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INTERNATIONALLY EDUCATED PROFESSIONALS CONFERENCE

The Community and Health Services Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendations contained in the following report dated September 28, 2011, from the Commissioner of Community and Health Services and the Acting Commissioner of Planning and Development Services.

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

1. The Commissioner of Community and Health Services be authorized to make applications for funding and execute service agreements with federal, provincial or community agencies to host an Internationally Educated Professionals conference in York Region, subject to the approval of Legal Services as to form and content.
2. The Regional Clerk circulate this report to the York Region Community Partnership Council and Human Services Planning Board of York Region for their information.

2. PURPOSE

This report provides the rationale for seeking funding to host an Internationally Educated Professionals (IEP) conference in The Regional Municipality of York. The IEP conference was identified as an action under the Council approved York Region Immigration Settlement Strategy.

3. BACKGROUND

Implementation of Immigration Settlement Strategy has begun

On September 22, 2011 Regional Council approved the York Region Immigration Settlement Strategy under the federally funded Local Immigration Partnership initiative through the adoption of Clause 5 of Report No. 7 of the Community and Health Services Committee. The Strategy was developed by the Region, in collaboration with the Community Partnership Council. The Community Partnership Council has begun the process of developing a three-year Action Plan to implement the community results and priorities identified in the Strategy. An important component of this work will be to identify funding opportunities to increase the community capacity to respond to the growing immigrant population.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

Immigration is an important component of York Region's workforce

The Changing Landscape: Recent Immigrants Living in York Region report notes that newcomers living in York Region are highly educated with over 50 per cent having a university degree or higher. Despite having high levels of education 60 per cent are working in jobs below their skill level compared to 37 per cent of Canadian born residents. As a result, newcomers are losing the skills that they come to Canada with, facing higher risks of unemployment and taking up to fifteen years to have equivalent incomes to Canadian born residents.

York Region's Economic Strategy Branch completed the Aging Workforce Study in 2011. The study identified that York Region will be facing a labour market shortage due to the retiring baby boomers over the next 20 years. Furthermore, it identified possible solutions for employers to retain and attract employees. The study found that newcomers will be increasingly important to help York Region remain economically competitive.

York Region IEP Conference will build innovation networks, facilitate learning for newcomers to gain meaningful employment and support newcomer entrepreneurs

The York Region Immigration Settlement Strategy identified hosting an IEP conference in York Region as an early success. The conference would support multiple strategic priorities including support for employers, support for the accreditation process and support for newcomer entrepreneurs.

Toronto has held an annual IEP conference for the past eight years and approximately 1,500 newcomers attend each year. It is a one-day conference usually held in February each year and includes panel discussions from industry experts, break-out sessions for professional sectors (engineering, information and communication technology, business, finance and health care) and soft skills workshops. The next Toronto IEP conference will be held on February 10, 2012. Other IEP conferences have been held in Kingston, Waterloo, Edmonton and Vancouver.

IEP conferences have been successful at helping immigrants gain information on supports available to them; further develop soft skills and their understanding of the Canadian work culture. A key draw for immigrants is the opportunity to connect with employers, support for better job to skill match, networking within their profession and hearing from other immigrants who have succeeded.

Although York Region has the second fastest growing newcomer community in Ontario, an IEP conference has not been held in York Region to date.

If funding is secured, the IEP conference would be held in the Spring of 2012 as a one-day conference, approximately four months after the Toronto IEP conference. This will allow sufficient gap between conferences and allow time to organize and secure funding. Like the Toronto model, the conference would help to address gaps, issues and concerns for both newcomers and employers. Unique to the York Region IEP conference would be the additional focus on newcomer entrepreneurs and the supports needed to start and manage their own business. Supports for newcomer entrepreneurs are critical to our economic vitality and is recognized by the federal and provincial governments.

An IEP Conference would align well with Economic Development projects and partner initiatives

The IEP conference strategically aligns with Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities funded projects in York Region including: the Aging Workforce Study, Hospitality First Project, and the Innovation in Manufacturing Project being led by York Region Economic Strategy Branch. Relevant internationally recognized occupational standards are a component of these projects.

An IEP Conference supports the goal of the Region's 2005 Economic Strategy to sustain a high quality workforce and collaborates with the Economic Action Plan presented to Regional Council on September 22, 2011.

Partner initiatives that the IEP conference aligns with include:

- *Addressing Skills Shortages for Small- and Medium-Sized Businesses* project being led by Social Enterprise for Canada
- Greater Toronto CivicAction Alliance report *Breaking Boundaries: Time to Think and Act Like a Region* identifies the need to leverage regional economic co-operation and improve labour force development across the Greater Toronto Area

The conference will demonstrate strong linkage between the economic vitality of York Region and supporting newcomer integration.

Relationship to Vision 2026 and Community and Health Services Multi-Year Plan

An IEP Conference would support the Vision 2026 goal of building a vibrant economy by attracting and supporting businesses, encouraging continual learning, promoting and supporting innovation, and partnering in service delivery.

The IEP conference further supports the goals identified under Community and Health Services Multi Year Plan, including fostering social inclusion and economic opportunities by addressing the needs of a growing and diverse community.

Next steps will be to secure funding and establish a steering committee

The immediate next step in developing the IEP conference would be to secure funding from provincial and federal governments, as well as commercial agencies. If the funding is secured, a steering committee would be established to organize the conference. Members of the Community Partnership Council will be involved at various levels including participation in the steering committee, recommending sponsors, encouraging newcomer participation, and promotion of the conference. Regional Council will be updated on the progress of the IEP conference, as appropriate.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

It is anticipated that it will cost approximately \$200,000 to develop and deliver a conference similar to the Toronto IEP conference. The costs associated with the IEP conference would be covered through funding by federal and provincial governments and commercial agencies. The cost for project setup, marketing and promotion to corporate sponsors, administration and printing would be covered within existing operating budgets.

The conference will not proceed unless funding is secured.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

Due to the importance of developing a competitive work force in key sectors in each local municipality, project staff will partner with local economic development offices to identify stakeholders to participate in the proposed forum.

The Region has a Small Business Enterprise Centre serving six municipalities: Town of Aurora, Town of East Gwillimbury, Town of Georgina, Township of King, Town of Newmarket and the Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville. There are three additional centres in the Town of Markham, Town of Richmond Hill and the City of Vaughan. As the mandate of these centres is to assist business start-ups, they can be partners in recruiting approximately 500 plus attendees for the conference.

7. CONCLUSION

The IEP conference would be the first one for York Region and is an innovative approach to address the needs of our economy. The IEP conference will lay the essential groundwork to encourage a sustained labour pool at the local level and support the economic integration of newcomers living in York Region.

The IEP conference jointly benefits both the Community and Health Services Department and the Planning and Development Services Department by supporting projects such as

the York Region Immigration Settlement Strategy, Economic Strategy, Aging Workforce Study and Community and Health Services Multi-Year Plan. All initiatives recognize the importance of enhancing labour market outcomes for newcomers living in York Region and help with the Region's economic vitality through meeting the labour market needs of employers.

For more information on this report, please contact Lisa Gonsalves, Acting Managing Director, Strategic Service Integration and Policy Branch at Ext. 2090 or Doug Lindeblom, Economic Strategy Director at Ext. 1503.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.