

Regional Workforce Priorities



Information Exchange & Networking Events Summary Report

Espanola · April 29, 2015
Mindemoya · April 30, 2015

Event Sponsors:

Cambrian College Employment Options LAMBAC
Manitoulin Sudbury District Services Board
Workforce Planning for Sudbury & Manitoulin

REGIONAL WORKFORCE PRIORITIES

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Economic and workforce development in small towns and diverse areas such as Manitoulin and LaCloche has its own unique set of challenges. Even though the history, identity and rural nature of each of these regions is distinct, changing economic conditions and workforce demographics requires an increased need for visionary thinking and regional collaboration.

Knowledgeable political leadership coupled with a strong commitment to and by key partners to economic development will make the difference between surviving and thriving. In fact, it has been said that *'no growth equals slow death'* and while no one wants to be responsible for the slow economic demise of local communities and businesses, it has become increasingly critical to find ways to work together to increase new business growth, support current and local industries, and improve workforce development, training and future job opportunities. Additionally, while it is essential to respect the distinctive characteristics of each area, it is equally as important to recognize the value of a regional approach as none of this can happen by working alone and in silos.

In April 2015, local leaders in economic development, education and training, business supports, employment and several levels of government gathered in Espanola and Mindemoya to discuss regional workforce priorities. Participants engaged in roundtable discussions, networking and information sharing on economic and workforce development, available resources and services as well as challenges and priorities. This report provides a summary of the highlights of each event – both of which underscored the need for more collaborative regional economic development approaches.

KEY THEMES

- *Attracting new business investment and growth;*
- *Visionary political leadership where economic development is not only valued and understood but is a priority;*
 - *Increased regional partnerships and collaboration;*
- *More local labour market intelligence gathering, including information on impact of changing demographics;*
- *Increased opportunities for youth through outreach and future workforce development opportunities;*
- *Improved connection between employers and First Nations communities;*
 - *Identification of creative solutions to ongoing challenges re: public transportation and high energy costs; and*
- *Addressing socio-economic conditions (lack of available and affordable housing, seasonal employment, low skill set of workforce, lack of childcare options, addiction and mental health issues, etc.).*

This report is a call to ALL leaders to commit to addressing economic and workforce development as a shared and strategic regional priority that builds on the unique nature of the area and capitalizes on the wealth of opportunity and local expertise that exists.

REGIONAL WORKFORCE PRIORITIES

SUMMARY REPORT

BACKGROUND

LAMBAC, Employment Options, Cambrian College, the Manitoulin-Sudbury District Services Board (DSAB) and Workforce Planning for Sudbury & Manitoulin (WPSM) formed a local committee in 2014 to discuss workforce development and growth opportunities from a regional perspective. From these early discussions it was clear that issues related to the workforce are impacted on/by various stakeholders such as those in economic development, education and training, employment services, the business sector, as well as different levels of government and that regional partnerships and collaboration are essential. Unfortunately however, due to varying mandates, geography and funding, it is often difficult for these stakeholders to meet and network, share information, discuss challenges, explore regional priorities and identify solutions to address the challenges that exist.

As a result, the committee agreed to host two information exchange and networking events: one in Espanola for the LaCloche area (April 29th, 2015) and the other in Mindemoya for the Manitoulin District (April 30th, 2015) to bring these key stakeholders together. Each event in each community offered an identical agenda and similar stakeholders from across the respective regions was invited.

PURPOSE & TARGET AUDIENCE

The purpose of each event was to provide an opportunity for key stakeholders to connect, discuss how each sector is currently addressing workforce development and growth and identify some of the challenges that they face. It was hoped that this might lead the way to further discussions on regional workforce priorities and/or other events focussed on business development, growth and expansion.

Attendees included a cross-section of representatives from economic development, employment, education, training, planning, municipal/town government, business/industry supports and government programs that offer funding and other resources.

LABOUR MARKET OVERVIEW

For each event, the Executive Director of Workforce Planning for Sudbury & Manitoulin presented the current labour market indicator data from Statistics Canada; the District of Manitoulin data for the Mindemoya event and the District of Sudbury data for the LaCloche event. It was noted however that labour market data on subsections (towns, townships, etc.) for each District as well as Aboriginal communities is difficult to obtain as it is often not available and/or is too identifiable as the communities are so small. A quick overview of the results from the WPSM employer survey (2014 *employrone*) was also provided and participants were informed that the survey report is available on the WPSM website at: <http://www.planningourworkforce.ca/publications.html>



The Ontario Works Program Supervisor, Manitoulin-Sudbury District Services Board provided an overview of a website that was developed several years ago to provide more localized labour market information and how this information has assisted local

services, stakeholders and clients. The website: www.labourmarketstats.com provides labour market profiles, a business/employer directory and local job postings. A student is hired each summer to update the employer database. Reports can be generated from this website. LAMBAC and Employment Options are partners on this initiative.

WORLD CAFÉ – ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSIONS

After the labour market presentations, participants were divided into the sector that they represent as follows: economic development; business and economic development supports; education, training & employment supports; and government (municipal, provincial federal).

Using a World Café format, each sector was given the following three questions:

- a) As a sector, how do you plan for and address workforce-related issues?
- b) What current initiatives are you engaged in that are related to workforce growth and development?
- c) What are the top 3 challenges in the region that impact on workforce growth and development?



They were asked to discuss and record their answers and then share them with all participants. It was important to hear the perspectives and strategies being used by each respective sector and although there were variations on specific themes, there were many commonalities (noted below).

PANEL PRESENTATIONS – FUNDING & RESOURCES

Once the World Café portion was complete, two panel presentations were offered. Participants heard from various government and economic development support agencies who presented on services that they provide and opportunities for funding. For the LaCloche event, panel presenters included: FedNor; Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs; Manitoulin-Sudbury District Services Board; EDCO (Economic Development Council of Ontario); Employment Ontario; LAMBAC; Waubetek and PARO Centre for Women’s Enterprises. For the Manitoulin event, panel presenters included: FedNor; Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs; Manitoulin-Sudbury District Services Board; Ministry of Northern Development and Mines; Employment Ontario; LAMBAC and Waubetek.

To close off each event, participants were given an opportunity to identify any other challenges and priority areas that they felt had not been identified, followed by an opportunity to network. The following is a summary of the themes and priorities that emerged from each day.

EMERGING THEMES & PRIORITIES

LACLOCHE/ESPANOLA

- a) **Private sector industry support and growth:** It was clear that industry plays a key role in workforce-related opportunities however employers are often not clear about the skills that they are looking for, are only interested in highly experienced and qualified employees and do not provide a lot of opportunities for students or new graduates. This is consistent with other reports. As well, participants clearly stated that economic development and growth is dependent on private sector

investment. It was also noted that with many businesses, there is a lack of business diversity and a lack of workforce succession planning. Economic developers noted that they constantly seek opportunities for growth by meeting with business owners and others to: identify gaps and needs; assess, monitor and plan ways to support current business owners; and encourage new business start-ups. Others also deliver business workshops and offer small business loans.

RECOMMENDATION: increase private sector industry investment, engagement and partnerships

- b) **Economic development as a priority:** It is recognized that the majority of the LaCloche area is comprised of small and dispersed rural communities and that economic development is often not a priority. Some communities have developed a very local economic development strategy however in most communities economic development is not well understood. Some offer political and leadership training to new council members so that they better understand their role and the value/potential impact of economic development. However, such training is not the norm in a number of these communities. As a result, the political climate does not fully support, understand or embrace the value of economic development. Even in communities that assign a political priority to economic development, it is difficult to do so without private industry commitment, engagement, support and investment. Some participants recommended the idea of more regional partnerships. It was further agreed that private sector and sector-specific partnerships should be nurtured.

RECOMMENDATION: create political climate that supports local/regional economic development partnerships, planning, business growth and new business investment

- c) **Collaboration and partnerships:** There were many examples of partnerships and formal/informal networks that already exist. For example, education, training and employment support organizations already assist with employment support funding and reach out to employers to better understand their employment needs. It was clear however that there could be increased collaboration and synergy between workforce development, business growth and economic development. It was agreed that there is great value in networking, planning and expanding partnership opportunities. This event provided some opportunity to do so.

RECOMMENDATION: continue to support networking, collaboration and partnerships

- d) **Research:** As noted in the introductory presentation, given the geographic area of LaCloche, it is difficult to obtain localized and community specific labour market data. Participants indicated that they would find it helpful to continue to network for intelligence gathering, monitoring trends and sharing information and data. As well several participant organizations noted that they conduct studies to identify current gaps and assess local industry-specific or community needs, however it is difficult to get accurate information from employers about their needs.

RECOMMENDATION: increase opportunities to collaborate on and share local research and labour market data and engage employers

- e) **Youth and future workforce development:** Various themes emerged that are not new. There continues to be an out-migration of youth from the area and some reported difficulty in motivating local youth. As well, it was noted that many youth lack basic and essentials skills and lack an awareness of jobs and business/entrepreneurship opportunities that are available. Participants at the event indicated that they offer a range of programs, services, as well as



upgrading, funding and training opportunities for youth, but uptake is challenging.

RECOMMENDATION: increase youth out-reach efforts to enhance job readiness skills and knowledge about job/business opportunities

- f) **Funding:** From the panel presentations, it was clear that many organizations and government ministries have a range of financial supports available for new business start-ups, entrepreneurship, internships, program-specific initiatives and capital funding in the form of business loans and grants. Business and economic development support organizations noted that they continue to encourage new businesses and provide information and assistance with funding applications.

RECOMMENDATION: become familiar with and take full advantage of funding opportunities to support economic and business development and skills training

- g) **Transportation services and energy costs:** While neither issue is new, due to a largely rural geography, lack of transportation to participate in training and employment opportunities continues to be a major barrier for the LaCloche area. As well, high energy costs were noted as a barrier to business start-ups and business growth. There are no easy solutions to these continuing challenges, yet more needs to be done.



MANITOULIN/MINDEMOYA EVENT

- a) **Private sector industry support and growth:** Efforts have been made to understand employer needs and respond to those needs. While industry is engaged through limited job creation opportunities, workforce succession planning and economic development discussions, there is little new job creation and very limited opportunities in primary industries. Most businesses are very small, in fact too small which hinders growth. Concerns were also raised about the ‘disconnect’ between employers and First Nations communities.

RECOMMENDATION: increase private sector industry investment, engagement and partnerships

- b) **Economic development as a priority:** Economic development participants, particularly in the Aboriginal communities indicated that they are engaged in developing economic development and community sustainability plans that are reviewed on an ongoing basis. Several noted that they conduct research to assess the issues, consult others, identify gaps and/or areas of potential growth and develop a business plan. Others however said that there are a number of good starts and while committees are often formed, progress stagnates. It was further noted that economic development and employment are however impacted by various socio-economic conditions such as seasonal employment, lack of available and affordable housing, low skill set of the workforce, high training and education costs, no transportation options, residents with no personal vehicles or driver’s licence, addictions and mental health issues and childcare needs. Some also reported on a “hidden economy” which supports illegal business activities. Additionally more effort needs to be made to engage private sector partnerships to invest in and grow the economic base in this largely rural collection of towns.

RECOMMENDATION: create political and social climate that supports local/regional economic development partnerships and business growth and improves local socio-economic conditions

- c) **Collaboration and partnerships:** Networking and partnerships continues to be important in the Manitoulin District. Various participants already engage in networking opportunities to better

connect students, graduates, education, local businesses, agencies and government services. It was noted however that while there is a great deal of good will to collaborate, it is difficult to find leaders to champion the regional economic development needs of Manitoulin Island as whole.

RECOMMENDATION: continue to support collaboration and partnerships to support workforce development, business growth and new industry attraction

RECOMMENDATION: identify a mechanism to champion a broader, more regional economic development approach to capitalize on the unique opportunities presented by Manitoulin Island

- d) **Research:** Regional information gathering and research is not only used to examine economic trends and opportunities but to influence policy and direction. Some participants raised the idea of better coordinating access to information and resources and improving communication technology (broad band/high speed internet).

RECOMMENDATION: continue to expand opportunities to collaborate on and share local research and labour market data and improve access to communications' technology

- e) **Workforce development:** Various efforts have been made to reach out to co-op teachers, guidance counsellors and colleges however much of this is on a piecemeal basis. As well, employment and training subsidies are offered and efforts are made to offer local training through partnerships where there are gaps or demand for specific skills such as in the trades (construction) and in tourism, however employment in these areas tends to be seasonal and training costs can be high. Additionally several organizations have formed a training alliance and education and training is also offered through KTEI and Contact North. Some participants indicated however that despite all of the efforts noted, there continues to be a lack of local training opportunities. Others also noted that there has been a slight shift from reliance on public sector jobs to more private sector opportunities.



RECOMMENDATION: increase collaboration on workforce development, outreach and training activities and capitalize on opportunities to engage both the public and private sectors

- f) **Youth and seniors:** Various themes emerged that are not new. There continues to be an out-migration of youth from the area and many youth lack basic and essentials skills and an awareness of local jobs and business opportunities. Participants at the event indicated that they offer a range of programs, services, funding and training opportunities for youth, including those for at-risk youth however uptake is limited. On the other hand, there appears to be an in-migration of older adults and participants noted that some are working beyond their retirement age. This not only impacts on access to entry level occupations for youth, but will increase demand in the healthcare sector (and a skilled workforce) to meet the needs of an aging population in the near future.

RECOMMENDATION: increase youth outreach efforts to enhance job readiness skills and knowledge about job/business opportunities

RECOMMENDATION: explore future regional healthcare needs and workforce development opportunities

- g) **Funding:** From the various panel presentations, it was clear that many organizations and government ministries have a range of financial supports available for new business start-ups, entrepreneurship, internships, program-specific initiatives and capital funding in the form of business loans and grants.

RECOMMENDATION: become familiar with and take full advantage of funding opportunities to support economic and business development and skills training

- h) **Transportation:** While lack of adequate transportation across rural communities is not a new issue, it continues to present a number of challenges for training and employment opportunities, for regional economic development planning, and for retaining and attracting new businesses.

EVALUATION & NEXT STEPS

The majority of participants for both events indicated that they were very pleased with the event they attended, found the sessions very informative, and enjoyed hearing about the different perspectives and initiatives underway, and the opportunity to network.

These events offered an initial opportunity to share information, resources and network on issues related to economic and workforce development and growth. Most participants agreed that discussions such as these need to continue - to build on current successes and enhance regional collaboration opportunities (on various priorities as noted). However, in order for any of this to move forward, it is also essential to increase the commitment and role of municipal leaders, the current business community and potential new businesses to economic and workforce development priorities for the area from a regional perspective.

