



GREATER CHARLOTTETOWN AREA
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Immigration Forum

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Themes & Issues

October 29, 2009

The Greater Charlottetown Area Chamber of Commerce held an Immigration Forum at the Delta Hotel, Charlottetown, on October 29, 2009.

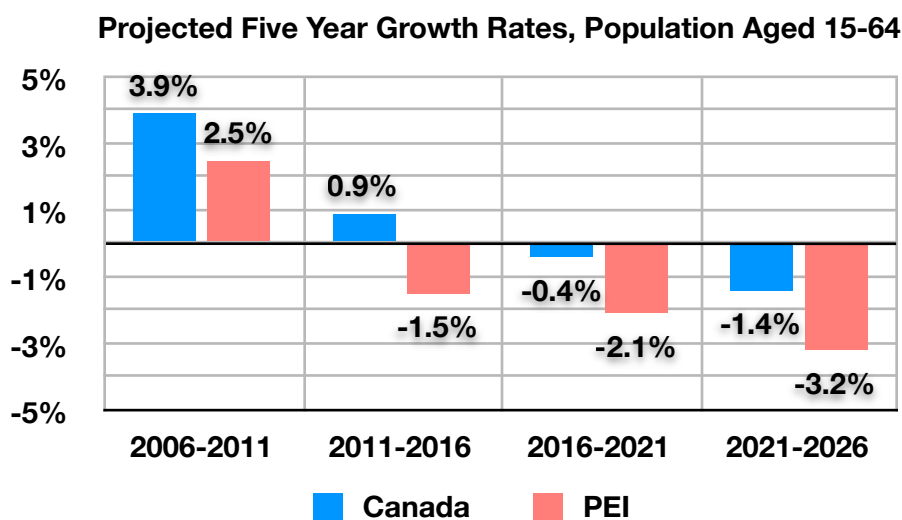
Following is an outline and examination of the Themes and Issues which cut across the many excellent presentations and commentaries.

1. The Demographic Challenge

There were numerous references, both oral and graphical, to the demographic challenge facing the Province and the greater Charlottetown area. Without immigration, population will decline and there will be an insufficient supply of labour. Obviously, attracting a new supply of labour through a population strategy is critical to the economic well-being of the province and its residents.

Given the response to this by Forum attendees, *it seems clear that more can and must be done to inform the general public, municipal leaders, business leaders and labour of the absolute need, and not just the desire, to attract and retain newcomers to the province.*

The following graph shows the projected decline in the working age population, illustrating the challenge and its immediacy.



Source: www.gov.pe.ca/photos/original/immigration_pop.pdf

2. Keeping Retention in Pace with Attraction

A number of presenters and commentators suggested that while the province and the greater Charlottetown area have been successful in attracting immigrants, the weakness in current policy and programming lies in retention. Rather than looking at both as part of the same policy mix, to be addressed hand-in-hand, it is as if they have been viewed as sequential. In fact, although retention does follow attraction and recruitment in time, a successful strategy should incorporate retention as a concurrent focus.

Given that the recent wave of newcomers is only the beginning of the levels of immigration and settlement required to offset potential labour force decline, ***there is some urgency to incorporate specific retention strategies as an integral part of attraction and recruitment efforts.***

3. Promoting a Welcoming Community

Interwoven among many presentations and comments was the undoubted importance of a welcoming community to the integration of newcomers into local society. The personal experiences of many presenters should leave no question as to the importance of this. Respect for diversity, acceptance of difference, an open heart and mind, sensitivity, warmth and hospitality were all mentioned during the Forum.

“A welcoming community has a strong desire to receive newcomers and to create an environment in which they will feel at home. A welcoming community ensures newcomers are able to participate fully in all aspects of community life. A welcoming community ensures newcomers have access to a full range of services and programs and can find meaningful employment opportunities.”

Attracting and Retaining Immigrants, A Toolbox of Ideas for Smaller Communities

- How does the greater Charlottetown area stack up as a welcoming community?
- Has there been sufficient strategic focus on identifying current attitudes and practices and assessing what needs to be done?
- Does a community consensus exist?

Considering the importance of this issue, there is reason to believe that a concerted examination of current attitudes, practices and programs could be beneficial.

4. Enhancing Language Training

There were numerous references to the importance of language and language training. Some presenters called it the key factor in retention and settlement. While there was general recognition of the very positive steps taken in the province to address language training, there was also a strongly held view that supply (financial resources) has not kept pace with demand. A significant backlog and waiting list is not the way to instill confidence in language provision programs.

Language training resources should meet the demand generated by vigorous immigrant attraction programs.

5. Establishing Connections

The importance of establishing personal connections for newcomers cut across many presentations. While references were made to different types of connections (social, spiritual, educational, business, local, international, formal and informal), there was a common theme throughout - ***personal connections lie at the very heart of a successful integration and settlement strategy.*** Whether it is word of mouth as the main factor in the selection of a university by an international student, or the establishment of business contacts in China, people contacts and networks are the most effective.

As an example of best practice for the business community, Forum attendees were impressed with the Connector Initiative of the Greater Halifax Partnership which puts newcomers to the area in personal touch with business owners, managers, key public servants and municipal and community leaders. It is an organized, deliberate and funded program with objectives, targets and accountability mechanisms. ***It could perhaps serve as a model for how to proceed in the greater Charlottetown area.***

6. Leadership and Coordination

Although not explicitly raised in the presentations, the theme of leadership and coordination was implicit in the Forum. Obviously, there is a tremendous amount of activity in the 'immigration file', with numerous programs and organizations involved.

But there appears to be a need for an overall Provincial strategy to be confirmed, including the setting of objectives and targets, and the delineation of the most appropriate roles for the provincial government, municipalities, settlement organizations, and businesses, both individually and collectively through the Chamber.

The Path Forward

The development and follow-through of a successful immigration strategy for the greater Charlottetown area¹ is complex and multifaceted, with overlapping interests and responsibilities. The Forum was not designed to develop a specific action plan, but to be a mechanism to re-focus on the issue through the sharing of information, experiences, and best practices, particularly those which will protect and enhance the economic base of the capital region and the province.

The Forum identified and/or confirmed:

- immigration is critical to the future economic base of the greater Charlottetown area and the province
- Population Strategy needs to be updated to:
 - ensure retention and welcoming initiatives are specifically included
 - recognize and support the critical role of the business community in successful recruitment and retention
 - recognize the required supportive role of municipalities in the Capital region
- leadership and coordination are critical
- mechanisms to build connections, both social and business, need to be examined and implemented
- resources for language training must be commensurate with efforts and resources to attract newcomers

In closing, the Forum has been part of a continuum of discussion on immigration spanning a number of years and one that will go on into the future. The Greater Charlottetown Area Chamber of Commerce is hopeful that the Forum and subsequent efforts will add to the quality of the debate toward integrating immigrants and newcomers into the business community and Island society.

¹ It is estimated that well over 90% of immigrants to the Province are in the greater Charlottetown area.