



Come North – Population Growth in Ontario's Northern Regions

Conference Report

Feb 2020

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Come North – Population Growth in Ontario’s Northern Regions

“Communities throughout rural and northern Canada are important to the growth and prosperity of our country...”

*- The Honourable Navdeep Bains,
Minister of Innovation, Science and
Industry*

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Executive Summary

Over 300 people representing almost 100 organizations gathered over six days in February 2020 to lay out a plan for population growth in Ontario's Northern Regions. First in the city of Temiskaming Shores, and then again in Thunder Bay, northerners discussed among themselves how to make their communities more welcoming.

Welcoming not only to new international arrivals but new arrivals from other parts of Canada, other parts of Ontario and, indeed, other Northern Ontario Regions. Welcoming as well to populations already living in our communities who do not feel welcome now. Population growth is not simply an exercise in addition after all, it also requires reducing any subtractions.

This document lays out short, medium, and long-term objectives for all Northern Ontario's Regions and their constituent communities. This report identifies 16 core themes and 18 separate action items to make Ontario's Northern Regions more welcoming.

Those themes and actions can be boiled down to five key points:

1. We need a plan.
2. We need a brand.
3. We need to work together.
4. We need people to provide services, not websites.
5. We need to monitor and update the plan, every year.

These five points should be reflected in the individual actions and strategies of every organization or community looking to grow the population in any of Ontario's Northern Regions.

COVID-19

This Report and the Action Plan it informs are the result of two conferences held just before the outbreak of COVID-19 in Canada. The economy and society that will be formed post COVID may be significantly different than the ones that existed pre-COVID. Or they may not.

One thing that is clear at this stage is that the impacts of COVID have re-emphasized the societal challenges this document highlights. Inclusive, welcoming communities that are devoid of racism and that provide opportunities for all members of society are critical to sustainable regions.

From a labour force perspective, COVID has yet to have impacted the overall demographic trends except, perhaps, to have accelerated them. Regular reports continue to come from businesses and business groups that jobs are still going unfilled. Employers still see this situation persisting well into the future.

Unemployment and lack of economic participation among First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples remain high. Increasing participation and encouraging retention among these populations represents the largest potential domestic contribution to our future well-being. Immigrants remain a major driver for our local economies. A decline in immigration would have significant impacts on our regions. Immigration targets for Canada continue to rise as a result, and population growth through immigration remains a priority of the federal and provincial governments.

COVID has definitely impacted the ability of affected organizations to carry out the actions discussed in this report. The timelines referenced here should, therefore, be considered advisory only. The overall plan, nevertheless, remains relevant, deliverable and indeed more pressing than ever.

Come north immediate action plan

1. The Come North Planning committee should be reconstituted as a Steering Committee to coordinate and monitor progress on these action items. The new committee should have no more than 15 members and be representative of Ontario's diverse northern regions.¹ Northern Policy Institute should coordinate this transition.
2. Wherever possible, immigration agencies should support and assist those working directly to facilitate reconciliation, and reconciliation efforts should actively include newcomers.
3. The Steering Committee, via one of its member organizations, should submit a proposal to FedNor to fund a coordinated marketing plan for Ontario's Northern Regions – this plan should reflect the themes and findings of the Come North event.
4. The Immigration portals should immediately be rebranded as “welcoming” portals to reflect the shift in focus from exclusively immigration, to retention, reconciliation, and migration.
5. The Timmins Local Immigration Partnership (LIP) should seek funding to update the Northeast Welcoming portal. This funding should include resources to put in place a staff position dedicated to keeping the community profiles and other resources on the portal up to date. The LIP should seek a partner organization to assist in populating and maintaining the retention/reconciliation side of the updated portal.
6. The Northwest Local Immigration Partnership should seek similar responsibility and funding for the Northwest Welcoming Portal as stated above for the Timmins LIP.
7. Communities and organizations who have or who develop local plans or resources for attracting or retaining population should make every effort to align their messaging, content, and look with that of the regional plan and marketing effort. Local groups should contact the Timmins and Northwest LIPs for inclusion and promotion of their efforts on the portals.

¹ While the final structure and mandate of this steering committee should be left to the founding members, attendees largely saw the need for a manageably sized group. They also indicated a preference for a balance of geographic and demographic entities (e.g. francophone, indigenous, central, western, and northern Ontario (mid-north and far-north)). There was also a general preference for agencies with an existing mandate, and resources, for specific action in these areas (economic development, population attraction, population retention, reconciliation and anti-racism) (economic development officers as opposed to CAOs, anti-racism coordinators as opposed to elected band councilors).

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8. NPI should take the lead on developing a common set of “welcoming communities” success measures that cover both attraction and retention. These measures should be collected, compiled, and reported annually.
9. Matchmaker and Connector positions should be created **in** Northern Ontario's rural and remote regions to coordinate access to existing services and to fill service and knowledge gaps as needed in rural communities.
10. Come North should be repeated annually to assess progress and reset priorities. A member organization of the Steering Committee should be the lead in seeking funds to support that effort for the next three years.

Structure Approach and Purpose

Come North – A Population Growth Strategy for Ontario's Northern Regions, is a combined effort of community leaders from across Ontario's northern regions. The effort is headed by the Lake of the Woods Business Incentive Corporation (with the support of the Northwest Community Futures Network) and the City of Temiskaming Shores. This report will summarize the findings and recommendations coming out of two conferences held in February 2020. The first was held in Temiskaming Shores on February 11-13 and will be referred to throughout this piece as the Northeast Conference. The second was held in Thunder Bay on February 18-20 and will be referred to as the Northwest Conference.

The conferences had three stated goals:

1. Increase awareness among all participants about the resources available to attract, retain, and assist people living in or moving to our communities.
2. Identify through direct interaction opportunities to leverage, partner, coordinate, and/or share resources, staff and activities.
3. Develop a concrete list of next steps identifying not only what is to be done, but by whom and by when.

Each conference followed an identical agenda: leading off with two plenary sessions on supporting and building sustainable connections with First Nations and Métis communities; five breakfast and luncheon speakers on current assets, known labour market trends, and current population growth efforts; three 60 minute long “learning and sharing breaks”; and nine 90 minute long breakout sessions spread over two and a half days.

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The purpose of the breakout sessions was to allow for information exchange, capacity assessment, as well as setting of goals and priorities in EACH discussion area for the next three years. The priority set for each session was to enhance local capacity, mutual support and leveraging. The nine breakout themes were as follows:

- Breakout 1 – About Us – online resources and information
- Breakout 2 – Who can you call before you come?
- Breakout 3 – Are we growing and how do we know?
- Breakout 4 – Sharing best practices, coordinating our efforts
- Breakout 5 – First Impressions – the first few months
- Breakout 6 – Living & learning together
- Breakout 7 – Marketing & attraction – play, study, stay
- Breakout 8 – Making our community their home
- Breakout 9 – Funding, partnering and leveraging

In each session participants were invited to explore the assigned theme by answering a series of eight questions. The questions were consistent across each theme.

- 1) What are the key assets we have in place now?
- 2) What are the key assets we are missing right now (the gaps)?
- 3) Who IS using these services right now?
- 4) Who ISN'T using these services right now?
- 5) Who do you REGULARLY partner with right now?
- 6) Who DON'T you REGULARLY partner with right now?
- 7) What new services/clientele could we deliver/serve with EXISTING assets/resources?
- 8) What new services/clientele could we deliver/serve with NEW assets/resources?

The breakout sessions were facilitated and were a blend of moderated group and table discussions involving a maximum of forty participants. Provision for discussions in French were made and notes were taken in both official languages.

Targeted Attendees

Invitations to attend the two conferences were sent to a broad range of community organizations. There was a special focus placed on economic development agencies, municipalities, First Nations, Indigenous service organizations and immigrant attraction and settlement agencies. Broad private sector representation was pursued through tourism industry organizations, chambers of commerce, and direct appeals to small, medium and large employers known to have an unmet need for workers. Police, fire, secondary and post-secondary institutions, health institutions, and other local service delivery agencies were also invited. Local unions, senior's organizations, youth support groups and local sports agencies were also sought out to provide a well-rounded

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perspective at these events. Federal and provincial agencies in the areas of education, health, economic development, transportation, rural and municipal administration, Indigenous relations and services and immigration were also invited. The general public was also welcome to attend, and multiple efforts to engage students and international students at northern colleges and universities were also undertaken. A full list of those organizations represented at the events is available in Appendix C.

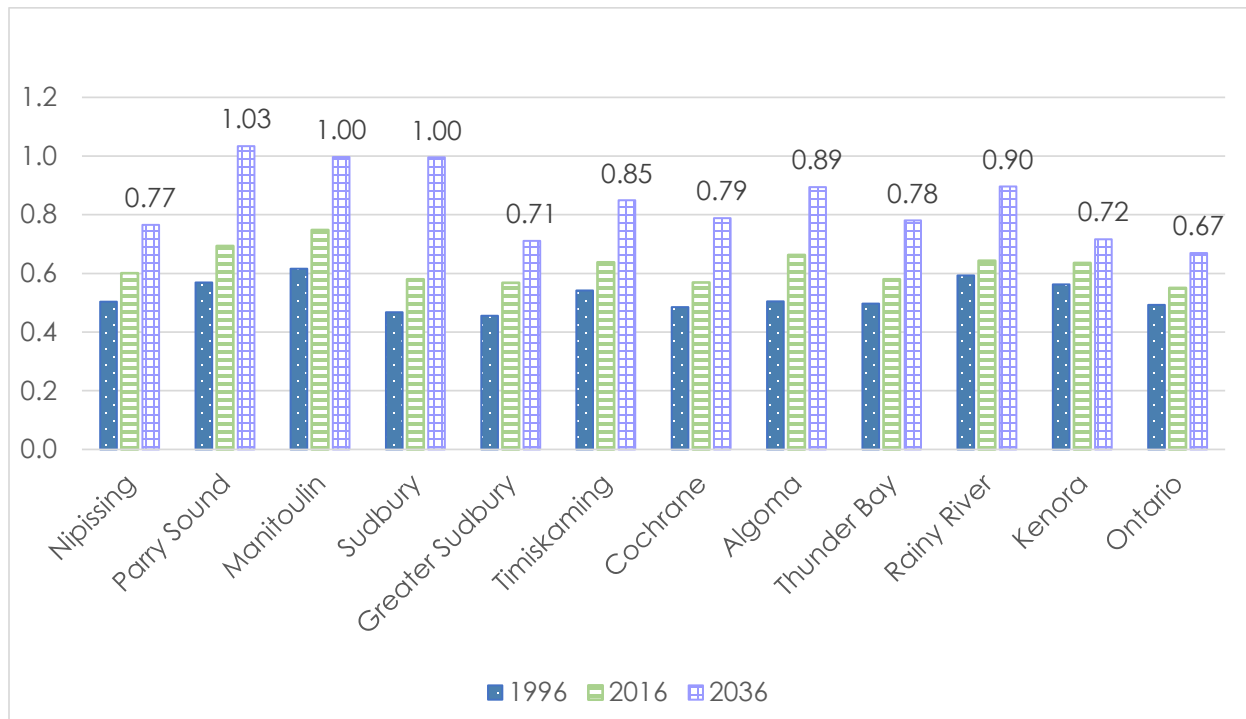
Why Population Growth?

Of the 11 census districts in Northern Ontario, all of them are currently experiencing labour shortages, population decline, or population aging. If we fail to improve our population retention and attraction numbers, our communities will become economically unsustainable in their current form. One way to understand this situation is to look at our demographic dependency ratio. This is the ratio of people considered unable to support themselves without some assistance (people age 14 and under, plus those 65 and over) to working age people (between 15 and 64 years of age, inclusive). A healthy, economically sustainable ratio is approximately one dependent to every two workers. A dependency ratio of .5 or close to it is the goal.

As outlined in the figure below. In 1996 every Census District in Ontario's north was at or near that score. In fact, several had a lower dependency ratio than .5. They had markedly more workers than economically necessary to support their younger and retired populations. By 2016 more than half had a ratio in excess of .6 and none were below the preferred measure of .5. Based on current population projections by 2036 no district will have a score lower than .7 and three districts will have two dependents for every worker. The exact opposite situation to the ideal economic circumstance of two workers for every dependent.

Contrast this forecast to that of the province as a whole. In 1996 the provincial demographic dependency ratio was actually worse than several Northern Ontario districts. By 2016 the province, through international immigration and national domestic migration, had surpassed all of Ontario's northern regions. Nevertheless, the province's own ratio continues to slip and will hit a concerning level by 2036 of roughly 1.5 dependents for every worker.

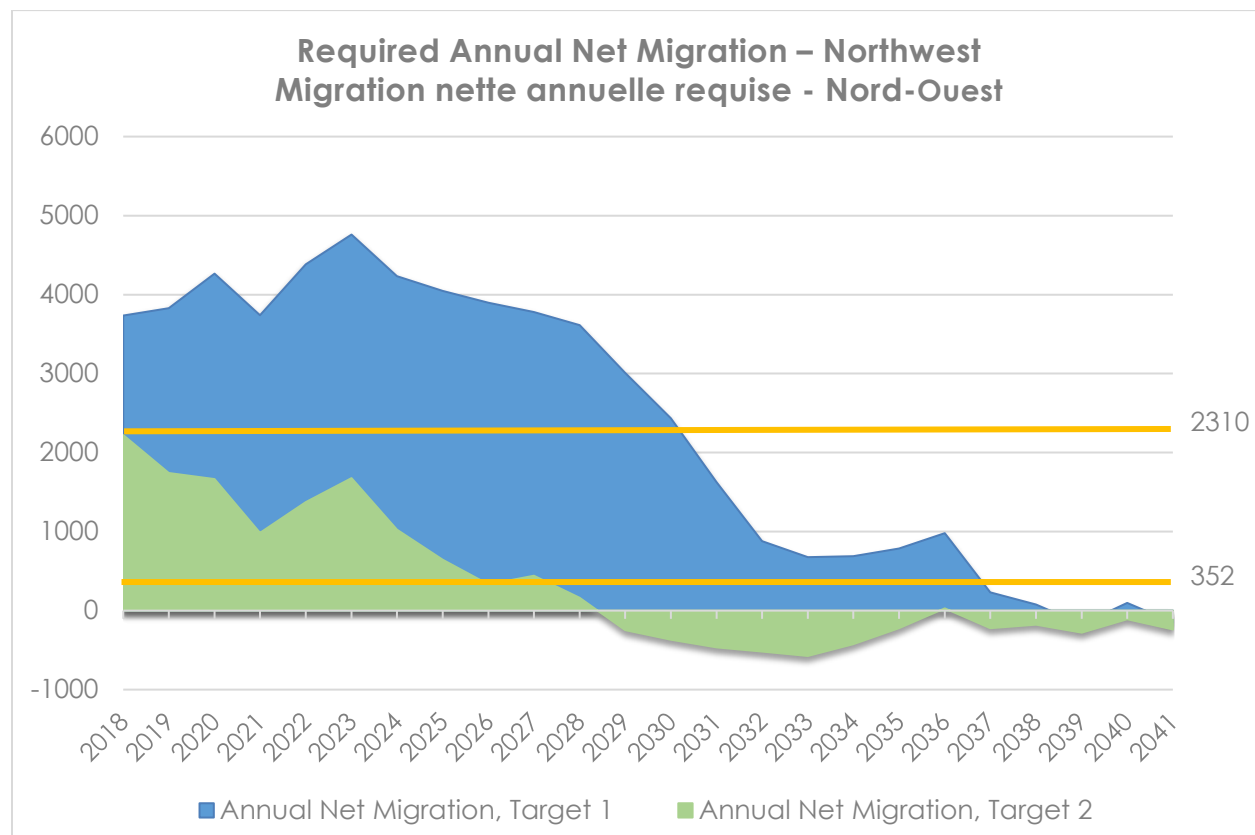
Figure 1: Dependency Ratio by District, Northern Ontario, 1996-2036



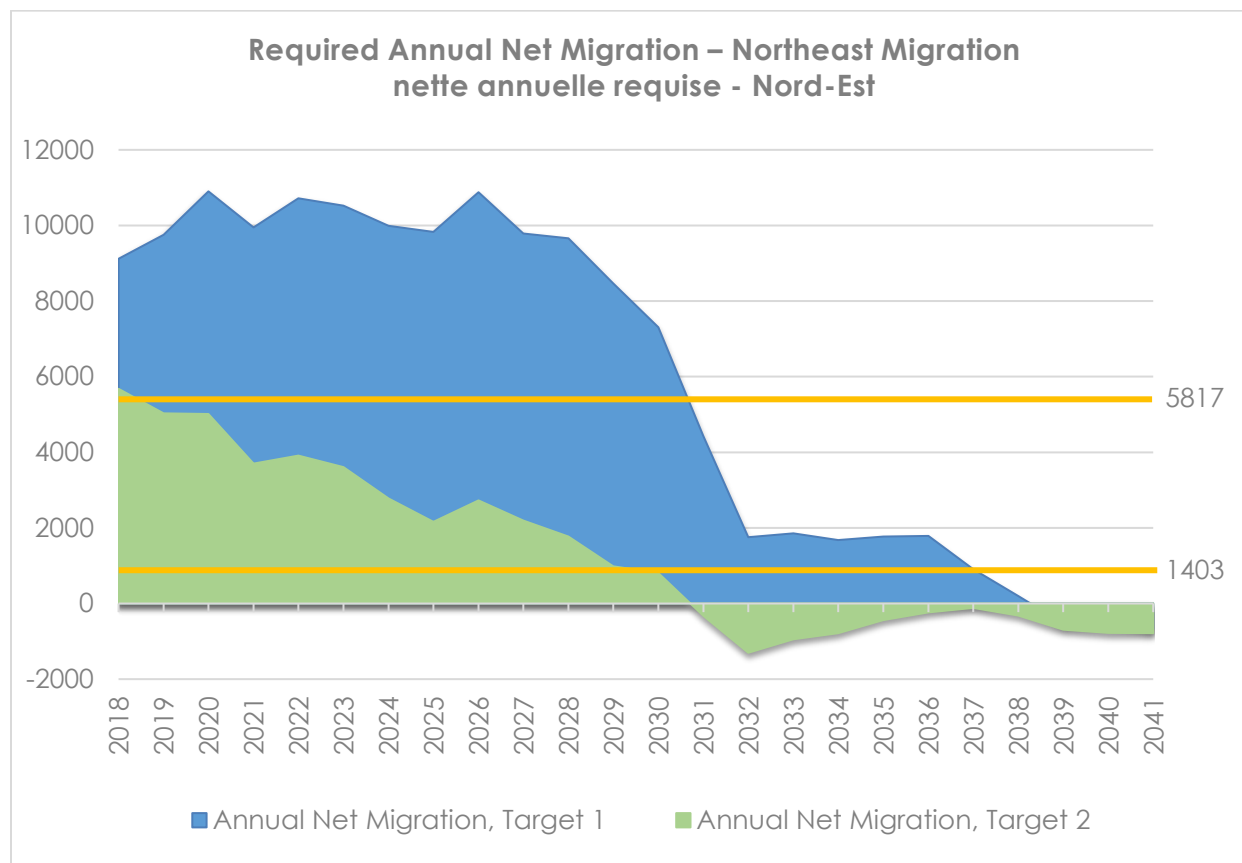
Note: Calculations of dependency ratios assume 100 percent labour force participation among the working-age cohort, those ages 15–64, and thus overestimate labour force participation rates, meaning the dependency ratios could be higher.

Sources: Statistics Canada, Census, various years; population projection for 2036 were derived from the Ontario Ministry of Finance's population projection tool.

If we wished to maintain our historical, healthy, ratio of dependents to workers, Ontario's northern regions would need to retain everyone who is currently here **and** attract some 8,100 additional people every year for the next twenty years. In order to just limit the fall in our ratio of dependents to working age people to match the expected Ontario level by 2041, Northern Ontario needs some 1,700 new people a year for the next twenty years. That's 34,000 new northerners to slow our decline, 162,000 to halt it. Assuming, of course, that everyone who is already here and who is born here over the next twenty years, stays here. The accompanying figure gives a visual representation of these targets.

Figure 2: DDR Targets for Northwestern Ontario

Source: Cirtwill, 2018. Author's calculations based on Ontario Ministry of Finance population projections – Spring 2018. Original DDR projections developed in collaboration with North Superior Workforce Planning Board, Thunder Bay Region's Local Employment Planning Council. Note: Target 1 – maintain current DDR, Target 2 – fall to provincial average DDR

Figure 3: DDR Targets for Northeastern Ontario

Source: Cirtwill, 2018. Author's calculations based on Ontario Ministry of Finance population projections – Spring 2018. Original DDR projections developed in collaboration with North Superior Workforce Planning Board, Thunder Bay Region's Local Employment Planning Council. Note: Target 1 – maintain current DDR, Target 2 – fall to provincial average DDR

Yet, despite this urgent need for a population influx and close to 100 percent retention we continue to hear persistent reports from employers of challenges in finding needed employees with in-demand skills. Immigration to northern communities remains well below historical levels and emigration continues to be a challenge.² International students, who represent a significant growth factor in our reported population levels do not tend to remain after graduation. There is a clear consensus across Ontario's north that more needs to be done to attract and retain the people we need to sustain our communities.

² See Moazzami, 2019 Human Capital Series

“Learning and Sharing”

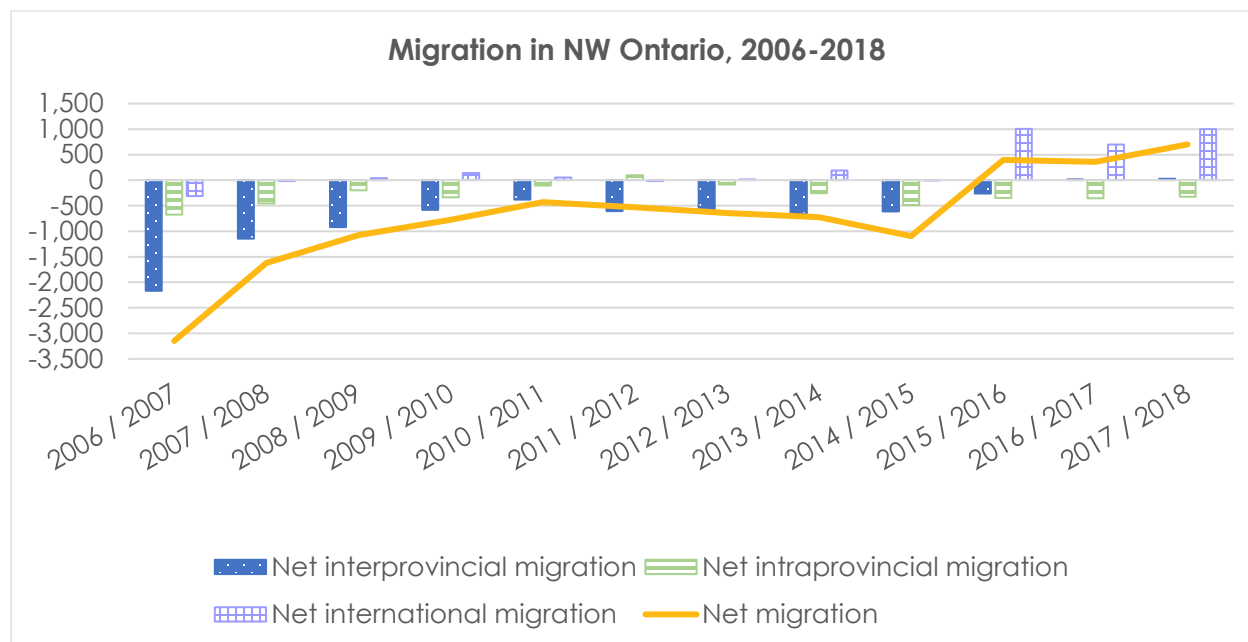
The great news is that the work has already started. In fact, it has been underway for some time, and it is making a difference. The migration graphs below highlight that net migration in both the Northeast and the Northwest has been positive over the last number of years. The principal driver of this has been international migration, reflecting a growing international student population. But we also see significant declines in interprovincial and intra-provincial migration. We are beginning to “win” the Canadian and Ontarian war for talent. The Northeast in particular, is beginning to see intra-provincial movement as population shifts away from the Greater Toronto and Hamilton area. The Northwest, meanwhile, has nudged over to positive interprovincial figures as the competition with Alberta for skilled trades has become more balanced.

Knowing that efforts are underway to attract and retain people and that those efforts are working is not enough. To make change in every community we need to know what those programs are, how they work, who is delivering them, and whether they could be available to, or replicated in, all of our communities. We also need to explore which programs are scalable, and how fast they can be scaled. What resources or relationships have given maximum value and what resources or relationships are missing which could deliver even more value.

This is why the two Come North conferences had a significant focus on “learning and sharing”. Given the urgency of response and the scarcity of resources communities throughout Ontario’s northern regions cannot afford to reinvent the wheel or to repeat the mistakes of others. Nor can Ontario’s north wait for others to solve this problem for us. Discovering what other communities, or indeed in some cases our own community, has achieved with limited resources will be the cornerstone from which to build a larger, more coordinated plan, to retain and grow the population in all of Ontario’s northern regions.

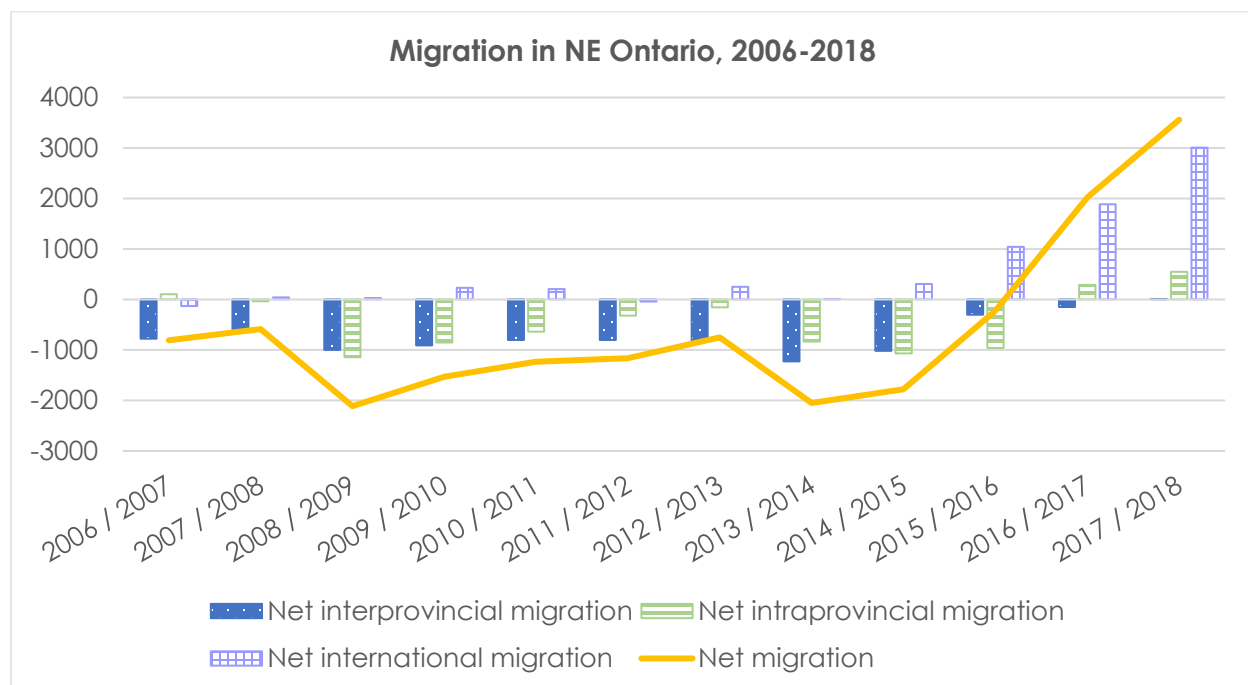
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Figure 4: Migration in Northwestern Ontario



Source: Author's calculations. Statistics Canada. Table 17-10-0138-01 Components of population change by economic region, 2016 boundaries

Figure 5: Migration in Northeastern Ontario



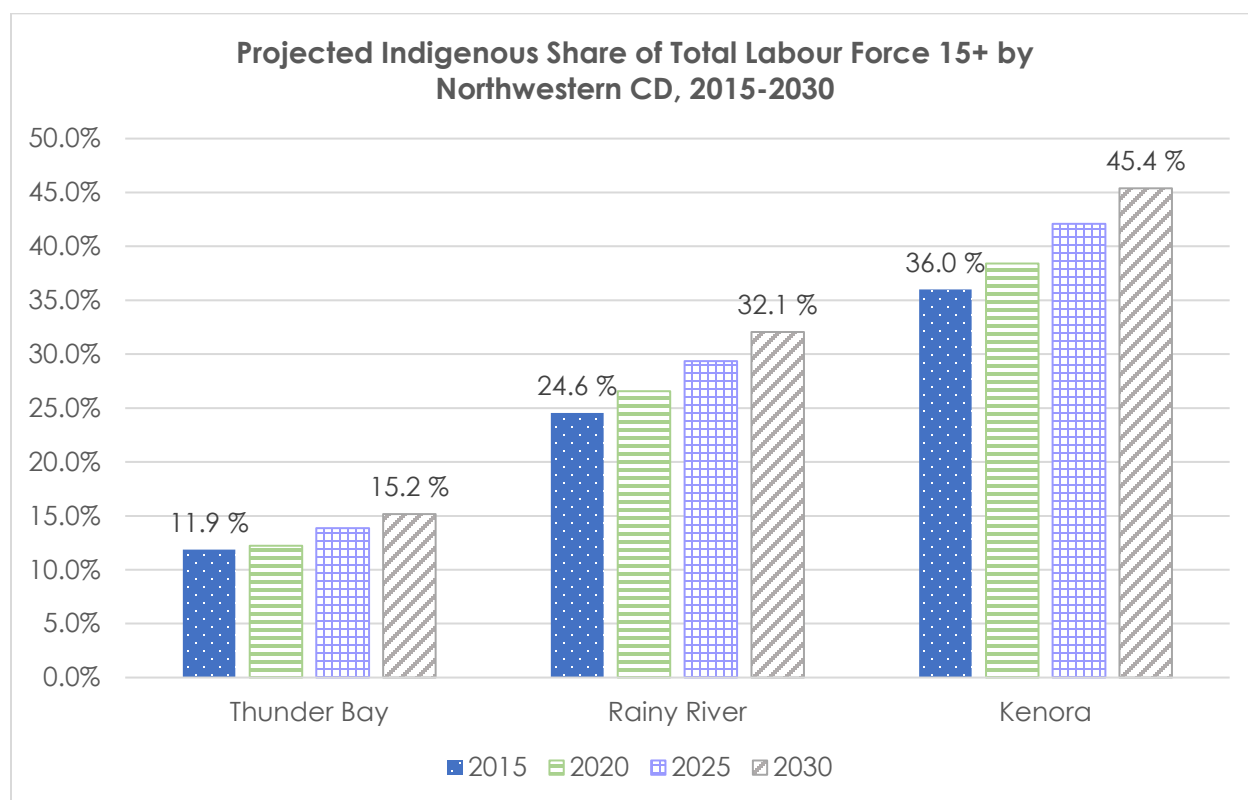
Source: Author's calculations. Statistics Canada. Table 17-10-0138-01 Components of population change by economic region, 2016 boundaries

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General Findings

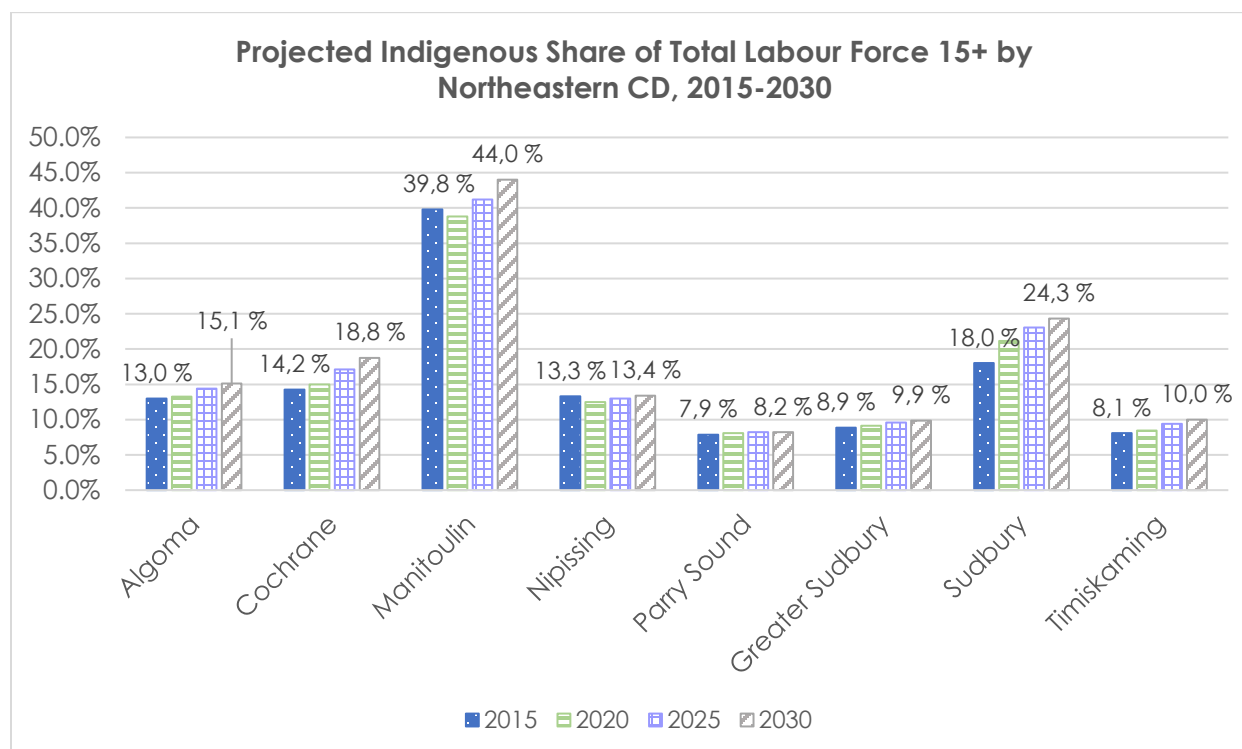
As previously noted, the Come North conferences investigated population growth strategies for Ontario's northern regions. It was recognized from the beginning that population "growth" requires both retention and attraction efforts. Conference discussions explored, therefore, the challenges and expectations of people already living in Ontario's northern regions as well as those possibly considering moving to communities throughout Ontario's north. Given the significant First Nation and Métis population in Ontario's northern regions, the first day of each conference was set aside to exclusively explore how to retain and grow these populations. The figures below highlight just how quickly the Indigenous population is growing in both the Northwest and the Northeast. There was clear consensus that a healthy and mutually respectful relationship between these populations and other Canadians was critical to the growth and sustainability of all communities in Ontario's north.

Figure 6: Northwest Indigenous Population Growth Projections



Source: Northern Policy Institute, Human Capital Series, 2019

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Figure 7: Northeast Indigenous Population Growth Projections

Source: Northern Policy Institute, Human Capital Series, 2019

The conferences also approached the ideas of retention and attraction through the lens of welcoming communities. An agreed upon theme running through the discussions was that being a welcoming community would assist in both retaining residents and attracting new ones. Based on the recorded deliberations (attached here in Appendix B) “welcoming” was consistently defined as involving some combination of openness, safety, active recruitment and engagement of new and prospective citizens, economic opportunity, and civic pride.

Participants and presenters recognized that to be a welcoming community is a collective responsibility shared by every member of a community and every organization operating there. There was also general acceptance that to assist the collective in understanding how to be welcoming and then to put that understanding into action would require individual action, whether by individual community members or by individual organizations. In Terrace Bay, for example, the municipality made it a priority to hire international students as interns through the Northern Heritage Fund Internship program and the local grocery store stocked an international food aisle for the first time. In Sault Ste Marie, the Local Immigration Partnership made a point to recruit First Nations and Métis leaders to their working groups and leadership table. Furthermore, participants were very clear that coordinated action by individuals and organizations would have the maximum effect and be most valuable in actually creating a welcoming community.

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Core Themes

Before summarizing the advice received from attendees on the activities involved between attraction and retention, it is valuable to note the level of consensus among attendees. This consensus provides a set of clear of rules for the development of a comprehensive population growth strategy for Ontario's northern regions:

1. There is an absence of a collective and consistent brand for Ontario's northern regions. One that can provide a consistent look and feel to marketing material for national, provincial, regional or local efforts.
2. There is a resulting inconsistency of message between communities and across market segments including tourism, student attraction, investment attraction and migration.
3. One speaker, Charmaine McCraw, offered an over-arching theme to be used for Ontario's Northern Regions: "Call this place home".
4. The marketing that is done is externally focused and has limited connection/utility to building pride of place or furthering reconciliation. As a result we fail to maximize our biggest asset, the one-to-one salesforce made up of the people of Ontario's north.
5. We are not seen as "welcoming" because we do not incorporate that messaging in our everyday lives or our marketing efforts. We are bad at telling our own story. Not just to others, but to each other.
6. We have more than enough online resources to effectively market Ontario's Northern Regions, what we do not have is the human capacity to keep the information up-to-date and to ensure it is properly interconnected for the ease of the end-user.
7. Direct person-to-person service remains the best tool for helping people settle into their community. Resources need to be allocated to expand that capacity throughout Ontario's northern regions.
8. The geography of Ontario's northern regions dictate that the capacity of each individual service deliver must be maximized. The "no wrong door" approach in Ontario's north requires an effective, up to date, and easy to use online asset inventory and program tool.

9. Service providers must be able to offer not just referral but also preliminary service introduction across specialty areas and, with guidance from knowledge hubs, be able to deliver remote service in most cases regardless of their personal expertise or organizational affiliation.
10. Few communities in the north are well prepared to welcome people to their community. This is often not for want of services but for a lack of coordination in making those services available.
11. Rural and remote communities feel that regional service delivery has let them down. They have limited knowledge of or access to these services whether that is in marketing, attraction, settlement, retention, analysis, or funding.
12. Despite the success of the Local Immigration Partnerships, coordination and cooperation across organizations and sectors is extremely limited.
13. One consistently noted reason for this limited collaboration is that funders do not recognize or allocate budgets to that activity. If the choice is between expending staff time on a specific, reportable deliverable, or attempting to achieve system efficiencies that may not deliver return on investments until months or years later, the choice is an obvious one.
14. Several urgent data gaps were identified, the principle one being better and more consistent knowledge at the local community level. The more pressing need, however, was for data to be available in a form useful to the end user. Few organizations have the capacity to find and analyze data, but all organizations have a need to target their efforts and track their impact.
15. There was also a consistent theme about the need for greater data sharing, particularly by funders and federal and provincial monitoring agencies.
16. Finally, it is interesting to note that while greater funding was a common theme, a higher priority was placed on more effective spending. The general feeling appeared to be that small investments in support of critical connecting pieces would deliver greater benefit to funders, agencies and the people served than large increases in siloed budgets.

Targeted Advice

There is a natural flow to the attraction and retention of people in a community so, while this was not the order in which the sessions were held, the following summary of findings will present the advice gleaned from the sessions in the following order:

- 1) Marketing & attraction – play, study, stay
- 2) About Us – online resources and information
- 3) Who can you call before you come?
- 4) First Impressions – the first few months
- 5) Making our community their home
- 6) Living & learning together
- 7) Are we growing and how do we know?
- 8) Sharing best practices, coordinating our efforts
- 9) Funding, partnering and leveraging

Marketing & Attraction

- *Key Assets*

It was generally agreed that Ontario's Northern Regions have a good product to sell. Low cost of living, high quality of life, good paying jobs, safe communities with reasonable, rural level, amenities.

- *Gaps*

The lack of a consistent brand and the presence of conflicting messaging across product categories was a noted point of discussion. With post-secondary institutions and communities marketing good jobs and 21st amenities and tourism promoters focusing almost exclusively on the outdoor experience. A better balance is needed.

- *People Reached*

There was a very limited discussion of who the market is now. Each individual organization and sector have decided on their own where and who to target, and why.

- *People Not Reached*

Where discussed there was usually consensus that greater attention needs to be paid to large and proximate markets like Winnipeg and Greater Toronto. From a Francophone perspective Europe and Africa were areas of particular interest due to language and existing cultural clusters.

- *Partnerships*

At the local municipal level there are linkages to build from – especially those between economic development agencies, workforce planning boards and local businesses. In

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the tourism area, relationships and co-branding/marketing exist between Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups and on a regional basis.

- *Missing Linkages*

Greater collaboration was encouraged between provincial/national players and their local communities. There was a common understanding that northern communities are often missed in national/provincial marketing efforts and Indigenous communities are often missed in regional efforts. Whether tourism based, immigration oriented or intended for investment attraction. One example where greater profile for Ontario's north was encouraged is in the welcome package at Pearson International for newcomers to Canada.

- *Efficiencies to Pursue*

It was generally accepted that there are considerable marketing efforts already underway. Increased collaboration and enhanced targeting was felt to be one way to maximize impact and stretch scarce dollars. Cross pollination of advertising was highlighted: tourism advertising to international students, post-secondary information for tourists, settlement information for travelers, community information for Indigenous populations.

- *New Ideas*

Tools that can be shared and re-used, particularly basic marketing materials, multi-language videos and high-quality online interactive experiences (virtual tours for example) were highlighted. Connecting tourism products with welcoming community efforts and local capacity to host events was mentioned. Feedback post conference highlighted the need for common data and examples to address negative stereotypes of Ontario's northern regions and highlight positive traits (to "tell our own story").

About Us – online resources and information

- *Key Assets*

The two immigration portals (neoimmigration.ca and cometonwontario.ca) were highlighted as extremely valuable centralized online assets. Ontario211 and the resources of the Local Planning Boards were also pointed to as good, basic, guides. Community sites were also pointed to as another main point of first contact with tourists, students, investors and migrants of all types.

- *Gaps*

The number one gap identified repeatedly is the lack of human resources to keep the online information current. The second, but a related point, was the lack of coordination of effort. Federal and provincial agencies annually update community

profiles, yet that information does not make it to public portals. Finding a way to streamline and resource this process was the number one issue highlighted in this area.

- *People Reached*

There is a sense that the existing assets, especially the portals and the municipal pages are being used by the audiences we intend: students, parents, potential investors and migrants (domestic and international) but the linkages between this usage and marketing efforts is not well known.

- *People Not Reached*

Clarifying who exactly is using our online resources and what level of satisfaction they have with those resources was noted as a key piece of missing information. This information would allow us to target marketing in areas where we wish to increase usage. The level to which the Indigenous population, especially those in rural and remote settings are using these resources was raised as a concern. Both in terms of accessibility but also in terms of cultural relevance and explicit targeting/welcoming/encouragement for use.

- *Partnerships*

In developing the portals and building Ontario211 there was considerable engagement with local communities. Resources to actively maintain those connections, even on some regular multi-year cycle, do not exist and so partnerships rely on initiative from already over stretched small communities and organizations.

- *Missing Linkages*

Ontario211 and the immigration portals were noted as tools rarely used by a domestic audience. Either as a tool to inform their choices or to verify content. This is a significant problem. Information about neighbouring First Nations communities, investment opportunities and other amenities is also not consistently present.

- *Efficiencies to Pursue*

Interconnectivity and consistency of messaging and information across online platforms, including social media, is important. Finding the immigration portals or Ontario211 mentioned on local sites is very difficult. Seeing obvious connections between the electronic presence of tourism, investment attraction, student attraction, and migration tools is almost non-existent.

- *New Ideas*

Stop building more stagnant online presence. Reinvest in interactive engagement and consistency of message. Either through expanded human capacity or greater high-end automated content that can be shared by all communities and organizations.

Who can you call before you come?

- *Key Assets*

Numerous examples of welcoming guides and information resources were highlighted. Settlement associations, the local immigration partnerships, le Réseau du Nord, community-based Francophone organizations, local school boards, libraries and post-secondary institutions all have assets to assist people to find their way in local communities.

- *Gaps*

The single largest gap that was repeatedly identified here is that these person-to-person resources are virtually exclusively available to those who are already here, in our communities. International migrants especially, but even domestic migrants from as little as 25 kilometers away are left to rely on static online resources and self-directed education about our communities and the amenities available.

- *People Reached*

Seniors, parents, students, and people living in our communities are generally considered to have reasonable access to a myriad suite of welcoming supports and assets. Especially in our five larger urban centres.

- *People Not Reached*

Those whose second language is English, or who have no English at all, struggle to access similar assistance. As do those in rural and remote communities. Those who are not physically present in our communities face the almost total absence of direct in-person support.

- *Partnerships*

There is a multi-level complex network of interlocking partnerships in place for the provision of in-person assistance to people moving to our communities. The Local Immigration partnerships and le Réseau du Nord are key resources in holding that network together with support from other umbrella organizations like the Local Planning Boards. Indigenous Friendship Centres and Tribal Councils play a similar bridging and coordinating role for the Indigenous population.

- *Missing Linkages*

Municipalities and First Nation communities are often not well connected to the services available. Especially those services delivered on a regional basis. Local community groups (sports and cultural entities) are also an underutilized resource in building welcoming communities.

- *Efficiencies to Pursue*

Either the province or the federal government should ease restrictions on pre-arrival service and supports for international students. Or alternative funding must be found. Existing resources should be able to meet this demand, although we conceded the full demand has not been experienced as the barrier to service is well known.

- *New Ideas*

Two ideas for enhanced person-to-person service in advance of people moving to a new community were repeatedly mentioned: 1) free or subsidized legal advice available by phone for potential international immigrants and 2) a single point of contact for anyone considering moving to a region or a community. The Labour Force Coordinator in Sault Ste Marie was highlighted as an example of such a position.

First Impressions – the first few months

- *Key Assets*

Colleges and universities were highlighted as important assets to assist in welcoming students to the community. Both for Indigenous students and international students and, indeed, for non-Indigenous students from rural and remote communities. Inter-cultural sensitivity training is increasingly available and being taken by service providers, community leaders and employers. This enhances the arrival experience for everyone.

- *Gaps*

Supports for spouses and children of immigrants were highlighted as an area in need of change. In particular, the lack of English as a second language for school aged children was highlighted as a significant gap in services that would assist in effective settlement in a community.

- *People Reached*

Again, there was a clear consensus that, for international immigrants at any rate, there are considerable resources available to welcome and orient them to a new community. Post-secondary institutions in particular were highlighted for robust welcoming and orientation programs. There was also a sense that these institutions are getting much better at supplying similar services and orientation to Indigenous students

- *People Not Reached*

Principal gaps identified were again in rural and remote communities where people who move to the community are often left to fend for themselves or to rely exclusively on their employer for orientation and settlement advice. Indigenous persons who are not students are felt to face similar barriers. This is often due to culture barriers, lack of

feeling safe or welcome, or lack of awareness. This access issue was also noted for the 2SLGBTQ+ population.

- *Partnerships*

School Boards, local unions, major employers and libraries are among the entities highlighted as playing central roles in the early stages of welcoming and community familiarization.

- *Missing Linkages*

Many frontline community and regional organizations highlighted their lack of connectivity with Service Canada and Service Ontario.

- *Efficiencies to Pursue*

Once again, the issue of knowledge of and access to the existing services was a key focus for efficiencies, especially in rural and remote communities. The “no-wrong door” approach requires a robust, up-to date online resource to allow any point of contact to provide not just a referral but also the early stages of service so as not to discourage the person seeking help.

- *New Ideas*

Professions North/Nord (PNN) was highlighted as a very successful model able to bridge service gaps for professionals and it was suggested their mandate be expanded to the skilled trades as well. There was some suggestion they have already expanded in this direction in relation to the health sector. PNN could also be used to assist domestic professionals and skilled tradespeople to move to Ontario's north as well.

Housing remains a significant barrier to early settlement and attraction. Access to affordable housing and to housing generally is problematic in many communities across the north and needs to be addressed.

Making our community their home

- *Key Assets*

Francophone centres, Indigenous Friendship Centres and local cultural halls were all cited as playing an important role in building and expanding connections between people and the community in which they live.

- *Gaps*

School based programs, or the limited capacity of those, especially extra-curricular and after school activities that tend to involve more community linkages were seen as a gap and one that is growing, not shrinking, as school resources become tighter. Particularly human resources and the ability to supervise students during community-

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based activities. Culturally appropriate gathering places and public safe spaces are also still seen as lacking in many communities.

- *People Reached*

The consensus view was that families, especially families with children, are generally more pro-active in seeking out and attending community events.

- *People Not Reached*

Those families where language is a barrier, even if one family member does not face those barriers but others do, tend to be less present in the community.

- *Partnerships*

Churches, multicultural associations, libraries, friendship centres and targeted support agencies are well represented in this work of welcoming and increasing participation of those new or newer to the local community.

- *Missing Linkages*

As was the case in many instances employers were both highlighted as a positive contributor and a class of community members that are less active. Large employers or employers with a particular passionate employee, new or long term, will often have a regular presence in the community and work to help support not only their employees but others. The majority of employers, however, are not large and do not have such a natural community liaison.

- *Efficiencies to Pursue*

Food, food and more food. The importance of introducing new residents, tourists, students and investors to local cuisine was repeated across multiple sessions during the conference. Allowing them to reciprocate was also highlighted as an important way to demonstrate openness and encourage participation.

- *New Ideas*

An inventory of assets was identified as a key resource that is lacking here. But not just an inventory of assets currently used to deliver services but also including spaces available for alternative uses and purposes. Legion halls, kitchen facilities at training centres, green space, faith based space that can be shared, etc.

Living & learning together

- *Key Assets*

It was generally agreed that there is an abundance of opportunity to experience, explore and learn about the many cultures present in Ontario's northern regions. Local regional, Provincial, and national gatherings happen regularly in most of our communities. There are an abundance of festivals, museums and galleries.

- *Gaps*

Awareness, or lack of it, especially among those living near event venues and interesting facilities was highlighted as significant challenge. This lack of awareness stretched from simply not knowing about the event to not being aware that the event was open to the public. Event invitations or details are too often disseminated to the same distribution list year after year with little variation. Way finding and easy access to information for both visitors and residents new to the area were also highlighted as being problematic, particularly west of Thunder Bay.

- *People Reached*

Most participants felt that tourists do participate in many events and functions and that each event has a committed local following as well. If you have been once, you tend to return.

- *People Not Reached*

There was general agreement that in many cases events "themed" for a particular population (Francophone, Indigenous, Italian, etc.) would see underrepresentation of other cultures. There was also a general sense that in many cases international students, and students in general, do not attend events held during the summer months or in more rural locations. Low income families were also noted as generally being absent from many high-profile events, especially those involving entry fees.

- *Partnerships*

Large employers and educational institutions were highlighted as supporters of major festivals and events. Francophone groups have a strong connection to each other and to their local communities. First Nations communities host many long-standing festivals and events involving partnerships amongst multiple communities. Métis communities similarly link with each other in mutual support of these activities.

- *Missing Linkages*

Linkages across cultural groups while growing, continues to be an area where most attendees see a need for greater effort. Promoting each other's events, attending them, and bringing a friend were all ideas suggested during deliberations.

- *Efficiencies to Pursue*

Recruiting young people to organizing committees was suggested as one way to increase marketing reach and effectiveness at low or no cost.

- *New Ideas*

Two ideas that were highlighted are concepts already being used locally. One is the sale of "micro-experiences" building a link between tourism and business expansion. The other is junkets for international students during the summer or on weekends to get them beyond the narrow confines of walking distance to their institutions and into more rural communities.

Are we growing and how do we know?

- *Key Assets*

The Workforce Planning Boards and Northern Policy Institute were highlighted as the primary source of data. Statistics Canada was next and then local/internal surveys. College and Universities, large municipal units, funders, as well as federal and provincial departments were all highlighted as existing stores of knowledge.

- *Gaps*

Key data gaps identified are in the areas of localized information, current information and information specific to sub-groups, especially the Indigenous population, Francophones and new international immigrants. Data sharing was also highlighted as a gap where organizations collect information but there is no mechanism to share it with others, even at a summary level. Finally the inability to easily access data specific to an organizations needs was highlighted as a challenge.

A lack of market understanding was also highlighted repeatedly. There is limited feedback from actual people who have come to or left our region and little knowledge of the wants and needs of the people in the regions we are targeting for attraction – whether for tourism, investment, migration or education.

- *People Reached*

Those who understand data, or know someone who does, can get access to reasonably good information. These individuals are largely clustered in the five major urban centres although the community Futures network does receive data purchased by FedNor.

- *People Not Reached*

Those who don't, can't. These individuals are largely clustered in rural and remote communities where data skills and knowledge are dependent on the chance presence of a single individual who, if they depart the community, leave a large knowledge gap.

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- *Partnerships*

Workforce Planning Boards, Settlement Associations, Colleges, Universities, Northern Policy Institute, Local Immigration Partnerships and other, larger, umbrella organizations have multiple partnerships with each other and local communities. Linkages with Indigenous communities are fewer but are growing.

- *Missing Linkages*

Private businesses, small communities and smaller service organizations have more challenges related to data partnerships.

- *Efficiencies to Pursue*

The consensus was that any population growth plan for Ontario's north should agree on a core set of measures and report those regularly and publicly. Success factors tied to the Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot, population growth, income, employment, happiness, are all measures that can be assessed for other populations as well: Indigenous, Francophone, etc.

- *New Ideas*

Large complex reports were highlighted as being of limited value to entities needing specific data points to target or assess their specific programs. Online data banks like communityaccounts.ca or Statistics Canada were seen as often having too much information or being too overwhelming for non-experts.

Training on basic data skills targeted for each user allowing them to develop and then update in house key measures for their organization may be a means to overcome this, but it is very labour intensive. As big data grows, flexible report generation may be possible on a common platform where each organization can save its own search and simply run it as often as they need or can get updated information (quarterly, annually etc.)

Sharing best practices, coordinating our efforts

- *Key Assets*

There are multiple disconnected networks operating in specialized area across the north. Regular meetings occur for immigration and settlement agencies, Planning Boards, Colleges, Universities, District Service Boards, local communities, First Nations and economic development agencies. Locally there are working groups that bring some or all of these entities together on a cross-sectoral basis, but that tends to be project specific work.

- *Gaps*

Data on post-program success, whether training programs, cultural competency training, secondary or post-secondary education, even health interventions is lacking. How can we know if we are delivering best practices if we can't track and compare our results?

- *People Reached*

Umbrella organizations with regional mandates tend to be those most active in identifying and assessing best practices. l'Université de Hearst was highlighted as one entity that is helping bring these lessons to bear at the local level. Indigenous global best practices similarly appear to be brought to bear on a case by case basis tied almost elusively to the capacity or knowledge of the individuals involved.

- *People Not Reached*

There are two voices seen as consistently lacking in assessing and sharing best practices: those who use the service or take the programs, and employers. Specifically, private sector employers, especially small and medium ones.

- *Partnerships*

Multiple organizations have good relations with a specific sub-set of employers but usually only insofar as it relates to specific skills gaps or labour needs.

- *Missing Linkages*

Two sectors were highlighted as being conspicuously absent in discussions around population growth: the housing sector and the natural resource sector. Again small, rural and remote communities highlighted their inability to participate either because of lack of resources or simply lack of awareness.

- *Efficiencies to Pursue*

There was extensive discussion of various programs and services available throughout Ontario's northern regions. Again, the focus was on lack of awareness of how to access these programs. It was felt that both cross program education efforts and an online asset map tool would increase program efficiency and impact.

- *New Ideas*

One proposal was to tie new training programs at college and university to identified systemic gaps, housing being the example used. But that also applies to data and governance training. It also could be a focus for a course on cross-sectoral marketing strategies that connect the attraction of tourists, students, migrants and investment.

Funding, partnering and leveraging

- *Key Assets*

FedNor and NOHFC were highlighted as two key funders. The Trillium Foundation and various community foundations were also noted. The impact of large employers in communities lucky enough to have them was emphasized multiple times.

- *Gaps*

Tribal Councils, Local Immigration Partnerships, major education and training infrastructure, translation and other services are perceived to be centralized in larger urban centres. Meaning the opportunities to partner and leverage in smaller or more rural communities are less than those in the larger centres. Knowledge of funding programs, potential partners, or innovative delivery models is also lower in smaller and more rural communities because that awareness is often dependent on the skills and knowledge of a single, unique, individual. When they depart or retire, that knowledge is often lost and not replaced. The absence of larger regional municipalities or a pool of municipal funds for investment in projects of common interest was highlighted as a gap that does not exist in other parts of the province.

- *People Reached*

It was noted that communities with economic development officers tend to be better at accessing funding from all sources due to both experience and the presence of a dedicated investment attraction resource. Similarly, political agencies and experienced not for profits were better able to navigate the complex field of donor relations.

- *People Not Reached*

Private corporations, particularly smaller and more rural businesses have a hard time leveraging available resources both because they do not know about them and because they lack the capacity to pursue them. Similar, volunteer organizations may miss opportunities because their members lack the knowledge, experience or time, to seize on partnerships or leverage funds when they are available.

- *Partnerships*

Again, partnerships exist in this area largely between those organizations with the capacity (as a result of size, mandate or location) to participate in them. Entities lacking the size or the proximity to increase their awareness of potential partners are also often overlooked by those potential partners for the same reasons. Out of sight, out of mind.

- *Missing Linkages*

The absence of long-term partnerships between organizations was noted as an area of concern. There are numerous examples of innovative project-based partnerships, to

take advantage of unique opportunities or to secure one-time special pools of funding. Too often when the funding runs out the partnerships end as well.

- *Efficiencies to Pursue*

Increased education and training, especially in rural settings, on funding programs and how to apply to them. Not just online guides but scheduled seminars online and in person with practical examples of what to do and not to do.

Ongoing presence of funders at conferences and major events, but again, not just as a display or trade show exhibit but running concurrent sessions involving applied training and program updates.

- *New Ideas*

The idea of creating a pool of people to assist other communities in drafting grant applications and funding requests was suggested. These individuals could either have a portion of their time “bought out” by funding agencies to expand the network of available assistance or could be dedicated interns (FedNor and NOHFC both run successful internship programs) specifically trained to provide this assistance.

Recommendations – The Way Forward

This section simply draws together the recommended steps to achieve efficiencies as well as the new ideas included in the targeted advice outlined above. The highlighted efficiencies can be achieved over the short to medium term and action on these items should rest with individual organizations. Progress on those items can begin immediately. Thunder Bay Multicultural Association, for example, committed to developing a new relationship with local unions to strengthen the connection between union members of different cultures with newcomers with similar backgrounds. The new ideas will involve additional funding progress on those items should be targeted over the next 12 to 18 months and should be led by the agency or agencies prepared to make the resources available to fund the change.

Short Term Actions

1. It was generally accepted that there are considerable marketing efforts already underway. Increased collaboration and enhanced targeting was felt to be one way to maximize impact and stretch scarce dollars. Cross pollination of advertising was highlighted: tourism advertising to international students, post-secondary information for tourists, settlement information for travelers, community information for Indigenous populations.
2. Interconnectivity and consistency of messaging and information across online platforms, including social media, is important. Finding the immigration portals or Ontario211 mentioned on local sites is very difficult. Seeing obvious connections between the electronic presence of tourism, investment attraction, student attraction, and migration tools is almost non-existent.
3. Either the province or the federal government should ease restrictions on pre-arrival service and supports for international students. Or alternative funding must be found. Existing resources should be able to meet this demand, although we conceded the full demand has not been experienced as the barrier to service is well known.
4. The issue of knowledge of and access to the existing services was a key focus for efficiencies, especially in rural and remote communities. The “no-wrong door” approach requires a robust, up-to date online resource to allow any point of contact to provide not just a referral but also the early stages of service so as not to discourage the person seeking help.
5. Food, food and more food. The importance of introducing new residents, tourists, students and investors to local cuisine was repeated across multiple sessions during

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the conference. Allowing them to reciprocate was also highlighted as an important way to demonstrate openness and encourage participation.

6. Recruiting young people to organizing committees was suggested as one way to increase marketing reach and effectiveness at low or no cost.
7. The consensus was that any population growth plan for Ontario's north should agree on a core set of measures and report those regularly and publicly. Success factors tied to the Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot, population growth, income, employment, happiness, are all measures that can be assessed for other populations as well: Indigenous, Francophone, etc.
8. There was extensive discussion of various programs and services available throughout Ontario's northern regions. Again, the focus was on lack of awareness of how to access these programs. It was felt that both cross program education efforts and an online asset map tool would increase program efficiency and impact.
9. Increased education and training, especially in rural settings, on funding programs and how to apply to them. Not just online guides but scheduled seminars online and in person with practical examples of what to do and not to do.

Ongoing presence of funders at conferences and major events, but again, not just as a display or trade show exhibit but running concurrent sessions involving applied training and program updates.

Medium to long term projects

1. Tools that can be shared and re-used, particularly basic marketing materials, multi-language videos and high-quality online interactive experiences (virtual tours for example) were highlighted. Connecting tourism products with welcoming community efforts and local capacity to host events was mentioned.
2. Stop building more stagnant online presence. Reinvest in interactive engagement and consistency of message. Either through expanded human capacity or greater high-end automated content that can be shared by all communities and organizations.
3. Two ideas for enhanced person-to-person service in advance of people moving to a new community were repeatedly mentioned: 1) free or subsidized legal advice available by phone for potential international immigrants and 2) a single point of contact for anyone considering moving to a region or a community. The Labour Force Coordinator in Sault Ste Marie was highlighted as an example of such a position.

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About the authors



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Charles Cirtwill is the founding President and CEO of Northern Policy Institute. Charles joined NPI in September 2013 after twelve years with the Atlantic Institute for Market Studies.

His published works focus on government structure and organization, business-government relations, inter-governmental relations, performance measurement and accountability. He has spoken across Canada and the United States on the role of think tanks in society, the appropriate assessment of government activities, and the use of school performance data to improve classroom practice and fully engage all education stakeholders.

He has worked in the public, private and not-for-profit sectors as a program manager, policy analyst, senior administrator, consultant and entrepreneur. Charles has also served as policy advisor to several political campaigns and has provided non-partisan advice and direction to provincial and municipal administrations across Canada.

He currently serves as an adjunct member of the Rural Ontario Institute's Board of Director, and he has had leadership roles in multiple community organizations including Civitas, IPAC, Scouts Canada, local school associations and local homeowners associations. He attended Dalhousie University, earning a BA in Political Science, a LLB, and a MPA with a focus on quantitative and qualitative assessment of public policy and programs.



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Hilary Hagar is originally from Hamilton, ON, but has many summer memories exploring the North. A recent graduate from the University of Guelph with a B.A. (Hons) in International Development, Hilary values interdisciplinary approaches and is passionate about community economic development and poverty alleviation. During her undergraduate degree, Hilary completed participatory research in both Cuba and Bolivia. Closer to home, Hilary has also contributed policy debates on issues ranging from greenhouse gas emissions in Ontario agriculture to Inuit nutrition and health. An avid outdoors enthusiast, she spends as much time as possible camping, hiking, and canoeing.



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Rachel Rizzuto is the Research Manager for Northern Policy Institute. Originally from the United States, Rachel attended the University of Guelph and the University of Waterloo, earning her B.A. (Honours) and M.A. (co-op) in Political Science, respectively. Throughout her academic and professional careers, Rachel has pursued the study of community and economic development, an enthusiasm borne out of travel throughout rural and urban China. Through her role at NPI, Rachel provides research expertise and passion for seeing northern communities thrive.

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