

what we know...

COMMUNITY ENGAGED SCHOLARSHIP INSTITUTE

NEWCOMERS ON BOARD: BASELINE DATA SURVEY RESULTS

Introduction and Research Goals

This research was motivated by the lack of data on diversity, particularly regarding newcomers and immigrants, on boards and committees in Guelph-Wellington.

It sought to answer the questions:

- What does immigrant participation on boards of directors currently look like in Guelph and Wellington?
- What kinds of strategies are being used by organizations to increase diversity on their boards?
- What obstacles might immigrants encounter when attempting to join a board?

The results informed the development of Newcomers on Board, a pilot program aimed at increasing the participation of newcomers in leadership positions in the community.

Background

In early 2016, the Community Engaged Scholarship Institute was approached by the leadership team of the Newcomers on Board pilot program (Volunteer Centre, City of Guelph, Immigrant Services Guelph-Wellington) to help gather baseline data on current levels of diversity on boards and committees in Guelph-Wellington. The research was conducted between April and July 2016.

The Newcomers on Board program matches highly-skilled immigrants in the Guelph-Wellington area with non-profit and corporate boards of directors and municipal committees.

Methods

This research was conducted through an online survey consisting of nine questions which were developed in conjunction with the Newcomers on Board team. The survey was intended for the director, president or chair of any public, private or non-profit organization in Guelph-Wellington, and was distributed through the contact lists of the Volunteer Centre, the United Way, the Local Immigration Partnership, and the Chamber of Commerce, among others.

A total of 74 organizations completed the survey, although not all of them answered all of the questions.

In this research, diversity is defined by the presence of immigrants on boards and committees, where immigrants refer to all individuals born outside of Canada (irrespective of how long they have been in Canada for).

Limitations

Because of the methodology used, the research findings should be interpreted with caution; while they provide an exploratory overview of the diversity on the boards of the organizations surveyed, the findings cannot be considered to be representative of all organizations in Guelph-Wellington.

This research was conducted to support the development of the Newcomers on Board program in Guelph-Wellington. It gathered data on the current participation of immigrants on local boards of directors, as well as on the strategies used by organizations to increase diversity on their boards, and the obstacles that immigrants may face when considering joining a board or committee in the community.

Research Findings

Organizational Background of Boards and Committees

- Of the 74 organizations surveyed, 59 were located in the City of Guelph, and 15 in the County of Wellington.
- 59 respondents identified as not-for-profit; 14 as public or governmental organizations (including municipal committees); and 1 as a private organization.
- They associated with various sectors: education (8% of respondents); individual, family and social Services (8%); community and cultural services (27%). 41% of organizations identified as providing "Other" types of services.

Levels of Diversity on Boards and Committees

- The number of members on boards surveyed ranged from 1 to 30 individuals, with an average of almost 11 individuals.
- On average, 14% of board or committee members were born outside of Canada.
- Of the 66 organizations that provided valid answers to these questions, 17 boards (or 26% of respondents) had no immigrant members.
- On the other end of the scale, in 7 cases, 40% were newcomers; and, on 3 boards, newcomer membership was at 50%.

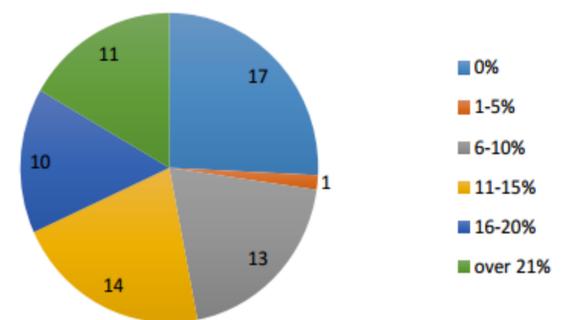
Strategies to Increase Diversity

- Of the organizations surveyed, 17% have provided intercultural awareness or diversity training to board members in the past two years.
- Almost half of the organizations are willing to accommodate cultural and religious holidays and diversity-friendly apparel choices (46%).
- 44% of organizations said they value the knowledge of other cultures and traditions when selecting board and committee members.
- 25% of boards and committees have implemented an equal opportunity policy.
- Some boards and committees provide leadership education and mentoring programs for new or potential board/committee members (24%).
- Very few organizations have tracked and compiled diversity and inclusion statistics (3%).
- 39% of respondents have not implemented any strategies to increase the participation of immigrants.

Obstacles to Newcomers Participating on Boards and Committees

- Most organizations (45 of the 65 who answered this question) noted that they are not aware of any obstacles that would prevent immigrants from joining their board.
- Others, however, indicated that their boards required English language proficiency, Canadian citizenship, police checks, membership in a professional association, or particular religious affiliations – characteristics which may hinder the ability of immigrants to participate.

Proportion of immigrants on local boards



Key Findings

Broadly, this research provided an overview of the diversity on some of the boards and committees in Guelph-Wellington. It also presented a number of strategies that have been used by organizations to increase participation of immigrants, as well as potential obstacles that immigrants might face when joining boards and committees.

- Most boards of directors or committees in Guelph-Wellington have only 1 or 2 members that are immigrants to Canada.
- 17 of the 66 boards or committees surveyed have no immigrant members. On the other hand, 7 respondents indicated having more than 40% of immigrants within their boards.
- Only 17% of organizations have provided intercultural awareness or diversity training to their board members.
- 39% of boards and committees have not implemented any explicit strategies to increase the participation of immigrants.
- Less than 5% of organizations track information about diversity and inclusion on their boards.
- 28 of the organizations surveyed expressed interest in learning more about how to increase diversity on their boards.

Researchers

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