



Talent Retention Project 2022

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Contents

Executive Summary - 03

Key Project Highlights - 03

Talent Retention Survey - 05

Informational Interviews - 06

Key Recommendations - 08

Case Study EduNova - 09

Case Study Prince Edward Island - 11

Conclusion - 12

References - 13

Executive Summary

The Talent Retention Project was initiated in 2019 by a group of community leaders in Thunder Bay, who conducted interviews with Lakehead University students to gauge their plans for staying in the region after graduation. The results of these interviews revealed a lack of awareness among students about job opportunities available to them post-graduation. As a result, the Talent Retention Steering Committee was formed to build community connections for students and promote job opportunities in the City of Thunder Bay and the Northwestern Region.

The Talent Retention Steering Committee consists of leaders from Lakehead University and Confederation College, as well as representatives from TD Bank Canada, the student unions of both institutions, the Thunder Bay Economic Development Corporation, and the North Superior Workforce Planning Board. The project is funded by Fednor and aims to research and implement strategies for retaining and attracting skilled youth in the region, with the goal of narrowing labor market gaps and promoting economic prosperity.

Key Project Highlights



Collaboration for the CO-OP and WIL event between the University and the College



Conducted surveys with participation of Lakehead Student Unions



Employer Informational Interviews



Finalizing the Key Communities Based Recommendations for Youth Retention

Cricket Pitch Initiative

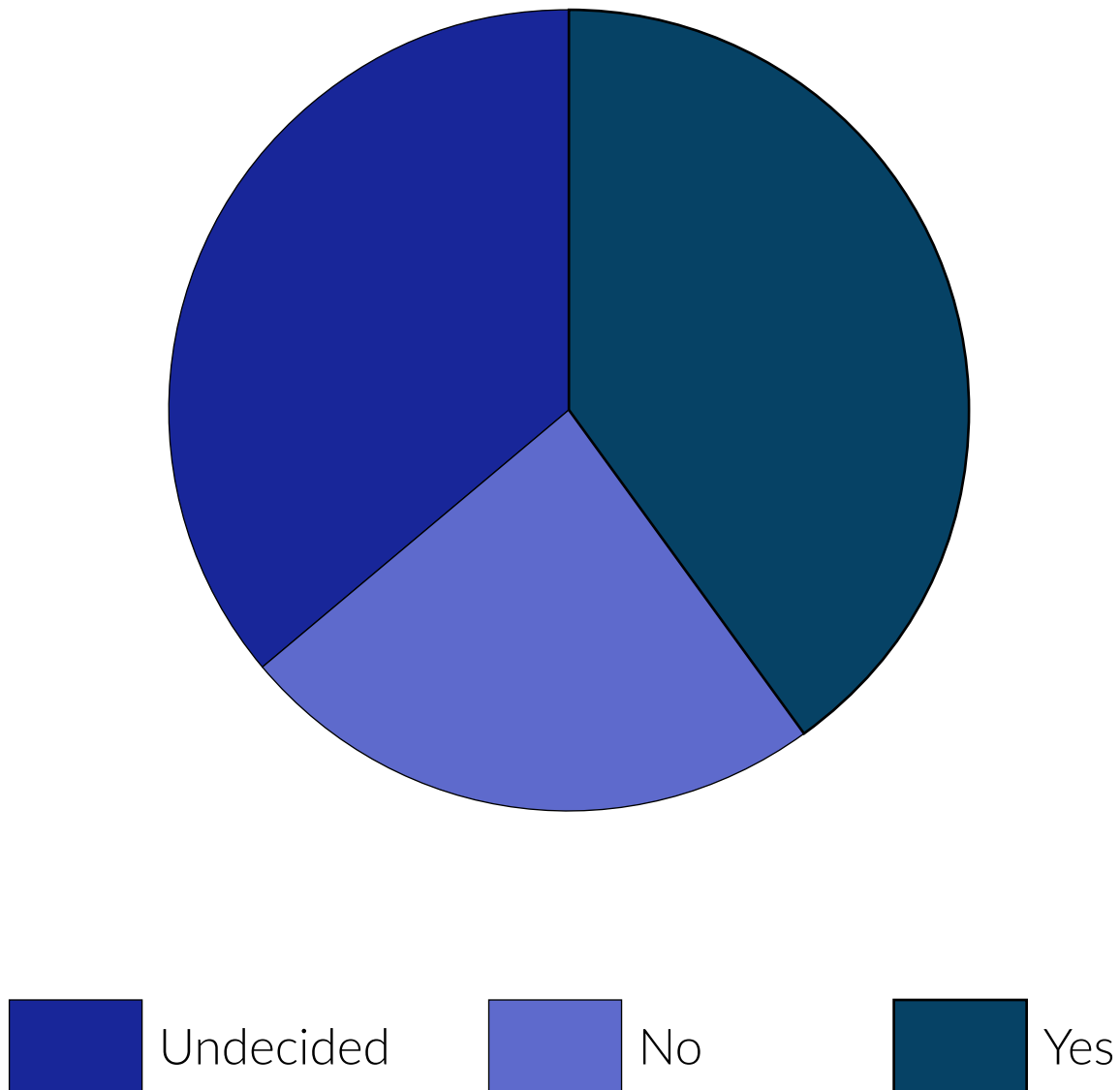


A former baseball diamond at Chapples Park in Thunder Bay has been transformed into the first official home for the city's cricket community. The addition of a concrete pad in the center of the field is the first step in creating a hub for local cricketers, many of whom are international students. Previously, these players had to rely on using the Hangar at Lakehead University as a makeshift playing field, but now have a dedicated facility at Chapples Park.

Cricket is a sport with a cult-like following in South Asian Countries. A group that included representation from TD Bank and the Lakehead University Student Union approached the City of Thunder Bay to provide the necessary resources and demarcate an area from Chappels Park to build a dedicated Cricket Pitch Turf. Hundreds of students participate in the tournaments which are held locally here. The Cricket Pitch has played a key role in enabling newcomers to build a network of friends at the same time providing them with appropriate cultural support to integrate into life in Canada.



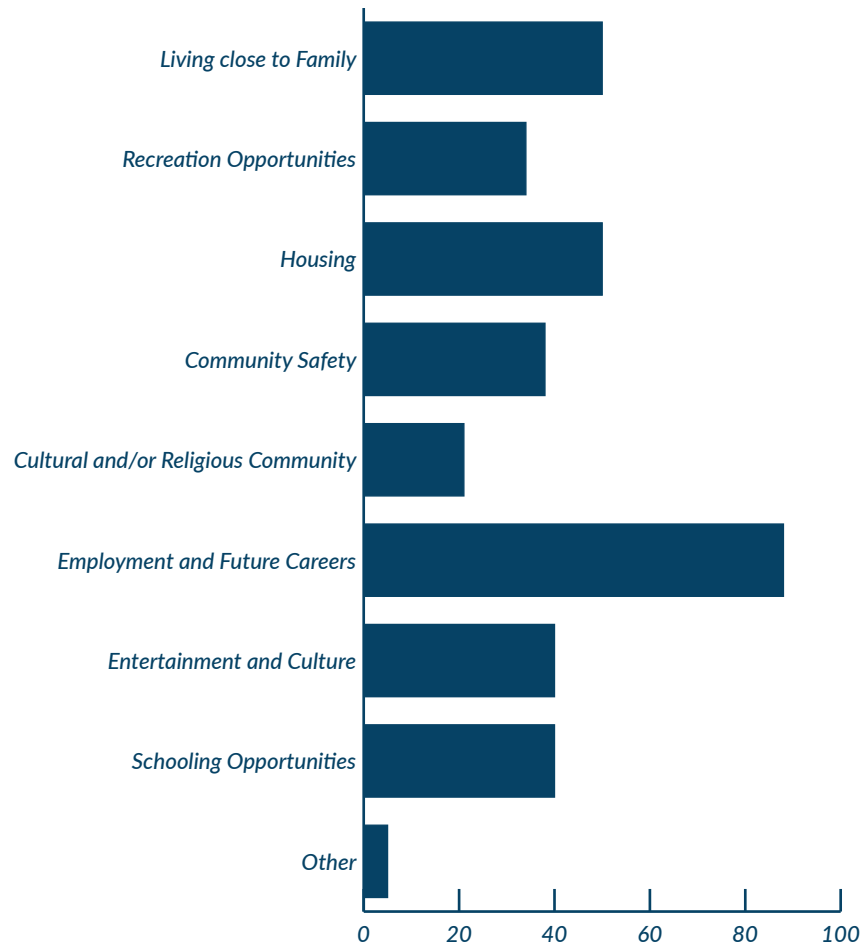
Surveys and Employer Informational Interviews



The Talent Retention Project was successful in implementing the Talent Retention Survey 2022 through collaboration with the Lakehead University Student Union and via data sharing agreements with the Northern Policy Institute.

The Talent Retention Project conducted interviews with 77 postgraduate students in 2019, including representation from international, domestic, and Indigenous students, as well as members of the LGBTQ+ community, the francophone community, and students with disabilities.

The survey asked students about their views on the job market in the Thunder Bay region and the factors that would influence their decision to reside in the community post-graduation.



The Talent Retention Project conducted interviews with 77 postgraduate students in 2019, including representation from international, domestic, and Indigenous students, as well as members of the LGBTQ+ community, the francophone community, and students with disabilities. The survey asked students about their views on the job market in the Thunder Bay region and the factors that would influence their decision to reside in the community post-graduation.

Results indicated that a high number of participants were uncertain about staying in the region after graduation, suggesting that this demographic could be targeted in efforts to increase the skilled retention rate for the city. Employment and future career prospects were identified as the top factor influencing students' decisions about where to live post-graduation, highlighting the importance of job opportunities in driving migration in the region. Recreational and cultural opportunities were also identified as important factors in students' decisions.

Analysis of survey results from 2019 and 2022 suggests that more work is needed to engage post-secondary students with employers and available support programs and resources to foster a strong connection with the local community. Barriers to integration, particularly for newcomers and international students, also need to be addressed.

The Talent Retention Project conducted outreach to employers in priority sectors in the City of Thunder Bay to gain a better understanding of the challenges they face in hiring and retaining skilled talent.

The Following Sectors were targeted for this process.



Business

**Indigenous
Led Business**



Health Care

Telecomm



**Engineering &
Infrastructure**

Banking



Highlights from the interviews include the following:

- Many employers are still dealing with the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and are trying to adapt to a hybrid work model.
- Engagement and awareness of different job boards as a source of qualified talent is low.
- Employers participate in career fairs and co-op events, but more work is needed to engage the student body, such as bringing employers into classrooms, hosting informal networking events, and participating in and supporting local cultural activities.
- A large number of employers are open to hiring diverse and skilled talent and are interested in working closely with post-secondary institutions to source talent directly.
- There is a need to provide networking and mentorship opportunities, sector-specific career fairs, and promote engagement with employers to match newcomers and graduating students with job opportunities and support.

Overall, the interviews suggest a need to increase and revisit engagement with employers in the city and region, including opening classrooms for discussions on opportunities available to post-secondary students and existing resources and supports to help them succeed.



Community-Based Recommendations

1. Creating a Welcoming Community Project

Thunder Bay welcomes a large number of newcomers each year from a wide range of countries, including Africa and the Middle East, Asia and the Pacific, Europe, the UK, and the US. These newcomers bring a diverse range of languages, customs, beliefs, and backgrounds and may come to Thunder Bay as family and business immigrants, refugees, international students, temporary workers, or visitors. Many will make Thunder Bay their permanent home and bring skills and experiences that contribute to the region's economic growth and community development.

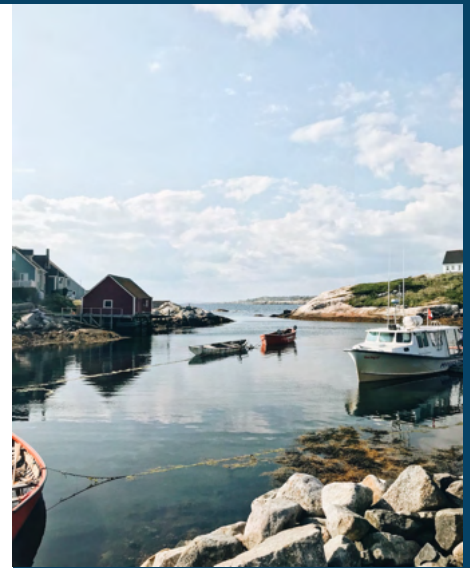
Creating a welcoming community is important to attract and retain newcomers. Celebrating and embracing diversity can encourage immigrants and minority groups to participate more fully in community life, which benefits the entire community. This can be achieved through events such as cultural festivals, cooking demonstrations, dance lessons, and other activities that showcase the diverse cultures represented in the community.

To successfully attract and retain newcomers, the region should celebrate diversity, support the retention of newcomers, and develop opportunities for newcomers to be actively involved in the community. It is important to understand and respond to the diverse and unique needs of newcomers to create a welcoming community that is attractive to them. Retention is a key factor in community and economic development and is a long-term process that takes time. When retention efforts are successful, everyone benefits, and the community and workplaces thrive.

Nova Scotia's Study and Stay program is a coordinated effort by the non-profit collaborative EduNova, in partnership with the province's post-secondary institutions, to retain international students in the region where they study. The program provides a range of support services to international students during their final year of study, including assistance with cultural and social adaptation, professional communication, networking and professional connections, career and labor market support, access to immigration resources and support, and mentorship.

Since its launch in 2016, the program has targeted 50 international students per year, with a focus on students from China, India, and the Philippines. The program has shown promising results, with over 80% of the original 2016 cohort still in Nova Scotia, compared to the typical retention rate of approximately 15%. The program's success is attributed to its holistic and individualized approach, which addresses the various obstacles that cause international students to leave after graduation by providing both "hard" and "soft" support, including a focus on building peer and professional networks in the community.

EduNova is now expanding the program to Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick, Newfoundland, and Labrador, intending to adapt the program to the specific needs and circumstances of each province while maintaining the basic parameters and functions of the Nova Scotia model. The expansion builds upon initiatives already underway in these provinces, such as New Brunswick's population growth strategy and Newfoundland and Labrador's reforms to streamline the transition to provincial nominee status for international students. The Atlantic provinces are collaborating with post-secondary institutions, multiple levels of government, businesses, and civil society to give international students the skills and networks they need to succeed in their adopted communities.



Case Study EduNova – A Talent Retention Strategy adopted by the Atlantic Region.

2. Thunder Bay Partnership

The Thunder Bay Partnership is a proposed collaboration led by the Thunder Bay Economic Development Corporation to work with the Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot (RNIP) and the Connector Program and the Workforce Planning Board to actively support the retention and attraction of skilled talent in the City of Thunder Bay and surrounding region. This partnership is modeled after the successful Halifax Partnership and aims to facilitate connections between employers and skilled talent both globally and locally. The Thunder Bay Partnership can provide education and support to businesses looking to participate in the RNIP program and can connect employers looking to expand in the region with emerging talent through the Connector Program.

The partnership will develop a plan of action that brings people, businesses, and government together to achieve measurable results in support of the city's economic growth. The success of this project depends on collaboration among various stakeholders, including businesses, agencies, and the private, postsecondary, arts and culture, and not-for-profit sectors. Engagement from provincial and federal partners and communities at risk is also critical to the successful implementation of the project.

3. Exploring Funding Options for Wage Subsidy Program Targeting International Students

Several Canadian government programs offer wage subsidies and hiring grants for employers who are looking to hire international students and recent post-secondary graduates. These programs provide financial support to employers to help offset the cost of hiring and training young candidates and can be a great way for companies to access a talented and motivated workforce.

Some of the key programs that offer wage subsidies and hiring grants for youth candidates include the Canada Summer Jobs program, NOHFC and FEDNOR internships which provides funding for employers to hire students for summer positions, and the Career Focus program, which provides funding for employers to hire and train recent post-secondary graduates.

To qualify for these programs, employers must meet certain eligibility requirements which at present exclude international students, and follow the application process outlined by the relevant government agency. Employers need to start the recruitment process as soon as possible, as many of these programs operate on a first-come, first-served basis and funding are limited. By taking advantage of these programs, employers can access a pool of talented youth candidates and receive financial support to help with the cost of hiring and training.

There are several benefits to wage subsidy programs for international students. For students, these programs provide the opportunity to gain valuable work experience in their field of study and to establish professional networks in their chosen industry. For employers, wage subsidy programs can help to address skills shortages and provide access to a diverse pool of talented and motivated employees. Additionally, wage subsidy programs can help to support the retention of international students in the local community, as students may be more likely to stay in the region if they have secured employment. Overall, wage subsidy programs can be an effective tool for both international students and employers to achieve their goals and contribute to the local economy.



Case Study - Prince Edward Island

The program for international students is designed to increase their understanding of the Canadian and Prince Edward Island (PEI) labor markets, develop transferable employability skills, build connections in the PEI network through volunteer and work experiences, gain entry-level experience in their fields of interest, and provide opportunities for career exploration and goal setting. The program will begin with a series of professional development training, followed by volunteer service to local organizations and a job search process to secure a 12–13-week internship with a private, public, or non-profit organization in PEI.

Private sector businesses that participate in the program will be eligible for a 75% wage subsidy, up to a maximum of \$5,400, while non-profit and public sector organizations will be eligible for a 100% wage subsidy, up to a maximum of \$7,200, to support the hiring of the student. A minimum wage of \$15 per hour is required and the employer must cover MERCs (mutual evaluation and review committees).

To be eligible to participate in the program, organizations must be in PEI, can supervise and mentor a student employee, and be able to add the student to their payroll and deduct appropriate MERCs.

Conclusion

Youth retention is crucial for maintaining economic growth and vibrant living in rural communities. The global economy, which is increasingly based on knowledge, puts rural communities at a disadvantage compared to large economic centers where the concentration of talent and capital creates a virtuous cycle of wealth creation and opportunity. However, COVID-19 has disrupted this reality by demonstrating the ability of technology to support remote work arrangements sustainably.

Rural communities with good broadband access can capitalize on this change by retaining their current youth, bringing back former youth currently living elsewhere, and potentially attracting newcomers who are interested in the affordability and quality of life benefits of rural living.

This project is funded in part by the Government of Canada and the Government of Ontario.



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