

19

YORK REGION IMMIGRATION PORTAL (YRIP)

The Planning and Economic Development Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendations contained in the following report dated May 11, 2007, from the Commissioner of Planning and Development Services:

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

1. Regional Council acknowledge the allocation of \$300,000 by the Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration to implement the York Region Immigration Portal.
2. Regional Council support the involvement of respective Departments of the Region in the York Region Immigration Portal as identified in the work plan from April 2007 to March 2008.
3. The Planning and Development Services Department report back to Council on the progress regarding the implementation of the York Region Immigration Portal (YRIP) project in October 2007.
4. This report be circulated by the Regional Clerk to local municipalities and the Human Services Planning Coalition (HSPC).

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to:

- Provide an update on the status of the Region's funding proposal to the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration (MCI) to create a Municipal Immigration Information Online (MIIO) Program, as reported to the Planning and Economic Development Committee on January 15, 2007.
- Provide an overview of the YRIP.

3. BACKGROUND

MCI distributed a call for proposals by municipalities to apply for one-time funding of up to \$300,000 to develop a Municipal Immigration Information Online Program (MIIO). Interest and input for a York Region Municipal Immigrant Information Online funding application was generated from local and regional governments, businesses, public and catholic school boards, Seneca College, United Way of York Region, community groups, immigrant service providers, including the new Welcome Centre. Letters of support

were garnered from all partners demonstrating collaboration and cross-sectoral partnerships. The Regional Municipality of York completed MCI's grant proposal and submitted the application in December 2006. The Region continued ongoing negotiations with MCI and submitted supporting documentation as requested in order to finalize the application.

Interdepartmental input and collaboration were attained when the work plan of YRIP was developed. The Finance Department and the Office of the Chief Administrative Officer provided expertise on information technology. The Community Services and Housing and Health Services Department provided input of future content of the portal. Their continued support in YRIP will be critical.

In March 2007, the Regional Municipality of York received notification from MCI that the funding proposal was successful. (*See Council Attachment 1*) MCI has delegated the task of making a formal funding announcement through a local MPP's office.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

4.1 Growth in York Region

York Region is Canada's sixth largest metropolitan centre. As of March 2007, it is home to an estimated population of 957,741. York Region has grown at a rate of approximately 3,000 people a month for the past five years, and is expected to reach a total population of 1.5 million in 25 years. Based on the latest census data, recent immigrants have accounted for 42% of the Region's population growth. Unlike the past, most new immigrants now come directly to York Region. About two-thirds of recent immigrants are of working age and in a position to contribute to the economy (i.e. generally considered to be 25 to 54 years of age) in addition to voting and childbearing age. York Region has the highest proportion (11%) of recent immigrants in the GTA who speak neither official language.

The top five languages spoken in the home for recent immigrants (1991-2001) in York Region are Cantonese, English, Chinese, Russian and Farsi. (*"Community Snapshots", 2006*)

4.2 Inclusivity Action Plan (IAP) Support for YRIP

Meeting the needs of York Region's population growth and large demographic change requires coordinated action on many fronts. For the purpose of establishing an online immigration portal for York Region, the HSPC and its Inclusivity Action Plan (IAP) have successfully engaged human service organizations in York Region who serve immigrant communities. A key IAP objective has been to create a coordinated, integrated, user-oriented and system wide response for newcomers settling and integrating into York Region communities.

4.3 YRIP Purpose

As identified in the Ministry's MIIO Program objectives, the YRIP will:

- Support the economic and social integration of newcomers in York Region by providing user-friendly, seamless access to settlement information and services.
- Function as an online gateway that most effectively informs prospective immigrants and newcomers about opportunities, government services and community support existing in the Region.
- Maximize resources available across institutions, save duplication of efforts, while enhancing individual organizations to serve their own clients.

4.3.1 Project Scope

The YRIP's primary focus will include developing information and tools to provide social support, settlement information and other services to immigrants and support the integration of immigrants into the local labour force.

The secondary focus will promote municipalities in York Region to potential or recently arrived immigrants. This will be achieved mainly by translating and posting marketing materials developed by York Region, local municipalities and other community partners.

4.3.2 Project Objectives

The YRIP key objectives to accomplish the goals described in the Project's Scope are:

- Objective 1: Assist newcomers and prospective immigrants with their settlement and employment needs via a welcoming single point of access portal service.
- Objective 2: Build relationships, bridge gaps and increase stakeholder capacity.
- Objective 3: Research, adapt and create YRIP content to meet the settlement and employment objectives of newcomers and attraction and integration objectives of York Region municipalities.

4.3.3 YRIP Governance Model

The Region is currently involved in the recruitment of project staff to oversee the development and implementation plan of the YRIP project. Project staff includes:

- YRIP Project Manager
- YRIP Content Development Specialist

The YRIP Governance Model will ensure the YRIP Work Plan is managed within the one-year project timeline and schedule of deliverables as set out with MCI. Key components of the model include:

- YRIP Steering and Planning Committee
- YRIP Advisory Committee
- Task Groups and Action Groups as identified to support subcommittees' work and issue specific initiatives.

4.3.4 YRIP Information Session

In order to inform and engage municipal staff/community partners, the Human Services Planning Branch will host a YRIP Information Session in May 2007. The purpose and scope of the Information Session is two fold. It will include an overview of the MIO Project, how portal technology works, the importance of the portal for the Region and why municipalities should join YRIP. The YRIP Information Session is one example that addresses a key objective of the project that includes building relationships, bridging gaps and increasing stakeholder capacity. A broad range of prospective partners such as community service providers, ministries, local and regional staff will be invited to attend the session.

4.3.5 YRIP Technical Solution

As identified by the technical solution requirements of the project, the Region's Information Technology Services Branch will work in collaboration with YRIP project staff to initiate a Request for Quote (RFQ) to develop the technical components of the project. The technical solution requirements will serve as a basis towards building the technical architecture of the portal.

4.3.6 Project Sustainability

MCI expects successful funding applicants to sustain the project after the one-time funding ends. The sustainability plan for the project includes:

- The Welcome Centre is a committed partner of the YRIP and will work collaboratively with the Region to assist in the development of the project.
- The Welcome Centre will develop a plan for managing the content and operating YRIP, subject to funding available.
- Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) is one of the funding sources that will be explored by the Welcome Centre to support its future web site on settlement and language services that will form the major content of YRIP. The final commitment of the Welcome Centre in this regard is subject to funds available from CIC.
- To ensure that the Welcome Centre's website integrates with the YRIP, the Welcome Centre will explore how a cross marketing strategy would be mutually beneficial to both partners
- The Region will host the portal on its servers and provide technical maintenance support

4.4 Relationship to Vision 2026

Vision 2026 addresses immigrant issues and inclusivity in a number of goal statements. Most specifically, in the goal of creating "*quality communities for a diverse population*" the action area associated with celebrating our diversity will be met by this initiative.

In creating a "*vibrant economy*", the action area of attracting and supporting business will be advanced by attracting a strong, internationally trained labour force and inform prospective immigrants and newcomers about opportunities, government services and community supports existing in the Region.

This project ensures York Region is ready for 2026, by creating a new portal technological infrastructure, in a service oriented architecture environment as envisioned and supported by the province and building on-line tools and resources locally.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct financial implications at this time. The cost of developing the York Region Immigration Portal will be covered in the one-time funding grant from MCI of \$300,000. Costs for the development of the YRIP will not be permitted to exceed the one-time funding grant of \$300,000.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

The York Region Immigration Portal will positively impact the entire York Region community. Local municipalities are important partners in the provision of human services in York Region. Becoming a more ethno-cultural inclusive community will take the efforts of many and provide significant value to residents of all local municipalities. The partners need to be committed to the principle of integrating resources and combining efforts toward the achievement of an effective, sustainable online communication and service delivery solution targeting newcomers and prospective immigrants.

7. CONCLUSION

As the sponsor of YRIP the Region becomes a partner to an ever-growing network of organizations that share a common goal of using the internet to promote inclusivity and sustainable development based on shared visions and values. In addition, the transferability of the concept underpinning this project and the outcomes will benefit local municipalities currently in the planning stage to adopt portal technology. The YRIP provides a framework for their information and decision support needs.

For further information about this report, please contact Mary Durante, Policy and Program Development Specialist, Human Services Planning Branch at (905) 830-4444 ext. 1504 mary.durante@york.ca.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

(The attachment referred to in this clause is attached to this report.)