



# Newcomer Retention in North Bay

Project Summary Report

April 2026



Understanding Experiences.  
Identifying Opportunities.  
Building a Stronger, More  
**Inclusive North Bay.**



Community  
Collaboration



Inclusive  
Partnerships



Evidence-Informed  
Solutions



Stronger, Sustainable  
Communities

Research. Evidence. Community. **Impact.**



## **Acknowledgement Participant Overview**

The research team at Canadore College gratefully acknowledges the valuable collaboration and support of our partners in this project, including the North Bay and Area Local Immigration Partnership, The City of North Bay Economic Development Department, Nipissing University and the International Department at Canadore College and Nipissing University Research Ethics Board.

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## Project Overview

Representatives from Canadore College, the North Bay and Area Local Immigration Partnership (NBLIP), the City of North Bay Economic Development Department, and Nipissing University collaborated on this five-year research project. This report reflects the first year of data collection and analysis. The study explored the experiences of newcomers in North Bay and identified key factors influencing their settlement and long-term retention. A comprehensive literature review, a mixed-method survey of 154 newcomers, and two focus groups involving nine participants formed the basis of this first-year study.

This research study was approved by the Nipissing University Research Ethics Board, and all investigators completed ethics and research training prior to the project commencing.

Data collection took place between October 2024 and March 2025, involving survey distribution and facilitated focus groups. Participants were recruited through community organizations, post-secondary institutions, social media networks, and local radio channels to encourage participation.

The project aimed to answer three central questions:

1. What is the experience of newcomers within the first year and subsequent years following their arrival in North Bay?
2. What factors influence newcomers to choose to settle in the community of North Bay?
3. What factors influence newcomer retention in North Bay?

Eligible participants were newcomers who had resided in North Bay for between three months and five years. The study utilized online survey tools and focus groups, focusing on key areas such as housing, employment, healthcare, transportation, education, and social inclusion. Findings from this research are intended to guide service providers, policymakers, and community organizations in designing inclusive and effective strategies to enhance newcomer integration and retention.

## Participant Overview

From the 154 respondents, the majority identified as female (52%), followed by male (46.7%), while 1.3% preferred not to disclose their gender identity. Most respondents were aged 25–34 (53.3%), followed by those aged 18–24 (21.3%) and 35–44 (20.7%). Smaller proportions were in the 45–54 (3.3%) and 65 and over (1.3%) age groups, indicating a predominantly young adult population.

Respondents came from a wide range of countries, with the largest group originating from India (53.3%), followed by Nigeria (6.7%) and Canada (6%). The remaining participants represented diverse nations across Asia, Africa, Europe, and the Americas, each contributing less than 3% individually. This highlights the multicultural background of the newcomer population in North Bay.

Over half of the respondents (56%) currently hold a Study Permit (international student) status, followed by Temporary Foreign Workers (21.3%) and Permanent Residents (10%). Smaller groups include Non-Immigrant/Canadian Citizens (8%), Naturalized Citizens (2%), and others such as CUAET holders, Visitor Permit



holders, and Refugee Claimants, each representing less than 2% of the sample. Additionally, 0.7% of respondents held a Visitor status.

## **Key Findings Overview**

The first round of data collection for this five-year research project generated valuable insights into the newcomer experience in North Bay. Through survey responses, focus groups, and community engagement efforts, themes emerged that highlight both strengths and barriers affecting newcomer settlement and long-term retention. The following key findings summarize the primary trends and issues identified during the data collection and analysis phase.

### **1. Housing**

From the data collected, housing emerged as a significant challenge in North Bay. This aligns with broader trends seen in communities across Ontario and Canada, where rising rental costs, limited housing stock, and accessibility barriers have created widespread pressures on the housing market. For newcomers, these challenges can be intensified due to limited local networks, lack of rental history, or unfamiliarity with the housing system. These issues are particularly acute for international students and families seeking long-term accommodation during their studies. Despite these barriers, the relative affordability of North Bay's housing market compared to larger urban centers, provides an opportunity to attract individuals and families relocating from urban centers.

### **2. Employment and Financial Stability**

Many newcomers, particularly those without permanent residency or relevant Canadian work experience, encounter employment challenges. Although underemployment was noted as a barrier, it was unsurprising given the high proportion of students in our sample. Other barriers included the need for local references and the lack of recognition for international experience.

It's important to acknowledge that requiring "Canadian work experience" is a discriminatory barrier for newcomers since it excludes highly qualified candidates with strong international experience. The Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC) has noted that imposing a strict requirement for "Canadian experience" is considered discriminatory and therefore illegal.

Despite these limitations, the city's growing labour demands and smaller labour pool could be leveraged to create targeted job pathways and mentorship programs. Employment support services tailored to all newcomers' qualifications and professional goals could further enhance financial security and long-term integration. Advocating to expand and sustain these services would be beneficial, especially to ensure that all newcomers, regardless of their status, have access.

### **3. Healthcare Access**

Healthcare access was identified as a challenge among survey and focus group participants, reflecting a trend experienced in many communities across Ontario and Canada. While some newcomers are eligible for the Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP), delays in accessing primary care and mental health services persist. Long



wait times and a lack of culturally appropriate care were recurring themes. Although these issues affect the broader population, newcomers may face additional barriers related to navigating the healthcare system, language access, or gaps in coverage upon arrival. Despite these challenges, the community-oriented nature of North Bay presents opportunities to strengthen health navigation supports and develop partnerships with local clinics to address service gaps.

#### **4. Transportation**

Public transportation limitations were frequently cited as barriers to accessing employment, education, and healthcare services, particularly outside core areas and during evenings and weekends. Challenges with the reliability and user-friendliness of the dynamic dispatching system were also noted by participants. These issues disproportionately affect newcomers, students, and residents without personal vehicles. However, North Bay's manageable size presents opportunities to enhance mobility, accessibility, and public transportation use through transit pilot programs and initiatives tailored to the needs of the community, including newcomers and students.

#### **5. Education**

Newcomers with children expressed concern over limited academic support and a lack of culturally inclusive programming. However, North Bay's educational institutions were generally viewed as accessible and safe. Strengthening services, career counseling, and cultural inclusion initiatives in schools could further support long-term family integration. Enhancing academic support services, career counseling, and initiatives that promote cultural inclusion within schools could further strengthen long-term integration for newcomer families.

There is an opportunity to strengthen links between educational institutions and community supports.

#### **6. Community Atmosphere and Social Inclusion**

Many newcomers described North Bay as peaceful and welcoming; however, common challenges emerged including isolation and discrimination. Isolation was reported as a significant factor affecting newcomers' sense of belonging, and it can occur independently of other negative experiences. Social integration is closely linked to opportunities for community engagement and connection.

Discrimination was also reported which poses barriers to full inclusion and participation in community life. The city's manageable size and civic spirit present opportunities to address both challenges through inclusive events, peer support networks, and diversity-focused community planning, fostering stronger connections and a greater sense of belonging for all residents.

#### **7. Retention Intentions**

According to survey data, 51.12% of respondents intend to stay for more than 5 years, and 78.19% want to stay for more than 3 years. Many newcomers expressed interest in remaining in North Bay, drawn by the city's peaceful atmosphere, natural surroundings, and safety. However, others identified challenges related to employment, housing, and social connections that influenced their decision-making. Retention intentions were strongly associated with a sense of belonging, opportunities for professional growth, and family well-being. Addressing systemic barriers in these areas could further enhance retention and integration outcomes.



## Conclusion

North Bay offers a peaceful, family-friendly environment with strong potential to serve as a model for newcomer integration. While challenges exist, particularly in housing, employment, and access to services, the community also demonstrates many strengths. With targeted policies, collaborative services, and a focus on inclusion, the city can enhance newcomer retention, especially for international students. Below are key recommendation themes that could support these efforts and help newcomers not only arrive but also thrive and remain in North Bay.

- ✓ Increase Promotion and Visibility of Settlement Services and Programs
- ✓ Expand Employment Programming and Supports
- ✓ Strengthen Community Belonging and Engagement
- ✓ Improve Access to Healthcare
- ✓ Improve Access to Affordable Housing
- ✓ Strengthen Transportation Infrastructure
- ✓ Enhance Data Collection and Evidence-Based Decision Making

## Strategic Recommendations for Improving Retention

### 1. Increase Promotion and Visibility of Settlement Services and Programs for newcomers

Enhance awareness of existing settlement services and programs offered by various community partners across the city.

- ✓ Increase participation in post-secondary institution open houses to promote local settlement services, support, and programs to international students.
- ✓ Distribute Relocation Guides and related settlement/community resources to community organizations and post-secondary institutions.
- ✓ Develop a concise, one-page directory of all settlement-related agencies to be shared in student lounges, gathering spaces, and partner networks.
- ✓ Collaborate with partners such as Chamber network to advocate for the needs of services for all individuals no matter their immigration status.

### 2. Expand Employment Programming and Supports

Develop and promote employment-focused programs that address the evolving needs and statuses of newcomers.

- ✓ Create tailored employment support programs for newcomer students, connecting them directly with local job opportunities.
- ✓ Promote regional employment services and support available through employment providers.
- ✓ Collaborate with employers to expand co-op, internship, mentorship, and placement opportunities that recognize and value newcomers' international experience, while also supporting newcomer's adaptation to



Canadian workplace norms. This approach aligns with guidance from the Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC), which notes that requirements for “Canadian work experience” is discriminatory.

- ✓ Partner with organizations such as the Chamber network to advocate for recognition of international credentials.
- ✓ Collaborate with partners to offer targeted workshops or information sessions for local employers to build their understanding of immigration processes including but not limited to work permits, sponsorship, hiring eligibility and immigration pathways to permanent residency.

### **3. Strengthen Community Belonging and Engagement**

Foster inclusion and encourage newcomers to actively participate in the social, cultural, and civic life of the community.

- ✓ Work with settlement service agencies to promote mentorship programs identified as key community needs.
- ✓ Offer on-campus workshops for newcomers and international students on topics such as financial literacy, taxes, and housing.
- ✓ Collaborate with partners to host and promote multicultural events and cultural celebrations throughout the community, ensuring visibility among post-secondary institutions.
- ✓ Encourage newcomer participation in civic planning, community organizations, and boards of directors to strengthen representation and engagement.
- ✓ Explore opportunities to develop a centralized volunteer database to share community-wide volunteer opportunities.
- ✓ Promote resources available through Tourism North Bay, including their website, which highlights year-round activities, dining and accommodation options, and a comprehensive community event calendar. Encourage newcomers who are leading initiatives to share and promote their activities through the Tourism North Bay Community Calendar to help increase visibility and community engagement.

### **4. Improve access to healthcare**

Support efforts to enhance access to healthcare services for residents including newcomers and international students.

- ✓ Support initiatives that enhance healthcare access for all residents, including newcomers and international students.
- ✓ Increase education and awareness of health care services available to newcomers, especially international students upon arrival.
- ✓ Advocate for culturally appropriate mental health services and support for navigating the healthcare system.
- ✓ Explore opportunities to develop a resource to help individuals navigate the healthcare system.

### **5. Improve Access to Affordable Housing**

Support efforts to enhance access to safe and affordable housing for residents including newcomers and international students



- ✓ Ensure newcomer perspectives are represented in community housing consultations by empowering organizations such as the Local Immigration Partnership (LIP) to participate in roundtables and share relevant feedback methods with the newcomer population.
- ✓ Engage local realtors and community groups to present housing options and assist newcomers, particularly students relocating to the area.
- ✓ Host tenant rights workshops targeted international students and temporary residents.
- ✓ Collaborate with housing partners to increase understanding of newcomer and student housing needs.
- ✓ Work with developers and landlords to explore opportunities for creating and maintaining affordable rental options that meet the dignity, safety, and security standards consistent with the human right to housing.

## **6. Strengthen Transportation Infrastructure**

Ensure local transportation systems are inclusive, accessible, and responsive to the needs of all residents including newcomers and international students.

- ✓ Host regular roundtable discussions between partners such as post-secondary institutions and the City of North Bay's public transit department to identify challenges and opportunities in the public transportation network.
- ✓ Explore opportunities to expand bus routes and service hours, with particular focus on industrial and educational areas.
- ✓ Consider offering cultural awareness training for front-line staff, including bus drivers, to help foster a more welcoming and inclusive experience for newcomers and all community members.

## **7. Enhance Data Collection and Evidence-Based Decision Making**

Support continuous improvement of newcomer programs and services through data-driven insights.

- ✓ Continue partnering with post-secondary institutions to conduct a five-year research study on newcomer experiences and outcomes.
- ✓ Share findings with community partners to inform future initiatives and policy development.
- ✓ Consider hosting recurring roundtable discussions with relevant research, workforce and settlement partners to identify projects and initiatives.