

# Niagara Integrated Local Labour Market Planning

## COMMUNITY DISCUSSION PAPER ... Informing Actions and Priorities

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**EMPLOYMENT  
ONTARIO**



Niagara Workforce  
Planning Board  
*Our Vision is Working*

**Niagara Region**  
*Building Community. Building Lives.*

## **Purpose**

Over the past several months there has been a significant focus on gathering data and consulting with community stakeholders to inform the Integrated Local Labour Market Planning process (ILLMP). The Niagara Labour Market Planning Committee (NLMPC) continues to examine information gathered and explore immediate and longer-term priorities and actions. The process has been deliberate and focused on the end goal – creating a Local Labour Market Plan that will channel activities and resources towards immediate needs and strongly position Niagara for the future.

This document provides a summary of the key findings, themes, challenges and tactics that have been identified through the process. Challenges have been validated in evidence and key strategic priorities have been identified.

Please consider the following when preparing for your participation at the upcoming community forum on April 7<sup>th</sup>. Forum discussions will provide the opportunity to:

- Add missing challenges or tactics
- Identify what must be undertaken immediately
- Explore what success will look like (what will our world look like if we are successful)
- Consider barriers that might impact on success
- Identify organizations that must be involved
- Consider what might your organization contribute (time, people, money, data, etc)

For those unable to attend, comments may be submitted electronically until 5 p.m. on April 24, 2009. Emails can be forwarded to [tparsons@niagaraworkforceboard.ca](mailto:tparsons@niagaraworkforceboard.ca). All input will help inform the NLMPC in the final decision making stages.

## **Background**

In June 2008, the Niagara region was selected by the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities as one of seven demonstration pilot sites to test a new approach to labour market planning. This framework recognizes the relationship between government responsibility and local priorities, and responds to a plan developed and supported within a culture of coordination and shared accountability by both community and government. Such a plan supports the local economic base, both existing and emerging. It links education and training programs to growing and emerging occupations. It strengthens Niagara's ability to serve students, job seekers, employers, and service providers. Indeed, it is the combination of many voices, ideas, strategies and commitments.

The plan will recognize the importance of moving Niagara to where it ought to go and putting in place the elements that will get us there. It will link workforce development to economic development and build on other planning documents including the Niagara Economic Growth Strategy 2009-2012. It will capture our approach to creating a knowledgeable and skilled labour pool that matches needs of our current economic structure, supports emerging clusters, promotes innovative approaches, and increases competitiveness and global positioning for the Niagara region.

The ILLMP process involves extensive primary and secondary data collection leading to the identification of key labour market trends, occupational and industry data, and population analysis. This plan will be grounded in community input, knowledge, intelligence, and statistical evidence that validates strategic priorities and supports documented tactics. To date over 1040 individuals have provided input about local area employment and training priorities, and new program and design needs.

It is important to note that these consultations and the Integrated Local Labour Market Planning process is taking place during a time of continuing job losses in manufacturing and other sectors across Niagara, within a backdrop of an emerging global recession. Daily news reports about history-breaking job losses in what were once considered stable and secure businesses - along with an expected \$18 billion deficit in Ontario over the next two years as the province battles the effects of the global downturn - have done little to instill confidence in the workforce.

When we began the process of introducing the Integrated Local Labour Market Planning process we could not and did not envision a rapidly weakening domestic economy and a global financial meltdown. In light of this, numerous participants throughout the region spoke of the urgency to take steps to address the challenging circumstances impacting their lives. This process recognizes the need for short term strategies to address immediate concerns while maintaining a steady course for long-term goals to position the region for future competitiveness, adaptability, and jobs prosperity.

### **NIAGARA'S LABOUR MARKET *IN TRANSITION***

For the past ten years the cries of looming labour and skills shortages have been frequent and loud.<sup>ii</sup> Then the global financial meltdown hit! At this point, it really doesn't matter whether you agreed or didn't agree with the forecasts. In the current recession, it may feel that such forecasts will never materialize or matter. For many of us, right now, it is about survival, it's about sustaining our businesses, keeping our jobs, or finding new jobs and quickly.

Niagara's labour market is in transition, and certainly the global economic recession that took hold in the third and fourth quarters of 2008 along with the provincial, national and international response to it, will have a tremendous impact upon how quickly and in what ways Niagara's labour market transforms. However, Niagara's labour market has been undergoing a major transition for the greater part of two decades, due in large part to shifting demographics, the globalization of trade, innovations in technology, and economic, political and social changes. Some of the most notable and consistent changes include the following trends:

- A continued shift from *goods-producing* to *services-providing* sectors and jobs
- Increased age, diversity and educational attainment levels of the population and labour force
- Increased proportion of self-employed

The following pages will provide you with a list of identified challenges and existing and new tactical approaches as to how we might move from challenge to solution. Solutions that must be SMART - specific, measurable, attainable, results driven, and time specific.

Readers choosing to examine the evidence relating to the above noted trends are directed to the website of Niagara Workforce Planning Board - Vision in Action page (<http://ntab.org/vision/index.php>).

## **ILLMP Guiding Principles: Process, Planning, Action**

Guiding Principles will serve as fundamental truths or test points that will guide the Integrated Local Labour Market Planning process. Actions, strategies and decisions will be examined based on the following guiding principles.

### **1. Inclusive**

The Local Labour Market Planning process will incorporate a model of inclusiveness across all target groups in the region, regardless educational attainment, economic or employment status, age, race, gender, language and ability. Economic competitiveness will be pursued in tandem with social inclusion.

### **2. Accessible**

The Local Labour Market Planning process will support ease of access for labour market participants actively seeking information and supports related to business, employment, training and education, and labour market information.

### **3. Regional**

The Local Labour Market Planning process will incorporate a welcoming, collaborative approach with community stakeholders, regardless of geographic location, to support a model of cooperation and exemplify integrated planning in its truest sense. It will be grounded in regional economic development influencing and contributing to existing action strategies and the region's competitiveness and futuristic approaches.

### **4. Responsive**

The Local Labour Market Planning process will actively engage community dialogue to inform a plan that is effective, efficient, timely and responsive to priorities identified at the community level.

### **5. Transparent and Accountable**

The Local Labour Market Planning process will provide a clear, easy to understand decision making and reporting structure, communicated in an open, timely, and effective manner. Implementation plans will adhere to timelines and deliverables, where possible, or report alternative approaches to ensure success measures are achieved.

### **6. Utilize existing assets**

The Local Labour Market Planning process will identify current research, best practices, plans and initiatives and incorporate appropriate strategies that relate to labour market planning. This integrated approach will avoid duplication, explore improvements to existing efforts and ensure a more focused use of resources.

## STRATEGIC THEMES, PRIORITIES AND ACTIONS

### OVERARCHING THEMES:

The consultation and planning process saw several strong ‘overarching’ themes emerge; these are essential elements in addressing the strategic priorities and are threaded through the tactics being presented for discussion.

### SUPPORT

It is essential that Niagara develop a strong support system that reaches job seekers, employers, service providers and government. Improving systems that impact sustainability and future growth, human resources strategies, creation of a learning culture, and one that targets users with an approach that is specific, relevant, and timely will create a stronger, competitive, flexible labour market.

### INFORMATION

Local labour market information and related data, needs to be made more accessible, meaningful and useful to its primary audiences, particularly job seekers, students, employers, service providers, unions, government and decision makers. Planning needs to be evidence based and predictive, taking forward thinking actions that build a flexible labour force for all occupational demands while promoting the full potential of workers.

### INTEGRATION

Increased communication and integration of approaches, processes and deliverables are essential in an efficient world of service delivery, strategic planning, and action implementation. Strong integrated local labour market planning will be best evidenced when it clearly intersects and supports economic strategies.

### KEY STRATEGIC PRIORITIES:

Four strategic priorities have been developed each influenced by the overarching themes and focusing on challenges that have been validated through the primary and secondary data. Attention was also directed at the primary audiences, namely, job seekers, employers, service providers, and government in an effort to ensure that Niagara’s plan is far-reaching and relevant across audiences.

*NOTE: numbering is provided for easy reference only and does not denote level of priority or importance*

1. Create a highly skilled, educated workforce that can effectively transition across industry and occupations. (job-seeker)
2. Create a support system that fosters a learning culture in Niagara among employers. (employer)
3. Strengthen the relationship between available labour market information and labour market development needs to support the link between economic development and workforce development planning (government, job seeker/student, employer, service providers)
4. Foster an ongoing inclusive and collaborative environment that maximizes Niagara’s labour market opportunities, resources, and successes (service providers)

### **NIAGARA'S ACTION PLAN TAKES FOCUS**

There never seems to be a shortage of proposed tactics and strategies. A look back over time will demonstrate that many actions have been identified, described, and documented. The real challenge comes with implementation and ensuring that tactics are achievable, measurable, and supportive of the end goal. To date, the ILLMP process has resulted in the identification of 17 existing actions that have been documented in recently published plans in Niagara, including the Niagara Economic Growth Strategy and the Path to Prosperity Plan; in addition a total of 27 new or proposed tactics have been captured. It is important to recognize the already formulated and committed tactics as all actions should be integrated and efforts combined where possible to achieve the greatest impact.

The recently released “Living in Niagara” report captured critical indicators that compared how well we are doing in relation to provincial and national trends. In total eleven areas were identified, two of which specifically relate to Education in Niagara and Work and Employment in Niagara. As part of our success measures there needs to be a link back to these and other key benchmarks that will demonstrate our progress and success or draw attention to areas where we under-perform.

The task at hand is to examine proposed tactics under the lens of the challenges to which they relate. Given our current economic conditions and the necessity that we plan for projected future needs, we must examine their urgency, the level of impact they can have on priority areas and our capacity to implement.

Beyond the validation of priority actions, next steps will include the identification of champions or leaders for each tactic and the specific activities, outcomes and success measures that relate.

**CHALLENGE – Education & Skills**

***Niagara needs to increase the skills and education of its workforce to support a transitioning economy.***

Based on 2006 census data, there is a total of 142,765 (51%) people aged 15+ in the Niagara region that has no certificate, diploma or degree, or with the highest level of education as a high school certificate or equivalent. Ontario, as a comparison, has 46.4% with no certificate, diploma or degree, or the highest level of education as a high school certificate or equivalent.

Looking at Niagara’s population aged 15-74, approximately 1 in 12 possesses a bachelor’s degree; in Ontario the number is closer to 1 in 8. The good news is that Niagara’s population is better educated than it was ten years ago or even five years ago. And since 2001, the percentage of its 20+ year-olds with a bachelor’s degree or higher has risen from 12.1% to 14.3%.

Niagara is very well positioned with respect to the two other major post-secondary credentials, namely apprenticeship/ trade and college qualifications as we exceed Ontario’s achievements in every age grouping. Specifically, 9.9 percent of the local population has earned their Apprenticeship or Trade Certificate or Diploma compared with only 8.0 percent of the provincial population. This equates to a 6,782 person advantage over Ontario, positioning Niagara well in this area.

Employers continue to require higher educational attainments for a wider range of occupations. In addition, net employment growth is concentrated among those with post secondary training. Furthermore, and to differing degrees, the age, diversity and education levels of the population can all have an impact on the productivity and innovative ability of its labour force.

As important is what is happening beyond our own borders provincially and nationally. Attention must be given to the rate at which newly emerging countries are moving towards a knowledge economy. Already India and China are graduating a significant population with Bachelors level degrees. Globalization has opened the world, perhaps never more evident than in recent months. The impact of the financial crisis is world wide; so too is the impact of the knowledge economy. Our vision must be futuristic and our approach must be innovative, staying two steps ahead of the developing world will be critical to our success.

<b>POTENTIAL TACTICS</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Foster stronger links between local employers and Niagara’s educational institutions to improve educational attainment levels</li> <li>2. Develop a communication strategy among all education institutions (including local school boards, Niagara College, Brock University, and College Boreal) and those that provide labour market information to promote sharing of information, strategies, and programs</li> <li>3. Support the development of applied degrees that meet the needs of the local economy.</li> <li>4. Strengthen Niagara’s competitive advantage by retaining the skilled labour force that holds trade, college and diploma certificates</li> </ol>
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**CHALLENGES – Small to Medium Sized Enterprises (SME) Support**

- ***Entrepreneurs and SME's generally lack internal supports to develop and manage human and financial resources***
- ***Entrepreneurs and SME's are unable to access and/or are unaware of resources to support skilled workplace development e.g. apprenticeship***
- ***Access to business development supports for business start up, maintenance, growth and competitiveness is limited***

The majority of Niagara businesses are small and this trend is becoming further entrenched. From 2001 to 2007, Niagara added more than 3,800 businesses, which represents a 17% increase in the number of firms located in the region. 55% of Niagara firms employ fewer than 5 people and 73% employ fewer than 10 people. Over this same timeframe, Niagara's share of businesses with 500+ employees remained flat, while Ontario experienced a 19% increase in its number of firms with 500+ employees. From 2001 to 2006, Niagara experienced a 25% increase in the number of earners reporting self-employment income.

While many of Niagara's small businesses recognize the importance of effective human resource development processes, many do not have the capacity to independently develop a skilled workforce. As businesses mature their need for a more structured and strategic approach to developing their human resources also grows. Yet many regional businesses simply lack the financial and human resource planning expertise to help businesses develop.

<b>POTENTIAL TACTICS</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. Develop process to transition post secondary graduates with entrepreneurial ideas into start-up businesses</li> <li>6. Support the revamping of apprenticeship incentives and qualifications to make them more effective.</li> <li>7. Foster employer commitment to staff training and lifelong learning and highlight Niagara-based "best practices."</li> <li>8. Promote collaboration among the private and public sector to increase awareness and access to programs that support SME's</li> <li>9. Increase awareness of grants and funding opportunities to support business development;</li> </ol>
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**CHALLENGE – Skills Mismatch**

- ***There is a mismatch between the skills and knowledge available and the skills and knowledge demanded***

The creation and destruction of jobs underlies the insatiable demand for labour force renewal. Since jobs and worker skills are not immediately interchangeable, workforce development becomes paramount. Findings suggest a jobs-skills disparity exists, largely due to the shifting composition of the local economy. A decline in specific industries coupled with gains in very different industries will continue to challenge Niagara’s labour force. Transitioning displaced workers from long held jobs to new ones can be a very long and challenging process.

Niagara Economic Growth Strategy describes the following five pivotal, emerging industry clusters: *bio-product manufacturing, digital media and software development, health and wellness and life sciences, logistics, and environmental, energy and other “green” technologies*. There is a vital role for Niagara’s post-secondary institutions to produce skilled labour to match existing and future demand, attract new employers and investment, and provide and support effective innovation and technology transfer.

In a 2008 Niagara Workforce Planning Board survey employer respondents (n=74) were asked to identify human resource issues to be addressed in 2008. The most significant factors cited were: *attracting qualified workers (65%); skill enhancement of the workforce (42%); enhancing productivity (39%); retaining workers (35%); healthy workplace (35%); work-life balance (33%); the need to downsize and/ or reorganize staff (30%); and succession planning- preparing for retirement of ageing workforce (30%)*.

Employer respondents overwhelmingly (98%) indicated that it was important to have access to information on labour market and job trends specific to Niagara. Many employers indicated a willingness to regularly share information needs and insights about the evolving labour market. Useful labour market information enables small employers to make sound human resource decisions.

**POTENTIAL TACTICS**

10. Encourage Niagara employers to proactively participate in building learning culture
11. Strengthen collaboration between education, service providers, and employers to create highly qualified individuals that meet skills and knowledge demands for growth in all economic sectors, eg. regional capacity in the field of interactive media through relevant program development, faculty, research capability, and greater national and international awareness for Brock University and Niagara College programs aimed at Interactive Media.
12. Examine the perceived gap between workforce preparation and skills demanded, primarily in the area of soft skills.
13. Recognize and build upon the strength of current educational infrastructure, promoting flexibility, short term intensive skills training programs and other innovative forms of education and skills training in Niagara.
14. Promote collaboration among education institutions and Niagara employers to increase co-op and work placements among Niagara employers.
15. Broaden the base of apprenticeship programs to support skilled trades and emerging occupations.
16. Offer training incentives to support all labour market groups
17. Promote bilingual capacity of the region as an asset
18. Identify and address the need for a francophone/bilingual skilled labour force
19. Market positive aspects of Niagara (cost of living, sense of community)
20. Develop an effective local labour market information framework to inform a skills strategy and planning process for the local economy and labour force.
21. Influence service delivery and supports (service providers – English and French serving, government) to respond to local needs including transportation access, employment barriers, stream-lined client referral system, agency professional development, and volunteer opportunities as a means of gaining local experience.
22. Make information available and accessible through internet, print, and in-person.
23. Create a central database for employment opportunities for Niagara

**CHALLENGES – Aging Workforce**

- ***A higher percentage of older workers in the labour force has business implications influenced by mobility across jobs, occupations, industries and regions.***
- ***Learning, performance, adaptability, and succession planning are all significantly correlated with age.***

Since 2000, Niagara’s labour force has experienced a dramatic increase in the participation and employment levels of individuals aged 55 years or older. A higher percentage of older workers has many implications for businesses. Older workers historically have tended to possess lower levels of education and tend to be less mobile across jobs, occupations, industries and regions. Reduced mobility can, for example, add greater challenges to the community’s capacity to deal with major changes, such as plant closures. Learning, performance and succession planning are all significantly correlated with age. And therefore, older workers incur much greater costs when they do ‘move’ across the various boundaries.

Niagara continues to have a somewhat older population than that of the overall provincial population, but in recent years Ontario’s population has aged more rapidly than Niagara’s population. From 2001 to 2006 Niagara experienced an 11.8% rise in the number of residents aged 55+ years.

In a recent employer directed survey (Fall 2008) 30% of employers identified succession planning including preparing for retirement of ageing workforce as a key challenge.

**POTENTIAL TACTICS**

- 24.** Strengthen programs and services to better support the adaptability and transition of older workers in Niagara’s economy
- 25.** Develop the tools that support succession planning
- 26.** Foster a learning culture among employers that enhances adaptability of the workforce
- 27.** Develop a profile of Niagara’s older workers

The following is a list of ILLMP identified Challenges that have tactics or actions identified in existing, approved plans that have already received local commitment. They are provided here to demonstrate a link with ILLMP but are not part of the prioritization process.

<p><b>CHALLENGES:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Entrepreneur’s and SME’s generally lack internal supports to develop and manage human and financial resources</b></li> <li>• <b>Entrepreneurs and SME’s are unable to access and/or are unaware of resources to support skilled workplace development e.g. apprenticeship</b></li> <li>• <b>Access to business development supports for business start up, maintenance, growth and competitiveness is limited</b></li> </ul>	
<p><b>TACTICS</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A) Strengthen links between business community and business programs at post secondary level. (SPRING'09) Leaders: Chambers, Brock, Niagara College, Niagara Workforce Planning Board</li> <li>B) Link business community into student business plan competitions with a goal of providing start-up assistance to at least two plans per year. (SPRING '09) Leaders: Chambers, EDO, Small Business Enterprise Centre</li> <li>C) Assist SME employers in human resource related areas including: assessment of education/training needs, applicable workforce development programs, strategic planning, and applied research capabilities. (NEDC, Niagara College)</li> <li>D) Catalogue all available services for businesses and ensure that information is provided with advanced technologies. (SUMMER '09) Leaders: EDO, Small Business Enterprise Centre</li> </ul>

<b>CHALLENGE:</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Niagara needs to increase the skills and education of its workforce to support a transitioning economy</b></li> </ul>	
<b>TACTICS</b>	<p>E) Establish Brock’s Canadian Centre for Lifespan Development and Research as a centre of excellence in the area of studying human development. (SPRING ‘10) Leaders: Brock, NHS, Hotel Dieu Shaver</p> <p>F) Working with health care professionals, develop a strategy to increase research capacities at Niagara’s post-secondary institutions. (FALL ‘10) Leaders: Brock, Niagara College, NHS, Hotel Dieu Shaver</p> <p>G) Develop process to connect post secondary research capabilities with new regional healthcare facilities. (FALL ‘10) Leaders: NHS, Brock, Niagara College, Hotel Dieu Shaver</p> <p>H) Ensure current post secondary health care training programs are linked and advanced at new facility and within community care clinics. (FALL ‘10) Leaders: NHS, Brock, Niagara College</p> <p>I) Advocate for increased research funding for agriculture at Niagara institutions and companies. Leaders: Chambers, NEDC, EDTS</p> <p>J) Build stronger collaboration between agricultural sector, greenhouse industry and post-secondary institutions to ensure alignment of research needs, and trained workforce. Leaders: NEDC, NWPB</p> <p>K) Build a focused, defined alliance between Cool Climate Oenology and Viticulture, Vineland Research and Innovation Centre and Niagara College forging a national centre of excellence in grape, wine, and tender fruit research and development. (FALL ‘09) Leaders: Brock, Niagara College, VRIC</p> <p>L) Develop green technology programs and research base for alternative energy at Niagara College (SPRING ‘10) Leaders: Niagara College, NEDC</p> <p>M) Develop chemical process focused engineering department at Brock. (FALL ‘10) Leader: Brock</p> <p>N) Secure a Canada Research Chair in Environmental Studies at Brock University. (FALL ‘10) Leader: Brock</p> <p>O) Develop LEED certified training programs at Niagara College. (FALL ‘10)</p> <p>P) Create bi-national educational partnerships in strategic employment fields (e.g., international trade, tourism, border security).</p> <p>Q) Ensure the Niagara Health &amp; Biosciences Research Complex at Brock includes allocation of space for green-focused research. Leader: Brock</p>

<sup>i</sup> *Niagara’s Labour Market In Transition*, a labour supply and demand study by the Niagara Workforce Planning Board, February 2009

<sup>ii</sup> The cries have sounded nationally, provincially and regionally. A few examples include *Performance and Potential, 2000-2001*, Conference Board of Canada, 2001; *Ontario’s Looming Labour Shortage Challenges*, The Conference Board of Canada, 2007; *Confronting The Jobs Challenge: A Niagara Human Resource Strategy*, eEconomics Consulting, 2000