

PCERII Working Paper Series

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TO EDMONTON: A CASE STUDY OF A MEDIUM  
SIZED CANADIAN CITY**

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# **THE ATTRACTION AND RETENTION OF IMMIGRANTS TO EDMONTON: A CASE STUDY OF A MEDIUM SIZED CANADIAN CITY**

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This study discusses ways in which Edmonton, a second tier city in Canada (with a population of approximately one million), could attract more immigrants, and ensure that they stay after their arrival. The first phase of the project consisted of a thorough review of previously published research on the attraction and retention of immigrants to specific communities (an annotated bibliography appears in the final report which can be found on the PCERII website: [pcerii.metropolis.net](http://pcerii.metropolis.net)). Second, we conducted a web search to determine what difficulties potential immigrants abroad might have in locating information relevant to a move to Edmonton. We also undertook an extensive survey of other websites to locate sites that had features that would be useful to prospective newcomers (for a full overview of other websites, please see the full report at [pcerii.metropolis.net](http://pcerii.metropolis.net)). Third, we conducted a survey of recent immigrants living in Edmonton and Calgary that asked about their reasons for choosing their current city as well as what they liked and disliked about it. The fourth aspect of the study involved two meetings with key stakeholders in Edmonton (representatives of ethno-cultural organizations; immigrant service providers such as settlement agencies, school boards, and other interested parties) to hear about their views on the topic. This study concludes with a set of recommendations for meeting Edmonton's goals of attracting and retaining immigrants.

## **Background**

Over the last decade in Canada, researchers and policy makers have begun paying more attention to issues of attraction and retention of newcomers to communities other than Toronto, Vancouver and Montreal. At one point, the then Minister of Citizenship and Immigration (CIC), Denis Coderre, proposed that a social contract be developed, according to which newcomers would agree to live in a particular community for a period of three years after arrival. Ultimately, the notion of a social contract was abandoned, but the Ministry continued to show interest in attracting immigrants to smaller communities (Krahn, Derwing & Abu-Laban [in press]). Several provincial governments have also sought ways to attract immigrants. Manitoba has been particularly active in this regard. By making extensive use of the provincial nominee initiative, that province has boosted its levels of immigration significantly (Morrish, 2004). The provincial governments of both Saskatchewan and Nova Scotia have made immigration a priority, and most recently, the province of Alberta, which currently faces the lowest unemployment rate in the country and the most severe labour shortages, has developed an extensive policy to attract and retain immigrants (Government of Alberta, nd).

Some municipal governments are also concerned that their cities will suffer if immigrants are not interested in settling there. For example, early in 2005, the Mayor of Edmonton publicly stated his goal of attracting and welcoming immigrants to that city to enhance the vibrancy of the community. The Prairie Centre of Excellence for Research on Immigration and Integration (PCERII) was invited to conduct a small research project on the attraction and retention of immigrants to the City of Edmonton. Thus, the study we report here focuses on the case of a single second-tier city of approximately one million people. However, many of our recommendations for the attraction and retention of newcomers would apply to a number of other mid-sized cities across Canada.

### *Why Should Edmonton and Other Canadian Municipalities Attempt to Attract and Retain More Newcomers?*

In Edmonton's case, there are two primary reasons for attracting more immigrants. The first has to do with the economic prosperity of the region. The provincial government estimates that, in the next ten years, Alberta will be short 100,000 workers (Government of Alberta, nd). The (unadjusted) unemployment rate in

Alberta for the month of December 2005 was 4.1% -- the lowest in the country (the national average was 6.5%). Calgary and Edmonton are two of the top three cities in Canada in terms of employment, and unemployment rates are uniformly low all over Alberta. Many companies are already at the point where labour shortages are seriously hurting business, in part because the oil and gas industry is pulling workers out of other industries. Most commercial streets in Edmonton have 'help wanted' signs by the dozens. Although the economy is strongest in Alberta, several other Canadian cities are also facing labour shortages, and are in a position similar to that of Edmonton, where businesses are suffering because of a lack of human resources. The other reason for wanting more immigrants in Edmonton, and this is shared by many communities across the country, is the clear connection between the overall vibrancy of a city and its immigrant population. As both Florida (2002) and Jacobs (1992) have noted, the cities in North America that are the most attractive sites, both to live and to conduct business, are cities such as San Francisco, Austin, New York, Toronto and Vancouver – cities that appeal to the “creative class”. Each shares certain characteristics, including a large and growing immigrant population. Calgary is fast becoming a city that will be able to attract immigrants in the same way that Toronto and Vancouver do, but Edmonton, like Halifax, Ottawa, Winnipeg and Saskatoon, is not a city of destination for many. In fact, over the last fifteen years, Edmonton has gradually been losing ground to Calgary. At one time, both cities attracted the same numbers of newcomers annually, but in 2004, 56.5% of all immigrants to the province went to Calgary, while only 29.2% came to Edmonton (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, nd,a). This puts Alberta’s capital city at a distinct disadvantage for growth.

#### *Research on Attracting and Retaining Immigrants*

An extensive review of previously published research on the issue of attraction and retention of immigrants revealed one prominent and consistent finding – employment opportunities are central to immigrants’ choices to move or stay in a community (see PCERII website for an annotated bibliography at <http://pcerii.metropolis.net>). Not surprisingly, studies conducted in Alberta showed that both Edmonton and Calgary were seen by immigrants as having the best employment opportunities in the province, although it is also clear that immigrants quickly learn about the “hot” labour markets of resource-based communities such

as Fort McMurray and Grande Prairie, and even smaller centres like Brooks. That said, it is apparent that immigrants often arrive in new communities with insufficient or inadequate information about the local labour market (Abu-Laban et al., 1999).

The literature review also highlighted many other employment barriers faced by immigrants, including problems with credential recognition (i.e., degrees or diplomas from other countries are often not recognized by Canadian employers or accreditation associations), lack of Canadian experience which many employers appear to believe is necessary, and lack of information about access to the informal networks often used to find good jobs by Canadian-born job-seekers (Krahn et al. 2000). Despite very low unemployment rates in both Edmonton and Calgary over the past several years, these employment barriers were still encountered by many immigrants to these cities.

Along with employment opportunities, other aspects of community life are also important in attracting and retaining immigrants. Of critical importance is the availability of affordable quality housing. The irony for many immigrants is that the stronger the local labour market, the more costly the housing market and the more scarce the availability of quality housing.

The presence in the host community of family and friends, or simply others from the immigrant's own ethnic background, is a crucial factor in the attraction of newcomers (Statistics Canada, 2003). If such ethno-cultural communities already exist, it is much easier to attract and retain immigrants. If such communities are absent, they can sometimes be "planted" by encouraging a large group of individuals and families from the same source country/region to settle in a specific community (Robinson & Coleman, 2000). At the same time, it is extremely important that residents of the host community make strong efforts to welcome newcomers in their midst and to let them know that they are seen as an essential part of the community's strategy for economic growth and social and cultural development.

The availability of a wide range of well-resourced settlement agencies is also a core element of successful immigrant retention and attraction. Of particular concern for many immigrants in recent years has been the availability of a range of educational opportunities for English language training, for job training and retraining, and for college/university programs (for both the immigrants themselves and their children). In addition, information about access to health, social and other community services is essential for the successful settlement of newcomers (Abu-Laban et al., 1999).

*Attracting Newcomers: A Proposal for an Immigrant-Friendly City of Edmonton Website*

When potential immigrants are choosing a place to live in Canada, the Internet is a natural place to look for information. For this reason, the amount and type of information available on the Internet has the potential to play a large role in attracting immigrants to a particular city or province. We conducted an Internet search in order to find out how much, and what kind of, information was available for newcomers and potential newcomers to Canada. Our search included the Government of Canada's federal website, as well as provincial websites for Alberta, Manitoba, and Ontario. Several municipal websites were examined, including: Edmonton, Calgary, Vancouver, Winnipeg, Ottawa, Montreal, and Toronto. Finally, we searched for websites produced by non-governmental organizations such as settlement agencies and ethno-cultural groups. There was a huge disparity in the amount of information provided for newcomers. With a few exceptions (primarily in languages other than English), there was little that we could locate that was designed explicitly for immigrants or potential immigrants to Edmonton.

A few municipalities and provinces have exemplary websites that provide useful information for immigrants and portray these cities and provinces as being very immigrant-friendly. We will discuss the best of these websites: Toronto, Vancouver, and Manitoba. Other Canadian cities seeking to attract more immigrants would benefit from adopting some of the features of these sites.

*Toronto*

Toronto's official municipal website, <http://www.city.toronto.on.ca>, is linked to another site designed for new immigrants. The main problem with this site is the difficulty a web surfer may have actually finding it. However, once one locates the website for immigrants he or she will find a "welcome" page with an introduction, topics of interest, and a menu with links to further information in fourteen areas including housing, employment, and education. Clicking one of the links in the menu on the immigration website will take the user to a page with information on that topic. The pages provide some information directly as well as many links to external websites that are relevant to the topic. For example, the page on employment has several relevant subtopics such as "How to look for work in Canada" and "Education credentials".

Clicking on these subtopics or scrolling down will lead the user to a small section on that subtopic with relevant links to places such as job banks and educational bridging programs. Outside the immigrant-specific site there is a section of the Toronto website with facts about Toronto that would also be very useful for potential immigrants. This site can be accessed both through the pages for immigrants and through the menu "Living in Toronto" on the main page. There is a link on this site that leads to facts about diversity. The diversity section provides information on the multicultural aspects of Toronto. This information is presented in a pro-immigrant manner.

#### *Vancouver*

The City of Vancouver (<http://vancouver.ca>) has a very good guide for immigrants. Like the Toronto site, however, it is somewhat difficult to find. It can be accessed by clicking on *Residents* on the main page, then *New to Vancouver*. This leads to a page with a link to the *Newcomer's Guide*. The *Newcomer's Guide* is designed for anyone new to Vancouver but is clearly geared towards immigrants. *The Newcomer's Guide* can be downloaded in whole or by section as a PDF file. The PDF version is available in several languages. The information can also be accessed in HTML format by going to the site map. The *Newcomer's Guide* contains a range of information from how to use '911' to accessing community services such as immigrant serving agencies.

#### *Manitoba*

The website of the Province of Manitoba, <http://www.gov.mb.ca>, has a lot of immigrant specific information that is easy to find. From the government's main website there is a clearly visible link on the left side of the main page for people *Coming to Manitoba*. This link leads to a page with information for anyone planning on coming to Manitoba. It has several links specifically for immigrants under the headings *Immigration* and *Newcomer Services*. Most of the links for immigrants on the "Coming to Manitoba" page lead to pages on a website created by Immigration and Multiculturalism, a branch of Manitoba Labour and Immigration. This website information for newcomers divided into five categories represented as pull-down tabs at the top of the page. They are: immigration; learning English; newcomer services; multiculturalism; and info centre. Much of this information can be accessed either by navigating the Immigration and Multiculturalism website, or by linking directly to specific pages through the options



listed on the “Coming to Manitoba” website. The main page of the “immigration” portion of the Immigration and Multiculturalism website is an advertisement for Manitoba. In fact, much of the information presented on this website is designed to encourage potential newcomers to choose Manitoba. The immigration section of the website also has a link called “Community Profiles” which leads to a second page with a menu on the left that lists all of the regions in Manitoba. Clicking on one of these regions leads to a map of the region and a list of all communities in that region. Clicking a community then takes the user to a description, and sometimes a picture of that community, including its biggest attractions. This feature is very useful for attracting immigrants to communities they have likely never heard of before.

Provinces and municipalities that are eager to attract newcomers should consider creating websites such as these that are welcoming, informative, and easy to find.

### **What Appeals to Newcomers: Survey of Immigrants Residing in Edmonton and Calgary in 2005**

Given limited resources for this study, it was not possible to undertake a large survey. However, the research team felt that it was essential to hear from recent immigrants to Edmonton, rather than simply relying on previous research findings. Since Calgary is Edmonton’s main competitor for immigrants arriving in Alberta, obtaining the perspective of individuals who recently chose to settle in that city was also seen as important. After obtaining research ethics approval for the study from a University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, and with the full cooperation of administrators and instructors in NorQuest College (Edmonton) and Bow Valley College (Calgary), members of the research team met with students in several classes in each institution and invited them to complete a questionnaire asking about how and why they had chosen their current city of residence and about their perceptions of its positive and negative features (see Appendix). A 10 - 15 minute oral discussion was held with members of each class after the questionnaires were completed.

#### *Profile of Study Participants*

Over two hundred recent immigrants participated in the study, 101 in Edmonton and 103 in Calgary. Almost two-thirds were women (Table 1), and most were between

<i>Table 1: Profile of Survey Participants *</i>		
	<b>Edmonton (%)</b>	<b>Calgary (%)</b>
Female	62	64
Male	38	36
< 25 years of age	12	7
25 – 34	32	35
35 – 44	48	46
45 or older	8	12
Ind. immigrant	55	67
Refugee	17	11
Family class	21	20
Other	7	2
< 1.5 years in Canada	61	46
1.5 – 2.5 years	22	29
2.5 – 3.5 years	12	10
3.5 or more years	5	15
* Source: Survey of immigrants enrolled in Norquest College (Edmonton) and Bow Valley College (Calgary) ESL courses.		

25 and 44 years of age. Over half of the survey participants were independent class immigrants, and the vast majority had been in Canada for only one or two years.

Edmonton respondents were a bit younger, on average, and a larger proportion had been in Canada for only a few years (Table 1). Two out of three Calgary study participants belonged to the independent class. In contrast, the Edmonton sub-sample was a bit more diverse in terms of immigrant status.

Reflecting the general profile of recent immigrants to Canada, sample members in both cities were typically well educated and highly skilled (results not shown in table). A full 43% (in both cities) reported at least 16 years of formal education (equivalent to a university degree). More than two-thirds had worked in professional or managerial occupations in their home country (72% of Edmonton respondents and 65% of Calgary study participants).

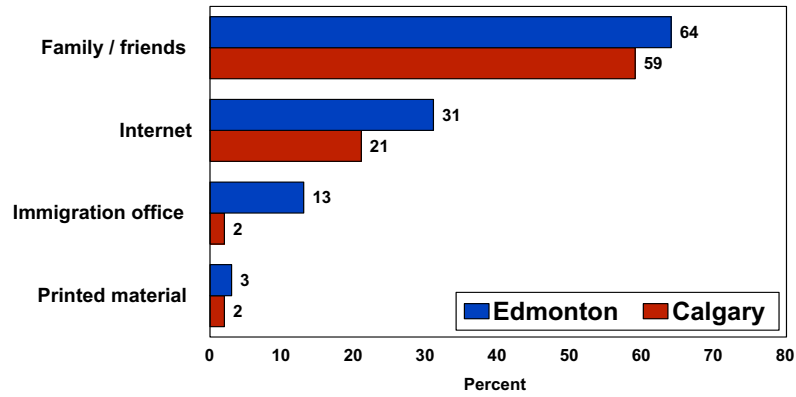
#### *How Immigrants Chose Edmonton or Calgary*

The recent immigrants were asked how they had found out about Edmonton (or Calgary) before arriving. The questionnaire invited them to check one or more possible sources of information including immigration offices, brochures (or other printed material), the Internet, and family / friends. Most survey respondents identified only one source of information. As Figure 1 reveals, among immigrants living in both cities, family and friends were clearly the most common source of information about the new city. However, almost one-third of the new Edmonton residents had learned about their new home via the Internet, along with one in five Calgary survey participants. Although one in eight (13%) of the Edmonton survey participants had obtained information about the city from immigration offices (presumably in their home countries), it is clear that such offices and the printed material provided through them is not how potential immigrants typically seek out new communities. If a host community would like to influence the choices of potential immigrants, the best ways to do so are via their family and friends already resident in the community or via the Internet.

#### *Why Immigrants Chose Edmonton or Calgary*

Survey participants were also asked "Why did you move to Edmonton (or Calgary)?" Almost all of the respondents wrote an answer to this question, and about half

**Figure 1: Sources of Information \* about Current City of Residence**



Source: Survey of immigrants enrolled in Norquest College (Edmonton) and Bow Valley College (Calgary) ESL courses

\* Survey participants could answer "yes" to each of these possible sources

listed several answers. Reflecting the conclusions drawn in other studies, *economic factors* (e.g., jobs, a strong economy) were mentioned most often (34% of all reasons given). *Family and friends* were mentioned as “pull” factors almost as often (29% of all answers), followed by *quality of life* reasons such as climate, city size, and access to social services (24%), and *educational opportunities* (e.g., ESL, post-secondary opportunities) which comprised 13% of all answers listed by survey participants.

Figure 2 shows that, even though Calgary has attracted more job-seeking immigrants in the past few years, Edmonton residents were somewhat more likely to mention economic reasons for choosing their city. This is probably because immigrants who settled in Calgary were more likely to note that family and friends already living in Calgary (no doubt attracted by the city’s “hot” economy) had convinced them to settle there.

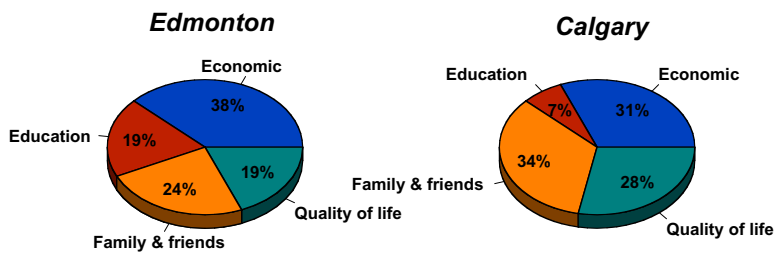
However, it is also interesting to observe that educational opportunities had attracted more Edmonton residents (19%) than Calgary residents (7%). Calgary may be able to attract more immigrants because of its strong economy, and larger ethno-cultural communities, but Edmonton appears to have a recruiting advantage in the education sector.

#### *Best Things About Living in Edmonton / Calgary*

Survey participants were also asked to identify the best things about living in their city. Most wrote something on their questionnaire, and well over half wrote several answers. *Quality of life* reasons such as good climate and a welcoming social environment were mentioned most often (48% of all answers), followed by *economic factors* (31%), and *educational resources* (19%). While almost one-third of the reasons provided for coming to their current city (see above) had involved the presence of family and friends, almost no one (only 2%) mentioned family and friends as among the best things about living in their city. It would appear, then, that while friends and family attract new immigrants, the quality of life and the work and education opportunities within the host city play a much larger part in retaining them.

Although more Edmonton residents had mentioned economic reasons for choosing their city (see above), Calgary residents were somewhat more likely to mention jobs and a strong economy as the best thing about living in their city (Figure 3). However, once again, Edmonton residents were much more likely (31% compared to only 8% of Calgary residents) to emphasize access to educational resources as “best things” about their city. Calgary residents were more inclined to comment on quality of life factors.

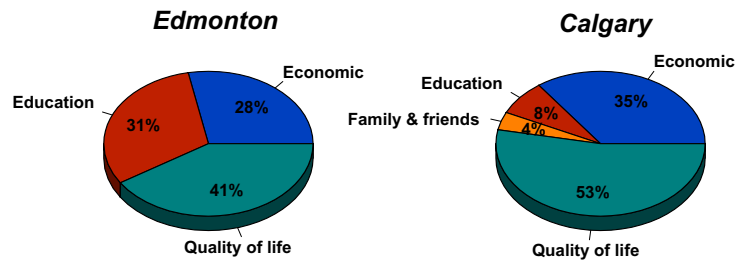
**Figure 2: Reasons for Choosing Current City of Residence \***



Source: Survey of immigrants enrolled in Norquest College (Edmonton) and Bow Valley College (Calgary) ESL courses

\* Respondents could list more than one reason. Most listed at least one reason, and about one-half provided a second reason. Percentages shown are based on the total number of reasons listed (300 in total).

**Figure 3: Best Thing about Living in Current City of Residence \***



Source: Survey of immigrants enrolled in Norquest College (Edmonton) and Bow Valley College (Calgary) ESL courses

\* Respondents could give more than one answer. Most listed at least one, and about two-thirds provided a second. Percentages shown are based on the total number of answers given (355 in total).

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#### *Biggest Problems About Living in Calgary / Edmonton*

When asked about the “biggest problems” they encountered in their new community, 41% of all the answers provided by survey respondents focused on economic problems (e.g., not being able to find a good job). Ironically (but not all that surprisingly given what other studies have revealed), potential employment opportunities attract immigrants to new communities and employment barriers discourage them after they arrive.

However, poor job prospects are not immigrants’ only problems. Quality of life concerns such as a difficult climate, poor public transport, and limited



social services were mentioned almost as often (37% of all answers). The third largest category (19%) involved problems encountered because of limited command of the English language. Only a small number of answers to this question (3%) focused on the absence of family and friends in the city.

Immigrants who had settled in Edmonton and Calgary answered this question quite similarly. However, when we look more closely within the “quality of life” category, we see that Calgary residents were more likely to mention that city’s climate as a problem (19 answers versus only 7 from Edmonton). Thus, very few new residents of Edmonton talked about their city’s climate as either a good thing or a bad thing. In Calgary, climate figured a bit more prominently in newcomers’ assessments of the city, although opinions about the climate were clearly mixed.

#### *Looking to the Future*

Eight out of ten of the recent immigrants now living in Edmonton answered “yes” in response to a question about whether they would encourage friends and relatives to live in Edmonton (this question was omitted from the Calgary questionnaire). A similar proportion (79%) indicated that they were personally planning to stay in Edmonton (compared to 85% of the Calgary respondents). Thus, despite the employment barriers many immigrants encountered, and despite the settlement and adjustment difficulties they faced in their new home, the vast majority of recent immigrants remained positive about their choice of Edmonton. In their words:

- *In spite of all problems, it still is a very good city to live. We as immigrants want to contribute and on the other hand need our children to grow in a good manner, so it is a good city to live.*
- *I want my kids to grow up here and complete their education in University.*
- *It is not expensive for immigrants [in Edmonton].*
- *Because there are more working chances, and there is a possible to buy a house, government support ESL program.*
- *Now this is my country, my city and I’m sure stay here. I don’t have any idea to move.*
- *I love this city.*

## **Stakeholder Meetings**

Two stakeholder meetings were held; the first was designed to elicit suggestions from the participants as to how Edmonton could attract and retain immigrants, and the second allowed the researchers to report back to the group and ask for assistance in identifying information gaps and setting priorities. The participants were providers of immigrant services and representatives of school districts and ethno-cultural groups. In the first meeting, the main issues discussed were employment, housing, and public opinion. Many agreed that two key employment issues are those of accreditation and Canadian work experience, problems that are not specific to Edmonton. Participants suggested that the City could improve the employment situation by becoming a leader in employment practices and thus setting an example.

Another key problem identified was affordable housing. In addition to long waiting lists, some landlords discriminate against newcomers. One example given was the evictions some newcomers face for having too many family members living in a single housing unit.

Public perception was the final issue discussed. Stakeholders observed that many people, including some in higher levels of government, do not recognize the contribution that newcomers make. Participants agreed that the City could stage a public awareness campaign that would help make newcomers feel welcome while at the same time dispelling some of the myths about them. The City could also identify and promote its advantages (such as relatively low cost of living, safety, educational opportunities).

At the second stakeholder meeting a wide-ranging discussion took place, and several individuals recounted their own experiences on arriving in Edmonton. There were a number of suggestions made that were outside the jurisdiction of the municipality, but the stakeholders felt that the City should either lobby the other levels of government on these issues or find ways to bring these problems to light.

Credential recognition and recognition of previous work experience were identified several times as employment related areas that must be addressed if immigrants are to achieve their potential. The problem of racism within the immigrant community was also raised. One participant suggested that since most immigrants come from homogeneous settings, they are unaccustomed to mixing with other groups.

Education was discussed for much of the meeting. It was suggested that the City should lobby school districts and the provincial government to develop differentiated programs for ESL students who have experienced educational gaps, particularly junior

high and high school students who have limited literacy in their first language. It was also suggested that the City work with school boards and post-secondary institutions to develop a strategy that includes both marketing the city and welcoming immigrants.

Several people had suggestions for an immigrant-friendly website, such as information about the freedom to practice one's religion, the lack of religious conflict in Edmonton, the fact that buildings and houses are warm in winter despite the cold temperatures outside, and the need for many pictures of Edmonton on the website.

Affordable housing for large families was another issue discussed. There must be places for people to live if they are going to be attracted to Edmonton from elsewhere. Other topics addressed included the long delays on the part of Citizenship and Immigration in processing applications to come to Canada; research on immigrant culture and its impacts on existing cultural groups; and the need for better interpretation services.

### **Recommendations**

After a comprehensive review of existing research on attraction and retention of immigrants, our survey of 200 newcomers to Edmonton and Calgary, an extensive review of websites, and participation in two stakeholders' meetings, we developed the following recommendations:

#### *Promoting Edmonton*

1. The City should send representatives to provincial immigrant trade shows overseas, armed with information about Edmonton as a potential destination.
2. The City should consult *Attracting and retaining immigrants: A toolbox of ideas for smaller centres* (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, nd,b).
3. Given the importance of educational opportunities for immigrants and potential immigrants, the City should work with school boards and public post-secondary institutions in Edmonton to develop a strategy that includes both marketing the city and welcoming immigrants.

4. The City should develop a comprehensive website specifically designed for potential residents, highlighting appealing features of Edmonton such as the wide range of high quality educational institutions; the success rates in K-12 on international achievement tests; and the fact that Edmonton, like all Canadian cities, is a safe city. The site should indicate that we have clean air and nature in the heart of the city; furthermore, there should be a positive statement about weather, dispelling unwarranted concerns, and indicating that Alberta was recently declared the province with the best weather in Canada. The cost of living in Edmonton is relatively low compared to most other Canadian cities (housing prices are markedly lower than in Calgary, for example). Cultural aspects of Edmonton should be mentioned on the site – there is a strong arts community, a strong sporting community, excellent recreational facilities, and Edmonton is home to many festivals throughout the year. The website should also have information that will help an immigrant family settle. Both the City of Toronto and the Province of Manitoba have informative websites that include necessary information; they could be used as reference points in designing Edmonton’s website. The website should provide a brief description of the main settlement agencies with links to their sites. It should be made clear that these agencies are open to people of all backgrounds and religions (i.e., Catholic Social Services and the Mennonite Centre for Newcomers are not restricted to Catholics and Mennonites respectively, but cater to immigrants of all backgrounds).

Similarly, there should be links to the three school boards, but it should be made clear that all three are publicly funded, and that the Catholic Board welcomes students who are not Catholic. The website should have promotional material in the languages of the largest immigrant communities – and immigrants who are already here should be encouraged to write about their own experiences in Edmonton.

Finally, the website should promote Edmonton as a friendly, welcoming city, which brings us to our second set of recommendations – these are aimed at keeping immigrants in Edmonton by ensuring a good quality of life.

#### *Making Edmonton a More Welcoming City to Retain Newcomers*

5. The City should examine its own services for cross-cultural awareness. There should be cultural sensitivity training for bus drivers, receptionists, and all other

city employees who come into contact with members of the public. The police in particular should be provided with additional resources to work with ethno-cultural communities to build trust.

6. The City should undertake an inventory of the services for newcomers that already exist (this could be carried out in conjunction with representatives of ethno-cultural groups). The services on the inventory should then be evaluated for their accessibility by immigrants.
7. Useful services that already exist should be promoted. For example, at a stakeholder meeting it was suggested that libraries bring in books written in languages other than English and French. In fact, the libraries have had materials in other languages for years, but many people are unaware of this.
8. The City should ensure that interpreters are both well-trained and well-paid.
9. Equitable hiring practices should be in place such that the employees of the City reflect the ethnic composition of Edmonton residents.
10. City managers should be evaluated on their ability to integrate immigrants into their departments.
11. The City should lobby the province whose responsibility it is to work with professional bodies, unions, post-secondary institutions, and employers to remove credential recognition barriers for immigrants.
12. The City should develop an internship program to provide a specific number of immigrants each year with Canadian work experience. This could be done in conjunction with other employers in the Alberta Capital Region, or with the province. A potential model is Career Bridge ([www.careerbridge.ca](http://www.careerbridge.ca)).
13. The City should develop a social marketing campaign to improve public awareness of the benefits of immigrants. For example, the campaign could focus

on immigrants in Edmonton who have been successful and who have made a contribution to the quality of life in Edmonton – not only for their own ethno-cultural community but for all citizens.

14. The City should institute an event such as *Celebrating the Welcoming City: Edmontonians who Make a Difference*, in which both Canadian-born and immigrant citizens would be honoured. At the same time, the City should continue to support the RISE awards (coordinated by the Mennonite Centre for Newcomers) which are focused primarily on immigrants and immigrant serving agencies.
15. The City should partner with large employers such as Syncrude on a publicity campaign about the need for workers (the current unemployment rate is extremely low and there is a tremendous shortage of skilled labour).
16. The City should bring together employers who champion immigrant workers to talk to other employers about their experiences in venues such as the Chamber of Commerce and Rotary Clubs.
17. The City should develop an anti-racism campaign that focuses on all Edmontonians – Aboriginal people, immigrants and Canadian-born.
18. Newcomers need easily accessible information on how to find accommodation.
19. More low income housing that can accommodate large families and more housing coops should be made available.
20. Improved transportation options, particularly east-west LRT connections and improved bus connections, are necessary.
21. The City should actively lobby the Department of Education on a number of points that affect the children of many immigrants, including the following:  
More funds are needed for ESL students in K-12 – currently it takes

69 students to hire one FTE ESL teacher. School boards should be made accountable for the expenditure of designated ESL funds. The age cap for high school ESL immigrant students should either be extended or a satisfactory alternative should be put in place to ensure that students aren't forced out of school. The City should urge the provincial government and Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA) to require that all ESL teachers have specialized ESL training, cultural competency and anti-racism education. Similarly, the City should lobby the provincial government and ATA to develop professional regulations that mandate cultural competency for all school personnel. The City could also pressure the province to work with school boards to develop and implement educational programs that promote active parental participation of immigrant families. In general, the province needs to be reminded that education is a priority in any knowledge-intensive society, and that more funding and services for education in general, and immigrants in particular, is necessary for the long-term benefits of both Edmonton and Alberta.

22. The City should encourage public post-secondary institutions to develop action plans to make their institutions more welcoming to immigrants. This would include components such as assessment of international credentials, student services, mentoring programs, cross-cultural competency training for all personnel and instructors, as well as supports for immigrant teaching staff.
23. In conjunction with the province and local settlement agencies, the City of Edmonton should determine what materials about laws and bylaws affecting immigrants are already available. The City should help with the distribution of these materials.
24. Where there are gaps, the City should produce pamphlets in a range of languages on pertinent bylaws (landlord/tenant rights; home owners' responsibilities; and other city bylaws that may be quite different from the norm in immigrants' home countries).
25. The City should ensure that landlords are aware of their responsibilities.

26. The City should work more closely with existing agencies and ethno-cultural communities. There are organizations that have already established strong communication connections within immigrant communities and they can be a useful two-way conduit of information for the City. Ethno-cultural communities should be provided with core information regarding life in Edmonton (housing, tenant rights, bylaws, recreational services and so on) because many independent and family sponsored newcomers will not access traditional sources of information. Furthermore, if the City establishes a committee with representatives from these organizations, new needs can be addressed as they arise.
27. The City should work with neighbouring communities such as St. Albert, Sherwood Park, Leduc, Spruce Grove, Devon, and Stony Plain to encourage them to engage in similar welcoming activities, particularly with their own civic employees.

### **Conclusion**

Although this study focused on Edmonton, many of the issues that emerged are relevant for other second-tier Canadian cities as well. Without adequate promotion, newcomers may not even know that smaller cities exist that have all the amenities that a metropolis can offer. More importantly, communities must find ways to ensure that the settlement experience of immigrants is improved. For adults, the employment barriers of credentialing and Canadian work experience must be overcome. For children and youth, major changes must take place in the educational system. Alberta has had a coalition for equity in education for some time; the coalition consists of settlement agencies, ethno-cultural groups and other individuals who are concerned that the future of the province, and immigrant children specifically, is being jeopardized by ignoring their needs. In the summer of 2005, a national coalition was created because these problems are found all over the country. If immigrants find jurisdictions that will do well by their children, they are far more likely to stay, and these cities are bound to receive secondary migration from across Canada as well. Finally, immigrants must feel welcome in the community in which they find themselves. If an open, welcoming attitude on the part of the general citizenry doesn't exist, there will be serious tensions.



All of the foregoing is premised on the assumption that the overall immigrant admissions will remain roughly the same in the next few years. The federal government has indicated that it will try to address the backlog of over 700,000 individuals who have been accepted but whose paperwork is not yet completed, but unless Citizenship and Immigration can effectively eliminate the delays, and unless the government increases the annual limits, smaller municipalities will all be in competition, not only amongst themselves, but with Vancouver, Toronto, and Montreal. None of those cities wants to lose its current share of immigrants. For years the prediction that all labour force growth will come from immigration by the year 2011 has been cited by governments, business leaders and academics, yet the number of immigrants entering Canada has not changed significantly in the last decade. If cities such as Edmonton, Halifax, Ottawa and Winnipeg are struggling to attract newcomers, what about smaller cities like Saskatoon, Regina, London, and Fredericton? If these communities are to prosper, Canada must open the door a little wider, and immigrants should be welcomed, rather than tolerated, once they get here.

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## **Immigrating to Edmonton Questionnaire**

### **Demographic Questions**

Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Home Country: \_\_\_\_\_ Sex: Male/Female

Immigration class: refugee independent immigrant family class other:

Occupation in home country?

Number of years of education before coming to Canada?

### **Survey Questions**

1. When (month and year) did you arrive in Edmonton?
2. Was Edmonton your first destination in Canada? Yes/No If no, where (what city) did you go first? Why did you leave this other city?
3. How did you find out about Edmonton before you came here? (Check all that apply) Immigration office \_\_\_\_\_ Internet \_\_\_\_\_  
Brochures/printed information \_\_\_\_\_ Family/friends \_\_\_\_\_  
Other (please explain)
4. Where did you get the most useful information about Edmonton? Why was it useful?
5. Why did you move to Edmonton? What made you choose Edmonton?
6. At the time, did you consider moving to Calgary instead? Yes/ No If yes, what attracted you to Calgary?
7. What are the best things about living in Edmonton?
8. What are the biggest problems you face living in Edmonton?
9. Would you encourage friends and relatives to live n Edmonton? Yes /No Why or why not?
10. Are you planning on staying in Edmonton? Yes/ No Why or why not? If you are planning to leave, where (what city) will you go?

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