NEWCOMERS ON BOARD: BASELINE DATA SURVEY RESULTS

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INTRODUCTION

This project, prepared for the City of Guelph, the Volunteer Centre of Guelph Wellington, Immigrant Services Guelph Wellington and other organizations, explores the current levels of diversity on Boards of Directors and City Advisory Committees in Guelph-Wellington. The findings from this research will inform the implementation of “Newcomers on Board”, a new pilot program seeking to build the capacity of immigrants to take on leadership roles in the community.

The aim of this project was to provide the Newcomers on Board project team with an analysis of the composition of boards and committees, and the strategies that are currently being used to increase the participation of immigrants. We also aimed to learn about the possible obstacles that might prevent immigrants from being able to join boards and committees in the first place.

This report provides the community partners with key findings from this research, which can be used to advise the implementation of the Newcomers on Board program.

METHODS

This research focused on understanding the numbers of immigrants currently sitting on boards and committees in Guelph-Wellington, and the kinds of strategies that are being used to increase their representation.

In order to accomplish this task, we conducted an online survey using Qualtrics software. The online survey consisted of nine questions which were developed in conjunction with the community partners (see Appendix A). It was intended for the director, president or chair of any public, private or non-profit organization in Guelph-Wellington, and was disseminated 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. 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 and should not be generalized broadly.

In this report, 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).
RESULTS

The survey allowed us to get a handle on the types of boards and committees that exist in Guelph-Wellington, and their demographic composition. It also provided us with a sense of the various strategies that are in place and the kinds of obstacles that immigrants may face when considering joining a board. Following the survey format, the results are presented in four sections: Organizational Background of Boards and Committees, Levels of Diversity on Boards and Committees, Strategies to Increase Diversity, and Obstacles to Newcomers Participating on Boards and Committees. The report ends with some key considerations.

Section 1: Organizational Background of Boards and Committees

Of the 74 organizations that answered the survey, 59 were located in the City of Guelph, while the remaining 15 were located in the County of Wellington. The vast majority of respondents (59) identified as not-for-profits; 14 respondents identified as public or governmental organizations; and 1 respondent identified as a private organization. Regarding the type of service offered, several boards indicated that they work in the areas of Education (8% of respondents); Individual, Family and Social Services (8%); or Community and Cultural Services (27%). 41% of organizations identified as providing “Other” types of services.

Section 2: Levels of Diversity on Boards and Committees

The next questions examined the demographic composition of boards and committees. The survey asked for the total number of board or committee members and the number of current members who were born outside of Canada, allowing us to calculate the proportion of immigrants on each board. The number of board members ranged from 1 to 30 individuals, with an average of almost 11 individuals. Organizations declared having between 0 and 5 board members who were born outside of the country, with the vast majority reporting 0, 1 or 2 immigrant members.

On average, 14% of board or committee members were born outside of Canada. This proportion varied slightly depending on the legal status of the organization: not-for-

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1 Responses listed under “Other” included, among others: religious services, scholarship awards, homeschooling, fundraising and advocacy, sports, business support and networking, refugee resettlement, women’s advocacy, heritage, arts, farmers’ markets, research, human resource consulting.
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Profits surveyed have on average 14.7% of immigrant members, whereas public and governmental organizations had a lower 10.2% of immigrant members.

The chart below gives an overview of the proportions of immigrants on the boards of the organizations surveyed. Of the 66 organizations that provided valid answers to these questions\(^2\), 17 boards have no immigrant members. At the other end of the spectrum, 11 boards reported that immigrants make up over 21% of their membership. In 7 cases, immigrants make up 40% or more of the boards’ membership, and three of the boards surveyed have 50% of their members who were born outside of the country.

\[\text{Proportion of immigrants on local boards}\]

\[\begin{array}{c}
0\% & 17 \\
1-5\% & 13 \\
6-10\% & 14 \\
11-15\% & 10 \\
16-20\% & 11 \\
over 21\% & 1 \\
\end{array}\]

**Section 3: Strategies to Increase Diversity**

This section examines the types of strategies that have been used to increase diversity on boards and committees.

Of the organizations surveyed, 17% have provided intercultural awareness or diversity training to board or committee members in the past two years. Most organizations have adopted measures that can help increase the diversity of immigrants on their boards and committees. For instance, almost half of the organizations are willing to

\[\text{Footnote}\]

\(^2\) Some answers were omitted since some organizations were unaware or unsure of the number of immigrants present, and some organizations did not answer these two questions.
accommodate cultural and religious holidays and diversity-friendly apparel choices (46%). A well-used means of increasing diversity is by valuing knowledge of other cultures and traditions when selecting board and committee members (44%). 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%). A number of organizations (20%) advertise board and committee positions through community newspapers and cultural agencies.

Other measures that organizations identified and used include offering cultural diversity awards, and implementing anti-racism/anti-oppression frameworks and values of inclusion in their work.

On the other end, some of the measures listed in the survey have not been used much by local boards and committees. Very few organizations have tracked and compiled diversity and inclusion statistics within their boards and committees (3%). Boards and committees are also unlikely to have created a specific position to oversee diversity efforts (3%). 39% of respondents have not implemented any strategies to increase the participation of immigrants. The following graph displays the types of strategies used by boards and committees:
Strategies to Increase Diversity

- Advertise positions in community newspapers and through cultural agencies
- Recognize proficiency in languages other than English and French as a valued skill
- Value knowledge of diverse cultures and traditions
- Implemented an equal opportunity policy
- Willing to accommodate cultural and religious holidays and diversity-friendly apparel choices
- Measure diversity and inclusion statistics
- Provide leadership education and mentoring programs for new or potential board/committee members
- Created a specific role to oversee our diversity efforts (e.g. a Diversity Director)
- Have not implemented explicit strategies to increase the participation of immigrants
Section 4: Obstacles to Newcomers Participating on Boards and Committees

Finally, respondents were asked whether there were barriers to the participation of immigrants. 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, adherence to a specific religion, or membership in a professional association – characteristics which may hinder the ability of immigrants to participate.

CONCLUSIONS

This report provided an analysis of the demographic composition of boards and committees in Guelph-Wellington, and the strategies that are currently being used to increase the participation of immigrants. It also outlined some of the possible obstacles that might prevent newcomers and immigrants from being able to join boards and committees. The larger aim of this research is to inform the implementation of “Newcomers on Board”, a new pilot program seeking to build the capacity of immigrants to take on leadership roles in the community. Key insights from this research can help with this:

- Of the organizations surveyed, most respondents indicated that to their knowledge, only 1 or 2 current board or committee members are immigrants.
- 17 boards or committees have no immigrant members.
- Only 17% of organizations have provided intercultural awareness or diversity training to their board members.
- 39% of boards and committees have not implemented explicit strategies to increase the participation of immigrants.
- Less than 5% of organizations measure statistics for diversity and inclusion.
- Less than 5% of organizations have a specific role to oversee diversity and inclusion efforts.

These results may point to areas of interest during the development of the pilot program. However, as we used a limited sample size, it is impossible to generalize beyond the findings of this research. Overall, this research provides a snapshot of some
of the boards and committees in Guelph-Wellington, as well as a means of understanding a number of strategies that have been used, and some of the obstacles that might prevent immigrants from joining boards and committees.

Finally, the survey also allowed respondents to express their interest in learning more about strategies to increase diversity on their boards and committees. A total of 28 organizations indicated interest in this issue, including 24 who left their contact information in order to pursue this conversation. This information will be provided separately to the project team, and could serve as an initial pool of organizations for participation in the “Newcomers on Board” pilot program.
APPENDIX A: SURVEY QUESTIONS

Organizational Background

1. Is your organization located in:
   - The city of Guelph
   - The county of Wellington (outside of Guelph)

2. What is your organization’s legal status?
   - Public organization
   - Not-for-profit or charity
   - Private (for profit)

3. What type of service(s) do you offer?
   - Education
   - Environment and Public Health/Safety
   - Health Care and Seniors Services
   - Employment Services
   - Individual, Family and Social Services
   - Housing/Food/Transportation Services
   - Community and Cultural Services
   - Criminal Justice and Legal Services
   - Manufacturing
   - Sales
   - Other (please specify):
Composition of Board of Directors or Committees

(In answering these questions, please consider the composition of your organization’s Board of Directors, or of any committee performing similar functions – for example, an advisory or executive committee.)

4. How many individuals sit on your organization’s board or committee? (If your organization has a Board of Directors and a committee, the numbers of the members can be added together.) _____

5. To your knowledge, how many of your current board or committee members were born outside of Canada? (If your organization has a Board of Directors and a committee, the numbers of the members can be added together.) _____

Strategies to increase diversity

6. Has your organization provided intercultural awareness or diversity training to the board or committee members in the past two years?

- Yes
- No

7. What steps, if any, has your organization taken to increase the participation of immigrants on your board or committee? (Please indicate all that apply)

- We advertise board and committee positions in community newspapers and through cultural agencies.
- We recognize proficiency in languages other than English and French as a valued skill when selecting board and committee members.
- We value knowledge of diverse cultures and traditions when selecting board and committee members.
- We have implemented an equal opportunity policy.
- We are willing to accommodate cultural and religious holidays and diversity-friendly apparel choices.
- We measure diversity and inclusion statistics.
- We provide leadership education and mentoring programs for new or potential board/committee members.
- We have created a specific role to oversee our diversity efforts (e.g. a Diversity Director).
- Other (please specify): ________
- We have not implemented explicit strategies to increase the participation of immigrants.

8. To your knowledge, are there barriers to immigrants becoming members of your organization’s board or committee? (for example, a requirement to be a Canadian citizen) What are they? ________________

9. Are you interested in learning more about strategies and opportunities to increase the participation of newcomers and immigrants to your board or committee? If so, please leave us your name and contact information: ____________________