects (example: Steinbach Trucking Pilot) and lessons learned from these. Are there transferable models?

- Develop a pilot project allowing temporary workers to become immigrants to rural areas.

- Provide greater opportunity and incentive for immigrant entrepreneurs. Provide funding and opportunities for those immigrant entrepreneurs who have already been successful to identify and bring in others.

- Develop "Team Canada Rural", promoting a stronger rural element to international trade missions.

- Encourage rural communities to politicize the issue of credentials recognition.

- Develop bridge programs for immigrants who have no need for Employment Insurance/Social Assistance, but substantial issues surrounding credentials recognition.

5- Social / Cultural Cohesion

Research Needs

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

Program Opportunities

- Develop a pilot project bringing immigrants to First Nations communities, promoting openness and exchange of cultures.
- Encourage pro-immigration communities to champion the benefits of immigration.

Conclusion

While many rural communities are looking to immigration as a means to stimulate economic development and increase population, immigration is not a panacea for the challenges they face. At best, immigration may serve as an important facet of well conceived community/regional development strategies, but only when stakeholders are fully aware of and prepared to meet both opportunities and challenges with equal enthusiasm.

The Manitoba Rural Immigration Community Case Studies was an initiative to first determine and then analyze some of these opportunities and challenges associated with immigration in rural environments in the province. It is hoped that not only will the findings prove informative but that the initiative will serve as a catalyst in developing knowledge, networks and communication on the theme. This is part of the wider objective to assist communities in developing expertise on the matter of rural immigration, making informed decisions and initiating and sustaining the efforts required for successful community integration strategies. Such efforts towards regional/rural immigration can be supported by appropriate policy and research commitments.

References

Statistics Canada (2003). *Canada's Ethnocultural Portrait: The Changing Mosaic*. 2001
    Census Analysis Series. Cat. No. 96F0030XIE2001008. Ottawa, Ontario

Appendix: Resource List and Contact Information

Parkland

- Settlement Guide

  Guide provides information on community life and contacts to assist newcomers access area services. The settlement guide is being developed and adapted for a number of communities in the Parkland Region.

For further information on material and Parkland's immigration program contact:

Margaret Durnin, Coordinator
Parkland Immigration and Language Regional Services
Box 131   Inglis, MB R0J 0X0
Telephone/Fax: (204) 564-2102

Portage la Prairie

- Welcome letter sent to all arriving provincial nominees through recruitment office

- Portage la Prairie International Agency Information Brochure

- Portage la Prairie Orientation Manual

  Extensive document providing general information about the community, as well as information about community organizations, services and other needs of new residents.

- Portage la Prairie International Interactive CD

  An electronic version of the orientation manual.

- City Website: http://www.city.portage-la-prairie.mb.ca/.

- International Website is being established

For further information on material and Portage la Prairie's immigration program contact:

Debbie Bachmeier
Skills Link Coordinator
Telephone: (204) 239-8327   Fax: (204) 239-1582
dbachmeier@city-plap.com

Steinbach

- Settlement Office Brochure

  Briefly outlines settlement services available and contact information for the settlement office. Available in English and High German.

For further information on material and Steinbach's immigration program contact:

Kim Shukla, Executive Director
Steinbach Chamber of Commerce
225 Reimer Ave. Steinbach, MB R5G 1N4
Telephone: (204) 326-9566   Fax: (204) 346-3638
E-mail: ks.stbcofc@mts.net

Winkler

- Town of Altona website: http://www.townofaltona.com/

- Town of Morden website: http://www.mordenmb.com/

     (Contains information on immigration)

- City of Winkler website: http://www.cityofwinkler.ca

- *Welcome to Winkler* Booklet

  Offers newcomers orientation information on essential services, including their location and phone numbers. Available in English and High German.

- Settlement Office Brochures

  Briefly outlines settlement services available and contact information for the settlement workers and employment facilitator. Available in English and High German.

For further information on material and Winkler's immigration program contact:

Laurie Sawatzky, Program Coordinator
South Central Settlement & Employment Services
100 - 571 Main Street, Winkler MB R6W 1G3
Telephone: (204) 325-4059   Fax: (204) 325-4158

Pat Gerber-Pauls and Joyce Bergen, Settlement Workers:
Telephone: (204) 325-4068

Phyllis Boulton, Employment Facilitator:
Telephone: (204) 325-4085