

The desire to promote the effective integration of immigrants into the labour force saw the City take steps to address its own human resource practices and to examine opportunities to support integration efforts with employers in the region.

Municipal Roles in Immigrant Integration: The Edmonton Experience

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In the spring of 2005, Edmonton City Council identified immigration and settlement as a strategic priority for their coming three-year term. The newly elected Mayor, Stephen Mandel, was concerned that immigration to Edmonton had stagnated while other cities, most notably Calgary, were experiencing sharp increases in their immigrant numbers.¹ The Edmonton region was experiencing significant developments in the energy sector and suffering from a concomitant labour shortage. At the same time, Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) was predicting that by 2011, 100% of all labour force expansion in Canada would have to come through immigration (CIC 2001). This forecast heightened concerns that failure to attract a skilled workforce to the region could potentially threaten economic growth.

At the same time, City Council and the City administration were concerned about the diversity of its workforce in relation to the broader population of the city and region and the capacity for the City to more effectively attract and integrate immigrants and visible minorities into its workforce. According to the 2006 Canada Census, Edmonton, as a city, had a population of 730,372 and, as a Census Metropolitan Area

(CMA), had a population of 1,024,820 (Statistics Canada 2008). At that time, visible minorities made up 22.9% of the city population and 17.1% of the CMA. Foreign-born residents made up 22.9% of the city population and 18.5% of the CMA. The City of Edmonton 2006 Employee Diversity Census saw 13% of its workforce self-identify as non-White, a significantly lower proportion than the population it serves. As well, despite the fact that recent immigrants to Edmonton were at their prime working age and had better credentials than their Canadian-born counterparts, they had lower employment rates and higher unemployment rates.

In order to more closely examine these issues, Council asked the Prairie Metropolis Centre to conduct research on potential municipal actions for attracting and retaining immigrants to the city. With funding from CIC, the research was completed. In November 2005, the research report and its 27 recommendations were presented to the Edmonton City Council (Derwing et al. 2005).

City Council responded by appointing then councillors Michael Phair and Terry Cavanagh to further review the report and return to Council with specific recommendations for action. At the same time, the City Manager allocated resources to the City of Edmonton's Office of Diversity and Inclusion and an additional Diversity and Inclusion Consultant was hired to support Council's work.

¹ Citizenship and Immigration Canada statistics show that while Edmonton and Calgary's immigration numbers were nearly equal in 1995, within a decade more than twice as many immigrants were choosing Calgary over Edmonton.

The report's recommended actions that fall within a municipality's jurisdiction were identified, best practices in other municipalities were researched and public consultations were held in March 2006. Nearly 80 people, representing immigrant groups, settlement agencies and other orders of government, gathered at the Edmonton Public Library to reflect on the recommendations and to provide guidance and support to the two councillors in their efforts to identify priorities. The policies and practices of other municipalities were presented and participants broke into small groups to identify priority actions for the City to consider.

In April 2006, councillors Phair and Cavanagh returned to City Council with a report recommending that the City further explore potential initiatives in the areas of labour attraction, public awareness, information services, community services and human resources. Council approved the recommendation and also directed the Administration to examine municipal policy options in the area of immigration and settlement. The Office of Diversity and Inclusion (ODI) established a cross-departmental working group that included representatives from the City's Community Services Department, Human Resources Branch, Communications Branch, as well as a representative from the Edmonton Economic Development Corporation's (EEDC) workforce development cluster.

Through additional public consultation, policy analysis and program development, the Administration returned to City Council in November 2006 with recommendations to implement a number of immigration and settlement initiatives and a policy framework to guide the implementation of the new programs and services. In December of that year, Council approved a budget that provided tax levy funding to several ongoing initiatives and directed the Administration to return to Council with immigration and settlement policy options. In May 2007, Council approved an Immigration and Settlement Policy focused on seven municipal service and program areas that relate to the attraction and retention of newcomers to the city: economic integration; intergovernmental relations; service access and equity; planning and coordination; communication, public awareness and education; community building and inclusion; and immigrant women. Responsibility for the implementation of the policy rests with the City's ODI.

Economic integration

The desire to promote the effective integration of immigrants into the labour force saw the City take steps to address its own human resource practices and to examine opportunities to support integration efforts with employers in the region. The City's Human Resources Branch created an outreach program and hired a human resource consultant (HRC) to work specifically toward creating a workforce that better represented the ethnocultural demographics of the region. The individual chosen, an immigrant herself, had substantial experience creating bridging and workplace integration programs for immigrants. She has since developed and implemented an immigrant internship program that has hosted eight interns in the City's Human Resources Branch and Transportation Department. Several of the interns are now in permanent positions with the City while the others are in the process of completing their internships.

The HRC facilitates job fairs in settlement agencies and other community settings familiar to immigrant and refugee populations and delivers seminars in the community that provide valuable information to immigrants on the City's job application processes. With provincial funding and through contracts with educational institutions, the consultant is also providing specialized support, such as cultural diversity training and language programs, to City business units where labour shortages are particularly acute or where there have been concerns expressed by immigrants about barriers to accessing jobs with the City. The HRC has developed an employment access program that includes working in partnership with a local community college and immigrant employment service to deliver job skill and language training directed toward increasing the number of immigrants working for the City's transit and medical emergency services. Curriculum is currently being developed and the program will commence in May 2009 with a second intake scheduled for September 2009. Edmonton Transit Services has contributed substantial resources to the project.

The City also worked in partnership with EEDC, local employers and community stakeholders in the creation of the Edmonton Region Immigrant Employment Council (ERIEC). Inspired by the success of the Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council (TRIEC), the City co-chaired, together with EEDC, a planning committee that

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completed a feasibility study and created an interim plan of action. Working with a local consultant, the committee was able to secure funding from multiple partners and establish a board of directors for the organization. ERIEC hired an executive director and commenced operations in September 2008. As ERIEC will complement and, in some cases, actively support the City's human resources initiatives, in 2009 the City is providing \$25,000 in partnership funding to ERIEC.

Intergovernmental relations

In 2005, the Alberta provincial government released its immigration policy framework, *Supporting Immigrants and Immigration to Alberta*.² The document includes a commitment to collaborate with municipalities in attracting and retaining immigrants. Recognizing the opportunity, Mayor Mandel has engaged in efforts to build collaborative relationships with federal and provincial ministers responsible for immigration. At the same time, the City's Office of Intergovernmental Affairs and Office of Diversity and Inclusion participated in various provincial planning bodies that examined issues related to economic and population sustainability. Despite municipal participation in a sub-committee devoted entirely to immigration and its link to economic sustainability, in 2007 a Canada-Alberta Agreement on Immigration was announced. This agreement committed the other orders of government to a "dialogue on the appropriate role of municipalities in program and policy development" (CIC 2007). To date, no such dialogue has taken place.

The City has, however, achieved much greater success at the administrative level. In 2006, the ODI developed a staff position devoted entirely to matters related to immigration, settlement and multiculturalism. ODI-initiated cross-

departmental and intergovernmental relationships have resulted in funding partnerships with the various orders of government. The City and provincial and federal governments have worked together to publish a *Newcomer Guide to Edmonton*, to operate a New Arrival Information Centre and develop and implement the Racism Free Edmonton Action Plan. These partnerships are with Alberta Human Rights, the Citizenship and Multiculturalism Education Fund, Alberta Employment and Immigration, Citizenship and Immigration Canada and Canadian Heritage.

Planning and coordinating for improved service access and equity

In 2005, the City Manager established the Office of Diversity and Inclusion. Since closing its Diversity Initiatives Office in 1997, the City continued to experience problems in the areas of human resources and service access related to exclusion and barriers to employment and service. The ODI is functionally located within the Deputy City Manager's Office and reports directly to the City's Senior Management Team (SMT), which is made up of the City Manager, the Deputy City Manager and the general managers of all City departments. ODI staff worked with the SMT to develop the City's diversity and inclusion goals, which address building a workforce reflective of the city's communities. Working with a cross-departmental working group, the ODI further developed the Diversity and Inclusion Framework and Implementation Plan,³ which contains a broad strategy as well as tools for achieving the City's diversity and inclusion goals. A broader Diversity and Inclusion Policy was presented to the City Council and approved in late 2008.

Diversity and Inclusion Teams are currently operating in each department, looking at ways to amend policy, practice, programs and services in ways that will meet the needs of a diverse workforce and population. Included in this is a

² The Policy Framework specifically references support for municipalities. This document can be viewed at <http://employment.alberta.ca/documents/WIA/WIA-IM_framework_overview.pdf>.

³ This is an internal City document. Copies can be obtained by contacting the Office of Diversity and Inclusion at 780-496-5779 or officeofdiversityandinclusion@edmonton.ca.

focus on the needs of a more culturally diverse population. The City's Immigration and Settlement Policy and initiatives align with these goals and provide a foundation for better meeting the needs of the various ethnocultural groups choosing to live, work and play in the Edmonton region.

Communication, public awareness and education

Through the research undertaken by the Prairie Metropolis Centre (PMC) and further best practice research and community consultation, it became abundantly clear to City Council and the Administration that the City would need to step up its efforts to communicate what it could offer to potential immigrants, including services for their effective settlement into the community. The PMC research indicated that newcomers chose Edmonton because of its employment opportunities, education institutions and quality of life. The City partnered with EEDC to establish a labour attraction Website, <www.movetoedmonton.com>, which highlights these particular elements of life in Edmonton and points out to newcomers and potential newcomers the type of support available to them should they choose to move to Edmonton. The Website includes video vignettes in seven different languages where recent immigrants share what it is they appreciate about life in Edmonton.

The City has also developed a *Newcomer Guide to Edmonton*, published in eight different languages: English, French, Mandarin, Spanish, Arabic, Hindi, Punjabi and Vietnamese. It was publicly released in October 2008 and complements the City's 3-1-1 service, launched in January 2009, which offers on-line telephone interpretive services in over 150 languages. This service provides information to all citizens, both established and new, on all City services, as well as referrals to relevant community services. Both of these services indirectly support the operations of the City's recently opened Citizen and New Arrival Information Centre, located in Edmonton City Hall. At the Centre, 3-1-1-certified agents offer in-person support by providing information on the city's services and referrals to relevant community-based settlement services. The Centre is being promoted and the Newcomer Guide is being made available at key points throughout the city, such as libraries, visitor centres, airports, settlement agencies and some community services agencies. As the Newcomer

Guide and New Arrival Information Centre align well with the Welcoming Communities section of the Alberta Government's immigration policy framework, they have received grant support from Alberta Employment and Immigration.

Community building, inclusion and the needs of immigrant women

During public consultations, the City was reminded time and again that the best recruitment strategy was a strong retention strategy. Immigrants choose to locate in cities where they have relatives or friends who share positive stories related to their arrival and settlement into the community. Newcomer groups identified challenges that could potentially undermine the City's efforts to welcome immigrants, refugees and their families. Immigrant organizations lacked the resources necessary to operate programs that supported the social, cultural and educational needs of these new arrivals. Immigrant groups were unable to find space to host programs and, at times, faced outright discrimination in trying to secure space in community-based facilities. The tireless work of newcomers often went unrecognized, and many communities were experiencing volunteer burnout. There was also evidence that many newcomers do not need or may not be eligible for services from the settlement agencies and sometimes lack engagement with City and other services that could effectively meet their settlement needs.

Using information and community support gained from significant consultations with immigrant groups and representatives of settlement agencies, the City established several new initiatives through its Community Services Department. The first is the operation of a grants program directed toward emergent immigrant and refugee groups. Unique among Canadian municipalities, it provides grants from a pool of \$450,000 to organizations providing everything from heritage language education programs, homework clubs, sports programs and cultural event programming.

The second initiative includes an array of supports to assist immigrant groups in their efforts to access space in the community. A space rental subsidy is currently available to organizations faced with financial barriers to accessing office or programming space. The City is also compiling a comprehensive listing of public and private spaces available to immigrant groups and developing a toolkit to help members

of these groups develop the skills in accessing this space. Discussions are underway to determine how the staff of the department might help address situations where these groups face discrimination. In 2007, City Council approved a Declaration of Membership in the Canadian Coalition of Municipalities Against Racism and Discrimination. Council recently approved an action plan that will address these and other forms of racial discrimination in the community. In order to address some of the acute challenges facing the city's African communities, the Mayor's Office and Community Services Department worked with community groups to establish an African Centre in one of the surplus public schools. The Mayor's Office and Community Services continue to examine the possibility of building a multicultural facility to also address some of these needs.

Finally, Community Services is looking at establishing a program that recognizes the significant contributions made by immigrants to the quality of life in Edmonton's communities. Still in its developmental stages, the program hopes to create ways to honour those individuals and groups who give their time and energy to projects that help the City achieve its goal of attracting more immigrants and retaining them in the community.

Conclusion

There is evidence that the initiatives described above are creating positive outcomes for both the City and its newest arrivals. The City hosts Immigration and Settlement Community Gatherings twice a year at City Hall, and the numbers attending continue to grow. Evaluations of the events indicate that newcomers and service providers feel more and more aware of the supports and services available to immigrants and their families and appreciate the attention being paid to their needs. The City is becoming

increasingly aware of the challenges facing these communities and the gifts and skills their members have to offer the city, both in the workforce and at the community level. These constructive relationships and clear policies continue to provide a solid foundation upon which the City can build communities where every citizen feels respected and included, and newcomers can achieve the quality of life they expect when they choose Edmonton as their new home.

About the author

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