

NPI digging into francophone population trends

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TIMMINS - The Northern Policy Institute is looking to have questions answered by summer students based in Timmins. Experience North is returning again this year, with work placements in North Bay, Fort Frances and Timmins.

NPI president Charles Cirtwill explained that two students hired for the summer in this city will look at the demographic profile of Northern Ontario's francophone population with more detail. They'll be looking to "get a sense of what the underlying trends are in terms of age, education (and) income" as well as where people are migrating from and what birth rates are.

"We've done a lot of that work for the overall population, and now we're doing a couple of sub-groups this summer," he said.

Summer policy analysts in North Bay will look at the nature and distribution of the Indigenous population, while Fort Frances students will explore labour market supply and demand.

Summer students in this city will be hosted by Collège Boréal.

“We’ve got a very strong francophone tradition, particularly in the Northeast, so you want to be able to look at the sustainability of those communities going forward, where are the strengths, and it ties into some of the things that we’re looking at in other fields, for example, both in terms of population attraction, are there services that are delivered in French that might make those communities a little more attractive to attract investment from other French communities,” said Cirtwill.

“One of the things that we hear on a regular basis is we’ve got a francophone population, particularly a young francophone population who don’t have the same educational options as the broader population, so the choices available to study in French are a little bit more limited. We’d like to be able to put some numbers around that.”

The NPI president said the results of the summer’s worth of research will eventually be published for interested parties to peruse – like tourism organizations.

“We’ve had some conversations with the tourism industry around getting a much clearer sense of either the demand or the supply of potential tourism services in French. That’ll be one of the areas that one of (the students) is working on in terms of trying to move from a qualitative sense of what’s out there to actually being able to identify in some sort of quantitative way the level of service, and whether there are opportunities for private investment,” Cirtwill said.

He explained the topics chosen for the summer are chosen the same way the Northern Policy Institute sets its research agenda.

“We spend a lot of our time talking to the people who live in Northern Ontario. We say we have 780,000 bosses, and what happens every quarter, is we take everything we’ve heard the last three months, we run it through what we call our ten filters, so there’s a cachement for everything we’ve heard from municipal people, whether that’s politicians, public servants, that type of thing, grassroots organizations is another filter, the federal side, the provincial side. Indigenous communities have their own filter.

“We come up with a list of 10 or 15 things that people in those particular areas are most interested in, then we combine them across the 10 sectors, and we end up with a list of ten priorities for us. That’s how we go about deciding what this summer is going to be, and in fact, what the organization itself is going to be looking at for the next 12 to 18 months.”

Cirtwill said there’s always a number of applicants from Southern Ontario.

“That’s great, because we’ve actually brought people to Northern Ontario and taught them things about the region, which is a huge boon.

“We’d love to see more applicants locally. I know there are parents out there who’d love to see their kids come home for the summer, and here’s a great opportunity for them to do it.”

Applications are being [accepted](#) until Jan. 31.