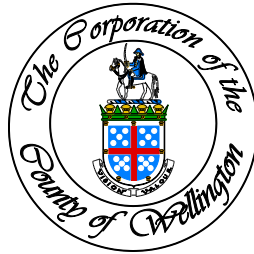


Wellington County Welcoming and Inclusion Assessment Survey

Key Findings and Actions



**Economic Development Division
County of Wellington
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Introduction

The County of Wellington is located in southwestern Ontario with a land area of 2,610 km² and a population of 98,860. Predominantly rural in nature, the County is comprised of seven member municipalities and surrounds the City of Guelph. The member municipalities include the Township of Centre Wellington, Town of Erin, Township of Guelph Eramosa, Township of Mapleton, Town of Minto, Township of Puslinch and the Township of Wellington North.

Since 2015, the County has been actively promoting itself as a place to live and work, through its Global Talent Attraction Initiative. However, despite ongoing efforts, gaps still remain locally in terms of community and employer engagement with newcomers and immigrant communities. Some employers have not yet fully tapped into the newcomer talent pool, or recognize the important skills and experiences immigrants bring to the workforce. Likewise, many residents do not understand nor appreciate the important role that new immigrants play in helping revitalize their communities.

Therefore, as part of ongoing efforts to attract and retain more newcomers, the Economic Development Division conducted a Welcoming and Inclusion Assessment Survey to help determine the extent to which Wellington County communities are welcoming to newcomers, and to offer recommendations that will help living and working in the County more attractive for newcomers.

The Survey was completed in fulfillment of the County's obligation under the Contribution Agreement with the IRCC. It was also guided by the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association (AUMA) model, Characteristics of a Welcoming Community, Mutual Intercultural Relations in Plural Societies Interview Survey, Measuring Rural Community Vitality Newcomer Engagement and Social Capital in Rural Communities, and other scholarly documents.

Methodology

The Survey was conducted using two main approaches - a mixed research approach which included the review of secondary data and the collection of primary data using quantitative and qualitative survey instruments, and a convenience non-probability sampling approach which means that only respondents that were willing and available participated in the survey. Two online questionnaires were administered from July 6 to August 6, 2021. One survey focused on Newcomers and Residents, and the other targeted Businesses and Organizations. The questionnaires were designed to collect data on key constructs of a welcoming and inclusive communities, including diversity and inclusion, social capital and community support services. Respondents perceptions were drawn on many of the constructs.

The quantitative component of the survey, interviewed persons drawn from businesses, support services organizations, newcomers and long-term residents.

Survey Sample

A total of 327 newcomers and residents participated and 65 businesses and organizations participated in the survey. In addition, 18 individuals were interviewed (8 business/organization and 7 newcomers/resident) to help compliment the quantitative data with some qualitative ones. Of the 327 respondents on the newcomer and resident survey, 105 or 32% were newcomers while 222 or 68% are long term residents. For the 65 participants on the business and organization survey 32 or 49% were elected official/board member, 14 or 21.5% were manager/supervisor and 15 or 23.1% were staff member.

Limitations of the Survey

Since the convenience non-probability sampling approach survey method was used, it meant that only participants who were conveniently available and willing to participate in the surveys did.

Given the characteristics of the respondents, special care must be taken about what generalizations are made with the survey data. For example, the Business and Organization respondents comprised elected officials or board members (49%), managers or supervisors (22%), staff members (23%) and volunteers (5%). Similarly, on the Newcomer and Resident Survey 32% of the respondents were newcomers. However, 93% of the newcomer were Canadian citizens who moved from other cities.

The designing of the Questionnaires using a single language (English) excluded some residents who are not highly competent reading English from participating.

Some Key Definitions

For the purpose of the Survey, the following definitions were used:

Immigrants - persons who are landed immigrants or permanent residents for 5 years or less. Such persons have been granted the right to live in Canada permanently by immigration authorities.

Newcomers - persons who come from outside the community and chose to move in order to work and /or live in your community. They can either be Canadian citizens, new immigrants or permanent residents, temporary workers or international students.

A welcoming community - a physical location (a town, city, community) which seeks to serve the needs of newcomers/new immigrants by making them feel valued, respected and a sense of belonging.

Inclusion - exists when all residents can fully participate in the various activities of the community despite his or her gender, skin colour, race, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, education, income level, religion, heritage, or physical or mental ability or many other factors.

Survey Results and Analysis

Profile of Survey Participants					
Newcomer and Resident			Business and Organization		
Categories	Frequency	%	Categories	Frequency	%
Immigration Status			Role		
Canadian Citizen	304	93	Elected Official/Board Member	32	49.2
Permanent Resident	19	5.8	Manager/Supervisor	14	21.5
Student visa	1	0.3	Staff Member	15	23.1
Work visa	3	0.9	Volunteer	3	4.6
TOTAL	327	100	Other	1	1.5
			TOTAL	65	100
Age (Years)			Age (Years)		
18 – 24	16	4.9	18 – 24	1	2
25 – 34	59	18	25 – 34	8	12
35 – 44	83	25.4	35 – 44	13	20
45 – 54	49	15	45 – 54	17	26
55 – 64	59	18	55 – 64	14	22
65+	60	18	65+	8	12
Missing	1	0.3	Missing	4	6
Gender			Gender		
Male	85	26	Male	28	43.1
Female	234	71.6	Female	32	49.2
Other	8	2.4	Other	5	7.6

Key Findings and Recommendations

Talent Attraction

- 105 newcomers or 32% of the respondents participated in the survey. Of that group, 88 or 84% held Canadian citizenship. The remainder of the 17 newcomers comprised of 13 or 12.4% Permanent Resident, 3 or 2.9% Temporary Workers and 1 or 1% International Student.
- Respondents on the Newcomer and Residents Questionnaire said the top three reasons for choosing to live in Wellington County were: ‘Can achieve desired lifestyle or quality of life’ (53%), ‘Family Ties/Connections’ (42%) and ‘Feeling of safety’ (35%).
- On the Business and Organization Questionnaire, respondents identified the three leading factor that will attract newcomers to Wellington County as: ‘Small town feel’ (57%), ‘Great for family’ (52%), and ‘Safety/Attractive job opportunities’ (48%).

- Respondents affirmed that most of the new immigrants that came to Wellington County are coming either through the sponsorship route or family/friendship connections.

Recommendation

- Target major Canadian cities using a branding strategy that will attract newcomers to come to the County.
- Leverage the characteristic features of small town feel, great for family, good quality lifestyle and feeling of safety as marketing propositions for the County.
- Encourage and support sponsors and residents to help attract newcomers to the County.
- Advocate for easier access and processing of immigration programmes.

Welcoming Community

- Approximately 75% of the newcomers interviewed said Wellington County is a welcoming place. However, the remaining 25% said that the communities where they reside or do business was not so welcoming.
- A few newcomers interviewed reported that they feel alone and disconnected in the communities where they live.
- 75% of respondents agreed that they feel culturally secure in the County, and 33% believed that the County is more welcoming than other communities in Canada.
- 25% agreed that Wellington County has developed the services required to address increased immigration.
- According to 34 responses on the Businesses and Organization Questionnaire, it was suggested that businesses in the County should provide good/higher paying jobs to help newcomers feel more welcome. “The main issue is that they pay inadequate wages to cover living costs. So what ends up happening is newcomers eventually leave for greener pastures”.
- 94% of business and organization respondents indicated that a relationship exists with newcomers at varying levels. 35% reported that the relationship is very active.
- Three out of four business and organization leaders (including 1 newcomer business owner) reported that they found it very hard to feel accepted as an outsider, and that understanding the Canadian culture can be a major challenge.
- Some organization interviewees said that there is mixed messaging at the local government level regarding new immigrants.

Recommendation

- Encourage and support community-based welcoming initiatives to help welcome and connect newcomers to the communities.
- Encourage the establishment and support welcoming initiatives in the municipalities with a goal of supporting newcomer initiatives.

- Encourage and support the strengthening of community based groups to help them participate in helping make our communities more welcoming.

Employment

- 67% of respondents said they were employed, while 9% said they were not. 24% of respondents were retired.
- 54% said that their current job is not aligned with their training/experiences while 12% said it is aligned.
- The business and organization respondents said the three leading factors affecting their ability to engage more with newcomers were: 'Unsuitable job opportunities' (33%), 'Language barriers' (31.3%), and 'Lack of transportation' (28.4%).
- Some of the businesses reported that it is difficult to know the skillsets of newcomers that are in the community, except when they apply for a job.
- All the employers interviewed reported that new immigrant employees are generally excellent, committed and respectful. Some of employers interviewed said they are committed to help new immigrants make a life in Canada.

Recommendation

- Provide support to HR Teams to help businesses emphasize more on the experiences and transferrable skills and less on Canadian experience when recruiting newcomers.
- Provide information on the education and skillset of newcomers to the community both for the attention of residents and businesses.
- Encourage and support businesses in building diverse and inclusive workplaces.
- Engage with job fairs to help connect businesses and newcomers.

Education/Schooling

- Almost 45% of the respondents either completed or is enrolled in university and post graduate level education. 38% either completed or is enrolled in college and trade schools and 3.7% had some high school and primary school level education.
- The percentage of newcomers with university level education was slightly higher than long-term residents, 40.3% of the long-term residents compared to 54.5% of the newcomers.
- Similarly, 50% of long-term residents who are permanent residents attained university level education compared to 54% of newcomers. 33% of the temporary workers attained university level education.

Recommendation

- Increase awareness of the educational credentials of newcomers that are moving in to live in the County communities.
- Encourage employers to recognize the international educational credentials that newcomers possess.

- Support newcomers with up to date information about the career paths in the County and the required education and training.
- Share information on labour market needs with newcomers pre and post-arrival.

Language

- 92.7% of respondents reported that English is their primary language and 95% indicated that they can communicate with it very well.
- Some of the new immigrants interviewed said they speak very little English, although it is a great improvement since arriving in Canada.

Recommendation

- Enquire about the current English Language training programme that the County now offers in order to make it more accessible by those who need the training.
- Encourage access to further English training either after work hours and or on weekends.

Difficulties and Challenges

- 52% of respondents rated 'Making Friends' as their greatest difficulty experienced from a social capital perspective. This was followed by 'Communicating with people of different ethnic groups' (43%), and 'The pace of life' (40%). The area with the least difficulty was 'Worshipping' with 9%.
- Newcomers, especially new immigrants, also reported that they had difficulty 'Dealing with Canada weather/climate' (79%), 'Obtaining housing' (95%), 'Finding transport' (68%), and 'Finding food they enjoy' (58%).
- Some of the new immigrants interviewed believed that there are some residents in the communities that are harbouring negative views against certain ethnic groups.
- Internet service in some areas of Wellington County is sometimes very slow. Most new immigrants stay connected with relatives and friends who are overseas through the internet.
- Many of the new immigrants interviewed lamented that there are not many leisure activities (sports, entertainment, etc) taking place in some of the communities. There are not many places to go apart from work.
- Some respondents reported that finding relevant information in the County can be difficult. Settlement Officers provide access to some of the information, however they are not adept with all the information newcomers need.
- Respondents overwhelmingly recognized that Wellington County libraries are excellent sources for accessing critical information because they are spread out throughout the County and are staffed with information management professionals.

Recommendation

- Make more effort to educate the community about the culture and traditions of newcomers.
- Encourage and support initiatives to help newcomers connect with community residents.
- Support and help promote the libraries services in the communities as central information centres.
- Help promote more positive messaging about newcomer in the media.
- Make information on the sources of critical information about the County and services more easily available.
- Collaborate and share information with key partners including realtors and business' HR teams.
- Support and encourage the development of affordable and appropriate housing through collaboration between municipalities and developers.

Diversity and Inclusion

- 95% of the responses on the survey agreed that 'We should promote equality among groups regardless of ethnic origin'. 84% agreed that 'It is good to have people from different ethnic groups living in the County', and 80% agreed that 'New immigrants and other newcomers should maintain their own cultural traditions, but also adopt those of Canadians'.
- 18% of the respondents agreed that 'I have been teased or insulted because of my ethnic or cultural background', and 8% agreed 'I have been threatened or attacked because of my ethnic background'.
- According to respondents, the policies and practices of businesses and organizations in Wellington County are generally trending positively in support of diversity and inclusion. For example:
 - 75% of respondents agreed 'Our organization's policy and practices are supportive of diversity and inclusion initiatives';
 - 77% agreed 'Our managers support the implementation of diversity and inclusion initiatives'; and
 - 40% agreed 'The organization's committees or work teams are usually made up of diverse staff and or resident'
- Similarly, the image and reputation of businesses and organizations surveyed indicate that their support for diversity and inclusion is also trending positively. For example:
 - 55% agreed 'The organization has a good reputation for supporting workplace diversity';
 - 68% agreed 'There is a process to bring forward discrimination concerns'; and
 - 82% agreed 'Staff are able to professionally work with diverse clients and coworkers'.

Recommendation

- Encourage initiatives that promote greater inclusion in workplaces, schools and neighborhoods.
- Increase collaboration between community groups to promote awareness and celebration of inclusion and diversity.
- Engage business HR teams on tapping into immigrant talent creating a more diverse and inclusive workplace
- Host community forums with business to share information on how their business can benefit from diversity and inclusion
- Encourage multicultural events to help residents and newcomers better appreciate and value each other.

Business and Organization Support

- Several businesses reported that the process of bringing overseas immigrants to help solve labour shortage challenges through the Labour Market Impact Assessment (LMIA) and Temporary Foreign Workers (TFW) Programmes is too tedious and time consuming.
- Most of the businesses and organizations said they are aware of the services to help settle newcomers offered by Settlement Officers. However, they expressed the concern that the settlement programme in its current form is unable to address some of the most pressing needs of new immigrants –such as affordable housing, accessing public transportation and achieving permanent residence status.
- 65% of business and organization respondents said they are not aware of the different immigration programmes through which they can recruit newcomers.
- 55% said they have not collaborated with support services organizations such as 2ndChance, Agilec, Settlement Officers in Wellington County as a source for recruiting newcomers.

Recommendation

- Facilitate greater collaboration between businesses and services organizations on helping to better support the integration of newcomers.
- Facilitate initiatives to help businesses understand and access the immigration programmes available.
- Encourage and support business' HR teams to embrace more inclusive policies in their hiring.

Wellington County Welcoming and Inclusion Action Plan 2022-2023

General Observations

A brief environmental scan of Wellington County municipalities revealed that there is generally a lack of a clear procedure or framework, to support the welcoming of newcomers to the County.

Access to affordable rental accommodation, public transportation, and in some cases appropriate jobs, remain major challenges and are affecting Wellington County's capacity to both attract and retain newcomers.

There are both support institutions and individuals in each of the municipalities in Wellington County that have some experiences interacting with newcomers, either through sponsorship or providing settlement services or support.

Prior to the onset of the COVID 19 Pandemic, most of the communities had events which either directly or indirectly helped to welcome and connect newcomers with the communities. The Town of Minto provides a regular and consistent newcomer welcoming initiative programme.

Awareness of when newcomers and residents come into the community is generally unknown by the Economic Development staff in our municipalities, since there are no tracking systems that provide this information. However, Economic Development staff and leadership are supportive of efforts to help their communities become more welcoming to newcomers.

Community Welcoming Initiatives

Goal: To help newcomers feel welcome and included in Wellington County communities through social, economic and cultural activities.

Actions:

1. County to develop a framework/checklist to support community groups to ensure community events are welcoming and inclusive events.
2. Develop a County welcome package with the support of local municipalities so information can be customized for each municipality and packages can be provided through the local municipal offices.
3. Encourage the restart of local Welcome Wagons.
4. Initiate and support mentorship and volunteer opportunities that connect new residents to established community members and groups.
5. Support community events that help connect newcomers and residents in the communities.

6. Investigate the development of a Multicultural festival that showcases different aspects of Wellington County communities and newcomers culture.
7. Promote and organize community conversations around immigration, diversity, equity, inclusion and discrimination.
8. Develop a media campaign to tell the stories of local immigrants highlighting both positive and negative experiences of newcomers and long-term residents, to help generate conversation and better understand immigration issues.
9. Develop a Welcoming Week. A weeklong promotion throughout Wellington County to promote diversity and inclusion. Activities such as tours, cultural displays, events, music, cultural exchange and the sharing of first-hand stories on immigration.

Collaboration with Businesses and Employment Support Agencies

Goal: To support newcomers in achieving high levels of labour market attachment thereby contributing to their economic prosperity as well as Wellington County as a whole.

Actions:

1. Host workshops for newcomers in Wellington County to provide employment resources and the opportunity to network, share experiences and ask questions.
2. Host an event to educate and share best practices on workforce diversification and newcomer employment with Wellington County employers and service providers.
3. Meet with businesses and provide workforce development support for newcomer and immigrant attraction efforts.
4. Participate with local businesses in newcomer job fairs to attract new workforce to Wellington County.
5. Encourage and support businesses in building diverse and inclusive workplaces.
6. Facilitate an Immigrant Entrepreneur Recognition Programme in Wellington County.
7. Participate and support workforce development projects through partner organizations.
8. Work with member municipalities and organizations outside of Wellington County to develop and locally implement best practices for workforce development.

Easier Access to Critical Information and Other Difficulties/Challenges

Goal: To ensure that the relevant information is accessible and shared across sectors, using multiple networks and channels, to facilitate equitable settlement outcomes and enhanced service coordination.

Actions:

1. Develop a Wellington County Newcomer and Immigration landing page that acts as a resource of local information and connections for newcomers, residents and employment service providers.

2. Promote the various types of immigration information relevant to Wellington County businesses to inform and educate.
3. Support the capacity of Wellington County libraries to help serve newcomers and residents as a physical location to find key information.

Local Government and Business Leadership

Goal: To provide strategic support to help make Wellington County communities more welcoming.

Actions:

1. Support the development of affordable housing and implementation of rural transportation and other major talent attraction initiatives in Wellington County.
2. Advocate to federal and provincial governments regarding the challenges and opportunities of attracting newcomers and immigrants to rural Ontario. Including easier access and processing of immigration programmes.
3. Continue to share federal and provincial immigration programmes information with employers and advocate for the benefit of welcoming newcomers, immigrants and new residents in the community.