



# Population Foru*iii* 2010

February 9<sup>th</sup> | Wolfville, NS

Final Report

# Introduction

A patient visits his doctor. He's not feeling like himself anymore – he's tired, lacking energy, feeling a little ragged. After running a series of tests, his doctor delivers her professional opinion. "The good news is that you're not going to suffer a heart attack anytime soon. The bad news? You've living with diabetes."

Such was the verdict delivered by one of Atlantic Canada's leading economists at Population Forum, a conference jointly hosted by the Nova Scotia Association of Regional Development Authorities (NSARDA), the Union of Nova Scotia Municipalities (UNSM) and the Nova Scotia Chambers of Commerce (Chambers) on February 9, 2010 in Wolfville, Nova Scotia.

Like many jurisdictions in the developed world, Nova Scotia's population is declining and ageing. But our challenges are perhaps more severe than elsewhere. The province has lower than average fertility rates - Nova Scotia women bear an average of 1.4 babies each, less than Canada's average of 1.6 and well below the replacement rate of 2.1 babies per woman. What's more, the province attracts only 0.7% of Canada's immigrants, and struggles to retain them beyond a few years. Put together, these demographic realities paint a vulnerable portrait of the province's economic future.

And while we're far from an economic and social "heart attack" – Nova Scotia's population challenge is a serious, long-term condition that poses significant challenges to the way we live our lives, educate our children, train our employees, staff our businesses, provide services to our residents and plan for the future.

- By 2021, 45% of Nova Scotia's population will be over the age of 40, up from 36% today.
- By 2026, Nova Scotia's population will have declined to 895,000 people, a 4.6% decline from 2004.
- Nova Scotia's share of new immigrants to Canada has dropped by nearly half since the 1970s, to less than 1%.
- In the last 40 years, Nova Scotia's natural replacement rate (births minus deaths) has dropped by 92%.
- By 2026, 1 in every 8 jobs will go unfilled.

Demographic experts, and indeed, many attendees at the Forum, are uncomfortable describing Nova Scotia's looming worker shortages and population decline as a crisis. But while Nova Scotia's declining and ageing population may not spell a pending catastrophe for the province's economic future, economists, business leaders and demographers say that significant action must be taken now if Nova Scotians are to enjoy a vibrant and prosperous future.

Population Forum was a vital first step. By joining forces and tapping the brainpower and experience of our joint networks, NSARDA, UNSM and the Chambers sought to build awareness about Nova Scotia's population challenges, pose and debate new solutions, and set the course for action.

Certainly, Population Forum has played a vital role in pushing the discussion forward. More than a dozen media outlets from across the province covered Population Forum, linking Nova Scotians with vital information about our demographic reality.

The Forum marked one of the first times that municipal leaders, business people and economic developers have gathered to listen to presentations by population and workforce experts, and brainstorm solutions to the challenges we collectively face.

This report has been prepared by NSARDA, UNSM and the Chambers to provide Nova Scotia's leaders, decision-makers and concerned citizens with factual insight into the nature of the province's serious population challenges.

Specifically, this report is intended to present the ideas and solutions expressed at the conference in order to fuel further action at the individual, government and corporate levels.

\*To download copies of the presentations and reports delivered at Population Forum – all of which contain

## Understanding Nova Scotia's Population Challenges

Nova Scotia's population challenge is a two-sided issue. Perhaps most pressing for the province's economic future is a major workforce challenge, across all economic sectors and job categories. Too few workers threaten Nova Scotia's ability to deliver services, care for the elderly, and meet new economic opportunities. But worker shortages are not the only challenge posed by a declining population. Across Nova Scotia, rural communities are reporting a dramatic reduction in numbers. Rural depopulation can compromise the ability of municipal, provincial and federal governments to maintain services and infrastructure, and can drain communities of their vibrancy.

## The Pending Labour Shortage

Nova Scotia will run out of available labour force in less than seven years. For a province that has long struggled with "too few jobs for too many people" syndrome, Dr. Jim McNiven's verdict on the extent of Nova Scotia's labour force challenges is staggering.

Sometime toward the middle of the next decade, and for the first time in at least a century, the number of people willing and available to work in Canada will be smaller than the number of jobs potentially available to them. After that point in time, a general labour shortage – not just in specific geographic areas or for particular skilled trades, but throughout the economy and in all provinces – will become a normal fact of Canadian economic life that will continue for as far ahead as demographers are able to forecast.

- Dr. JD McNiven

### **Immigration as a solution**

Dr. McNiven, a senior policy research advisor with Canmac Economics Ltd. predicts the province would need to attract at least half a million immigrants - 515,000 people – by 2028 to maintain modest economic growth. For a province that currently attracts less than 1% of Canada's total immigrants, that target is unrealistic.

### **Increasing participation rates as a solution**

Participation rates are already on the rise among Canadian seniors, hitting 8% compared to 3% several years ago. But in order for Nova Scotia's workforce problems to be completely solved by increasing participation rates, workers would not be able to retire until some point in their 70s. Meanwhile, no other adults would be permitted not to work, making dependence solely on older workers an impractical solution.

### **Boosting productivity as a solution**

One way to address labour force challenges? By doing more with less – or boosting productivity through investments in research, development, education and training, and processes. The challenge: even if Nova Scotia were to increase productivity levels by more than 50%, and far above the Canadian average, we'd still come up short, according to Dr. McNiven's research.

### **The conclusion?**

Addressing Nova Scotia's labour challenges will require a mixed solution – boosting immigration levels, participation rates among older workers and productivity. And the most important factor? Boosting our creativity.

Approaching problems with fresh insight. Considering questions like this: Assuming current levels of demand, how could you staff a Tim Horton's with only two people?

"Solving labour force challenges will require creative thinking that is truly out of the box," McNiven states.

## People and Communities

Youth out-migration, lack of immigration, falling fertility rates and an ageing population has all resulted in population decline, especially in rural, or non-metro-adjacent communities. To combat population decline, many communities are searching for new ways to repopulate rural communities.

Why does repopulation matter? The resultant shrinking tax base and rising service costs, dwindling labour pools and infrastructure challenges can all be mitigated through repopulation strategies. David Bruce, Director of the Rural & Small Town Programme at Mount Allison University, has identified strategies for a number of potential target groups for repatriation:

- Retention of the existing population, including youth, young families and seniors
- Attracting new people to rural areas including urban residents and immigrations
- Repatriation of former residents.

### Repopulation Strategies



#### How to attract and retain youth:

- Involve them in meaningful ways in planning for the future
- Be proactive in identifying opportunities for employment and business creation
- To combat a lack of awareness about what's out there, connect young people with existing programs
- Involve the business community to create apprenticeships, and mentoring opportunities
- Ensure young people have access to high speed IT



#### How to attract and retain seniors:

- Provide good health care services
- Barrier-free and maintenance-free housing
- Provide the community social supports and networks that will allow seniors to age in place, rather than move.



#### How to attract and retain immigrants:

- Get to know and develop relationships with non-Canadian born residents
- Ensure immigrants have access to economic opportunity
- Find ways to ensure health and education services are tailored to the needs of immigrants
- Develop a multistakeholder group – including businesses – to develop a local or regional immigration plan
- Recruit newcomers using existing immigrants as contacts



#### Repatriating former residents

- Ensure economic opportunities
- Underscore ties to family and quality of life
- Prepare for associated marketing costs

# Creative Solutions to Persistent Problems

NSARDA, UNSM and the Nova Scotia Chambers of Commerce didn't organize Population Forum simply to share depressing statistics about population decline. While sharing information is a vital first step in addressing the population challenge, it is indeed just a first step.

Our goal was that Population Forum would be a milestone in collaborative action. To this end, the Forum was structured to enable creative brainstorming across a four key strategies:

- Workforce Availability
- Attraction, Retention and Repatriation
- Roles of Federal and Provincial Governments in Rural Repopulation
- Role of Municipalities, Business and the RDAs in Rural Repopulation

The following section highlights ideas, solutions, and actions posed by the more than 100 municipal leaders, economic developers and business owners in attendance at the conference.

Attendees participated in facilitated brainstorming sessions on four key themes:

- Workforce Availability
- Attraction, Retention and Repatriation
- Roles of Federal and Provincial Governments in Rural Repopulation
- Roles of Municipalities, RDAs and Business in Rural Repopulation

The following section provides an overview of our findings. During the course of the brainstorming sessions, some themes emerged continuously, while others were mentioned once or twice. In general, we have arranged responses in order of popularity.

## Welcome to Nova Scotia

How can Nova Scotians not only attract newcomers to their communities, but also make them feel welcome?

- Employment opportunities
- A hospitable and friendly attitude
- Personal and community services which respect different tradition and cultures
- Affordable and appropriate housing
- Settlement agencies and multicultural associations
- Appropriate cultural and recreational activities
- Public education on cultural and anti-racial issues
- An open, proactive spiritual community
- Involve children in learning about different cultures
- Resources on cultural education in schools and libraries

# FINDINGS

# 1

## WORKFORCE AVAILABILITY

### THEME

Sometimes the best answer is right in your own backyard. One key way to address the labour shortage is to harness the skills of the local population and do a better job-matching people with available jobs.

Women are on the verge of outnumbering men in the workforce in some countries. However, there are still lots of opportunities to engage and retain women workers. Many attendees underscored the need to improve Nova Scotia's daycare offering. Making daycare more affordable, creating new daycare options for mothers who work from home, and tax credits for daycare expenditures were all highlighted as strategies for tapping into women workers.

The following specific groups were identified as potential targets for enhancing participation rates.

#### Retirees

- Develop a retiree database that identifies specific skills and training
- Recruit retirees and link their expertise to communities and businesses
- Ensure retirees are aware of opportunities in the workforce
- Offer medical plan incentives
- Recruit retirees as mentors/trainers to help boost performance and productivity of younger workers
- Provide training – especially technology-related, to senior citizens
- Offer tax breaks for pensioners and older workers to encourage participation
- Require pension recipients to commit to two years of volunteer service in sectors most affected by labour shortage, such as agriculture

#### Aboriginal People

- Address cultural and financial barriers within the Aboriginal community
- Address racism
- Aboriginal Community Contract with businesses to encourage employment
- Offer telecommuting opportunities to Aboriginal People living on reserves
- Promote education and training

#### People with Disabilities

- Improve support for programs for people with learning disabilities
- Create more opportunities for people with disabilities to work from home
- Enhance funding for workforce supports for people with disabilities
- Make workplaces more wheelchair accessible
- Offer incentives to employers for hiring people with disabilities such as technology upgrade credits
- Collaborate with employment and service organizations that support people with disabilities

# ATTRACTION, RETENTION & REPATRIATION

Nova Scotia needs to boost our numbers. Attracting, retaining and repatriating people to Nova Scotia's rural communities is an important piece of the repopulation puzzle. The following section provides an overview of the conditions required to encourage newcomers to live, work and build a future in Nova Scotia.

## IMMIGRANTS

### Cut red tape/ simplify immigration process

- Too high level skill sets required
- Match needs or skill sets with the immigrants entering Canada (i.e. farming vs. IT)

### Create and promote welcoming community – market the community/NS to the rest of the world

- Church Hall/ library greetings
- Appropriate recreational and social infrastructure
- Make more services accessible to rural communities-i.e. libraries are mobile
- Prepare community members before bringing immigrants in
- Enhance cultural awareness- need to be accepting and understanding of different cultures, not just tolerant
  - Educate community about the value of new-comers

### Maintain continual contact with immigrants

- Survey immigrants to identify their issues

### Provide affordable housing

### ESL training

### More flexibility to recognize foreign credentials (4)

- Professional associations impede credential recognition
- Recognition of international standards- red seal trades

### Jobs need to be available before they will come (4)

- Offer job placement aid
- Job counseling

## YOUTH

### Municipalities need to “hip up” to engage youth

- Open committee meetings to youth, bring councils in to schools
  - i.e. youth municipal council
- Develop mentorships for youth (2)
- Get youth involved in the communities (2)
- Find out what they like about the community

### Get businesses to engage youth- CBDC take initiative

- Offer youth work experience in local businesses
- Connect local industries with school children

### Keep in touch with graduates (3)

- I.e. Facebook groups and social media
- Send gift baskets to universities

### Desirable jobs (6)

- More well-paying/professional type jobs
- Create unique job opportunities
- Benefits
- Flexible work hours

### Offer quality education opportunities

- High cost of education forces youth to “chase” high-paying careers
- Post secondary education is forcing youth to work elsewhere
- Change tax structure to retire student loans so they can live in NS
- Access to trades training in community college system
  - Apprenticeship hours can be a roadblock to youth entering the trades

### Make communities appealing

- Access to exciting recreation and desired services opportunities
- Sell our lifestyle to youth- “It’s not about the money.”

### Make capital accessible for start-up businesses

## ATTRACTION, RETENTION & REPATRIATION CONTINUED

Educate youth about career opportunities in NS  
• i.e. Career pathing

**Entry-level housing (becoming out of reach due to energy code)**

**More transfers/revenue to municipalities to provide services needed to make community competitive**

**Employers shouldn't require "3 yrs experience" on so many jobs**

**Advertise business and technology opportunities on Facebook**

**Establish more childcare options**

**Make public transportation more available- i.e. from Windsor or Truro in to Halifax**

### FORMER RESIDENTS

**Market the strengths of the province and the lifestyle (5)**

- It's a healthy place to live
- Natural resources
- Quality of life- flextime, recreational facilities, broadband, lower prices (2)
- Safe place to raise children (2)
- Lower cost of living
- Community pride

**Create a database of people who have moved away**

- Find ways to stay in touch with people who have moved away
- MADGE- Mothers Against Distant Grand Children- get them to network with youth

**Accessible healthcare**

**Small/efficient housing for aging or retiring population**

**Strong education system for families with children**

**Strong recreation opportunities and cultural infrastructure**

**Provide tax incentives to offset cost of moving**

**Allow retiring people from US to come here- health care benefits**

# ROLES OF FEDERAL AND PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENTS IN RURAL REPOPULATION

## THEME

The federal and provincial governments play an important role in leading an effective repopulation strategy for Nova Scotia. Participants began by highlighting effective strategies and programs that are already in place.

### Immigration-specific:

- Nominee Program (immigration program to speed up permanent residence visa process)
  - Fast teaching immigration
  - Credentials not always accepted
  - Takes too long
- Navigator Program is assisting in retaining immigrants
- Dept of Immigration Entrepreneurial Program
- Live-in Caregiver Program- after 2yrs can apply for permanent resident status
- Immigrant Sponsorship Program through businesses and local churches
- RDA immigrant programs
- Provincial Immigration Strategy
- RDAs acting as catalyst with Office of Immigration
- Foreign students now have 2 yrs to find a job as opposed to 6 months

### Opportunities for Improvement:

- Credential Recognition (10 responses)
  - Shorten timelines
  - Standardize/reduce credentials of skilled workers
  - Create credential assessment center
- Support Networks for Immigrants
- Allow students/migrant workers to become citizens after 3-4 years
- Allow live-in caregiver program participants to be eligible to take courses at community colleges
- Privacy Act makes new immigrants difficult to identify thus difficult to welcome
- Bring immigrants outside Halifax rather than just to cities
- Improve dialogue between Nova Scotia and Canada Immigration departments

- More provincial and local responsibility for immigration as delegated by federal government
- Exit interviews with immigrants who do not stay
- More responsive Nominee Program-focus on supporting local community policies
- No caps on number of immigrants
- Multi-level government partnership on immigration

### Provincially:

- Workplace Training
- One Journey Program (Department of Community Services job skills training program)
- Immigrant Settlement and Integration Services - replicate in small towns
- Foreign students can now work off-campus
- Relocation of Programs in Cape Breton and Colchester County
- Settlement Funding
- Bursary Program- incentive to stay and work in community
- Red Seal Apprenticeship Programs- designed to encourage apprenticeship employment
- Test Drive Annapolis/Digby- host a dinner and evening at a hotel with 20 couples- Asked what do they dislike about Alberta? What might entice them to relocate to Nova Scotia?

### Federally:

- Federal government relocated GST center to Summerside to revitalize community
- Federal and Provincial Partnerships in Canada and North America to entice former residents to return to the province (i.e. aquaculture and health/nurses)
- Targeted Wage Payroll Rebate
- Self-employment benefits program

### Opportunities for improvement at the federal and provincial levels

- Decentralization of government services!
- Child subsidiary program 9 (2 responses)
  - Additional funding to financially support daycare

## ROLES OF FEDERAL AND PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENTS IN RURAL REPOPULATION CONTINUED

- Change government mindset - Rural areas are assets not liabilities
- Federal programs' emphasis is currently on large cities
  - Track effectiveness of programs
- Minimize role of outside special interest groups in shaping rural development
- More local control of our natural resources
- Local control of province-owned industrial land
- Promote home-based businesses
- Federal and provincial tax incentives for manufacturers and retailers if they locate outside metro area
- Service Nova Scotia on wheels- one-stop shopping or services
- Provincial government must help municipalities retain services
- Settlement association outside of Halifax
- Lobby Provincial Government to amend Municipal Government Act to allow municipalities to offer tax incentives for businesses willing to locate in rural Nova Scotia
- Healthcare- retain and recruit healthcare professionals
- Pay women to have children
- Identify and target communities with significant out-migration and establish comprehensive policies to support growth i.e. tax free zones
- Affordable housing- i.e. Florenceville, McCain's built 20 units
- Commercialization of universities- too general, need specialization

# 4

## ROLES OF MUNICIPALITIES, RDAS AND BUSINESSES IN RURAL REPOPULATION

### THEME

Local challenges require local solutions. Municipalities, businesses and the RDAs are uniquely poised to assist communities develop and implement homegrown repopulation strategies.

#### THE ROLE OF MUNICIPALITIES

##### Work together - develop a plan

- Partner with chambers of commerce
- Work with school students to create link to the future
- Cooperation between municipalities
- Amalgamation- leads to more money for services to attract people

##### Utilize RDA resources

- Promote initiative internationally-
- Trade show marketing

##### Promote the towns

- i.e. Kings county booth at Calgary Stampede
- Celebrate business successes- promote image
- Use website to promote towns
- Recognition of accomplishments to promote civic pride
- Annual campaign to welcome people home
- Act as leaders- community committees, PR, websites

##### Create atmosphere that attracts newcomers

- Encourage cultural community opportunities
- Festivals/events
- Welcome centers, not just welcome wagon
- Immigration navigator

##### Build infrastructure to support new opportunities

- Recreation facilities and arts centers

##### Asset mapping to identify gaps/needs

##### Support economic development

- Land use planning to create opportunities for new businesses

- Public transit-towns are bedroom communities
- Tax incentives economic development zones

#### THE ROLE OF BUSINESS

##### Be informed

- Get educated about the need to recruit & retain, and about the population decline issue

##### Be open to recruiting immigrants/newcomers

- Tolerance is not acceptance
- Incorporate newcomers in to business community
- Offer mentoring and socialization programs to immigrant workers

##### Be a voice

- Express their labor needs, skill sets required and plans for expansion
- Commission your chamber of commerce for help
- Connect to policy-makers
- Lobby on behalf of employees for doctors, recreational facilities, etc.
- Offer cultural sensitivity training
- Use testimonials to promote businesses
- Promote your community

##### Work together to build:

- Create one skilled worker database
- Assist employees spouses in finding employment
- HR asset mapping

##### Become part of mentor programs/ internships/training for youth/Co-ops/ placements

##### Be willing to relocate to rural areas

- Obstacles can be zoning, taxes, permits

##### Be flexible and open to change

- Provide onsite daycare
- Offer flexible work hours

## ROLES OF MUNICIPALITIES, RDAS AND BUSINESSES IN RURAL REPOPULATION CONTINUED

### THE ROLE OF THE RDAS

#### **Collaborate with businesses and municipalities to develop, and implement a population strategy**

- Share best practices
- Include immigration in population strategy
- Pull stakeholders together, be coordinators (i.e. Population Forum is an example)
- Promote BRE- it's easier to retain a business than to find/start a new one
- Link business – and labour market needs – to government

#### **Be a voice**

- Identify priorities of the community
- Collect valuable information for Integrated Sustainability Plans
- Field immigration inquiries
- Provide/Facilitate cross culture training/ awareness
- Host events for immigrants
- Target communities for specific cultures

#### **Lobby provincial and federal government for funding to implement long-term solutions**

- High level marketing such as i.e. overseas immigration fairs
- Work through jurisdictional issues

#### **Link skilled labor needs to training courses**

- I.e. NSCC is often 2-3 yrs behind in creating new career/tech positions (water treatment techs)
- Implement research

# Conclusion

Nova Scotia's population challenges are complex and deep-seated. No one organization has the answers – collaboration is crucial.

Population Forum represented a unique opportunity for Nova Scotia's Municipalities, RDAs and Businesses to join forces to tackle population decline. A number of creative and efficient solutions were posed here.

But the February 9th gathering in Wolfville was just the beginning. NSARDA, UNSM and the Nova Scotia Chambers of Commerce are committed to tackling what may be the most crucial issue affecting the prosperity of communities across Nova Scotia.

Our next steps are to gather as a group and identify a shortlist of solutions that we can act on now. Communicating these actionable solutions – with governments, businesses, economic development organizations, communities and individuals, will be our next step.

Of course, part of communicating is sharing information, and getting informed. We encourage readers to forward this report to friends, colleagues, and political leaders. The more we can join forces to address population decline, the more effective we will be.

# Population Forum 2010

February 9<sup>th</sup> | Wolfville, NS

**Presented by**



Your Vision. Our insight.  
Together for  
**community**  
success.



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