



2018 Immigration Forum: Community Input

On 1 March 2018, 160 municipal and community leaders, immigrants, refugees, researchers, educators, service agencies and others participated in the 2018 Immigration Forum to explore and share input on how Waterloo Region can fully leverage the contributions and skills of its immigrants and refugees.

Forty five participants shared their thoughts on the forum and provided suggestions for future events. Many others shared their insights into how to attract and retain immigrants and refugees in Waterloo Region.

What participants thought of the forum

- 82% of participants said the forum was “very good” or “excellent”
- Over 90% were “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with the registration process, the keynote address, the community panel, the networking break and the small table discussions
- Participants enjoyed the small table discussions and the keynote address the most
- There was a desire for more time for discussion of issues and to invite more people with lived experience and decision-makers into the conversation
- Participants said that their involvement inspired them to continue advocating, collaborating and raising awareness in their work

Input on immigrant attraction and retention in Waterloo Region

Forum participants discussed the approach that Waterloo Region should take to attract and retain immigrants and refugees. Participants suggested that Waterloo Region take a long-term, integrated approach to immigration, with consideration to all sectors and how Waterloo Region positions and promotes itself as a community of choice for immigrants and refugees. Participants saw a need for balance and to both attract new immigrants and effectively support those already here, while being inclusive of all immigrants and refugees, temporary migrants, etc.

There was widespread agreement that an approach to attraction and retention should be holistic and collaborative, and aimed at both meeting the basic needs of immigrants and refugees and creating the conditions for them to thrive in Waterloo Region.

Participants focused on leveraging municipal politicians to advocate on behalf of community interests re immigrant and refugee attraction, settlement and retention, with a focus on having a strong voice before the federal government. It was also suggested that business community be involved in advocacy, especially given the need to better match immigration and local labour market needs – to attract people who can work in both professional as well as lower skilled/entry level roles.

Participants encouraged more involvement of immigrants and refugees in matters impacting them.

Many comments supported Immigration Partnership's existing directions and the strengthening those.

Participants highlighted specific areas of focus, including:

- Community education and collaboration with other community initiatives to ensure immigrant/refugee focus i.e., Wellbeing Waterloo Region
- Addressing ethnic, religious, racial discrimination
- Taking inter-faith and inter-ethnic approaches
- Greater focus on housing affordability, affordable transit, employment, effective language training, overall affordability of living, health care and family reunification
- Working with employers re workplace diversity



There were further suggestions to:

- Strike a task force to review how Waterloo Region attracts, integrates and retains immigrants, refugees, international students (high school and post-secondary, esp. their transition to permanent residency) and other temporary migrants
- Expand immigrant mentorship and networking programs locally
- Connect to the neighbourhood work happening in cities
- Explore collaborative approaches to funding
- Continue to provide services and keep newcomers informed about these services

“Create a task force to review how Waterloo Region is attracting and retaining immigrants and refugees. High school and university students, migrant workers, new GARs and PSRs should be involved”

Forum Participant