

# Immigrant Attraction and Retention in Lanark County

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*“We are an untold good story. We want to grow, we have everything but they don’t know we are here.”*

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We value your input tremendously and hope that this research can help other rural municipalities follow in your footsteps as they try to initiate, expand, or sustain their immigrant attraction, integration, and retention efforts.

We also thank our Project Director, Dr. Wayne Caldwell, for the opportunity to engage in this meaningful research and for his support and guidance throughout the process. In addition, we thank the Ontario Ministry of Food, Agriculture, and Rural Affairs for their financial support.

## Executive Summary

Most small towns in Ontario are expected to experience labour shortages and declining populations in the upcoming years due to an aging population, youth out-migration, and declining birth rates (CRRF, 2005; CIRRO, 2011). Smiths Falls and Lanark County are no exception. To mitigate the economic challenges associated with population decline, the federal and provincial governments have identified immigration as an avenue through which labour market gaps can be filled.

Documenting the results of a mixed methods study, this report presents the reflections of eight key informants (policymakers, service providers, and officials) and six newcomers in Smiths Falls and Lanark County. The interviews with key informants revealed the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats, and next steps for the immigration efforts underway. The participant observation and virtual focus groups with immigrants shed light on the experiences of newcomers to the region. These reflections are summarized as best practices in this report and will contribute to a Best Practices Toolkit for the Rural Immigration Project.

In addition, 10 practical recommendations to fuel the immigration efforts already underway are proposed in this report. They are:

1. Collaborate and coordinate activities between the Smiths Falls and Lanark LIP. Look towards each other for best practices;
2. Create partnerships with all local Chambers of Commerce to facilitate the process of educating employers to recruit and retain the talent they need to meet the needs of their businesses;
3. Create a branding and marketing strategy to attract newcomers. Consider a collaborative approach between the departments of economic development and tourism;
4. Expand the initiative of creating a welcome pass to include Lanark County and profile surrounding communities;
5. Create an attraction and retention strategy for Smiths Falls and Lanark County based on research outlining the needs of the community and the immigrant population;
6. Consolidate the two immigration portals for Lanark County into one for the sake of efficiency and to avoid confusion;
7. Create immigrant-friendly policies at the municipal and organizational levels, such as anti-discrimination policies;
8. Create a physical space for immigrants/newcomers to be able to socialize and connect with each other such as an Arts and Culture Centre or a Multicultural Centre;
9. Work with the urban LIPs (especially service providers) to encourage secondary migration to rural areas; and,
10. Advertise business opportunities to potential immigrant entrepreneurs.

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## 1.0 Introduction

Many small and rural communities in Canada are struggling to maintain their population and employment base. They are challenged by forecasts of declining populations, expected changes in the workforce, and increasing national and global pressure to stay competitive (CRRF, 2005). In response to these challenges, all levels of government in Canada are working with communities to encourage the attraction and retention of primary and secondary immigrants in order to meet labour market needs, sustain population growth, and enhance diversity. However, many communities lack the resources to be able to create strategies to successfully attract and retain immigrants.

The Rural Immigration Project, led by Dr. Wayne Caldwell at the University of Guelph, is seeking to address the above-mentioned challenge. Funding for the project is provided by the Ontario Ministry of Food, Agriculture, and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA). The goal of this project is to help rural regions across Ontario develop policies and programs in order to attract and retain immigrants through a Toolkit of Best Practices. To do this, four case studies have been selected for the project, including Lanark County (and Smiths Falls).

The purpose of this report is to explore and assess the current immigration efforts in Lanark County and Smiths Falls. In addition, this report will share some stories of immigrants living in the region. To investigate the situation, the researchers used a mixed methods approach that included secondary data analysis, interviews, a virtual focus group, and participant observation.

This report is divided into three main sections. First, a brief context piece on immigration in Lanark County is introduced. Next, a findings section presents a SWOT analysis and next steps that emerged from the interviews with service providers and policy makers. Then, the findings from a virtual focus group and participant observation with immigrants are presented. Finally, recommendations for Lanark County and Smiths Falls are offered.

## 2.0 Context: Lanark County

Lanark County is located in Eastern Ontario. This vast geographical area is composed of eight municipalities including: Beckwith, Town of Carleton Place, Drummond/North Elmsley, Lanark Highlands, Mississippi Mills, Montague, Perth, and Tay Valley (Lanark County, 2014). Smiths Falls is a separated single tier municipality within the geographical boundaries of Lanark County and will be included with the other municipalities in this section of the report. As of 2011, Lanark County had a population of 64, 325 with Smiths Falls as its most populated municipality.



**Figure 1: Map of Lanark County**

*The Rural Mosaic: Building on Strengths & Seizing Opportunities* strategic plan for the LIP – Renfrew and Lanark (LIP – RL) acknowledges that “local economies are changing due to youth-outmigration, an aging workforce and a shortage of skilled labour” (LIP –Renfrew and Lanark, n.d., p.1). Attracting and retaining immigrants is identified as a potential solution to these demographic challenges. Similar concerns with the workforce are outlined in Smiths Falls, *A Strategy to Welcome Newcomers*. This report states that “immigration has become an essential source of population sustainability, regional economic development and cultural vitality” in rural areas (Smiths Falls LIP, 2011, p.7). According to Statistics Canada data, the population of Lanark County has been increasing, albeit marginally. Immigrants as a percentage of the population peaked in 2006 and the percentage has since decreased. For more information, the next section describes the composition of immigrants in Lanark County, as per the 2011 National Household Survey (NHS) and Census data from 2001 and 2006. Please note that the global non-response rate for the Lanark County in the 2011 NHS was 39.1%, and this may affect the quality and accuracy of the data presented below.

## Immigrants in Lanark County

The three figures below describe the characteristics of immigrants in Lanark County, their continents of origin, and their representation as a percentage of the total population.

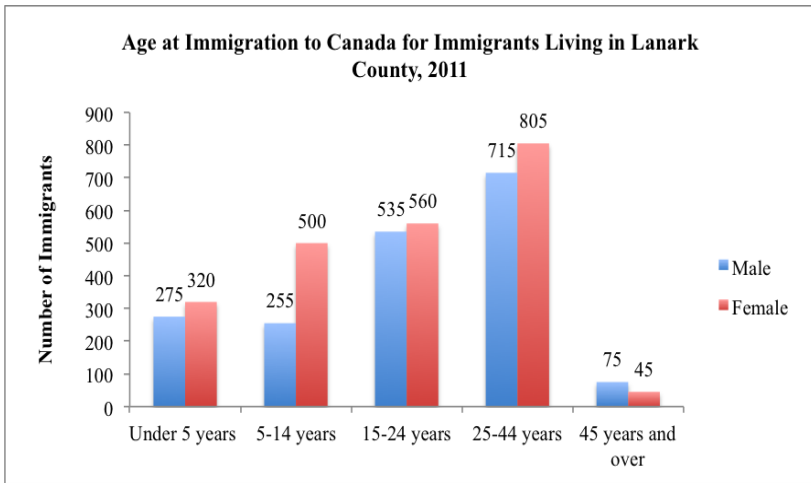


Figure 2: As of 2011, 64 percent of immigrants living in Lanark County were between the ages of 15-44 when they first immigrated to Canada. The percentage of immigrants aged 45 years and older was very small.

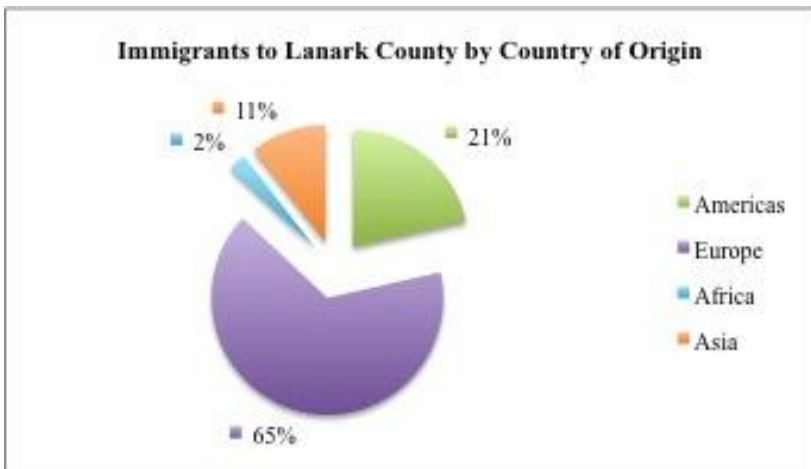


Figure 3: As of 2011, the majority of immigrants living in Lanark County emigrated from Europe and immigrants of African descent made up the minority, a 63 percent difference.

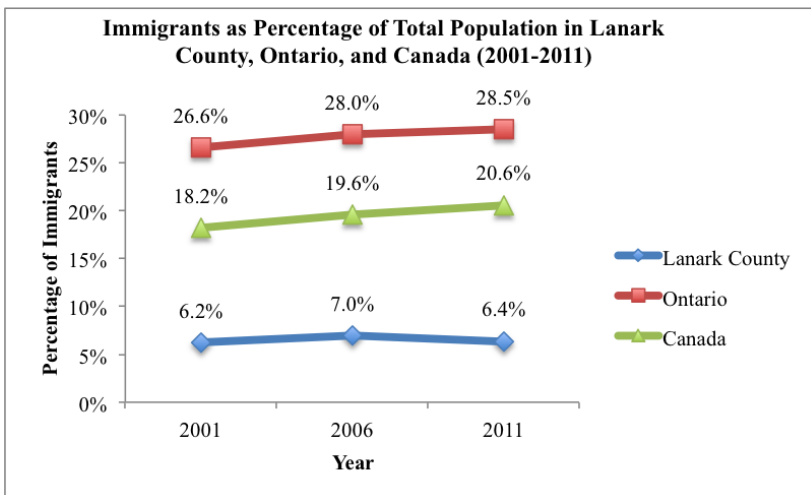


Figure 4: From 2001-2006, the representation of immigrants as a percentage of the total population in Lanark County increased by 0.8%. From 2006-2011, it decreased by 0.6%. The percentage of immigrants to Ontario and Canada has increased by approximately 3 percent each from 2001-2011.

In summary, the representation of immigrants as a percentage of the total population has decreased by 0.8% between 2006-2011. The majority of immigrants living in Lanark County were between the ages of 15 and 45 when they first arrived in Canada. And, the majority of immigrants to Lanark County originate from European countries. The section that follows will highlight the immigration efforts currently underway in Lanark County and Smiths Falls.

### 3.0 Immigration-related Efforts

Many immigration-related efforts are underway in Lanark County and Smiths Falls. Immigration efforts in this section are divided into two sections: 1) Efforts associated with the Local Immigration Partnership – Renfrew and Lanark (LIP – RL); and, 2) Efforts associated with Smith Falls Local Immigration Partnership (SF LIP). Since Smiths Falls is geographically located within Lanark County there is some overlap, especially with service provision. These overlaps will be noted. This next section will speak to the various programs, projects, partnerships, policies, and events in place. Please note, this section is not intended as a comprehensive list of the efforts; rather, it attempts to paint a general portrait.

#### *Lanark County*

Immigration efforts in Lanark County started off with the launch of the Local Immigration Partnership - Renfrew and Lanark (LIP-RL) in early 2011. Initially, the project was taken on by the staff at the Labour Market Group of Renfrew and Lanark, a satellite office of the 1000 Islands Regional Workforce Development Board. The Labour Market group initiated immigration efforts by identifying immigration as an area of focus for the development of the local workforce. The LIP-RL has two advisory councils, one for Lanark and one for Renfrew, and covers the largest geographical area in Ontario<sup>1</sup>. The Lanark County

*“We recognize that immigration is not just a benefit to economic development. It is a benefit to everything. It is a benefit to cultural availability. It is a benefit to the depth of pluralism that can be achieved. Painting it all in an economic development picture is crucial, but that’s not the whole story.”*

<sup>1</sup> The Rural Immigration Project chose to only focus on the efforts of the Lanark portion of the LIP.

advisory council consists of partners from Perth & District Union Public Library – Perth, TR Leger School for Adult, Alternative and Continuing Education, TR Leger Immigrant Services – Lanark County, Lanark Planning Council For Children, Youth and Families – Carleton Place, Algonquin College Employment Services Perth Campus – Perth, Canadian Career Academy – Carleton Place, and The Town of Carleton Place. In the strategic planning process, five key areas of focus were identified for immigration efforts Lanark: 1) Employment Opportunity; 2) Language Training; 3) Awareness; 4) Newcomer Information Guide; and, 5) Service Provider Readiness. In addition to these strategic priorities, the LIP is in the process of initiating a pilot project to foster welcoming communities. To overcome the challenges associated with limited resources in rural areas, the LIP uses an asset-based model to make the most of existing community assets and resources.

The LIP staff acknowledges that political, community, and employer buy-in are key ingredients for immigration efforts to be effective. The LIP spends a considerable amount of resources creating awareness around the benefits of attracting immigrants and the programs that are needed to retain them. To attract immigrants, they have two online platforms promoting the region and the work of the LIP. The Smiths Falls LIP created the first Lanark portal to mirror the Smiths Falls portal. The LIP – Renfrew and Lanark created the second portal for Lanark and Renfrew once they became an official LIP.

1. [Immigrate to Lanark](#); and,
2. [Lanark County Welcomes You](#).

To help with retention (and attraction), the LIP has created employers' guides for the manufacturing, healthcare, and construction sectors. In addition, the LIP supports various programs and projects that are detailed below.

## Programs

Three key programs<sup>2</sup> have been initiated in Lanark County. These include:

- 1. Settlement Services.** The TR Leger School of Adult, Alternative and Continuing Education, which are a part of the Upper Canada District School Board, hold the Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) contract for settlement services. The main office is in Cornwall, which has a welcoming centre where immigrants can drop-in for services. The settlement services department has two part-time staff and a team lead. Each part-time staff is responsible for providing satellite services, when the need arises, to a large geographical area that includes Lanark County and Smiths Falls. In terms of evaluation, quarterly reports are prepared for CIC, mainly tracking client numbers. There is also a qualitative component to share success stories. Under the agreement with CIC, there are target numbers of newcomers that a settlement agency should serve.
- 2. Language Services.** The TR Ledger School offers English as a Second Language (ESL) programs in Cornwall and Brockville. ESL was offered in Smiths Falls, but currently there is not enough demand. In addition, TR Leger offers the LINC<sup>3</sup> program (Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada) online and at the Cornwall Office. The school is accredited as a regional CLARS assessment centre, which assesses the language proficiency of immigrants to determine their starting point in the ESL or LINC program. ESL staff host conversation circles and workshops for newcomers on topics such as financial literacy as well as citizens' rights and responsibilities.
- 3. Newcomer Youth Mentorship Program.** Big Brothers and Big Sisters of Lanark County host a newcomer youth mentorship program on an as needed basis. The program pairs newcomer children with a mentor to engage in a variety activities depending on individual interests. For more information see the Big Brothers and Big Sisters Programs [here](#).

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<sup>2</sup> Programs are defined as any planned series of events with funding for 3 or more years.

<sup>3</sup> ESL is funded by the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship, Immigration, and International Trade and can be accessed by anyone. LINC is a federal program, funded through CIC and is accessible to Permanent Residents and Convention Refugees only.

## Projects

There are five projects<sup>4</sup> underway in Lanark County. These include:

- 1. Municipal Buy- In Package.** Recognizing the need for political support, a presentation was designed by the LIP - RL staff to educate elected officials about the importance of immigration and to build capacity among the municipalities to serve newcomers. There are over 25 municipalities in Lanark County that received a presentation from the LIP staff. Through these presentations they hope to garner political support for immigration.
- 2. Welcoming Communities Project.** The LIP - RL developed a Welcoming Communities Project after conducting 18 months of research. Through the research, they discovered that retention is a bigger challenge for Lanark County than attraction. To address this challenge, they proposed a project that uses micro-grants to support local organizations that are interested in making their existing policies and/or programs immigrant-friendly. In theory, having immigrant-friendly policies and programs will allow immigrants the opportunity to participate in community events, create a sense of belonging, and, ultimately, encourage them to stay. The LIP - RL have received over thirty expressions of interest from local organizations that want to make small, sustainable changes to existing programs and policies to include a diversity and/or multiculturalism component. For example, organizations could be granted funding to purchase translation services to make a program inclusive for a particular audience. The LIP-RL is actively seeking funding opportunities to make the Welcoming Communities Project possible.
- 3. Welcoming Communities Seminars.** The LIP-RL, in partnership with Mills Community Support and the Smiths Falls LIP, organized welcoming communities seminars in Carleton Place, Mississippi Mills, and Smiths Falls. A community activator, [Bruce Anderson](#), was invited to facilitate sessions to improve community cohesiveness by acknowledging existing strengths in the community.

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<sup>4</sup> Projects are any initiatives that are not defined as programs.

4. **“My Story” Campaign.** The *My Story Campaign* was created by the LIP-RL to understand newcomer experiences. Their target audience included a range of stakeholders including: newcomers to Canada, employers who have hired newcomers, service providers who have assisted newcomers, and community members with connections to newcomers. This storytelling approach served as a way to reach out to immigrants and better understand how their settlement experiences could be improved.
5. **Employer Engagement Sessions.** In partnership with the Chamber of Commerce in Mississippi Mills, the LIP - RL staff conducted presentations for employers to inform them about future demographic challenges and the role of immigration in mitigating these challenges. Through the presentations they discovered that most employers were not actively planning for the future workforce needs of their businesses. Since the presentations were conducted, more employers have been approaching the LIP staff to learn about how immigrants can help them meet their labour market needs.

It is clear that local champions, municipalities, elected officials, business organizations, and service organizations are coming together in the Lanark Country to further the cause of immigrant attraction and retention through programs and projects. Key efforts are summarized as best practices on page 28 in this report.

## *Smiths Falls*

The Smiths Falls Local Immigration Partnership (SF LIP) started in 2011 and covers an 18 km radius. Immigration efforts began with the creation of a web portal, which is now maintained under the municipal website. The LIP Council strives to include cultural organizations, community police officers, service providers, economic development officers, the welcome wagon, and the TR Leger School on the LIP council. Most representatives on the LIP have an alternative staff member who can attend meetings in their absence to ensure that everyone stays up to date. In the past there was an employers' council, but LIP staff found it more effective to meet with employers one-on-one as they all had different needs. While Smiths Falls LIP is separate from the LIP – RL, they share many social services, and collaborate when the opportunities arise. Two key portfolios overlap between the two LIPs: ESL classes and settlement services. TR Leger offers ESL classes in Smiths Falls and Lanark County contingent upon the number of immigrants who are willing to participate. Currently, there are no ESL classes in Smiths Falls due to insufficient demand. In addition, Smiths Falls LIP and LIP - RL collaborate on certain initiatives such as the welcoming communities seminars that took place earlier this year. While Smiths Falls does not have a large population of immigrants, there is an employer in town actively employing immigrants from the Philippines. Moreover, many of the local farms employ temporary foreign workers and healthcare industries are recruiting Personal Support Workers from abroad. The following section will discuss the immigration efforts in Smiths Falls in further detail including programs, projects, events, and policies.

## Programs

There are various programs in Smiths Falls. These include:

- 1. Awareness.** The SF LIP creates awareness about diversity, the benefits of immigration, and the activities of the LIP through a variety of approaches. They work with service providers to ensure they are considering adaptations needed to serve newcomers (e.g. translation) and they understand what other service offerings are available to assist immigrants in the community. To get the word out about the broader LIP activities, the LIP staff utilize their website, quarterly newsletters, community partners, and community events.
- 2. Resource Guides.** The SF LIP created two guides to help with immigrant attraction and retention. First, a [resource guide](#) was created to help newcomers settle into the community. The guide is available in English, Mandarin, and Tagalog. Second, an [educational guide](#) was created to help employers understand the needs of newcomers in the workplace and how to support their integration.
- 3. Online ESL.** Recognizing that ESL classes can only be held in Smiths Falls if there is sufficient demand, Willis College bought ten licenses for an online ESL program called Easy Speak. These online lessons can be accessed for free at the Smiths Falls Public Library.
- 4. Welcome Wagon.** The [Welcome Wagon](#) is a free greeting service for people undergoing lifestyle changes including moving to a new neighbourhood. Once the welcome wagon team is notified about a new community member, a community champion visits their house to present the welcome basket and answer any questions about the community. The welcome wagon is a service that is available in many communities but it requires someone to take the initiative to go the extra mile to personally welcome newcomers.

- 5. Partnership with Smiths Falls Chamber of Commerce.** The Smiths Falls & District Chamber of Commerce provides a free one-year membership for newcomer entrepreneurs. The benefits of joining the local Chamber of Commerce include: an invitation to networking sessions and to be listed in the Chamber of Commerce’s Business Directory. To celebrate the growing number of newcomer entrepreneurs in the community, an annual Immigrant Entrepreneur Award is presented at the Chamber’s annual general meeting. This award has been offered with great enthusiasm from the community as signaled by the high number of nominations received each year.
- 6. Community Police Information Session.** In Fall 2014, Constable David Murphy, a Community Services Officer with the Smiths Falls Police Service, was invited to present to an ESL class in Smiths Falls as a guest speaker. Before an audience of approximately 15 newcomers, Constable Murphy spoke about the Canadian law enforcement system, citizens’ rights and responsibilities, and the role of the police in plain language. “I wanted to convey that the police want to help the community stay safe,” said Constable Murphy. An important part of his session was the question answer period, which allowed newcomers to pose questions such as: what is the legal drinking age in Ontario? Will we get arrested for walking on the grass? Can my children drink at home? The variety of questions indicated that Constable Murphy and the 15 newcomers who attended the session built a bridge towards integration through increased awareness of the Canadian system. Constable Murphy hopes to continue collaborating with ESL classes to help newcomers understand how police services prevent crime and protect society.
- 7. Working with International Students.** The SF LIP works with a growing number of international students at the local High School. For example, if the international students at the High School want to host an event, the LIP staff will help facilitate that process. It is hoped that building these relationships may be beneficial in the future if these international students decide to stay in Smiths Falls and are granted Canadian citizenship.

## Projects

A project of Smiths Falls is the **Welcoming Communities Group**. According to their Facebook page, the Smiths Falls Welcoming Community Group is “an informal group of community members & organizations working together to create programs that capitalize on the talents available in the community and encourage community members to become more involved and more engaged in the everyday life in town”. Currently in its infancy stage, this new grassroots group has no formal agenda. The members intend to identify on-going opportunities that will contribute to building an inclusive, welcoming community.

## Events

Smiths Falls hosts two main events newcomers may be interested in - the **Newcomers’ Dinner and Community Potlucks**. Every year, various partner organizations of the LIP assist in coordinating and hosting a newcomers’ dinner for newcomers who have arrived in the community within the last three years. The organizations that provide space, food, and equipment rotate on a yearly basis, with a new organization taking the lead each year. In addition, the LIP works with Mills Community Support to organize monthly community potlucks where everyone is welcome.

## Policies

The municipality of Smiths Falls has a [cultural policy](#). The policy recognizes the importance of culture and articulates the need to make culture a strategic priority.

## Summary

For a small geographical area, Smiths Falls and District has several programs, projects, events, and policies in place to guide immigration efforts. The Local Immigration Partnership, service organizations, community police services, business organizations, and private companies are spearheading these efforts. The next section will unveil the strengths, weakness, opportunities, threats, next steps, and ideal vision identified by the policy makers and service providers in regards to immigrant attraction and retention in Lanark County and Smiths Falls.

## 4.0 Findings: Interviews

Eight interviews were conducted with key informants who identified as policymakers, service providers, or key players involved with immigration in Smiths Falls and Lanark County. For the sake of consistency, each key informant was asked to reflect on the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats pertaining to immigration-related efforts in their respective region. Their reflections are presented in this section.

### Strengths

Key informants from Smiths Falls mentioned 5 key strengths; whereas, the key informants from Lanark County mentioned 3. These strengths will be separated and presented by region below.

#### Smiths Falls

The key informants mentioned 5 key strengths; including: political support, the Smiths Falls LIP, clear vision and continued strategic planning, community buy-in, and a cultural policy.

First, at least 70 percent of key informants mentioned political support as a strength. The Mayor and council members demonstrate their support by attending community events, inaugurating businesses, and becoming loyal customers.

Second, one hundred percent of the key informants mentioned the SF LIP as a strength of their immigration efforts. The many reasons the LIP is considered strong include: the inclusion of immigrants on the LIP council, strong relationships with LIP members, partnerships with other rural LIPs, small geographic purview, and their central location in Town Hall. Combined, these strengths translate into commitment from partners, access to resources, and strong collaborations.

*“You have to have people on the LIP committee, not just Canadians...people from the immigrant population as they have the ability to reach back and connect to that population”*

Third, at least 70 percent of key informants mentioned a clear vision and continued strategic planning as a strength of their efforts. Clear vision refers to an acknowledgement of the important role that immigrants will play in the future of the community. Strategic planning refers

to the research that was conducted when the LIP was initially formed to outline the need for immigration and detail any efforts already underway. These two elements are key for long-term impact as they help generate community buy-in.

Fourth, at least 50 percent of key informants agreed that community buy-in is a strength. The community, they assert, is welcoming already as evidenced by local support of community events. In addition, all key informants spoke passionately about the many benefits of living in Smiths Falls and are excited to promote these benefits to newcomers.

Finally, the Town of Smiths Falls has a [cultural policy](#). The policy recognizes the importance of culture and articulates the need to make culture a strategic priority. One of the purposes of the policy is to attract and retain newcomers. This policy is a strength of their efforts because it canonizes Smiths Falls commitment to prioritizing immigration and sets them apart from other municipalities in Lanark County.

## **Lanark County**

Key informants from Lanark County identified three key strengths, including: 1) the Local Immigration Partnership - Renfrew and Lanark; 2) ESL services; and, 3) Settlement Services.

First, the Local Immigration Partnership - Renfrew and Lanark (LIP-RL) was mentioned as a strength. For example, the LIP-RL's collaboration with the Labour Market Planning Board and with Mills Community Support has helped them leverage market research and community development expertise to facilitate the immigrant attraction and retention efforts. Approximately 75 percent of the key informants mentioned the LIP-RL as a strength of the immigration efforts in Lanark County.

Second, the ESL services offered through TR Leger were lauded in many interviews. TR Leger is part of the Upper Canada District School Board, a partnership which makes it easier for parents of newcomer children to be aware of and have access to ESL training. Based on demand, TR Leger can offer satellite or online ESL classes, English conversation circles, and presentations from community services such as police services.

Lastly, Settlement Services, also offered through TR Leger, were mentioned as a notable strength of the immigration efforts in Lanark County. Similar to the ESL services, satellite settlement services are offered meaning that a part-time Settlement Services Worker travels throughout Lanark County to provide settlement services to newcomers in the region. Interestingly, the ESL Teacher and the Settlement Services Officer are both part-time positions being taken on by the same person. Eighty percent of the key informants mentioned TR Leger as a strength of Lanark County's immigration efforts.

These eight strengths from Smiths Falls and Lanark County will be translated into best practices that will populate the toolkit for the Rural Immigration Project.

### *Challenges/Weaknesses*

The interviews with key informants revealed many challenges that champions are facing as they try to further their efforts aimed at attracting and retaining immigrants in Smiths Falls and Lanark County. In Smiths Falls, some of the challenges include: assumptions that there are negative perceptions towards immigrants, lack of awareness of the need

*“I find with some of the LIPs there is an awful lot of talk and I don't walk away from the meeting with ok here is an action plan that I am responsible for next time and this is what we must do. Sometimes the LIPs start out with a lot of flourish and over the years they have almost gone about as far as they can go...I think we are almost at a bit of a stall for some who aren't certain what more they can do”*

for immigration, challenges associated with integrating the spouses and children of immigrants, continuous newcomer engagement in events, lack of attraction strategy for Smiths Falls, lack of an up-to-date strategic plan for LIP, inconsistent schedule of ESL classes, employer engagement in initiatives, lack of understanding of local labour market needs and how immigration can help, time-consuming nature of collaboration, and lack of stable funding. Challenges relating to CIC's changing priorities and urban-centric policy were also mentioned.

The weaknesses mentioned by key informants in Lanark County include: having two web portals for Lanark County; lack of involvement of key service organizations in the LIP-RL; struggle with community and political buy-in; large service area of LIP-RL (it covers the largest geographic area of any LIP in Ontario); and, lack of newcomer engagement. The difficulty in achieving CIC's recommended targets for Settlement Services clients was mentioned as an external challenge that has implications for Lanark County's immigrant attraction and retention efforts. Achieving these targets was identified as a challenge due to the distance and travel time in such a large geographical area.

*“People have good intentions saying this is what they [immigrants] need, well that is not what they need...we need to reach out to those voices and say come on tell us what you need and how can we make the experience better for you and make you feel [like you are] a part of the community”*

### *Opportunities*

*“We are an untold good story. We want to grow, we have everything but they don't know we are here.”*

Lanark County and Smiths Falls boast many attractive qualities mentioned by key informants. In Smiths Falls these included affordable business space; being situated at the heart of the Rideau River; close proximity to major centres; good lifestyle (parks and recreation areas); low cost of living; availability of commercial, retail, industrial, and small-scale manufacturing infrastructure; active transportation options; and, good service offerings. In Lanark County, the rural lifestyle, affordable business space, and the low cost of living were mentioned as the main factors that attracted newcomers. There is opportunity to capitalize on these community assets to promote the region to potential newcomers.

### *Threats*

The key informants identified a variety of threats that may hinder immigration efforts in Lanark County including: a lack of amenities, lack of a critical mass of immigrants, challenging economic conditions, and poor data for rural areas. Most communities in Lanark County are experiencing population decline due to an aging population, youth outmigration, and low birth rates. Population decline leads to a smaller tax base, resulting in cutbacks to community

amenities and services such as public transportation. Most communities Lanark County are very homogeneous compared to larger centres; this lack of ethnic diversity may affect attraction efforts. Currently, Lanark County does not have a large number of employment opportunities that are attracting immigrants to the area. Smiths Falls has a similar issue due to the loss of some major employers in the last few years such as the Hershey Factory, Staples, and Target. Understanding the depth of the issue and creating strategies to mitigate these economic challenges is difficult because Statistics Canada does not have reliable data for communities with a population fewer than 10,000 people.

### *Next Steps*

The key informants, in response to the challenges/weaknesses, identified diverse next steps for immigration efforts. These are elaborated upon below.

Nine next steps were identified by key informants in Smiths Falls, including:

1. Increase education to employers about how to recruit the talent they need to meet their business needs;
2. Create a branding and marketing strategy for the Town of Smiths Falls;
3. Create a 'Welcome Pass' that offers newcomers discounted prices on tourist attractions and other community services;
4. Integrate an immigrant attraction and retention strategy into the community and economic development plan;
5. Create an asset map for the community, to better understand how existing resources can be leveraged;
6. Create programming for newcomer youth;
7. Conduct more research on the needs of the immigrant population to inform strategic planning;
8. Ensure that information for immigrants is accessible in terms of language and format (written, video, etc). Work with new mediums such as podcasts; and,
9. Explore pockets of funding beyond CIC. For example, another municipality received funding from city council to renovate their space into a multicultural centre.

Five next steps were identified by key informants in Lanark County. They include:

1. Educate the elected officials throughout the County about the importance of immigration, by framing the situation in economic development terms;
2. After achieving political buy-in, encourage lower-tier municipalities to create their own initiatives to attract and retain immigrants;
3. Increase education to employers about how to recruit the talent they need to meet their business needs;
4. Seek funding for LIP-RL to provide micro-grants for organizations looking to make their existing policies and programs immigrant-friendly. Many organizations already work on anti-bullying and LGBT inclusion frameworks, multiculturalism could be easily included; and, Engage with international students to ensure their integration needs are met.

### *Wishful Thinking*

If resources (time and effort) were not a constraint, key informants mentioned that they would ideally like to pursue these potential avenues for future action.

1. Key informants in Smiths Falls and Lanark County identified the following “wish-list” for future action:
2. Increase awareness of diversity through events and organize diversity training for the police force and social service organizations;
3. Leverage the existing Filipino ethnic enclave in Smiths Falls to attract more members of the same ethnic group;
4. Rural LIPs could work with the urban LIPs to encourage secondary migration to rural areas;
5. Advertise business opportunities to potential immigrant entrepreneurs;
6. Work with employers to provide welcoming workplaces training and to create welcoming workplace policies; and,
7. If economic development and the greater community continue to support alternative industries, such as the new medical marijuana facility, it could potentially increase employment opportunities and attract newcomers.

8. LIP –RL should collaborate with the Labour Market Group to better understand the local labour market needs and how the LIP can support employers interested in hiring and retaining newcomers.

### *Ideal Experience*

The key informants were asked to articulate their ideal vision for how their immigration efforts will manifest. The main response to the question was the desire for the community to be welcoming to newcomers. One key informant mentioned prioritizing social integration. She stated: *“Of course we want to help people to a point where they can find employment and maintain employment because if they don’t have that they aren’t going to stay. But I think our larger focus is on the person integrating...it is a more personal, social, and cultural focus than an economic focus.”*

*“It is about welcoming and wanting to make new friends and wanting to learn new things about cultures so that we can all relate because ultimately all families want the same things: they want love, safety, security, and success for their kids”*

Regarding importance of reaching out to newcomers, another key informant stated: *“We need to be warm and welcoming with lots of outreach...we need to reach out to the employers and the community at large and say if you meet someone new reach out and tell them we are here to help them.”* Lastly, a staff member of the LIP mentioned they would like to have a more visible presence in the community by having their own physical space such as an Arts and Culture Centre.

## 5.0 Conversations with Immigrants

Understanding the perspective of immigrants living in Smiths Falls and Lanark County is important so that the experience of immigrants and the vision of the policy makers/service providers can be compared. Although the ideal situation would have allowed the researchers to host focus groups with community partners in Smiths Falls and Lanark County in order to understand the perspective of immigrants, time and scheduling constraints did not allow for focus groups to be completed. Instead, the researchers had to take two more creative routes to understanding immigrants' experiences: 1) we spoke with three immigrant entrepreneurs at their places of work, thereby supporting their businesses and getting to know their stories at the same time; and, 2) the Smiths' Falls LIP were kind enough to distribute our focus group questions (tailored for a virtual format) to their clients via e-mail. We received three online responses in this way. The experiences of immigrants, gleaned through these two methods, are presented in this section.

### *Stories of Immigrant Entrepreneurs*

Smiths Falls has a remarkable number of immigrant-owned businesses. The researchers were informed that two hotels, 4 subways, 1 coffee culture, 1 pizza hut, 2 restaurants, and 1 nail salon are among the businesses that are immigrant-owned and operated. The researchers went out to hear the stories of these immigrants (and their businesses) first hand. Two stories are captured below.

#### *Spotlight on Ram*

Ram initially moved to Toronto from Sri Lanka as a asylum seeker fleeing ethnic conflict. Having had a life-long passion for cooking, Ram took his first job in a restaurant in Toronto as a part-time dishwasher. His dedication helped him gain increasing responsibility in restaurants: from preparing finger food to becoming a sous chef in a variety of restaurants specializing in Greek, Thai, Italian, and Mexican cuisines. To continue his passion, Ram moved to Smiths Falls 5 years ago to open up a restaurant. He was attracted to the region because of the business opportunities (lack of ethnic restaurants and low overhead costs). He said that the first two years were difficult because the community was not used to fine dining. His business partners (two immigrants who work at banks in Toronto) encouraged him to make himself known in the

community and promote his restaurant. He did this by organizing food tastings at community events, hosting a cooking show on CTV, and volunteering to be auctioned as a Chef for a fundraiser organized by the Hospital Foundation. He also raised awareness of his restaurant by connecting with the Mayor. Some of the on-going challenges he faces include: having to travel to bigger centres for ethnic ingredients and finding as well as training the right staff. With time, he has gained the support of the community, trained a competent team, and achieved acclaim for his restaurant. Ram mentioned that he intends to expand his operations to neighboring small communities and recommends establishing businesses in smaller centres. His advice to newcomer entrepreneurs is not to expect fast results and to be patient. “Success will come with time,” he says.

### *Spotlight on Rosie’s Nail Salon*

The husband and wife team have owned a nail salon in downtown Smiths Falls for the last 15 years. They relocated to Smiths Falls after settling in Guelph for a couple of years. They chose Smiths Falls because they wanted to raise their children in a rural environment. They mentioned a few benefits to living in Smiths Falls including its proximity to Ottawa, the location on the heart of the Rideau River, and the welcoming nature of community members. They’ve observed many changes in town over the years, especially after closure of the Hershey factory. After the closure, they noticed business has slowed down. However, Rosie mentioned that one benefit of operating a business in a small town is that the smaller scale allows for the business to adapt quickly to changes in the economy.

### *Virtual Focus Group Results*

In addition to visiting the businesses captured above, three immigrants responded to the virtual focus group questions that were sent out by the Smiths Falls LIP via e-mail. The profile of the respondents included: two females and one male in their early 40s representing three countries, namely; Germany, Netherlands, and China. Two of the three immigrants immigrated directly to Smiths Falls whereas, one first moved to Mississauga then to Smiths Falls. The immigrants were asked four open ended questions that encouraged them to reflect on what brought them to Smiths Falls, why they stayed in the region, what supports they wished they had, and any advice they would offer to newcomers.

All three immigrants mentioned that they were attracted to Smiths Falls because of job opportunities, either offered to them or their spouses. In addition, one immigrant mentioned schools for their children as a factor that attracted them to Smiths Falls.

When asked to reflect on what helped them stay in the region, some factors that immigrants mentioned included: job, schools, proximity to Ottawa, support from friends and the Welcome Wagon, and the beauty of the province of Ontario.

The immigrants were also asked to imagine services they wish they had when they first moved that would have helped them settle into the region. Some services that were mentioned include: language training, formal (a centre like ONTRAC) and informal (from friends) support with finding a job, and knowing that foreign degrees are not recognized in Canada would have been helpful. In addition, one immigrant mentioned that they would advise newcomers to use their network to find jobs if they were to move to Smiths Falls.

*“Smiths Falls is a beautiful town, nice and quiet, and the cost is low.”*

## 6.0 Best Practices

### *1. Micro-Grants for Organizations*

The Lanark LIP is seeking funding to be able to provide micro grants to service organizations that are willing to alter programs to make them immigrant friendly. The LIP has received expressions of interest from over 30 local organizations that are willing to tweak existing programs to have a welcoming/multicultural/diversity component. “Basically, the idea is to give a small amount of money to support organizations to make small, sustainable changes to their programs with newcomers in mind,” explained the Coordinator of the LIP – RL. They are currently seeking seed funding for this proposal and have applied to the Trillium foundation for a grant to pilot the project. They are hoping this initiative will maximize resources and integrate a newcomer lens into existing programming of local organizations.

### *2. Municipal Buy-in Package*

Recognizing the need for political support, a presentation was designed by the LIP – RL staff to educate elected officials about the importance of immigration and to build capacity among the municipalities to create initiatives to welcome newcomers. There are over 25 municipalities in Lanark County that received a presentation from the LIP staff. Through these presentations, LIP – RL hope to garner political support for immigration and encourage individual municipalities to create their own initiatives to attract and retain newcomers.

### *3. Partnering with Civil Society Organizations to Provide Diversity Training*

Smiths Falls LIP and LIP – RL have partnered with Mills Community Support Corporation, which is a community development and social service organization. The two LIPs have been working in partnership with Mills Community Support Corporation for over one year to create welcoming communities and capitalize upon the strengths of the community in the process of attracting and retaining newcomers. This year, the partners ran 3 welcoming communities seminars in Carleton Place, Mississippi Mills, and Smith Falls. They invited Bruce Anderson, a community activator, to speak about the mindsets, organizations, and interactions that are needed for communities to be welcoming for all (including LGBT folks, folks with disabilities, and any type of person who might be an outlier). The key to the partnership with Mills Community Support

is a recognition that social factors are important for retention and a willingness to explore together the challenges facing all community members as they strive to belong and stay in Lanark County.

#### *4. Partnership with Chamber of Commerce*

The Smiths Falls LIP partnered with the Chamber of Commerce to provide a free one-year membership for newcomers. By being a member, newcomers can engage in networking opportunities and have their business(es) listed in the Chamber of Commerce Directory. In addition, the Chamber organizes an annual immigrant entrepreneur award, recognizing an immigrant business owner at their annual general meeting. This award has been well received by the community and receives many nominations each year.

#### *5. Community Police Presentation to Newcomers*

In Fall 2014, Constable David Murphy, a Community Services Officer with the Smiths Falls Police Service, was invited to present to an ESL class in Smiths Falls as a guest speaker. Before an audience of approximately 15 newcomers, Constable Murphy spoke about the Canadian law enforcement system, citizens' rights and responsibilities, and the role of the police in plain language. "I wanted to convey that the police want to help the community stay safe," said Constable Murphy. An important part of his session was the question answer period, which allowed newcomers to pose questions such as: what is the legal drinking age in Ontario? Will we get arrested for walking on the grass? Can my children drink at home? The variety of questions indicated that Constable Murphy and the 15 newcomers who attended the session built a bridge towards integration through increased awareness of the Canadian system. Constable Murphy hopes to continue collaborating with ESL classes to help newcomers understand how police services prevent crime and protect society.

#### *6. Representation on the Smith Falls LIP Council*

When the Smiths Falls LIP set up their council, they asked each partner to appoint a main representative and an alternative representative to be on the LIP Council. Having an alternative representative ensures the partner organizations have a back up in the event that the main representative cannot attend the LIP meeting.

## *7. Cultural Policy*

The Town of Smiths Falls has a [cultural policy](#). The policy recognizes the importance of culture and articulates the need to make culture a strategic priority. One of the purposes of the policy is to attract and retain newcomers. This policy is a best practice because it canonizes Smiths Falls' commitment to prioritizing immigration and sets the foundation for initiatives such as an Arts and Culture Centre to be built in the future.

## *8. Satellite Service and Online Options*

Three staff (two part-time and one team lead) at TR Leger settlement services cover the Greater Cornwall Area but also do outreach in the rural counties of Stormont, Dundas, Glengarry, Leeds, Grenville, Prescott, Russell, and Lanark on an as needed basis. Immigrants in Cornwall can drop into the welcome centre for services, whereas immigrants in other counties need to arrange an appointment in advance. The settlement counselors are able to travel to meet with clients; however, due to the lengthy travel times between counties, they are working on setting up the other LR Leger Schools (15 in total) to connect immigrants with settlement services staff in Cornwall via Skype. They are hoping to expand this initiative to include public libraries as well.

TR Leger is able to host ESL classes if there is sufficient demand. Currently, classes are running in Cornwall and Brockville. In Smiths Falls, the numbers for ESL class dropped this year. To mitigate this issue Willis College in Smiths Falls purchased ten online licenses for Easy Speak software that can be accessed for free at the Smiths Falls public library.

## *9. Political Support for Businesses*

Elected officials in Smiths Falls personally connect with new businesses in the area to show their support. In addition, they try and garner awareness for the new business by attending inaugural ceremonies. Having strong, personalized political support for immigrant businesses makes entrepreneurs feel welcomed in the community and able to ask for assistance if they need it.

## *10. Welcoming Wagon and Pass*

A welcome wagon is a greeting service offered to new homebuyers in Smiths Falls and Lanark County. This service is used as one way to reach out to newcomers in the community. The Welcome Wagon is run by a community champion who, after presenting a basket of coupons from local businesses, is available to answer questions about the community and serve as an initial point of contact. Welcome Wagon is a best practice from Smiths Falls and Lanark County because newcomers mentioned the support of the Welcome Wagon in the focus groups and other communities, such as Perth County, would like to emulate this effort.

A Welcome Pass is an idea that the Smiths Falls' LIP wants to implement in the next calendar year. While similar to a welcome wagon in terms of the social connection that is built, a welcome pass would have to be obtained by registering with the Smiths Falls' LIP as a newcomer. The welcome pass would allow a newcomer and their family to enjoy cultural spaces in their new community free of charge or at a discounted price.

## 7.0 Recommendations

Weaving together the findings of this research, the researchers offer the following recommendations for future action based on data collected from key informants, immigrants and lessons learned from other regions.

1	Collaborate and coordinate activities between the Smiths Falls Local Immigration Partnership and the Local Immigration Partnership – Renfrew and Lanark. Look towards each other for best practices;
2	Create partnerships with all local Chambers of Commerce to facilitate the process of educating employers to recruit and retain the talent they need to meet the needs of their businesses. Following the example of LIP – Renfrew and Lanark’s partnership with the Chamber of Commerce in Mississippi Mills could be beneficial. Consider using new media such as podcasts and webinars to engage and educate employers;
3	Create a branding and marketing strategy to attract newcomers. For an example of a branding and marketing initiative created collaboratively by the economic development and tourism department, look to the City of Timmins: <a href="http://www.timminsbrand.ca">http://www.timminsbrand.ca</a> ;
4	Expand the initiative of creating a welcome pass to include Lanark County and profile surrounding communities;
5	Create an attraction and retention strategy for Smiths Falls and Lanark County based on research outlining the needs of the community and the immigrant population. Other counties have included such a strategy in their economic development plan;

6	Consolidate the two immigration portals for Lanark County into one for the sake of efficiency and to avoid confusion;
7	Create immigrant-friendly policies at the municipal and organizational levels, such as anti-discrimination policies. The municipality can take the initiative to become a signatory of the <a href="#">Canadian Coalition of Municipalities against Racism and Racial Discrimination</a> ;
8	Create a physical space for immigrants/newcomers to be able to socialize and connect with each other such as an Arts and Culture or Multicultural Centre;
9	Work with the urban LIPs (especially service providers) to encourage secondary migration to rural areas; and,
10	Advertise business opportunities to potential immigrant entrepreneurs.

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## Appendix A

### KEY TERMS

**Immigrant:** Any person who has gone through the Canadian immigration process to become a permanent resident and/or citizen of Canada. For this report, this definition includes people who have chosen to settle in Lanark County as their initial home upon arrival in Canada (primary migrants) and people who have chosen to relocate to Lanark County after initially living elsewhere in Canada (secondary migrants).

**Immigrant Attraction and Retention:** the efforts aimed at bringing immigrants into the region and encouraging them to stay.

**Local Immigration Partnership (LIP):** a local initiative funded by Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) to help identify gaps in service delivery for immigrants and to collaborate and coordinate services in order to fill these gaps.

**Settlement Services:** Settlement services are intended for immigrants to help them find their footing in new surroundings. They include, but are not limited to: help with interpreting and filling out government documents, referrals to community services, help finding jobs or training for specific jobs, and English as Second Language (ESL) classes.

**English as Second Language (ESL) classes:** ESL classes are for immigrants with varied levels of English in addition to their mother tongue. They can range from beginner to advanced levels, depending on the needs of the immigrant.

**Policy Makers:** For this research, policy makers are defined as any individuals who are affiliated with the government and can influence the policy-making or program implementation process.

**Service Providers:** For this research, service providers are defined as individuals or organizations that provide social, financial, or advocacy services and/or support for immigrants. These include organizations whose mandate is specific to immigrants and whose mandate encompasses all people, including immigrants.

Note: These definitions are not universal; they are specific to this report.