



Final Report

Local Immigration Partnership Feasibility Study

Columbia Basin Alliance for Literacy

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Finally, we want to express our gratitude for the generous funding and support provided by the Government of Canada – Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. We are truly grateful for the commitment of the federal government to immigration and the work it supports to ensure successful settlement and integration.

Executive Summary

In the fall of 2021, Columbia Basin Alliance for Literacy (CBAL) received funding from IRCC to conduct a feasibility study to identify the need and support for a Local Immigration Partnership in the West Kootenay region with a focus on the communities of Trail, Castlegar and Nelson. Following a brief RFP, PEERs Employment and Education Resources (PEERs) was selected as the research and consultation firm based on their experience in similar and related initiatives within the settlement sector, but also on their extensive experience in consulting, forming, and coordinating Local Immigration Partnerships in other regions of BC.

To meet the objectives set for this study, a mixed methodology of five key components was established in consultation with CBAL management; the following five research steps were identified and approved as the project methodology:

1. An online scan and interviews with LIP Coordinators in smaller and rural communities
2. A demographic profile of West Kootenay Immigrant Demographics
3. A Community Scan to identify assets and gaps in relation to immigrant settlement and integration
4. Three Focus Groups with community stakeholders involved in immigrant settlement
5. Seven consultations with key West Kootenay informants (decision-makers / leaders)

The research steps were further supported by ongoing communication and reporting between CBAL and PEERs. The research, consultation and reporting was conducted between October 2021 and March 2022.

The research and activities of this project fell within a period of the COVID pandemic where personal distancing and BC COVID safety measures were in full effect. As a result, it was determined that all consultative elements of the research would be conducted virtually except for the Focus Groups. These were conducted in-person in venues in Trail, Castlegar and Nelson where all distancing and COVID safety protocols could be managed.

Key Findings and Emerging Themes

In response to the study's purpose of examining whether there is, 1. a need for, and 2. demonstrated support for the formation of a West Kootenay LIP, the research has identified the following findings and emerging themes.

1. Canadian, provincial and local population and immigration trends are significantly impacting and changing the demographics of the West Kootenays.
 - The West Kootenay population is currently growing slower than the overall BC population and has a higher portion of seniors aged 65 and older (22.4%) compared to the overall population of BC (18.3%).
 - In tandem, 78.7% of BC's immigrant admissions live in Metro Vancouver. According to 2016 Census data, a fractional 1.2% (3,220) chose the Kootenay Regional District as their intended destination, including only 0.4% (995) destined for the West Kootenays.

These numbers have significant, economic, workforce and societal impacts, many of which are already being felt in the West Kootenay's major communities. To help reverse declining populations and boost local economies, it is crucial for small communities and rural areas such as the West Kootenay region to explore and implement strategies and policies to attract and retain new immigrants

2. There are a number of existing local initiatives that align with the purpose and functions of a LIP.
 - The International Education Program at Selkirk, the Rural Northern Immigration Pilot (RNIP), and the Provincial Nominee Regional Entrepreneurial Program are all examples of regional initiatives already in place to support the attraction and retention of new immigrants to the region.
 - While these programs, and several other settlement programs and services, would continue to operate independently of the LIP, representatives have all acknowledged that the region could further benefit from the greater coordination, cooperation and collaboration amongst diversity and settlement initiatives in the West Kootenays that a LIP could bring.
 - While each of these initiatives is playing a significant role in immigrant attraction, and in fact "changing the cultural face" of the region, they openly acknowledge that there is a significant challenge in the retention of new immigrants to the West Kootenays.

3. Immigrant retention is a significant issue in the West Kootenays.
 - Despite growing efforts in immigrant attraction to the region, immigrant retention faces significant barriers. These include, but are not limited to housing supply, culture shock, lack of supports for secondary applicants, lack of "real" welcoming and inclusion, a need for improved access to information and services, some evidence of racism and anti-immigration sentiments, and a lack of understanding of the value and importance of cultural diversity.
 - All of the above, including the overarching issue of immigrant retention, are issues that fall within the auspices of a LIP and its role in community planning and coordination.

4. There is significant support for the formation of Local Immigration Partnership from local organizations, agencies, and institutions.
 - Within the interviews, focus groups, and consultations over 23 unique organizations were represented, nearly all of which stated their interest in participation and membership in the LIP.
 - The Community Scan of Relevant Assets and Gaps scan identified 43 community-based and / or regional organizations that are relevant to the formation and ongoing work of a Local Immigration Partnership. These 43 were specifically identified as having a role in the settlement service and immigrant integration continuum.
 - These representatives identified a further 11 categories of other organizations, public institutions or consortium groups that should also be considered. In addition, there is

significant interest to see all municipalities of the West Kootenays represented at the table.

5. In addition to clear interest and support for the LIP, the region's community stakeholders have brought forward a significant number of thoughtful considerations for the successful development and implementation of the LIP.
 - Considerations for the establishment of the LIP in the West Kootenays include governance and representation, membership with reach across the region, ensuring immigrant populations are represented, need for adequate funding, engagement with First Nations, the requirement for adequate communications and marketing, etc.
 - The full list of considerations and the supporting detail can be found on pages 19 to 22 of this report.

Concluding Recommendation

Based on the research, input received and the overall findings of the feasibility study, this report recommends that CBAL and its significant community of interest move forward with the next steps in the formation of a Local Immigration Partnership for the West Kootenay region of BC.

LIP Overview and Purpose of the Study

What are LIPs?

Local Immigration Partnerships (LIPs) are funded by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) to develop and implement community level plans to improve immigrant and refugee settlement and integration. These partnership tables convene to support local research and planning to build the capacity of communities to be welcoming and inclusive and to ensure immigrants have opportunities to fully participate economically, socially, politically, and culturally.

The federal government began funding LIPs across the country in 2008, and in 2014 began funding LIPs in BC. Currently, there are about 90 LIPs across Canada with 17 currently operating in British Columbia. A list of BC LIPs can be found here: [BC Local Immigration Partnerships](#).

Memberships of individual Local Immigration Partnerships vary based on localized requirements and interest, but are typically comprised of individuals representing local government, settlement and community agencies, education, business, parks, recreation and culture, policing, libraries, volunteerism, and others.

LIPs do not deliver services directly to immigrants. Rather their purpose is to:

- engage service providers and other institutions in immigrant integration processes,
- support community level research and strategic planning,
- share and promote promising practices, research and information related to intercultural diversity and the development of welcoming and inclusive communities,
- increase awareness of and engagement in intercultural diversity issues,
- promote cultural diversity in leadership positions,
- support collaboration and coordination of service provision,
- increase awareness of existing immigrant integration programs, services, and information, and
- work to remove barriers to inclusion and ensure immigrants have opportunities to take equal and active roles in the social, economic, and political life of the community.

Purpose of the Feasibility Study

In the fall of 2021, CBAL received funding from IRCC to conduct a feasibility study to identify the need and support for a Local Immigration Partnership in the West Kootenay region with a focus on the communities of Trail, Castlegar and Nelson.

Approach to the Study

In the fall of 2021, CBAL issued a call for proposals and through this process selected PEERs Employment and Education Resources to conduct the study. PEERs has extensive experience in research, assessment and evaluation, coordination of community and cross-sector planning initiatives and specifically in the establishment, set-up and management and coordination of Local Immigration Partnerships. Through its work in the formation, project coordination and ongoing support of various BC LIPs including the [Burnaby, Surrey, Tri-Cities, North Shore](#) and [Langley](#) partnership tables, PEERs is intimately familiar with the history of Local Immigration Partnerships, their intended purpose and objectives, and of the planning, activities and community development that CBAL should explore and consider within this study.

Project Timeline and Circumstances

All research and consultations for the feasibility study was conducted between October 2021 and February 2022. Analysis of the information collected, and the development of the final report took place during February and March 2022.

Although it had no discernible impact on the research and consultation process, it should be noted that the research timeline and all activities fell directly within the COVID pandemic when personal distancing and BC COVID safety measures were in full effect. The project research team worked cooperatively with CBAL to minimize any participation impacts and to ensure that all elements remained inclusive of interested stakeholders. Fortunately, at this stage of the pandemic, both the research team and the wide array of participants who contributed to the project have become fully adept at the use of online communications tools for the purposes of interviews, consultations, general project communications, etc.

During the initial planning stages, it was decided that the focus groups would be held in-person in the three communities, but that mask protocols and proof of vaccination would be required for in-person attendance. Any prospective participants that could not meet these requirements were offered the opportunity for electronic input or direct contact with the research team. As indicated below, the focus groups were well attended and met expectations for registration.

Methodology

To conduct the study, PEERs established a thorough project methodology and completed the following as outlined in their initial proposal:

1. Meetings and input from the CBAL Executive Director and her team
2. A scan and interviews with LIP Coordinators in Smaller Communities
3. A demographic profile of West Kootenay Immigrant Demographics

4. A Community Scan to identify assets and gaps in relation to immigrant settlement and integration
5. Three Focus Groups with community stakeholders involved in immigrant settlement
6. Seven consultations with key West Kootenay informants (decision-makers / leaders)
7. Production of an Interim Report and this Final Report

The following briefly describes the research and consultation steps that were undertaken.

1. Meetings and input from the CBAL Executive Director and her team

Throughout the study, PEERs provided updates and progress reports and requested guidance as needed from the CBAL Executive Director and her team.

2. A scan and interviews with LIP Coordinators in Smaller Communities

Through its LIP network, PEERs was able to locate a relatively current list of all LIPs in Canada. From this list PEERs identified LIPs operating in regions similar in size and community make-up as the West Kootenays. This included LIPs operating in smaller communities, rural areas, or those representing a region with multiple smaller communities. An online scan of the websites of the identified LIPs, however, did not provide sufficient information for the purposes of the feasibility study, and so telephone and online interviews were conducted with the LIPs Coordinators.

PEERs developed a set of guiding questions and reached out and set up interviews. Consultations were conducted with six coordinators / coordinating teams of LIPs from various parts of Canada. The information and input provided in these consultations was captured in detailed notes and subsequently summarized and analyzed to identify promising practices related to LIP establishment and set-up, ongoing management and coordination, and stakeholder engagement.

Interviews were conducted with the following LIPs:

a) **Western NS (Nova Scotia) Local Immigration Partnership**

Brenda LaGrandeur, Coordinator

<https://westernren.ca/localimmigrationpartnership/>

b) **Bow Valley Immigration Partnership - BVIP**

Meagan Reid, Coordinator

<https://bvipartnership.com/>

c) **Maple Ridge, Pitt Meadows, Katzie Local Immigration Partnership**

Carolina Echeverri, Coordinator

www.ridgemeadowsnewcomers.com

d) **Medicine Hat Local Immigration Partnership**

Jennifer Mah, Coordinator

<https://mhlip.ca/>

- e) **Zonal LIP (ZLIP)** is made up of the Foothills and Rocky View LIPs. The feasibility study for this LIP was completed in March 2021 and received funding to establish the Zonal LIP from IRCC in September.

Foothills Region, Coordinator

Lilly Cai, Coordinator

Rocky View Local Immigration Partnership

Kelly Keating, Coordinator

www.ccisab.ca (Calgary Catholic Immigration Society website; not LIP focused site)

- f) **Central Okanagan Local Immigration Partnership**

Deven Basdeo, Coordinator

<https://kcr.ca/immigrant-services/central-okanagan-local-immigration-partnership/>

3. Demographic Profile of West Kootenay Immigrant Demographics

PEERs reviewed and pulled key immigrant demographic data from Census Canada, IRCC and BC Stats to develop a profile of the West Kootenay region including key immigrant data for each of the three main communities. The profile includes data on overall population including age distribution, level of education, labour force, and income as well as immigrant focused data including historical immigration trends, immigration by class and by age, country of origin, and languages spoken.

The information collected informed the design and content of the focus groups and was also used to inform the key informant interviews. This profile has been included with this report as a separate document.

It is important to note that the Census is the key source of immigrant demographics at a community level. Census 2021 data has not yet been released; community level immigrant focused data will not be available until the Fall of 2022.

4. Community Scan: Assets and Gaps

PEERs designed a matrix to guide the collection of West Kootenay assets and gaps in settlement and integration initiatives across the communities of the region. Once the online scan had been completed, PEERs presented the matrix to CBAL for review and further input and final additions.

5. Focus Groups

PEERs led three focus groups: Trail on November 30th, Castlegar on December 1st and Nelson on December 2nd. Recruitment for all three sessions was handled by CBAL and the focus groups were well attended by a range of stakeholders from within the settlement community, as well as several representatives from mainstream and civic organizations with an interest in the

settlement issues of the West Kootenays. Each group also included immigrants who shared their lived experiences settling in the region. In total, 38 individuals participated.

The specific objectives of the focus groups were threefold:

- a) To examine the interest, need and key issues for a LIP in the West Kootenays,
- b) To obtain an understanding of how a LIP could contribute / benefit the immigrant settlement experience in the West Kootenays, and
- c) To discuss and identify prospective LIP members.

Attendees provided their opinions, perspectives, insights, and experiences in response to a series of guiding questions. All input was captured in comprehensive notes and has been reviewed, sorted, and themed. This input, along with the demographic data, and the scan of assets and gaps, was used to develop the questions used to lead the key informant interviews conducted in January and February 2022.

6. Consultation with Key Informants (decision-makers / leaders)

Based on the information collected within the research and consultation steps described above, PEERs conducted seven individual consultations with a range of individuals involved in immigrant settlement and integration, education, and economic development for the region. The purpose of these interviews was to:

- a) To gauge their interest in participating in a LIP,
- b) To gain an understanding of stakeholder engagement and the potential for partnerships; and
- c) To identify of additional potential members from sectors other than settlement and immigrant services and to explore potential project leads and co-chairs.

Interviews were conducted with:

- a) **Danny Beatty, Director**
International Education and Development, Selkirk College
- b) **Andrea Wilkey, Executive Director**
Community Futures Central Kootenay
- c) **Eleanor Stacey, Executive Director**
The Civic Theatre
- d) **Desneiges Profili, Executive Director**
Columbia Basin Alliance for Literacy
- e) **Rebecca Richards, Director**
Lower Columbia Initiatives Corporation
- f) **Jacomien van Tonder, Director**
Metal Tech Alley
- g) **Jamie Malcolm, Programs Manager & Morag Carter, Executive Director**
Skills Centre

Is there a need for a Local Immigration Partnership in the West Kootenays?

As described in the section above, comprehensive research and consultation was conducted to determine the need and support for a Local Immigration Partnership in the West Kootenays. Findings from this research and consultation indicate a clear need and strong support for the establishment of a LIP in the region. The following is a description of the need and of the support expressed.

The Demographic Picture

Much has been said about Canada's need for immigration. The pool of Canadian-born existing and potential workers is limited due to the country's aging population and low birth rate. However, thanks to Canada's immigration policies, Canada's population and its labour force has continued to grow year over year.

Statistics Canada's population projection suggests that Canada's population growth will depend entirely on immigration by 2030. The same is true at the provincial and regional levels. Some facts:

- According to the World Factbook put together by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), on a list of nearly 228 countries, Canada ranks 186 for its birth rate.¹
- British Columbia's seniors' population is projected to steadily increase to represent almost 25% of all BC residents (or 1,607,284 persons) by 2041. While the total population of BC is aging, the West Kootenays currently has a larger proportion of seniors than the provincial level. According to Census 2016, 22.4% of the West Kootenays' population was 65 years or older, compared to 18.3% for BC.
- The working age population in BC is predicted to slowly decline over the next 20 years. In 2020, the proportion of population aged 20 – 64 (working age) represented approximately 61% of the province's overall population. By 2041, it is anticipated that BC's working age population will have shrunk to 58%.² For the West Kootenays population numbers are even more dramatic. According to Census 2016, BC experienced a population increase of 5.6% between 2011 and 2016. Over the same period, the West Kootenays saw a much lower population increase at 2.3%; the neighbouring East Kootenays reported an increase of 6.6%. As the table to the right indicates, this low growth trend is expected to continue for the region.

¹ The World Factbook, Country Comparisons – Birth rate, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/field/birth-rate/country-comparison>, 2022

² People 2020: BC Sub-Provincial Population Projections by BC Stats https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/data/statistics/people-population-community/population/people_population_projections_highlights.pdf

Most new immigrants to Canada choose metropolitan areas to make their new homes – Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver. According to Census 2016 data, a little more than 80% of BC’s immigrants live in the Metro Vancouver area. Recent national and provincial immigrant population data shows that:

- Between January 2015 and August 2021, a total of 1,923,000 permanent residents’ admissions to Canada were issued. Among them, 14.2% (273,520) chose BC as their intended destination.
- 78.7% of BC’s admissions planned to live in Metro Vancouver, and a fractional 1.2% (3,220) chose the Kootenay Regional District as their intended destination, including 0.4% (995) destined for the West Kootenays.
- Canada will continue to bring 401,000 to 430,000 immigrants per year over the next three years, and close to 60% will be admitted under the economic immigrant category. Based on recent arrival rates, BC is estimated to receive about 14% (56,000 to 60,000) of Canada’s new immigrants annually for the next three years.

BRITISH COLUMBIA POPULATION BY DEVELOPMENT REGION

Development Regions	Population as at July 1st (000s)			Average annual growth 2020-2041
	2020	2030	2041	
Van Isle/Coast	893	979	1,057	0.8%
Mainland/Southwest	3,129	3,630	4,167	1.4%
Thompson Okanagan	618	679	738	0.9%
Kootenay	169	175	177	0.2%
Cariboo	169	177	181	0.3%
North Coast	57	62	65	0.6%
Nechako	38	45	52	1.4%
Northeast	66	73	78	0.9%
B.C. Total	5,140	5,820	6,516	1.1%

Source: BC Stats

To help reverse declining populations and boost local economies, it is crucial for small communities and rural areas such as the West Kootenay region to explore and implement strategies and policies to attract and retain new immigrants. Immigrants not only fill gaps in our labour market, but also pay taxes and boost the local economy by establishing businesses, spending money on goods, travel, transportation, housing, etc. With more immigrants comes increased diversity, new perspectives and ways of doing things, new ideas and traditions, more dynamic and interesting communities. For further detailed information on immigration and population see the attached Demographic Summary – West Kootenays (Castlegar, Nelson, Trail)

The Community's Perspective: Interest, Need and Key Issues

As described in the methodology section above, the research team consulted with more than 50 individuals currently involved in immigrant settlement and integration in the West Kootenays and in similar LIPs across Canada.

Participants in the focus groups and one to one consultations shared the common view that the immigrant population in the region is small (compared to BC's major urban Centres) but gradually increasing, and a critically important part of the region's future economic and population growth strategy. Acute skills and labour shortages were cited repeatedly. There was agreement amongst participants that immigration was a key part in addressing these shortages and efforts to attract and retain newcomers to the region were described. In addition to a desire to attract more immigrants, many shared the sentiment that the "people of the region are hungry to make it a more welcoming region" and that it was time to be intentional.

Solid support for a LIP to support these efforts and to lead others was expressed by participants with many stressing that the time for a LIP in the West Kootenays is now. In one key informant's words:

"I think the idea of a LIP is a wonderful idea – to work across the region on a broader level to educate and inform – and not do it one by one as a single organization."

Immigrant Attraction and Retention – Aligning Local Initiatives

The Rural Northern Immigration Pilot Program, the Provincial Nominee Program and the International Education Program at Selkirk college were cited as important initiatives in attracting more immigrants to the region. Although these were seen by many as playing a critical role in attracting immigrants to the region, the need for more programs and more support to retain new immigrants was also noted and that more coordination of these efforts, as a LIP would offer, is required.

The planning and delivery of the RNIP Pilot Project was seen as having raised awareness; more employers and other stakeholders have come forward and expressed interest in the issues and support of the work being done.

International Education at Selkirk was mentioned many times and perceived as a key driver in changing the face of the communities it serves. It was explained that many students choose Selkirk as it is more affordable and that many of those fully intend to apply for Permanent Residency. However, it was also noted that once trained, most leave to find employment in other parts of the province; in fact, the Manager of International Education and Development estimates that only about 10% stay in the region. This he reported as being due to the lack of jobs locally. Many, by the time they finish their studies, have been in the community for four or five years; if there were jobs, many more would stay.

The program has been operating for about 10 years and has steadily grown; it now offers training and education to nearly 750 international students. It was noted in the focus groups that despite the wide recognition of the program's impact on cultural diversity of the West Kootenays, it is unlikely that many residents make any distinction between international students and immigrants. Although study

participants overwhelmingly reported the benefits of the increased cultural diversity, it must be recognized that International Students currently do not fall within the auspices of a LIP.

The **Rural Northern Immigration Pilot (RNIP)** was perceived by participants as a promising practice for bringing skilled immigrants to the region. As stated above, skills and labour shortages are acute in the West Kootenays. Workers are needed across all sectors with some industries such as mining and metallurgy, forestry, manufacturing, health care, transportation, construction, education, and technology currently facing severe shortages. The RNIP Pilot was implemented to address these shortages.

RNIP is an IRCC funded community led immigration program designed to bring skilled permanent residents to rural communities. The goal of the program is to spread the benefits of economic immigration to communities outside of large metropolitan centres. Prospective candidates intend to reside in the community and find a job or an employer identifies a potential immigrant for a job and then an application for endorsement is submitted. The community reviews the application and selects those who best fit. Once endorsed, these candidates are eligible to apply to IRCC for Permanent Residence. If they meet the federal immigration requirements and obtain Permanent Residency status, the community works together to welcome the candidate and their family members and provides them settlement and integration support.

As of December 2nd, 2021, RNIP has endorsed 194 individuals: 85 in 2020, 97 in 2021 and 12 so far in 2022. The pilot is slated to end December 2022 and a formal request to extend the project to 2024 has been submitted to IRCC.

The **Provincial Nominee Regional Entrepreneurial Program** was also cited as another effective way to bring newcomers into the region. Within this program, those selected must commit to stay in the community for a minimum of three years. Over the pandemic, this program was largely on hold and is now starting to open back up. The Chambers of Commerce in the three cities manage the applications and reported being “flooded” with applications from all over the world; in one of the communities, it was estimated that 25 applications per week were being screened.

Although these programs, as well as other settlement services offered in the community provide support to new immigrants to settle and integrate, participants reported that many of these immigrants do not stay within the region. A list of all service and supports has been included as a separate document with this report.

Representatives from each of these initiatives were included within the focus groups and or key informant interviews and provided perspective not only on the impacts of their program, but what they saw as a need for greater coordination, cooperation and collaboration amongst diversity and settlement initiatives in the West Kootenays. This was further emphasized by a widely held recognition that as the population of the region changes so must the continuity, availability of supports and access to settlement services evolve.

Factors Impacting Immigrant Retention

Participants cited several reasons and regional issues for the low retention of immigrants within the West Kootenays.

- **Housing** – Repeatedly housing costs and the acute shortage of housing were cited; micro-aggressions from landlords was also reported.
- **Lifestyle** – The Kootenays is well-known for its access to many outdoor activities and many of the region’s residents hike, ski, snowshoe, boat, etc. Many who move there do so to enjoy these activities. Many folks wishing to immigrate to Canada come from countries where these activities are less common and not of great interest and elements that would support retention are not available, e.g., places of worship, access to ethnic foods, activities and sports, existing ethno-cultural communities, etc.
- **Culture Shock** – The shock of moving to a small mountain town where very few others share your culture, interests, beliefs, views and lived life experience can be problematic, isolating and for some too difficult to overcome.
- **Lack of supports for secondary applicants** – Several participants noted that primary applicants go to work and obtain support from employers and colleagues while spouses and family are often left without.
- **Lack of real welcoming and inclusion** – Many of the research participants cited that Canadians are often nice, helpful and polite – but that is different than being truly welcoming and inclusive
- **Lack of understanding of the value and importance of cultural diversity** – Participants shared that both in workplaces and at a community level there is a need for more education for employers on attraction, hiring, onboarding and retention and more education for the general public to better understand how communities grow and thrive.
- **Access to information and services** – It was noted that new immigrants to the West Kootenays need better access to settlement and employment information and programs to avail themselves of the available services
- **Racism and anti-immigration** – although incidents and overt examples were reported to have lessened, it was shared by several participants that racism and anti-immigration sentiments still exist within the communities and this needs to be systematically addressed.

Understanding of how a LIP could contribute / benefit the immigrant settlement experience in the West Kootenays

When asked how the West Kootenays would benefit from a LIP, participants suggested that the LIP could support the region to:

- Shift the mindset(s) of decision-makers
- Increase diversity on committees, boards and in management
- Boost conversation and collaboration at all levels to improve understanding of immigration and enhance integration of newcomers
- Improve understanding of immigration and diversity
- Raise awareness of the assets and possibilities of small towns with service providers and their clients in other regions

- Address racism and provide cultural sensitivity for the community at large
- Educate on the needs and benefits of immigration to the region and its communities
- Improve the welcoming and inclusive nature of our communities
- Centralize information to facilitate new immigrant access to information and to services
- Leverage and multiply our capacities by sharing information, resources, and expertise
- Educate employers on the benefits of newcomers as workers, onboarding processes, and adjusting recruitment and attachment processes to bring on immigrant workers
- Assess current needs of immigrants and of the community
- Advocate to address service gaps
- Develop community inclusion, creating a bridge between the existing community and the incoming new immigrants
- Address the fear of hiring others who are not Canadians – need some general education for those businesses and industries that don't even know where to start
- Promote the Kootenays and attract new immigrants to the region

Is there support for a Local Immigration Partnership in the West Kootenays?

In response to the Focus Group and Key informant Interviews it is categorically clear that the participants in all sessions and interviews are in full support of the establishment of a LIP for the West Kootenays. Questions in these sessions and interviews explored both the need and reasons (as described in the section above), but also their suggestions on prospective members, willingness to participate, potential lead organizations and basic elements of structure and leadership. The following sub-sections identify the collective responses to these items.

Prospective LIP members

As stated previously, the focus group participants and key informants represented a wide range of stakeholders, and many claimed a keen interest in joining the LIP. Below is the list of agencies and institutions represented.

- | | |
|-------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| 1. Castlegar and District Chamber of Commerce | 9. Community Futures |
| 2. Castlegar and District Public Library | 10. ISSofBC |
| 3. Castlegar and District Recreation Department | 11. Kootenay Career Development Society |
| 4. City of Castlegar | 12. Kootenay Family Place |
| 5. City of Nelson | 13. Metal Tech Alley |
| 6. City of Trail | 14. Nelson Public Library |
| 7. Civic Theatre | 15. Nelson and District Chamber of Commerce |
| 8. Columbia Basin Alliance for Literacy | 16. School District #8 |
| | 17. Selkirk College |

18. Skills Centre
19. Teck
20. Trail and District Chamber of Commerce

21. Trail and District Public Library
22. Trail FAIR Society
23. WorkBC

When participants were asked to provide suggestions on the type or specific representatives to be considered for membership the following were identified:

1. K – 12 education
2. Faith groups
3. Intercultural Kootenays
4. Columbia Basin Trust
5. West Kootenay Friends of Refugees
6. The Lower Columbia Community Development Team Society
7. Other key employers / business representatives

One person suggested that not only Castlegar, Nelson and Trail should be represented by the membership but all cities and a municipal representative(s) within the West Kootenay region should be included within the table's membership.

The Community Scan of Relevant Assets and Gaps is also useful in considering potential LIP membership and a community of interest. The scan identified 43 community-based and / or regional organizations that are relevant to the formation and ongoing work of a Local Immigration Partnership. These 43 were specifically identified as having a role in the settlement service and immigrant integration continuum.

In addition, the scan identified a further 11 stakeholders, institutions or community consortiums that could be considered as key to the membership and operations of the LIP. These organizations were distinct from those above in that their relationship to the settlement and immigration process and services was less direct, but nevertheless were seen as key community contributors in these issues.

As is evidenced in the full scan, there is certainly an existing settlement and immigrant service infrastructure in the West Kootenays that would support the formation of a LIP in the region. However, it should be noted that within the Focus Groups and the Key Informant Interviews it was repeatedly stated that: 1. As the region's population grows and diversifies there is a definite need for additional settlement supports, and 2. That the region's settlement services and the related stakeholders would most certainly benefit from a unifying body such as a LIP, and the collaboration, cooperation and coordination it could instill.

Establishing a Local Immigration Partnership in the West Kootenays – Considerations

As described above, not only is there a clear need for a LIP in the West Kootenays but very strong interest and support for a LIP exists amongst stakeholders from across the region. In the focus groups, key informant interviews and in the consultations with coordinators from similar LIPs across the country a number of considerations emerged. In planning for and establishing the LIP, the research team recommends these be thoroughly reviewed and considered to ensure the greatest possibility of success.

1. Identify a Lead Agency and Co-Chairs that fully understand the region and immigrant settlement and integration issues

When key informants were asked what agency would be best to lead a West Kootenay LIP, the majority identified CBAL. CBAL was seen as having experience working on these issues, being well-known in the settlement sector, having the capacity, knowing the lay of the land and understanding programming and related initiatives. It was also suggested that a process be put in place to select the lead agency.

When asked about Co-Chairs, the following agencies were suggested:

- Selkirk College
- Community Futures
- The Civic Theatre
- One of the Chambers of Commerce

It was further suggested that the LIP adopt the practice of a “rotating chair” as a means to support greater engagement.

2. Consult and obtain agreement from potential participants on governance and representation model

The challenge of fairly representing all of the communities of the West Kootenays was raised several times in the focus groups and KIIs. This was also confirmed within the consultations with the LIP Coordinators. IRCC provides a governance structure that can be modified to address and meet the unique needs of various regions and stakeholder groups. These variations should be explored and examined to determine the best models for governance and representation.

LIP Coordinators stressed the importance of taking time to develop the governance structure, the Terms of Reference and communications plan before diving into activity.

It was also raised that existing programs and committees within the region should be considered and leveraged in the formation of the LIP and its membership. RNIP and its steering committee were specifically named; building the LIP from this steering committee may be an option.

3. Select members that have reach throughout the region not just within their own community
Not only regional reach was noted as important, but so was the need to garner the support of respected champions and stakeholders.

4. Ensure that significant immigrant populations are represented at the LIP table
The importance of the immigrant voice and lived experience was clearly stated by many. Although the work of many LIP tables is supported by an Immigrant Advisory Council, it is also worthy to consider having representation of major immigrant populations at the LIP table.

5. Consider adopting an “Associate Membership” option
To ensure solid support of the LIP and its work, offering the option to be an “Associate Member” allows for the inclusion those who do not have the capacity to be full members but want to stay informed and participate when possible.

6. Consider the different needs, cultures and understanding of the issues held by the communities coming to the table
The uniqueness of the communities of the West Kootenays and the challenge of addressing all needs and interests was shared many times through the consultation process. LIP Coordinators confirmed the importance of fully understanding the differences and commonalities and how this relates to planning, representation and in maintaining engagement. They also shared that some communities have a better understanding of the issues and / or have already engaged in similar work; other communities have a lesser understanding and less experience.

7. Manage perception of the LIP as an entity on its own rather than as a consortium
LIP Coordinators shared that some LIP and community members struggled to understand that the LIP was not an agency but a convening body. This is important as it can pose a challenge in engaging people in the work of a collective if they believe the responsibility for the work is held by the LIP and its team.

8. Factor in the unique characteristics of smaller communities
As outlined in the demographic section, the vast majority of immigrants to Canada choose large metropolitan areas to settle. As a result, smaller communities have less experience supporting immigrant settlement and integration and may need to be supported to develop an understanding of the immigrant experience – the challenges they face and the contributions they will make.

Not only is there often lesser experience, but smaller communities are often more tightly knit; “*everyone knows everyone*” and there is a comfort in this that may limit interest in welcoming new folks. Residents of smaller communities often feel a greater sense of belonging than those residing in larger centres; as a result, they may need to spend time exploring and understanding “belonging” and what it means to be truly welcoming and inclusive. They may need time to understand the purpose of LIPs and their purpose.

9. Be prepared for “push back”

Related to the consideration above (#6), some community push back may emerge. Smaller communities may have an interest in maintaining the status quo; they like their community the way it is and may be resistant to the changes that will come with increased immigration and multiculturalism.

One LIP Coordinator recommended to “go to where the energy is”; don’t keep pushing up against resistance, and then broaden your reach and engagement.

10. Source adequate funds to ensure that capacity is in place to support the success of the LIP

The need for adequate funds was repeated in almost every interview with the LIP Coordinators from other regions. Several shared their under-estimation of the amount of work noting such activities as sourcing additional funding and writing grant applications, communications and stakeholder engagement and in coordinating not only the LIP committee but also coordinating an Immigrant Advisory, multiple working groups as well as all of the events, activities and resources generated by the LIP.

11. Marketing / Messaging

Several people consulted emphasized the importance of clear messaging; be very clear what the mandate of a LIP is – what it will take on and what it will not. Maintain focus on the development of more welcoming and inclusive communities, not only on the needs of immigrants.

As well, it was suggested that the messaging aim to garner community support and illustrate what the LIP is doing to address issues at a local level. It was noted that not everyone in the West Kootenays is open to increased immigration and so there is a need to be very strategic with communications and to be prepared to receive and address resistance.

12. Meeting Planning

Many offered suggestions regarding meeting planning to ensure equal access to all LIP Committee members. Suggestions included rotating meetings across the three communities, hosting some meetings online, limiting the number of meetings to four per year.

It was mentioned that often in smaller communities, the people who should be involved wear many different hats and are already involved in several regional, sectoral and community planning tables and may be challenged to commit sufficient time to the work of the LIP.

13. Develop a robust communications plan

Another area that was noted as critical was communication. Communication is key in maintaining engagement of the membership but also for engaging the community at large. Fact sheets, newsletters, e-bulletins, social media and other communication tools were mentioned.

14. Focus on stakeholder engagement

Similar to #12 above, stakeholder engagement requires significant time and effort and it paramount to the success of a LIP. Some promising practices shared by the LIP Coordinators interviewed included:

- Offering info sessions or one-to-one onboarding meetings to every interested individual to help them understand LIPs and their work.
- Using communication / project management tools like Basecamp, Monday.com and Cascade Strategy.
- Paying close attention to the needs of community partners and what they need from us and make plans to address.
- Maintaining a community focused approach; not replicating what is being done in other communities.

15. Engagement of First Nations in the work of LIPs

Although not raised by many, the importance of having representation of First Nations' communities at the table was stated.

16. Collaborate with other LIPs

Many of the LIP Coordinators interviewed were quite new to their positions and made a point of sharing the importance of collaborating with and learning from the work of other LIPs.

Conclusion

Based on the research, input received and the overall findings of the feasibility study, it is without hesitation that we would recommend that CBAL and the significant community of interest move forward with the next steps in the formation of a Local Immigration Partnership for the West Kootenay region of BC.

Whether that next step be the completion of an application for funding, or a process and endorsement for the establishment of a clear community and contract lead for the LIP, it is clear from this study that there is not only significant interest and support for the establishment of a regional LIP, but also a demonstrated need and urgency for the increased coordination, collaboration and planning that a LIP can bring to the issues and approaches of immigrant settlement and integration in the West Kootenays. This interest and support is perhaps best personified by one of the Key Informants who said quite matter-of-factly, “how quickly could it be pulled together?”

As identified in the previous section of the report, there are many considerations and determinations to be made as the LIP is formed and developed in the region. However, it is of some significance that in this substantial list of considerations brought forward by the whole range of stakeholders and community participants, all statements are clearly affirmative and instructive to the formation of a LIP, and none are prohibitive, cautionary or in dissent of the formation of a LIP.