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# Niagara Region

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**REPORT TO:** Co-Chairs and Members of Public Health and Social Services Committee and  
Co-Chairs and Members of Corporate Services Committee

**SUBJECT:** Municipal Immigration Information On-line Program,  
Phase II Funding

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## RECOMMENDATION

That this Committee recommend to Regional Council that conditional upon approval from the Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration (MCI):

1. that the Regional Chair and Clerk be authorized to enter into an agreement to receive Phase II funding for the Municipal Immigration Information On-line Program, to improve the content of the Niagara Immigration Portal [www.niagaraimmigration.ca](http://www.niagaraimmigration.ca) .
2. that this report be distributed to local Niagara municipalities and economic development agencies.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The Municipal Immigration Information On-line program supports the economic and social integration of new immigrants and prospective immigrants by providing user-friendly, seamless access to information and services.
- Only municipalities with currently completed and publicly launched immigration portal are eligible to receive funding through the Municipal Immigration Information On-line Program for the development of improved online content
- Community Services received a \$235,000 grant from MCI (100 per cent funded) to cover the period March 1, 2007 to February 28, 2009 to support the creation of the portal and initial content.
- On November 13<sup>th</sup>, 2008 [www.niagaraimmigration.ca](http://www.niagaraimmigration.ca) (Niagara- Welcome Home) was officially launched as Niagara's immigration portal.

- In July of 2008, MCI additional funding was announced and made available to municipalities that already had completed immigration portals. The purpose of this funding was to improve the content of those portals to further increase the success of the users. Niagara submitted a proposal to MCI on January 29<sup>th</sup>, 2009 and is requesting \$287,000 to improve the content of the portal.

## **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no direct financial contributions required from the Region.

## **PURPOSE**

This report has been prepared to provide information to Committee and Council regarding an opportunity to enhance the portal content and receive funding from the Municipal Immigration Information On-line Program Phase II.

## **BACKGROUND**

In November 2008, Niagara Welcome Home was launched as Niagara's Immigration Portal with funding from the Government of Ontario and in the presence of MPP Kim Craiter and local dignitaries, as well as member of local cultural organizations and heritage clubs, members of the public and Regional staff. The portal can be found at [www.niagaraimmigration.ca](http://www.niagaraimmigration.ca) .

Working on the momentum from the initial launch and all of the hard work that has been generated to create the website, Niagara believes in the concept of the portal and already has wide ranging ideas to improve the content, to make the portal more interactive with the user, and provide a true insight to what the Niagara Region really has to offer someone thinking to relocate. This proposal will describe content enhancements that will have broad reaching affect across the entire site; such as Mapping, Video Tours, User generated content with special reference and User Acceptance Testing. These enhancements will create a new standard in web portals, where the user can be directed to sources of information that they seek, but also give them an opportunity to discover the unique qualities of the host (Niagara) in the hopes that they will come to realize that Niagara truly does have their best interests in mind and hope that they will have an experience that conveys "Welcome Home".

Since the launch of [www.niagaraimmigration.ca](http://www.niagaraimmigration.ca) we have already begun meeting with focus groups and our community partners to find the answer to the question "What should we do next to make it better"? While the portal is still relatively new to the "World Wide Web", the traffic that it has seen since the launch date has remained consistent. With almost 70 sessions a day and an average length of stay being about seven minutes, we are confident that the 4,500 people that have visited the site since

the launch date are finding it a useful tool. But Niagara wants to do more for our users, in the hopes that we can provide detailed information that will help our audience make a decision that Niagara is the best fit for them.

Niagara will require skilled labour and professional persons in the future, and we do not have many of the local resources to fill positions. But from our focus groups and feedback from our partners, we realize that people abroad know very little about Niagara beyond the natural wonder that is recognized world wide; Niagara Falls.

## **REPORT**

Our content improvements will touch almost every portion of the current website, improving what is already there and putting the information into a context that is usable by our target audience. The improvements to content will be in the following areas:

- Mapping
  - Mapping technologies to better orient potential immigrants to the geography of Niagara. Niagara is a huge community and participants from focus groups gave the same consistent feedback. Because of Niagara's geography it is important that users of the site have as much information about the size and spatial features of Niagara as possible. While Niagara's geography does pose some challenges, mapping information will increase the satisfaction and success of new residents to Niagara. Providing Zoning and Planning with the mapping information will increase the success rate for entrepreneurs to get their new businesses established and create new jobs for other residents and immigrants to Niagara.
- Virtual Tours
  - The use of virtual tours to make Niagara the first portal to offer virtual 'fly-throughs' of the 12 municipalities, using recognized points of interest to show visitors what each of our 12 municipalities actually looks like. This would give the website visitor a realistic sense of just how varying and expansive the Niagara region actually is, which cannot be justifiably done with words and two-dimensional pictures or illustrations.
- Volunteer/Opportunities Resource database
  - Local retired professionals who wish to make use of their skills on a part time basis, or as mentors to newcomers in Niagara would be able to post to this database. Also, there would be an element intended for recently arrived immigrant to Niagara, spouses of immigrants living in Niagara, or those contemplating moving to Niagara to post their skills and qualifications, and

match up with volunteer and other opportunities that could lead to successful employment.

- User Generated Content with Spatial Referencing
  - Niagara’s portal already has a Photo Gallery that depicts pictures of various items of interest across all of Niagara. We would like to be able to show the public where in Niagara these pictures were taken. We would also like to be able to map for our contributors and members of our Facebook group “Niagara Canada Immigrants” points of interest such as event locations, locations of services that are unique to their culture.
  
- User Testing
  - With any improvement to a website, user acceptance testing is a must. Because of the nature of this audience we have to be as diligent as possible to ensure we are creating improved content that is usable to **our target audience.**

Ongoing measures of evaluation are in place to track the usage of the site and regular reports are available through the Niagara region’s IT department/web administrative staff. These same measures will be applied to the proposed enhancements.

An evaluation plan and targets will be confirmed by the Steering Committee as part of implementation. The anticipated key evaluation components are outlined below:

**Sustainability**

The partnerships with our community agencies and immigration service providers will continue through our regular interactions within the Community Services Department, as well as ongoing sessions of the established Steering Committee. Technical service provision will come from the IT/ Web Services departments of the Niagara Region and content specific reviews will be managed between Community Services and IT Web Solutions within the Niagara Region Departments, as well as through consultation with our community partners as required.

Anticipated Outcomes	Methodology
Increased length of time per session on the portal.	Website statistic and regular reports will verify this information
Increased attraction of immigrants to Niagara	Census trends and service provider reporting
Eventual decrease in projected numbers of skilled and professional employees required by local employers	Reports from organizations and service agencies that provide labour trends and shortages for Niagara region.

**Partners**

Role of the partners

- Information Niagara 211, Welland Heritage Council, St. Catharines Folk Arts Multicultural Centre, Fort Erie Multicultural Centre, Niagara Training & Adjustment Board (ntab) and Business Education Council of Niagara will provide support and up to date content to avoid duplication of efforts.
- Niagara Newcomer Employment Council will assist with ensuring the programs and services contained on the portal continue to match the needs of newcomers and local employers.
- Local economic development agencies will continue to provide relevant content for the portal.

Submitted by:

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Commissioner, Community Services

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Commissioner, Corporate Services

Approved by:

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Mike Trojan  
Chief Administrative Officer

*This report was prepared by Scott Laugher, Program Evaluator/ Quality Assurance Coordinator, Community Services and reviewed by Cathy Cousins, Director, Operational Support Services, Community Services and Bob Diakow, Director, IT Solutions and Facilities Management.*