

**Outreach to Businesses in the Lawrence Heights Neighbourhood:
Survey Findings
March 2011**

Local Immigration Partnership

Introduction

The City of Toronto comprises some 140 neighbourhoods which range in socio-economic scope. The community of Lawrence Heights has been identified as a Priority Neighbourhood in Toronto by the City of Toronto Strong Neighbourhoods Taskforce. Building on research conducted by the United Way of Greater Toronto, Priority Neighbourhoods are areas of Toronto earmarked for increased investment and support in an effort to build “safer streets, engaged, active residents, and ultimately, a more prosperous economy.”¹

Just over 50% of the people living in Lawrence Heights are immigrants², a reflection of the percentage that reside in Toronto, Canada’s number one immigrant-receiving metropolis.

The Local Immigration Partnership (LIP) is a community planning process focused on understanding the needs and challenges faced by newcomers in the Lawrence Heights neighbourhood.

The project is focused on identifying solutions inside and outside the community that will support enhanced newcomer settlement and integration.



Local businesses are an integral part of the community. They play a key role in building a vibrant, welcoming and engaged community as they attract industry, infrastructure, and serve those who work, play and live in the neighbourhood.

As such, the Lawrence Heights LIP conducted an outreach effort with local businesses in the Lawrence-Heights neighbourhood with 3 key goals:

¹ Strong Neighbourhoods: A Call to Action, 2005. United Way of Greater Toronto and the City of Toronto.

² 2006 Census Data. Statistics Canada.

- learning about the experiences, needs, and challenges of the for-profit sector in Lawrence Heights in the areas of business operations and growth, human resource management and corporate citizenship;
- establishing a rapport with businesses in an effort to bring them into the process of collaborative community building;
- identifying ways in which the for-profit sector might become involved in supporting the successful settlement and integration of newcomers.

Method

Through this engagement, 25 businesses were consulted using in-person, on-line and telephone surveys. For the purposes of this activity, a recent immigrant describes someone who was born outside of Canada and has lived in the country for five years or less.

Most of the organizations that were contacted were receptive to the concept of fostering welcoming and inclusive community initiatives in the Lawrence Heights neighbourhood. Beyond a simple deployment of a bulleted survey, staff and volunteers who conducted the surveys were trained to use the survey tool as a discussion guide. The tool served as a template into which a more fluid conversation could be inserted, allowing for a conversational approach and the encouragement of further dialogue about the project and the further needs and experiences of the business. This approach was vital to the successful engagement of conversation, and to fostering interest in further discussion – and in some instances, alliance and partnership.

To identify respondents, a list of businesses was generated from the Scott's Directory and YellowPages.ca.

It is important to note that while the outreach approach was random, the sample that was generated was too small to be representative of the overall views and opinions of businesses in the Lawrence Heights area. As such, this document should be read as a collection of the operations, hiring and community partnership experiences of different businesses in the community.

Who did we talk to?

In order to learn about who was in the sample pool, some basic demographic information was collected from among respondents. Most respondents had a large geographic customer base where 25% of had a national customer base, and 20.8% had an international customer base. The largest number of respondents (33%) catered to a city-wide geographic customer base and the least catered to a local or neighbourhood customer base.

The majority of respondents were sole proprietors (33%), 25% were partnerships, 21% were running family businesses and corporations were also represented by 21% of respondents (See Figure 1). All but one was a for-profit.

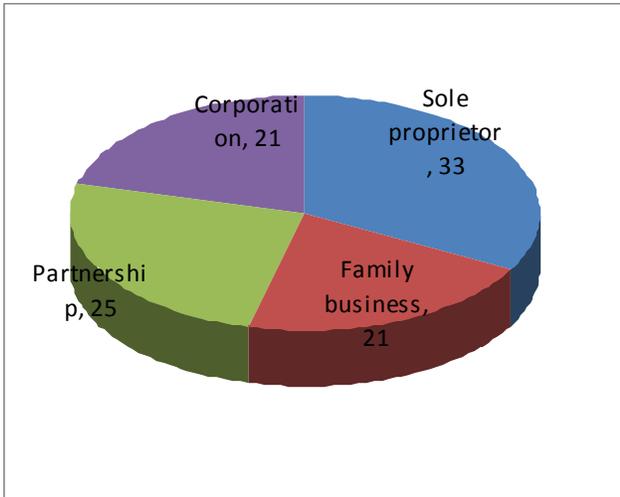


Figure 1: Types of Business Respondents

Of those who chose to identify their revenue levels, the majority reported to have made more than \$1 Million annually (32%), 18% generated \$500,001-\$1 Million, 9% generated \$100,001-\$500,000 and 4.5% generated \$10,001-\$50,000.

Interestingly, in contrast to patterns of response to other questions, almost half of the survey respondents chose not to answer this question for undisclosed reasons. (See Figure 2)

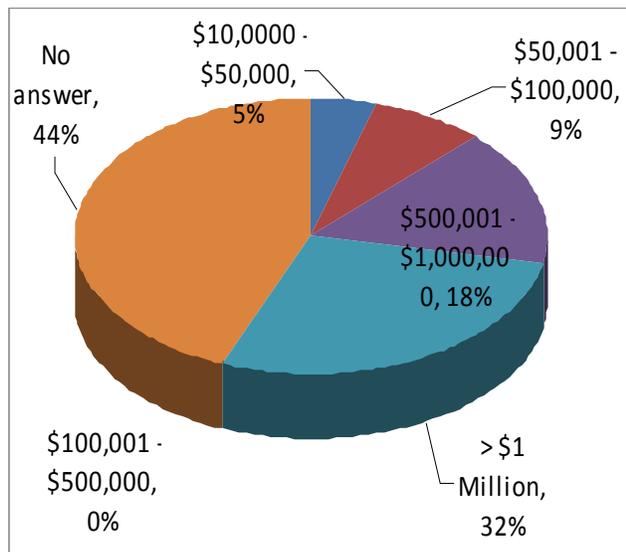


Figure 2: Revenue of Business Respondents

The size of the workforce among respondents varied greatly, as well, as displayed in Figure 3. Fully 80% reported not having a unionized workforce and only 36% reported to have a Human Resources Department.

The vast majority of respondents employed Salespeople and customer/ client service representatives (46%) while 33% reported employing skilled labour, 8.3% employed unskilled labour, and 4% employed administrators. The spread of industries represented by respondents can be found in Figure 4. Retail Trades and Manufacturing were

the most represented (29% and 21%, respectively) and the remaining respondents were splintered among different industries including Construction (13%), Wholesale Trade (13%), Healthcare and Social Assistance (8%) and Utilities (8%).

Very few respondents belonged to business networks or associations. Almost 2/3 of respondents did not belong to any such association; those who did, predominantly belonged to Sector Councils or Industry Associations. Larger associations like the Toronto Board of Trade, Canadian Chamber of commerce and Canadian Federation of Independent Businesses were the most popular.

What did they say?

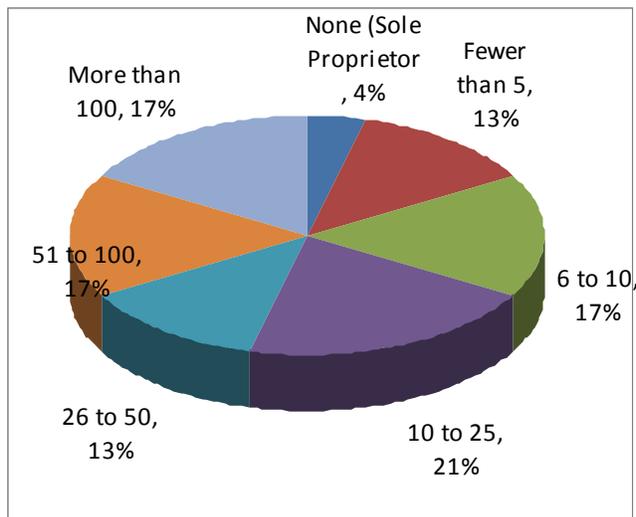


Figure 3: Workforce Size of Business Respondents

Employment Practices

Many respondents were not aware of free industry or government-sponsored programs that help to build their workforce.

On the other hand, however, those businesses who were taking advantage of free programs were using a variety of services and reported benefiting greatly from them. One employer reported inviting employment service organizations to provide programming in the workplace and another reported accessing free strategic planning programming at financial

institutions. Of those who had never accessed free programming, 73% were interested in receiving more information.

Where 75% of respondents were looking for more information to help grow their business, the majority (39%) were looking for social networking and web usage and another 39% were interested in industry-specific information. Respondents were also looking for information about workshops and general business events (33%), industry-specific information (33%), statistics about the local population (22%), and information about business taxes (17%).

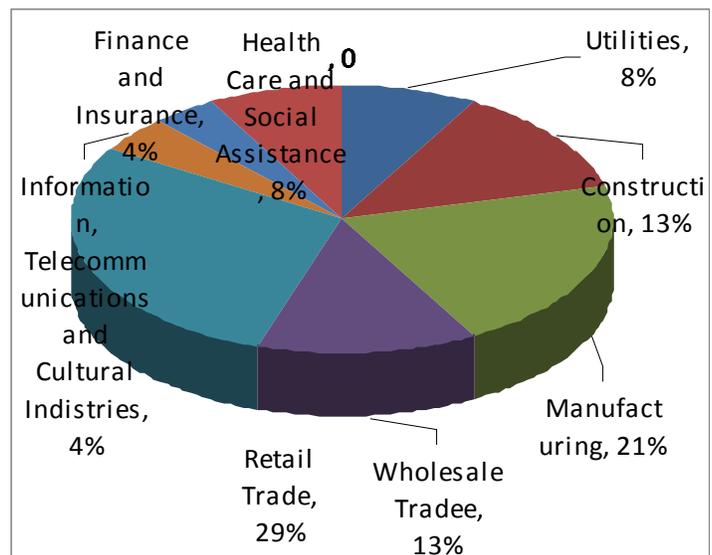


Figure 4: Industry Sector of Business Respondents

Hiring and business-to-business purchasing were also identified as topics of-interest.

Hiring Practices

The majority of respondents who had attempted to hire in the past 5 years (80%) encountered no difficulties in the hiring process. For those who did experience difficulty during the hiring process, using temporary workers or hiring underqualified candidates were the leading strategies to resolve the problems. Many attributed staffing problems to a skills shortage and some specified further that English

language proficiency was the specific skill that was lacking. This is interesting because, when asked what the specific jobs were, the overwhelming response was for customer support and sales positions.

When respondents were asked about their recruitment process, the vast majority of responses (29%) favoured referrals from friends, family and other employees as the preferred method. Other recourses that respondents relied on included advertising in newspapers (13%), advertisements on their own websites (13%), professional recruiter or staffing agency (13%). The least used methods reported during this consultation were internships (2%) and government programs (2%). Non-profit employment service organizations were only identified by one respondent.

Newcomer Hiring

Fully 70% of respondents reported having hired a newcomer(s) in the past 5 years. The leading problem in retaining recent immigrants was cited to be language barriers (44%). Difficulty verifying foreign work experience and credentials were the next most often experienced barrier in hiring newcomers. It is surprising, then, that when asked whether they accept foreign skills and work experience, the response among 80% was 'yes'. The ways in which employers were accepting or recognizing credentials, however, was unclear and will require further exploration.

When asked to identify what might encourage them to hire (more) recent immigrants, business respondents identified programs that subsidize wages (56%) as the leading incentive. Others included in-house language training at 28%, assistance verifying foreign education and training and financial support in training and orienting recent immigrants (both at 22%).

It should be noted, however, that almost half (44%) of the survey respondents either did not answer this question or responded that 'no incentive' would help them to hire more immigrants. Whether this is an indicator of the employer's confidence in their own ability to hire newcomers effectively, or an indicator of their wariness of programs and services was not clear. To better understand the reasoning behind the low interest in incentives will require further engagement and relationship-building.

Corporate Citizenship

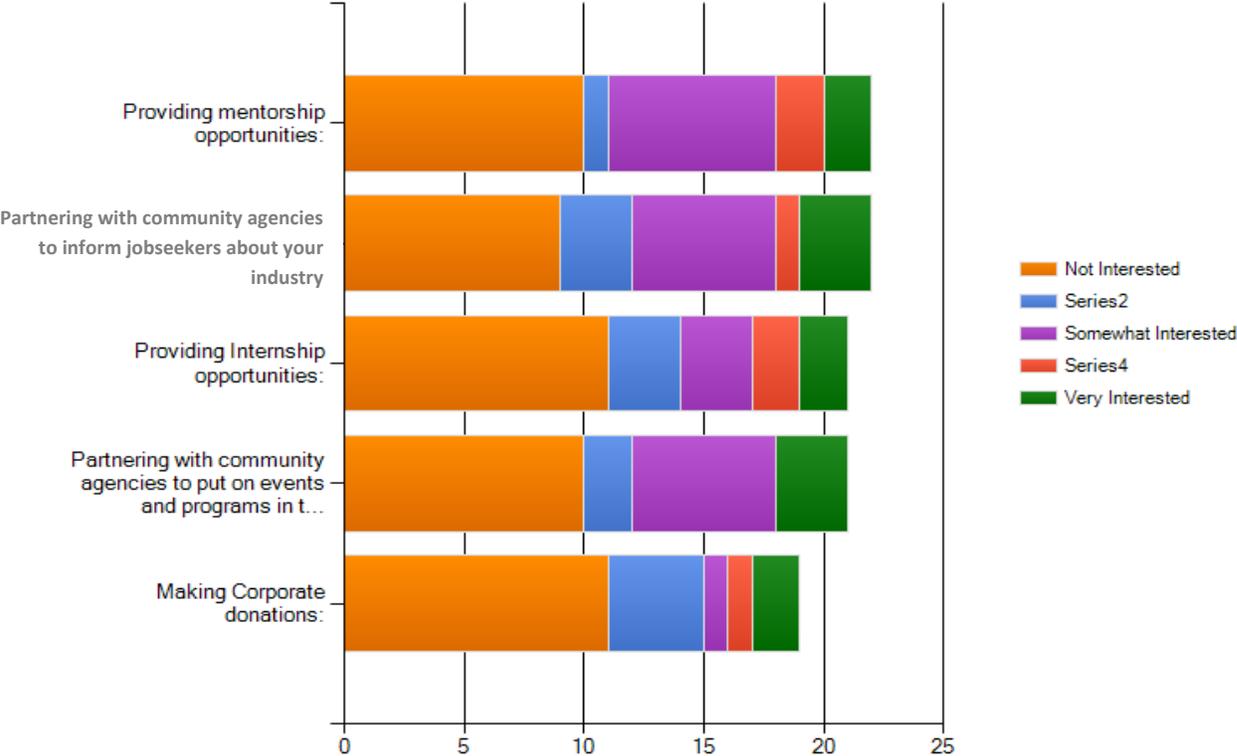
Fully 78% of the 18 respondents who offered information about their business' Corporate Citizenship did not have any Corporate Citizenship or Community Relations policies to speak of. The remaining 22% who answered this question exclusively described their Corporate Citizenship as green business practice.

Respondents were presented with a menu of different ways to become involved in community initiatives and they rated their interest in each offering.

Partnering with Community Agencies to inform jobseekers about their industry received the most interest. Providing mentorship opportunities and partnering with community agencies to put on events and programs in the neighbourhood also received positive responses. Making Corporate donations was the least popular option as was providing internship opportunities. Figure 5 details the rates of response.

The interest of business respondents to participate in forums where they could meet one another was also quite low at 30%. Of these respondents, however, there was overwhelming interest to receive information about diversity hiring and diversity management in the workplace. More information about free supports and workshops available to businesses was also a topic that businesses would come to a forum to learn more about.

Figure 5: Interest of Business Respondents in Community Relations and Opportunities to Build Corporate Citizenship



Conclusion

This sampling of a broad cross-section of business types and sizes is only a small window into the daily operations, hiring and corporate citizenship activities of the for-profit sector in Lawrence Heights. It is part of a conversation that is unfolding between businesses and other stakeholders seeking collaboration to meet the demands of a globalized society and economy. In Bathurst-Finch, the Local Immigration Partnership will continue to support these conversations and connect stakeholders engaged in community renewal and newcomer integration to the potential for growth that lies just outside their doorstep.