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IMMIGRANT RESEARCH AND INCLUSIVITY ACTION PLAN

The Planning and Economic Development Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendation contained in the following report, August 18, 2004, from the Commissioner of Planning and Development Services:

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that:

1. This report be received for information.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to provide a summary of initiatives to study and address the issue of ethno-cultural diversity in York Region. The report summarizes the Region's participation in the Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council (TRIEC) as well as two projects initiated under the sponsorship of the Human Services Planning Coalition (HSPC) – an *Inclusivity Action Plan* and a research partnership with York University.

3. BACKGROUND

York Region has received between forty to sixty thousand immigrants in each five year period for the past forty years, including 43,405 immigrants in the 1996-2001 census periods. In 2001, the proportion of foreign-born individuals in York Region was 39.1%, a higher proportion than the 905 regional averages of 34.3%. Within the GTA, the City of Toronto followed by Peel Region had the highest proportion of foreign-born individuals at 49.4% and 43.1% respectively.

This rapid growth in immigration brings assets in terms of skilled professionals, cultural diversity and economic prosperity. However it also challenges human service providers in responding to the needs of immigrants and in making York Region inclusive for all ethno-cultural groups. For example, of the 797,040 immigrants arriving in the GTA between 1991 and 2001, Toronto received 65%, Peel Region received 20% and York Region received 12%. And yet in 2003/04, York Region received only 5% of the dollars allocated by CIC for basic language training.

The HSPC recognized the importance of addressing the consequences of increasing rates of immigration. In its 2003-2004 work plan, the HSPC identified the issue as a priority, defining it as a question of inclusivity (i.e. generating the feeling and the reality of belonging).

Also in 2003-2004 the HSPC's Research and Innovation Action Group proposed a partnership with York University to study the relationship between immigrant settlement

patterns and the provision of human services in York Region.

In December, 2003 the HSPC and York University submitted an application for funding as a Community University Research Alliance (CURA) to the Social Science and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC). In the spring of 2004, HSPC was advised that it was one of 40 of 118 applicants that had passed the first phase of the grant approval process.

In a separate, but related, initiative the Human Services Planning Branch provides support to the Regional Chair in his role as a member of the Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council (TRIEC). TRIEC is a 68-member council representing civic leaders from the private, voluntary and public sectors from across the GTA. It is an initiative of the Toronto City Summit Alliance and has the goal of improving immigrant access to the GTA Region labour market. This is an important initiative as illustrated by the prediction that, by the year 2011, 100 percent of Canada's net labour force growth will depend on immigration.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

4.1 Inclusivity Action Plan

In January, 2004 the HSPC approved the establishment of a planning committee with representation from the Simcoe-York District Health Council, the United Way of York Region, Catholic Community Services of York Region, YRDSB, York Neighbourhood Services, CHATS, York Region Police Services, Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, York Region Health Services Department, York Region Community Services and Housing Department and the Human Services Planning Branch. The planning committee reviewed previous reports and recommendations and proposed three themes for an action plan:

- 1) improving communication
- 2) promoting ethno-cultural representation
- 3) creating ethno-cultural awareness

A consultation document has been developed and distributed to approximately 650 service providers in York Region. The planning committee will also be facilitating focus groups with various ethno-cultural organizations, groups and individuals. In total, the consultation will target a minimum of 500 respondents. The input will be compiled in a document, called *The Road to Inclusivity: An Action Plan for York Region*, which will form the blueprint of a region-wide plan of action to make York Region an ethno-culturally inclusive community. A draft of the action plan is scheduled for completion by October 2004.

A summit for human service providers and decision-makers is planned for late November 2004 or early January 2005. At the summit the draft *Inclusivity Action Plan* will be adopted and human service providers will be encouraged to begin working together to implement the region-wide, proactive strategy.

4.2 HSPC-York University Research Partnership

Working with Stan Shepson, Vice-president of York University and his staff, the second phase of the funding application process to SSHRC was submitted on Aug. 4, 2004. The proposal identified four major research areas – education, employment, health and well-being, and housing. Working groups with representation from York University faculty, the Centre of Excellence for Research on Immigration and Settlement (CERIS) and human service providers from York Region have been formed.

A Community Advisory Group (CAG) of key stakeholders representing service providers and immigrant groups in York Region was also created to provide input on the overall research program and direction. The sectors represented on CAG include: Immigrant/Settlement Services, Education, Police and Safety, Social and Family Services, Volunteer and Non-profit, Hospital-based Health Care, Community Health Care, Recreation and Culture, Planning and Development Services. Other staff support is provided by York Region Geomatics and the Human Services Planning Branches.

The submission for funding was deemed to be a strong one, with over 20 twenty letters of support from a broad range of human service providers. The total funding request is a million dollars over five years. A response to the funding request is anticipated in November 2004.

When approved, the study will provide practical research on the patterns of settlement of immigrants in York Region and the implications for both mainstream human service providers and settlement service agencies.

4.3 TRIEC

Chair Fisch is a member of the Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council, it's Intergovernmental Relations Committee and was a panellist with other GTA Mayors and Chairs discussing immigrant employment on June 29, 2004. Other York Region members on the Council include Mayor Don Cousens and Rahul Bhardwaj, CEO of York Region United Way.

One of TRIEC's first initiatives was Careerbridge, an internship program for internationally trained professionals. All Careerbridge interns are pre-screened to ensure they have high-level Canadian language skills, more than three years of international professional experience and verified post-secondary education. York Region received two interns in the first phase of Careerbridge and has agreed to continue its participation in the next phase.

Another TRIEC initiative is a mentoring program linking practicing professionals and skilled immigrants in the same occupation. York Region is one of three pilot sites that will be launching the program this fall. York Region's project will be co-managed by three community agencies with funding provided by HRSD. York Region's involvement has been to provide leadership in bringing stakeholders together and in championing the value of the project to the broader community.

These initiatives are specifically targeted at getting new Canadians into jobs for which they have been professionally trained, thus reducing the unemployment rate for recent immigrants – which was 10.7% compared to 5.4% for the total labour force in the GTA at the time of the 2001 census.

4.4 Relationship to Vision 2026

Vision 2026 addresses immigrant issues and inclusivity in a number of goal statements. Most significantly, in the goal of creating ‘quality communities for a diverse population’ the action areas associated with celebrating our diversity will be met by these initiatives.

They will also help to ensure an ‘enhanced environment, heritage and culture’ by building pride in our heritage.

In creating a ‘vibrant economy’, the action area of attracting and supporting business will be advanced by a strong, internationally trained labour force.

Meeting the needs of immigrants and newcomers to York Region will help achieve the goal of ‘responding to the needs of our residents’.

In the goal of ‘managed and balanced growth’, human service needs of all residents will be addressed in proactive ways.

And lastly, in the goal of ‘engaged communities and a responsive region’, the action area of being a Region that involves its citizens will be enhanced by these initiatives.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The costs of the *Inclusivity Action Plan* are limited to staff time, printing and mailing expenses. These costs were approved in the 2004 budget. In addition, the HSPC has contributed \$5,000 from revenues generated in the *It’s All Here* employment project.

The 2004 budget included a contribution of \$15,000 towards the HSPC - York University research project. An additional contribution of \$15,000 will be submitted with the 2005 budget. If the project receives funding from SSHRC, York University has confirmed a contribution of \$30,000. Other funding partners, such as CIC, Laidlaw and Trillium Foundations will be pursued.

The rapid rate of growth in immigrants and newcomers to York Region may require additional staff resources for analysis, project management and planning. A business case to support an additional staff resource will be included in budget requests for 2005.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

Local municipalities are important partners in the provision of human services in York Region. Programs and services provided by the Human Services Planning Branch continually and consistently include representation of the interests of area municipalities. The three southern municipalities have the largest numbers of newcomers, although the demographic shift is happening in all municipalities.

Table 1
Foreign-born individuals in York Region in 2001

Aurora	18.1%
East Gwillimbury	13.8%
Georgina	11.4%
King	21.4%
Markham	52.9%
Newmarket	18.7%
Richmond Hill	48.3%
Vaughan	41.9%
Whitchurch-Stouffville	16.7%
York Region Total	39.1%

Partnership with local area municipalities is an important and necessary foundation for all initiatives.

7. CONCLUSION

The changing demographics of York Region are an important consideration in its growth management strategy. The importance of a skilled labour force and the inclusion of immigrants in both the workforce, and as fully participating citizens, are critical to the growth of York Region as a strong, caring safe community. The *Inclusivity Action Plan*, the HSPC- York University research project and support of TRIEC are all initiatives that will contribute to that vision.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

(A copy of the attachment referred to in the foregoing has been forwarded to each Member of Council with the September 8, 2004 Planning and Economic Development Committee Agenda and is also on file in the Regional Clerk's office.)