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# Benchmarking Community Attractiveness to Newcomers

## *A Tool Development Project*

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### What is the project?

**A partnership project is underway to provide more information for small towns and rural communities to better understand their relative attractiveness to newcomers.**

The project will provide communities with a tool to help them assess their capacity in attracting and retaining adequate human capital for economic needs. By generating indicators based on national and provincial statistics in a number of socioeconomic categories, the project will enable rural and small town communities to measure, assess and enhance their capacity to attract newcomers, to retain youth and to address labour and skills shortages.

### What is the purpose of the project?

Access to a variety of comparable measures will complement local knowledge, enabling stakeholders to identify areas for improvement, or strengths to build upon, to attract and retain newcomers. This will help communities to build strategies to fulfill the human capital requirements necessary to drive local innovation, community vitality and economic growth. Utilizing these indicators, individual rural Ontario communities would be able to benchmark themselves against similar communities and against themselves over time.

This project will seek feedback from communities on how relevant and helpful these kinds of data are. It will also explore different options for how to make this information available as a tool for local stakeholders contemplating strategies so they can track their progress in improving attractiveness.

### Why will communities benefit?

Many rural communities across Ontario are facing slow-motion demographic changes. A number of the province's smaller centres that are more distant from urban growth areas, or are not retirement or tourism destinations, are faced with aging populations, low fertility rates, outmigration of young people and a relatively small influx of newcomers. Combined, these factors are leading to slowing population growth rates or even population decline. These trends will eventually result in shortages in the skilled, educated labour force needed by employers across a range of sectors.

By providing small and rural communities with sound data, they will be better equipped to develop strategies that build on local assets, enhance their quality of place, and increase their attractiveness to the talent and people they need to thrive.

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### What is the rationale for the project?

There is mounting evidence that communities of all sizes can be successful in making themselves more welcoming, retaining the skilled people needed while attracting entrepreneurial types who will contribute to innovation and productivity in the local economy.

The accessibility of comparative attractiveness measures at the community level will have widespread relevance. Some local stakeholders may already have a sense of their own community's statistical realities, but few would have an accurate picture of how they differ from their neighbours or other relatively similar communities across the province. It is intended that factual comparative data will act as a catalyst for a local

community's planning efforts and make for better-informed decisions and strategies for attracting newcomers based on a sound understanding of strengths and weaknesses relative to their peers.

The term "newcomer" in this project is broadly defined and may include an international immigrant, a migrant from another province or another part of Ontario as well as youth contemplating a return to the community. The re-attraction of young people back to their hometowns after completing post-secondary education elsewhere is an especially persistent challenge that many rural communities would like to address.

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## How did the project get started?

Recognizing the absence of comparable statistical data on rural community attractiveness, the provincial Community Immigrant Retention in Rural Ontario project (CIRRO) sponsored preliminary research in the Brockville area to explore the application of attractiveness measures used in the Conference Board of Canada's earlier project, *City Magnets: Benchmarking the Attractiveness of Canada's Cities*. The results showed promise, leading to a partnership among a number of organizations that are working together with the Conference Board to develop a set of measures appropriate for Ontario's smaller towns and rural communities.

## Who are the partners?

Financial support for this partnership project comes from the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA), the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU - Labour Market Partnership), the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade (MEDT), the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO), the Rural Ontario Municipal Association (ROMA) and Workforce Planning Ontario. All are active members in the project steering committee. Technical and stakeholder liaison support is provided by the organizations listed above, as well as the Rural Ontario Institute, the Rural Research Group at Statistics Canada, and the Ontario Ministry of Northern Development, Mines and Forestry. The project is managed and coordinated by the Rural Ontario Institute.



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Ontario Ministry of Agriculture,  
Food and Rural Affairs  
[omafra.gov.on.ca](http://omafra.gov.on.ca)  
[reddi.gov.on.ca/cirro.htm](http://reddi.gov.on.ca/cirro.htm)

Ontario Ministry of Economic  
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Workforce Planning Ontario  
[workforceplanningontario.ca](http://workforceplanningontario.ca)



Rural Ontario Municipal  
Association  
[amo.on.ca/ROMA](http://amo.on.ca/ROMA)

Statistics Canada  
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