

**Workplace Inclusion Charters: Are they Assisting Marginalized Workers?**

Includes:

Final Report

By: Zachary Hatton

Completed for: New Canadian's Centre

Supervising Professor: Bharati Sethi

Trent Community Research Centre Project Coordinator: Kerith Paul

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Suite 3.10, Trent University Student Centre

1600 West Bank Drive

Peterborough, ON K9L 0G2

Phone: [\(705\) 748-1093](tel:(705)748-1093)

Email: [tcrc@trentu.ca](mailto:tcrc@trentu.ca)

Website: [trentu.ca/tcrc](http://trentu.ca/tcrc)

## **Abstract**

While Peterborough continues to grow and become more diverse, the need for inclusive workplaces also grows. This environmental scan looked at Workplace Inclusion Charters (WIC) across Canada in the last decade, and their effectiveness in fostering inclusion in communities. The overall findings of an environmental scan were incredibly positive, given that many communities successfully integrated a WIC into their community and found key benefits for all involved. The research focuses primarily on municipalities and business owners and the experienced growth the WIC has had on them. Key findings include increased productivity and retention for employers who invest in making their workplaces more inclusive, a new outlook on standardized processes, and customizable programming for seamless inclusion.

## **Background**

As Peterborough continues to become more diverse, there must be more done to foster inclusion throughout the community in all facets, including in employment. In 2021, Peterborough-Kawartha had over 6,000 residents who were newcomers to Canada.<sup>1</sup> As newcomers to Peterborough are currently met with a wide range of businesses with a wide range of experiences with cultural humility. Workplace Inclusion Charters (WIC) have been created in recent years by municipalities and partners across Canada to provide education and goals for local businesses to aim to be more inclusive workplaces. WIC aims to bridge the gap between business and newcomers to create a more inclusive workplace, which has many benefits for the community.

## **Purpose**

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<sup>1</sup> Statistics Canada. 2021 Census of Canada: Peterborough-Kawartha

This environmental scan seeks to assist the New Canadians Centre (NCC) in determining the effectiveness of WIC, and how they foster inclusion in the workplace and the Peterborough community. There are currently three municipalities in Ontario that have created WIC - Kingston, Belleville, and Timmins, and there are multiple other WICs across Canada. The environmental scan aimed to research these charters, compare commonalities and differences, and evaluate the positives and negatives to the overall programs.

### **Research Question**

The main question governing the research undertaken is: *How do WICs foster and promote safe and inclusive workplaces for marginalized populations, specifically newcomers?* The sub-question is: What are some barriers for employers and businesses to join the WIC and how can those barriers be alleviated?

### **Methods**

To conduct the environmental scan, each WIC in Canada was evaluated for commonalities and differences, which included similar programs to WIC as well. Further to evaluating existing WIC programs, interviews were conducted by myself with municipalities and business owners who have participated in these programs to inquire about successes and challenges faced in the initial rollout, and throughout the process. This included the City of Belleville, one of the most recent municipalities to enact a WIC, as well as Bow Valley in Alberta which has had a WIC since 2017.

### **Findings**

When analyzing each WIC, the demographics of the municipalities is crucial in determining which Charters are most in line with the needs of Peterborough. In analyzing demographics, population and newcomers' statistics were taken from the Canadian census of

2021, with some approximations based from smaller towns within the region. Newcomers were individuals who were admitted to Canada between 1980 and 2021 as immigrants or refugees.

Belleville, Ontario:<sup>2</sup>

Population: 55,071

Newcomers: 3,110 (5.65% of total population)

In 2018, recent immigrants to Canada experienced almost double the unemployment as the general population at 9.4%.<sup>2</sup> The City of Belleville implemented their first WIC in March 2023 to help address non-inclusive practices in many groups, including newcomers. Belleville tailors their WIC to suit the differing needs of businesses in the community, based on size, current practices, etc. The WIC has general principles and values of inclusivity, which signatories agree to which celebrates diversity and inclusivity. Signatories must then create an action plan with the municipality to address non-inclusive practices in their workplace. The WIC currently has 19 signatories identified in many different workplace settings. Belleville's WIC appears to model Kingston's in many ways as they both include a diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) statement as part of their values and principles which all businesses must sign onto, but then seek an action plan in collaboration with the business to create a more inclusive workplace.

Kingston, Ontario:<sup>3</sup>

Population: 132,485

Newcomers: 11,440 (8.63% of total population)

Kingston began developing a WIC program in 2017 as part of a workplace and 'in-migration' strategy. Similar to Belleville, the DEI statement is a must for businesses but then

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<sup>2</sup> Belleville Workplace Inclusion Charter

<sup>3</sup> Statistics Canada. 2021 Census of Canada: Kingston, City

provides flexibility for businesses to identify actionable and attainable goals for the individual workplace in conjunction with the municipality. Kingston experienced an over 10% increase in newcomers between the censuses of 2016 and 2021, with over 14% of the population of the Kingston region being immigrants or non-permanent residents.<sup>4</sup> The Kingston WIC has been modelled in other municipalities, as it allows businesses to shape their action plan with the assistance of program staff, while also encompassing the values and principles of DEI.

Timmins, Ontario:<sup>5</sup>

Population: 28,874

Newcomers: 695 (2.41% of total population)

Timmins enacted their WIC in 2022. This WIC differs from Kingston and Belleville, as it does not provide as much leniency for action planning to be individualized. Timmins offers 16 commitments over five categories which businesses must implement, either partially or fully. The five categories are communication, culture and leadership, recruitment and onboarding, training and development, and policies. Each category has three commitments, except policy has four. This WIC also has an award component, recognizing ‘Inclusion Champions’. The stages of awards include gold, silver, and bronze, with bronze needing to complete at least four of the sixteen commitments including at least one from training and development. Whereas silver challenges businesses to complete six commitments, with at least one from every category. Gold continues the commitment of every category being represented, but challenges businesses to complete ten commitments, which means not every commitment must be fulfilled to achieve top ranking because not every commitment is achievable to all businesses. Timmins currently has 17

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<sup>4</sup> 2021 Census Highlights: Immigration and Language. City of Kingston. Kingston Immigration Partnership. 2021

<sup>5</sup> Statistics Canada. 2021 Census of Canada: Timmins, Population Centre

businesses signed on to the WIC, which is significant based on the percentage of newcomers in the community.

Bow Valley, Alberta:<sup>6</sup>

Population: ~26,590

Newcomers: ~4,390 (16.51% of total population)

Bow Valley's WIC began in 2017, the first in Canada, and continues to grow today. Like Timmins, Bow Valley has a set commitments list which acts as a toolkit for businesses in their inclusion building journey. They changed their program significantly between 2022 and 2023 to include more commitments for LGBTQIA2S+ initiatives and added a bonus commitment to mentor new signatories or share insights to build a better WIC. Signatories of WIC, like the Rimrock Resort in Banff, have been opened up to what inclusion can bring. The Bow Valley WIC showed Rimrock that investing in language and their staff was beneficial for all facets of their employees' lives. In this case, as well, the commitment to language allowed the organization to take inventory of languages spoken throughout the staff to make a more beneficial, inclusive atmosphere for clients who may speak other languages as well.<sup>7</sup> The current WIC for Bow Valley provides six commitments under the category of culture, language, and newcomer inclusion. These include support for settlement organizations, and flexible time off to recognize other cultures' significant days. Bow Valley, like Timmins, gives out awards to signatories who meet a certain number of commitments throughout the year. These are recognized on the website every year, including archiving past winners. Currently, of the 11

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<sup>6</sup> Statistics Canada. 2021 Census of Canada: Lake Louise, Banff, Canmore, Harvie Heights, Exshaw, Lac Des Arcs, Dead Man's Flats, Kananaskis

<sup>7</sup> Karli Fleury, *The Surprising Impacts of Workplace Inclusion | The Rimrock Resort Hotel*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6ieJeRTXMuw&t=119s>

businesses receiving awards for at least five commitments reached, over half received gold commendations, which means they implemented at least 14 of the 17 commitments.

Wood Buffalo, Alberta:<sup>8</sup>

Population: 72,326

Newcomers: 14,765 (20.41% of total population)

Wood Buffalo has the highest percentage of newcomers in relation to their total population of any municipality currently with a WIC at over 20% according to census data from 2021. This leads to Wood Buffalo having one of the most plentiful WIC with five sections. These include training and education, inclusive spaces, human resources, policies, and guidelines, and supports. These sections have many commitments within them which cover many areas of inclusion including accessibility, cultural humility, and LGBTQ issues. Wood Buffalo has four levels of award, as does Bow Valley: signatory, bronze, silver, and gold. Where Wood Buffalo differentiates its commitments is that to receive recognition each category must be represented in different amounts for the various awards. For instance, gold tier requires five out of nine training commitments to be reached, while all other commitments in the charter must be completed. Wood Buffalo is the most complete WIC in terms of training, including Indigenous training, as well as training in other cultures, domestic violence, and sexual harassment, among others. Through an employment census, it has been found that in recent years, Wood Buffalo has overachieved the rest of Alberta in racialized workers in the workplace by over 15%, women by 6.4%, indigenous persons by 6.9%, persons with disabilities by 12%, and LGBTQIA2S+ by 12.1%.<sup>9</sup> These numbers show a direct correlation between the WIC coming into force, and inclusive hiring practices being implemented across the region, however the latter three groups

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<sup>8</sup> Statistics Canada. 2021 Census of Canada: Wood Buffalo, Specialized Municipality

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.rmwb.ca/en/community-services-and-social-support/employee-census.aspx>

are underrepresented in terms of increasing seniority, which shows there is still work to do for Wood Buffalo to prosper.

Red Deer, Alberta:<sup>10</sup>

Population: 100,844

Newcomers: 14,765 (14.64% of total population)

Red Deer's WIC has three categories containing a total of 20 commitments. The three categories include Workplace Culture with 8 commitments, Policies Rights Safety and Regulations containing 6 commitments, and Workplace Accommodations containing another 6 commitments. The Red Deer WIC is arguably the broadest of all the WICs, it does not include set provisions for a specific group the commitment is aiming to protect. Workplace Accommodations does contain a commitment to a policy for time off for religious and spiritual holidays, and throughout the day being accepting of prayers, or other spiritual events throughout the day. These are seen in many charters, and the broad scope also allows Red Deer to have an award class for completing all WIC commitments under the 'platinum' category, which is different from any other WIC, which gives a lower threshold.

Saint John, New Brunswick:<sup>11</sup>

Population: 69, 895

Newcomers: 4,570 (6.54% of total population)

Saint John provides a similar program to WIC, however under the name Newcomer Employment Champions (NEC). The NEC program is, as the name suggests, completely centred on newcomers' integration into the workforce. This program offers a program expert to meet with companies every quarter, with professional development opportunities and toolkits, along

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<sup>10</sup> Statistics Canada. 2021 Census of Canada: Red Deer, City

<sup>11</sup> Statistics Canada. 2021 Census of Canada: Saint John, City

with commitments which all seek to build inclusivity in the workplace and hiring process.

Camila Ugarte of OSCO Construction Group in St John described learning of qualifications from other countries, and accents not being language barriers as the initial first steps to becoming inclusive.<sup>12</sup> The NEC program offers three awards each year to businesses and provides useful networking opportunities to businesses as an incentive to the program.

### Peterborough, Ontario<sup>13</sup>

Population: 125,478

Newcomers: 6,070 (4.84% of total population)

### **Analysis**

Peterborough is in the average percentile for Ontario municipalities which have implemented a WIC, at 4.84% of the total population being newcomers according to the 2021 Canadian census. They are between Belleville and Timmins in relation to size, and both of these municipalities employ different strategies to implement their WIC. Every WIC has the ability to assist businesses in checking their preconceptions in hiring practices and providing assistance and training throughout employment for a greater depth of inclusivity. Each municipality that implemented a WIC saw businesses gain crucial insights and tools which had positive impacts on the community because when individuals are included and taught in the workplace, they gain transferable skills which support all facets of life. As this environmental scan focused primarily on newcomers and their inclusivity in the workplace, the Saint John's NEC program was of particular interest. The focused nature of their program enabled specific focus, and attention from both businesses and program staff to continue to check-in and assist businesses in their

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<sup>12</sup> Mikael Hellstrom and Camila Ugarte, *Strategic Partnerships For Workplace Inclusion | YMCA Saint John and OSCO Construction Group*, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uALKrK\\_wqgM&t=5s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uALKrK_wqgM&t=5s)

<sup>13</sup> Statistics Canada. 2021 Census of Canada: Peterborough-Kawartha

journey. This could be a stepping stone to a larger WIC in the future. Saint Johns is smaller as a total population but has similar numbers of newcomers which provides an appropriate base of knowledge of the program's size and success. Businesses generally wanted to feel a sense of connection between the program, as it is a seemingly daunting task to implement a new set of principles. Of businesses talked to in Ontario in both Belleville and Timmins, there was excitement towards some form of recognition in awards to show progress and incentivize more action within the community. This is somewhat challenging when setting individual goals as Belleville does, however, is still possible with similar commitments. There is also perceived merit in having more concentrated commitments to enable businesses to have a heightened awareness of what is being asked of them.

### **Recommendations**

While the three municipalities in Alberta; Bow Valley, Wood Buffalo, and Red Deer, are all model WIC, given the demographics of these communities, they are better strived for in the future. Peterborough falls directly in the average of Ontario communities which currently have implemented WICs, and they can be more attainable models to follow in the infancy of a WIC. The Saint John NEC program is of particular interest, as it focuses on newcomers exclusively, which is what the research conducted focused on. The initial recommendation would be to focus on one area optimize the system, and then build on it, as was done in Bow Valley. Initial hurdles to the WIC being cost and anxiety towards implementing new practices can both be overcome by taking a more gradual approach, and not expecting businesses to complete all commitments in the first year. The viability of any WIC or similar program depends on the community stakeholders, showcasing how there are beneficial elements for stakeholders to implement is

essential, similar to how the NEC markets their program.<sup>14</sup> It is thus recommended that Peterborough begin with a smaller, more focused WIC which has been done in similar sized municipalities, potentially even focusing exclusively on one form of inclusion and building on it each year. Peterborough still maintains its small-town feel, the mentorship program brought in by Bow Valley recently is also an idea to keep in mind in future years of a WIC program. Grants from the Ontario and Canadian governments would be extremely beneficial to subsidizing the program, as has been done in Timmins through the Ministry of Canadian Heritage, and in New Brunswick through the provincial government.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, through an analysis of existing WIC and programs like it across Canada, there have been many successes that have been able to be felt in the community by inclusivity in the workplace. There is a diverse range of commitments included in each WIC program, the focus of this environmental scan was on workplace inclusion for newcomers, however, most have many parts throughout. Many preconceptions can limit inclusivity, specifically in small-town settings with a historic lack of diversity. Training programs can benefit these communities and commitments to community betterment reflect on many facets of society. Inclusion fosters healthy working relationships, increases productivity, and retention of employees. This has benefits for everyone because newcomers become closer to the community. As it pertains to the mission of the NCC, the NEC program in New Brunswick is a fruitful first step in the pursuit of a WIC as it pertains to newcomers' inclusion more specifically, however, all programs provide a deep insight into inclusivity in the workplace.

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<sup>14</sup> Saint John Newcomer Employment Champions

The next steps for research on WIC should be to continue to interview successful municipalities, businesses which have signed onto the WIC, and newcomers who work for these establishments. As interviews are conducted over a length of time, a more expedient method may come from a survey, however, interviews will reflect a more complete picture.

### **Current Municipalities with WIC**

#### *Belleville, Ontario:*

<https://www.belleville.ca/en/home-and-property/workplace-inclusion-charter.aspx>

#### *Kingston, Ontario:*

[https://www.cityofkingston.ca/documents/10180/173394/Careers\\_WorkplaceInclusionCharter.pdf](https://www.cityofkingston.ca/documents/10180/173394/Careers_WorkplaceInclusionCharter.pdf)

#### *Timmins, Ontario:*

<https://timminsedc.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Timmins-Workplace-Inclusion-Charter-PD>

F-Printing.pdf

#### *Bow Valley, Alberta:*

<https://bvpartnership.com/workplace-inclusion-charter>

#### *Wood Buffalo, Alberta:*

[https://www.rmwb.ca/en/community-services-and-social-support/resources/WBWorkplaceInclusionCharter\\_Toolkit.2023-03.pdf](https://www.rmwb.ca/en/community-services-and-social-support/resources/WBWorkplaceInclusionCharter_Toolkit.2023-03.pdf)

#### *Red Deer, Alberta:*

<https://rdlip.ca/wp-content/uploads/Inclusion-Charter-Commitments-FINAL.pdf>

#### *St John, New Brunswick:*

<https://swnb.ymca.ca/newcomer-connections/newcomer-employment-champions/>

### **Census Data**

Statistics Canada. 2021 Census of Canada: Belleville, City

Statistics Canada. 2021 Census of Canada: Kingston, City

Statistics Canada. 2021 Census of Canada: Lake Louise, Banff, Canmore, Harvie Heights, Exshaw, Lac Des Arcs, Dead Man's Flats, Kananaskis

Statistics Canada. 2021 Census of Canada: Peterborough-Kawartha, Federal Riding

Statistics Canada. 2021 Census of Canada: Red Deer, City

Statistics Canada. 2021 Census of Canada: Saint John, City

Statistics Canada. 2021 Census of Canada: Timmins, Population Centre

Statistics Canada. 2021 Census of Canada: Wood Buffalo, Specialized Municipality

### **External References**

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