

3

YORK REGION IMMIGRATION PORTAL PROJECT UPDATE

The Community and Health Services Committee recommends:

- 1. Receipt of the presentation by Cordelia Abankwa-Harris, Managing Director, Strategic Services Integration and Policy and Lisa Gonsalves, Manager, Program Development and Delivery.**
- 2. Adoption of the recommendation contained in the following report dated March 25, 2010, from the Commissioner of Community and Health Services.**

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that this report be received for information.

2. PURPOSE

This report provides an update on the progress of the York Region Immigration Portal project since its official launch in July 2008, and information on the development and implementation of the Portal's marketing strategy. The Community and Health Services Committee will also receive a demonstration of the Portal at its meeting on April 14, 2010.

3. BACKGROUND

The Region received a one-time capital grant of \$300,000 to develop a 'one-stop' web-based tool for immigrants

In 2006, the provincial Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration (the Ministry) distributed a Call for Proposals to municipalities to develop a Municipal Immigration Information Online Program. The Region engaged in a collaborative process with a wide range of community stakeholders serving immigrants to gain support and complete the funding application. In March 2007, the Region was awarded a one-time capital grant of \$300,000 to develop a Municipal Immigration Information Online Program. The funding supported the technical and content infrastructure development of the project. Provincial funding to sustain the York Region Immigration Portal's ongoing operational cost was not included in the one-time capital grant.

The purpose of the Portal is to provide useful information to immigrants to help them integrate more seamlessly into York Region communities

As identified by the Ministry, the main objective of the Portal is to support the economic and social integration of newcomers into York Region. The web site also functions as an online resource tool that informs immigrants of opportunities, government services and community supports within York Region.

Benefits of portal technology

The Region collaborated with the Town of Markham and the other Regional municipalities to define the costs and benefits of an internet Portal. In 2008, Regional Council and the Council of the Town of Markham approved the acquisition of portal technology and the recommended joint project to begin portal implementation. When implemented, the Joint Portal Project will provide many improved services online and provide a citizen-centric approach to service delivery. The transferability of the concept underpinning the York Region Immigration Portal initiative benefits the Joint Portal Project and provides a framework for understanding the benefits and outcomes of portal technology.

The process to develop the Portal involved a wide range of external and internal stakeholders

The former Human Services Planning Coalition adopted the Portal initiative as an important complement to its Inclusivity Action Plan. The initiative supported a key Inclusivity Action Plan objective – “to create a coordinated, integrated, user oriented and system wide response for newcomers settling and integrating into York Region communities”.

In 2007, the project’s external stakeholder committees were formed in order to provide direction on the content and design. The YRIP Steering and Content Committees were comprised of members from a variety of sectors including the former Human Services Planning Coalition, local municipalities, education, community health care; hospital based health care, community information providers, technical support, business/employer, consumer groups and local immigrant service organizations.

The project’s internal partnership linkages involved a number of Regional departments including Corporate Services Department – Legal Branch; Finance Department - Information Technology Services Branch; and Planning and Development Services Department.

The York Region Immigration Portal officially launched in July 2008

The Portal was officially launched and went online in July 2008. The former Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, Michael Chan, joined local and Regional representatives in

the launch. Various media attended the event and showcased the Portal as a valuable 'one-stop' tool. The official launch elevated awareness in the initial promotion of the Portal to human service organizations, new immigrants, ethno-cultural groups and Regional and local governments.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

New governance, new provincial web/content design strategies and new provincial funding inform the Portal's refresh and marketing strategy

Following the official launch, as part of the transfer of the former Human Services Planning Coalition, oversight of the Portal was transferred from the Planning and Development Services Department to the Community and Health Services Department. At this time, the Community and Health Services Department was provided an opportunity to refresh the Portal's original design and content based on established best practices. Other processes which informed the Portal's refresh included new Provincial web/content design strategies shared widely with Municipal Immigration Information Online Program partners, and renewed marketing to target user groups. Through an expression of interest, the Region responded to the Ministry's request to submit a proposal (outside of the original one-time capital grant) for funding to market the Portal. In March 2009, a one-time grant totalling \$19,870 was awarded to York Region to implement a Portal marketing strategy.

The goal of the Portal refresh includes creating a fresh design, while maintaining the same key areas of focus

The goal of the project was to create a better user experience including easier navigation capabilities, improved user interface, a fresh look and intuitive design. In addition, new Provincial multilingual translation initiatives provided an opportunity to enhance the Portal's multilingual web pages. Through this initiative, the web site's 'Welcome Page' will be translated in 15 different languages. As part of the project scope, staff ensured the integrity of the original work was carefully maintained. A two-pronged approach was taken to implement the project goals including a content audit, and a new design concept.

The Portal will help new Canadians integrate into York Region and help those who wish to immigrate to make informed decisions

A number of municipalities in Ontario are attempting to attract immigrants; York Region is a 'destination of choice' for thousands of newcomers annually. York Region is the fastest growing Census Division in Ontario and the third largest in Canada. Between 2001 and 2006 York Region's population increased by 22%, or by 163,458 people. Immigrants accounted for almost 60% of this growth, or 96,735 people. (*Immigrants refers to persons who are born outside Canada, including recent immigrants i.e. those who immigrated to Canada between 2001 and 2006*).

York Region is home to more than 380,500 immigrants. This represents 43% of the total population in 2006, an increase from 40% in 2001. (*Source: Statistics Canada, Census 2001 and 2006*).

New Canadians bring many benefits and strengths to their communities but without support it can take as long as fifteen years for many to become fully integrated into Canadian society. More immigrants are coming straight to York Region from their countries of origin. It is therefore crucial to focus on integration supports.

The recently launched Community Partnership Council will create a robust “made in York Region” immigration strategy which will address integration issues that meet this region’s unique circumstances. The Portal will also assist with integration by giving new Canadians the type of information they need to better access services and supports, and help potential immigrants make informed decisions.

Modernized, intuitive design and a comprehensive marketing campaign created to attract a wider audience

Over the last year, it has been necessary for the Community and Health Services Department to work in partnership with Information Technology Services Branch to make the necessary technical upgrades prior to launching the marketing campaign. As part of the technical upgrade, a feature was added to assist with tracking and monitoring the web site’s usage.

In order to market the Portal to a wider audience, the marketing strategy will focus on paid and unpaid media advertising to drive targeted user groups to the web site. A new tagline has been developed to build recognition of the Portal. The tagline is ‘*Information for Newcomers*’ and will be used throughout the marketing strategy to:

- Encourage recently arrived and prospective immigrants to use the Portal.
- Promote the benefits that can be gained from using the Portal.
- Educate immigrant service providers about the Portal.
- Create an awareness of the role that inclusivity plays in creating vibrant, diverse and healthy communities.
- Identify the most effective method to promote the Portal to newcomers.

Key messages that will be incorporated into the communication products include:

- The Portal has trusted, reliable and useful information one would need to settle into the community.
- The Portal is easy to access and understand.
- The Portal is one method the Region and the community are using to attract, retain and seamlessly integrate newcomers.
- York Region is a great place to live, work, learn and play.

The campaign will be targeted to both English and non-English speaking new and prospective immigrants. It will use media that the target audience is known to access, including a variety of English language publications directed to immigrants, multi-ethnic publications, online web sites directed to immigrants and local and ethnic media outlets. As part of the marketing campaign local municipalities, local school boards, immigrant settlement agencies and community agency providers will be encouraged to link to the Portal through their organizations' web site. In addition, the Portal's marketing strategy will profile the attributes of each local municipality.

Additionally, targeted promotional items such as bookmarks, notepads and tent-cards will be distributed through various immigrant settlement agencies, community and government organizations such as libraries. The campaign will run from April 2010 to September 2010. A post-campaign evaluation will also be conducted to determine the effectiveness of the marketing campaign.

Community partnerships and linkages important to the ongoing success of the Portal

The Portal was developed within a community partnership model and as such viewed as a 'community asset'. The Portal's intent is not to duplicate information provided by existing service providers. It provides links to third party immigrant related information and service providers, federal, provincial and York Region local municipal web sites that address specific needs of immigrants across the Region. The Portal provides a prominent link to OntarioImmigration.ca, Settlement.org and to the Federal Department of Citizenship and Immigration Canada on its home page. In addition, prominent links to various settlement service agencies including the Welcome Centre Immigrant Services, COSTI Immigrant Services and Job Skills have been added to the website. Future updates could include links to other services.

Ongoing partnership development and linkages with the broader community will be critical to maintain the Portal's credibility as a trusted source of information.

The Region continues to administer the Portal

The Region has committed to hosting the technical infrastructure within the Region's network. The Information Technology Services Branch has been instrumental in providing technical support to the project since its inception and continues to work collaboratively with the Community and Health Services Department to address the Portal's technical needs.

The Region, through the Community and Health Services Department, Strategic Service Integration and Policy Branch, will continue to administer the Portal to meet immediate operational needs and build on its credibility as a valued tool for immigrants. As part of the sustainability plan, Regional staff will respond to users through the web sites' Feedback Page on issues relating to technology and content update changes. To ensure

quality customer service is in place, users will be able to refer immigrant related questions to service agencies with expertise.

The Region will continue to look for and identify potential linkages with senior levels of government and community partners to address the Portal's long-term sustainability.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no net tax levy financial implications. The cost to develop, refresh and market the York Region Immigration Portal was covered in the total one-time 100% funding grant from the Ministry of \$319,870. Through in-kind support, and where resources permit, the Community and Health Services Department will continue to maintain the content on the Portal. However, staff will continue to seek opportunities for support to maintain the content on the Portal from the community and senior levels of government.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

The Portal will assist newcomers from other countries in particular, and anyone who is new to the region, to more effectively access information and services so they can more easily settle into and contribute to our communities and economy. It will also help those who wish to move to the region make informed decisions. York Region as a whole will be profiled. However the positive impact of the Portal will largely accrue to local municipalities and their residents as local governments play a vital role in providing services to immigrants.

7. CONCLUSION

As a sponsor of the Portal, York Region is a key partner in the ever-growing network of organizations and communities across Ontario that share a common goal of using web-based tools to promote inclusivity and sustainable development based on shared visions and values. The Portal is well positioned to act as an 'information gateway' to a wide range of services and information to help immigrants integrate into York Region communities.

For more information on this report, please contact Cordelia Abankwa-Harris, Managing Director, Strategic Service and Integration Policy Branch at Extension 2150.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

York Region Immigration Portal Update

Portal Demonstration

Cordelia Abankwa-Harris and
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Community and Health Services Department
April 14, 2010

Overview

- ❑ Background
- ❑ Goals of the portal refresh
- ❑ Purpose of the Portal
- ❑ Key feature changes
- ❑ Portal demonstration
- ❑ Next steps

Background

- ❑ Provincial Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration distributed a Call for Proposals
- ❑ Region was awarded a one-time capital grant of \$300,000 to develop online program
- ❑ Funding supported technical and content infrastructure development
- ❑ Region was awarded a one-time grant of \$19,870 to market the Portal



Goals of the portal refresh

- ❑ Create a better user experience
- ❑ Easier navigation capabilities
- ❑ Improved user interface
- ❑ Fresh look and intuitive design
- ❑ Maintain integrity of original work



Refreshed Portal is designed as a tool for social and economic integration

- ❑ Supports the economic and social integration of newcomers
- ❑ Functions as an online resource tool that informs newcomers of opportunities, services and community supports



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Slide 5

Original Portal 'Home Page'



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Slide 6

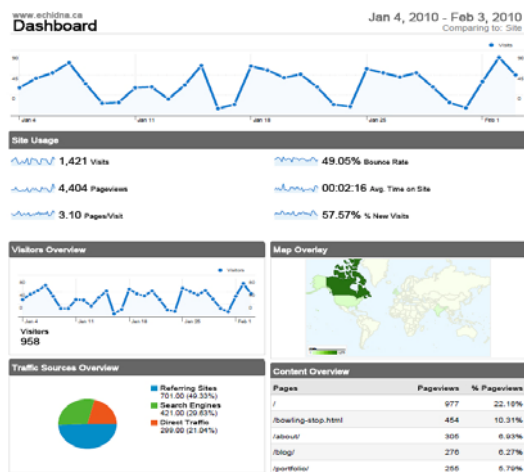
Original Portal 'Living Page'



Community and Health Services Committee/April 14, 2010

Slide 7

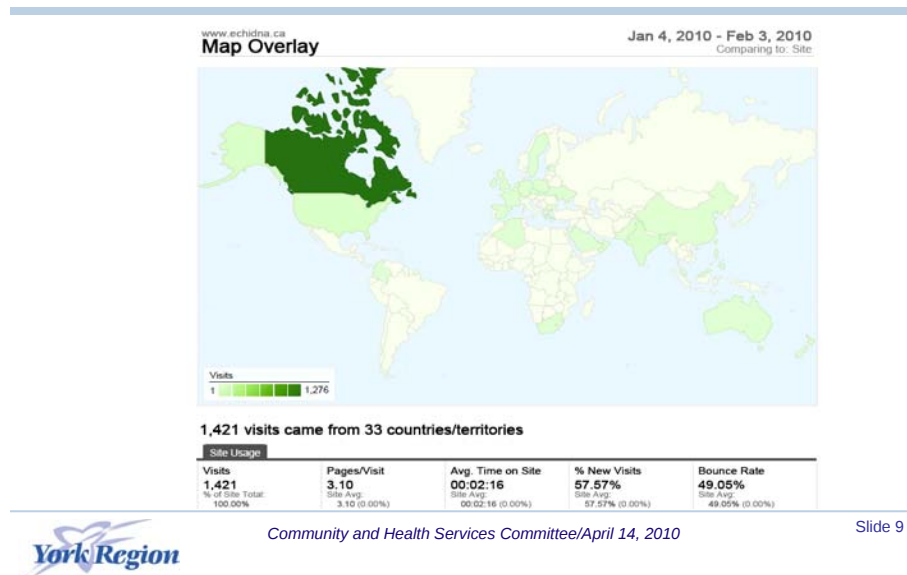
Google Analytics



Community and Health Services Committee/April 14, 2010

Slide 8

Google Analytics



Next Steps

- ❑ Transfer the refreshed Portal to Network
- ❑ Marketing and promoting the Portal
- ❑ Sustaining the Portal
- ❑ Partnerships and linkages
- ❑ Future project innovations