

Outreach to Businesses in the Bathurst-Finch Neighbourhood

Survey Findings

March 2011

Bathurst Finch Local Immigration Partnership

Introduction

The City of Toronto comprises some 140 neighbourhoods which range in socio-economic scope. The community of Westminster-Branson, also known as Bathurst-Finch, has been identified as a Priority Neighbourhood in Toronto. Through the City of Toronto's Strong Neighbourhoods Taskforce and 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

Bathurst-Finch is a major immigrant-receiving corridor in Toronto where 70% of the population are immigrants. The neighbourhood faces socio-economic challenges where some 41% of households earn less than \$30,000 per annum, there is a high rate of un- and underemployment, and there are few community resources available in this pocket of the City that serve the densely-populated area of 24,403². The five most popular languages spoken in the community are Russian (32%), Tagalog (6%), Korean (4%).

The Local Immigration Partnership (LIP) is a community planning exercise focused on understanding the needs and challenges faced by newcomers and the receiving community in Bathurst-Finch. The project is focused on identifying solutions inside and outside the community that will support enhanced newcomer settlement and integration.

Local businesses are important stakeholders in the task of building welcoming communities. They play an integral role as they attract industry, infrastructure, and serve those who work, play and live in the neighbourhood.

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

- learning about the experiences, needs, and challenges of the for-profit sector in Bathurst-Finch in the areas of business operations and growth, human resource management and corporate citizenship;

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

² 2006 Census Data. Statistics Canada.

- 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, 28 businesses were consulted through 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 organizations contacted were receptive to the concept of fostering welcoming and inclusive community initiatives in the Bathurst-Finch 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 rather than a measured telemarketer's survey. The tool served as a template into which responses could be inserted, allowing for a conversational approach and the insertion of further dialogue about the project, further needs and experiences of the employer, etc. This approach was vital to the successful engagement of conversation, and to fostering interest in further discussion – and in some instances, alliance and partnership.

The research was intended to explore seven key issues:

1. Identify local business demographic
2. Recruitment and hiring decision-making.
3. The premium employers place on Canadian qualifications and credentials in hiring decisions
4. Attitudes towards youth hiring
5. Awareness of diversity and inclusion challenges and opportunities
6. Awareness of/participation in business networks and associations
7. Awareness of/participation in corporate citizenship programs and initiatives

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

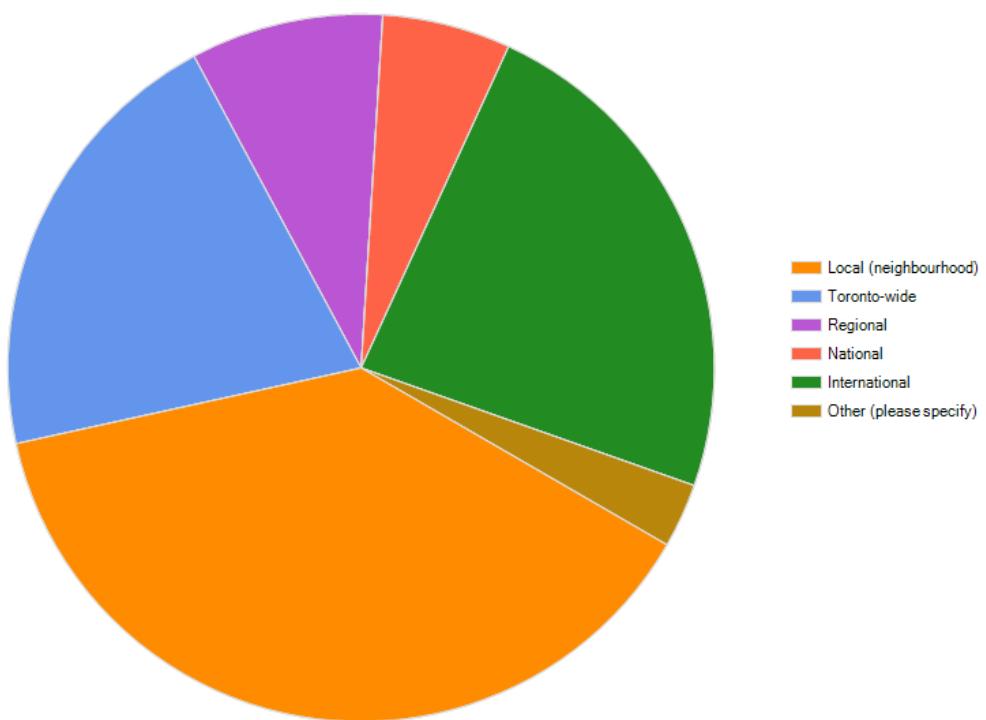
It is important to note that, while the outreach approach was random, it is too small a sample to be representative of the overall views and opinions of businesses in the Bathurst-Finch area.

Findings

Demographics

Information about respondents was gathered to gain a picture of who was consulted. Figure 1 shows that the majority of respondents have a local consumer base (48%), followed by those with an international consumer base (30%) and those serving a City-wide population (26%).

Figure 1: Customer Base



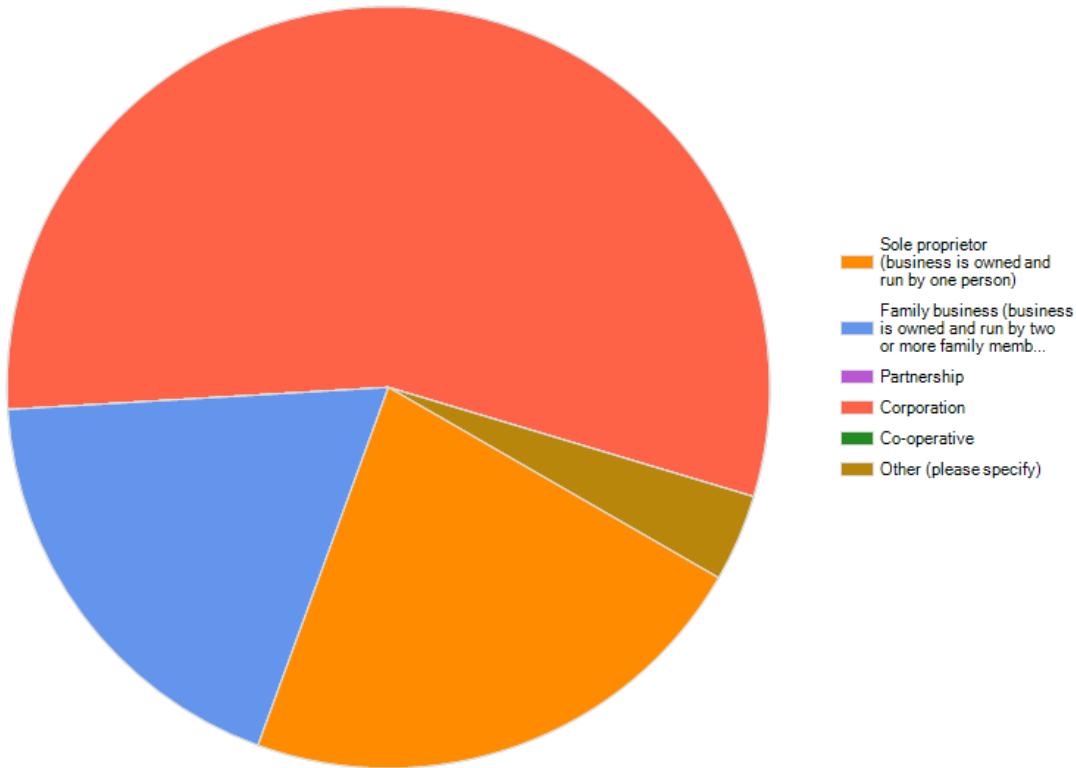
The majority of those consulted identified as corporations (56%), followed by sole proprietors (22%) and family businesses (19%). See Figure 2.

An overwhelming number of respondents were not comfortable sharing information about their annual revenue.

The spread of employees within organizations was quite broad:

- Sole proprietor (4%)
- Less than 5 (19%)
- 6 to 10 (22%)
- 11 to 25 (22%)
- 26 to 50 (11%)
- 51 to 100 (4%)
- More than 100 (19%)

Figure 2: Business Type

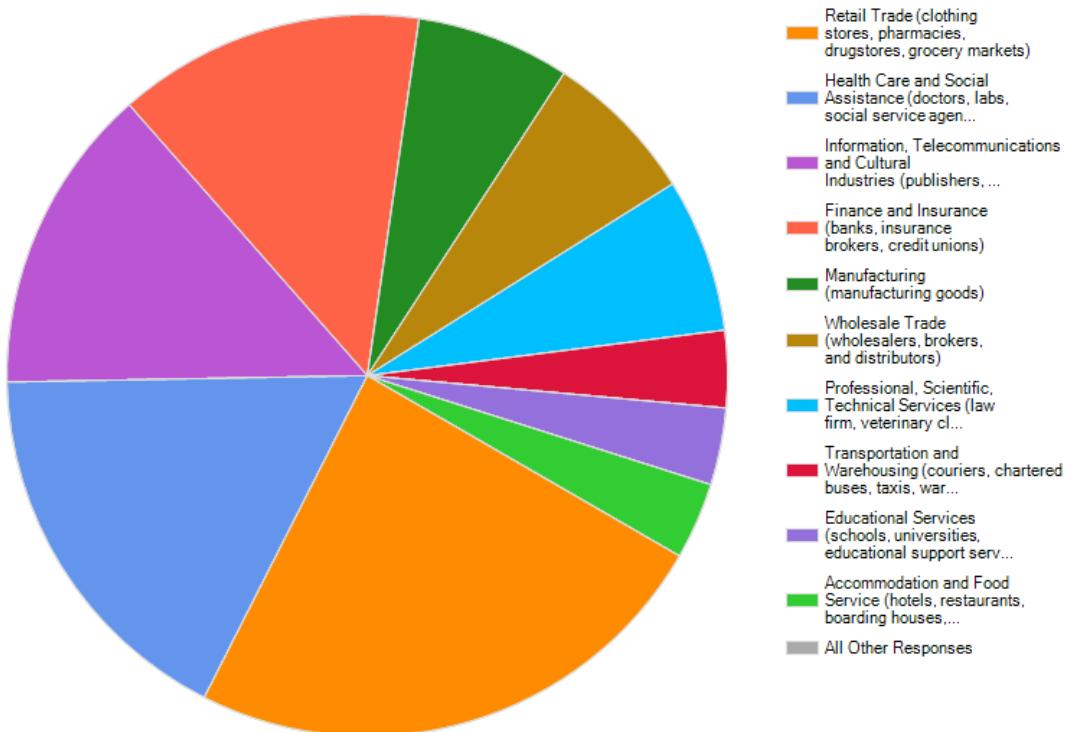


Eighty percent (80%) of respondents reported that they did not have a unionized labour force. Sixty-four percent (64%) of respondents indicated that they did not have a Human Resources office.

Approximately 46% of respondents indicated that their labour force is made up mostly of skilled labourers. This included a wide range of occupations, from Personal Support Workers to Laboratory Technicians. Salespeople (27%) and Information/Technology Programmers and Engineers factored in at 15.4%.

The variety of industries represented among respondents was staggering. Eleven different industries were represented, ranging from Retail Trade to Healthcare, to Information, Telecommunications, and Cultural Industries (See Figure 3). The most-represented industry was Retail Trade (26%), followed by Health Care and Social Assistance (19%), Information, Telecommunications and Cultural Industries (15%) and Finance and Insurance (15%) of respondents.

Figure 3: Industry types



Business Operations

Very few respondents identified as belonging to business associations. Out of the 30% who did, however, only 4% belonged to an ethnic Chamber of Commerce, and 4% to the Toronto Board of Trade. Many respondents, upon further questioning, admitted that they let their association membership lapse because they were not getting much value from them. Interestingly, each respondent that belonged to a business association named an Industry Association or Sector Council. These include: Korean Association of Dry Cleaners and the Ontario Safety League.

Fully 87% reported never having taken advantage of government or industry-lead programs to help develop the business or build the workforce. Of the 20 respondents who identified never having accessed these kinds of resources, 7 indicated that they would be interested in more information about such resources, while 10 abstained from answering.

Of those, 13% of respondents who identified as having accessed government and industry-sponsored resources before, indicated that they would be interested in continuing to receive such information.

When asked what kind of information would help to grow their business, respondents had a variety of responses. The most popular response was industry-specific information (54.2% of respondents), statistics about the local population (45.8% of respondents), social networking and using the web (25% of respondents), announcements about workshops and events for businesses (21% of respondents), business-to-business purchasing (13% of respondents) and information about business taxes (12.5% of respondents).

Community Relations

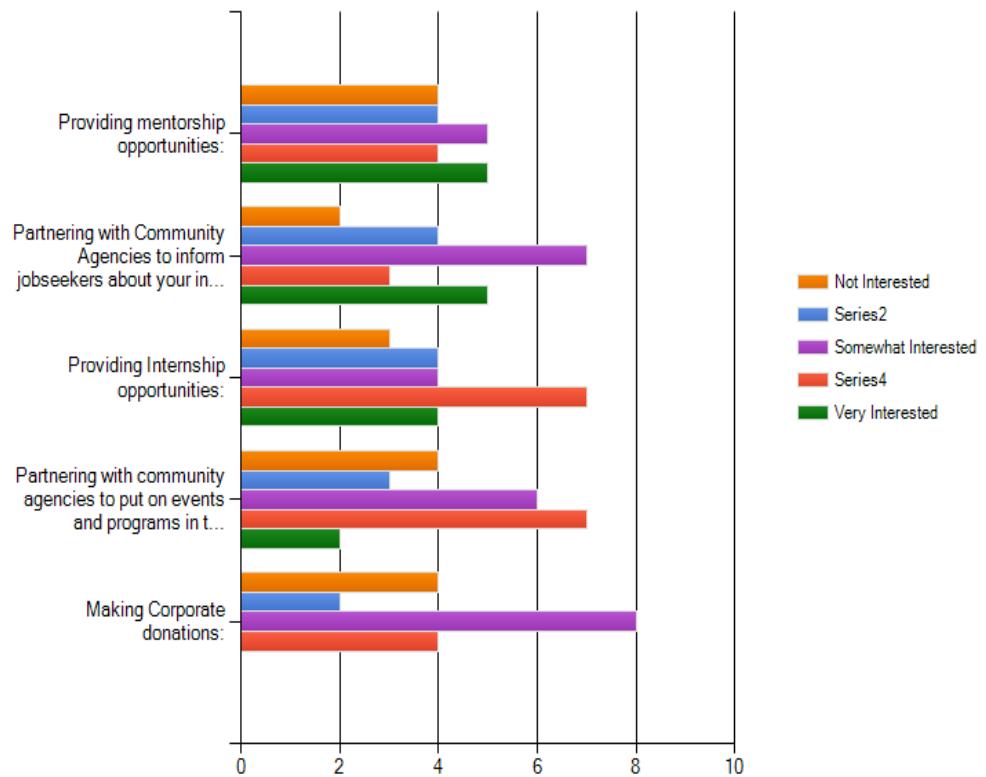
The number of respondents with Community Relations or Corporate Citizenship policies was almost split in half with exactly half of those with such policies identifying them to be centred on safety, and the other half focused on environmental responsibility. One large financial institution identified a community giving strategy as a part of their corporate citizenship.

With respect to diversity, one respondent suggested that pursuing programs that support store-front operations so that they reflect the community in their staffing would be an important role for businesses to play in building communities. It is a measure that could serve to foster greater community-economic integration. This suggestion was particularly directed towards larger companies like banks and hospitals with the capacity to review and adjust their practices.

In gauging the interest of respondents to become more involved in community initiatives, respondents were asked to indicate their interest in 5 different types of community initiatives on a 5-point Likert scale. The initiatives were: providing mentorship opportunities; providing industry-specific informational exchange for job-seekers; providing internship opportunities; partnering with community agencies to put on community events; making corporate donations.

Overwhelmingly, the overall response rate was positive, with an average interest rating of 3 out of 5 across all initiatives. The most popular initiative was providing mentorship opportunities, with 22.7% of respondents being 'very interested'. Next was the initiative of providing internship opportunities and partnering with community agencies to put on events in the neighbourhood.

Figure 4: Interest in Building Corporate Citizenship



When respondents were asked about their interest in attending a Local Business Roundtable to meet and network with other businesses, half indicated that they were interested. The topic of most interest was receiving information about supports, resources, workshops and programs to assist employers. Forums about recruitment and retention methods were also in high demand, as was information about diversity in the workplace and local business trends.

Employment Needs and Trends

While 93% of respondents reported having hired or attempted to hire in the past 5 years, almost 50% reported having encountered difficulty in building a labour force. The majority of the difficulty was attributed to a skills shortage (i.e. a lack of candidates with the requisite education, experience and/or skills) where 92% of responses identified a lack of technical skills, credentials and education. Respondents also included a lack of language skills and soft skills in their characterization of ‘skills shortage’. In the case of a transportation company operating touring coaches and school buses, the position of the hiring authority is that the combination of certification and soft skills is difficult to acquire.

In the current economic climate of high unemployment, it is not surprising that only 20% of responses cited labour shortage as a barrier to workforce growth.

Some of the workers that respondents employ include: Pharmacy Assistant, Machine Operator/ Programmer; Driver/ Warehouse Worker; Food and Beverage Retail Salesperson; Radiologist; Financial Product Sales; Reception – limited hours; Graphic Designers; IT Specialists/ Programmers; Lab Technicians; Personal Support Workers.

The most common responses to the hiring and retention problems identified by respondents included:

- Business functioned with fewer employees (27%);
- Have other employees work overtime/ longer shifts (18%);
- Hired temporary help (18%);
- Recruited from outside the province (14%);
- Recruited from outside the country (14%)

Recruitment methods among respondents varied greatly. The majority (71%) sought referrals from friends, family, and other employees; 42% relied on job advertisements on their own website, 42% relied on advertisements on external websites and, to a lesser degree, respondents also relied on internship and co-op programs (25%) and government employment centres (21%).

Yet, despite these difficulties, respondents had an optimistic outlook for hiring over the next 5 years. The vast majority expected it to become easier (42%), but 33% expected the hiring climate to become more difficult.

Newcomer Hiring

When it came to hiring newcomers, 73% of those who responded indicated that they had hired newcomers in the past 5 years, while 23% had not. When asked whether they have encountered problems when hiring newcomers, 50% described challenges in hiring and retaining newcomers.

Some of the challenges reported by respondents included:

- Language barriers (30%);
- Lack of community/ government services to support recent immigrants in the workplace (25%);
- Difficult verifying foreign education and training (20%);
- Cultural misunderstandings (20%).

A common experience among respondents was that newcomer employees often required additional training. How this trend might bode for newcomer hiring is unclear from this survey, but support to better train and integrate newcomers was identified by many respondents (58% - see below) as an incentive that would help them hire more newcomers.

Some respondents offered information about how they are meeting some of the challenges listed above. One employer described a rigorous hiring program which employs a pre-interview electronic testing that sets a standard for all candidates. This example, however, is drawn from a multi-national conglomerate and the experience cited here is hardly transferrable across a wide range of hiring capacity.

The acceptance of foreign work experience and credentials was an overwhelmingly common practice among those surveyed (80% of respondents). This is not to say, however, that respondents found this task simple. In fact, despite the inclination of employers to accept credentials, there was a significant portion that found it difficult to verify credentials (20%). The methods and tools used by respondents to verify credentials, however, is unknown.

Certain industries such as the healthcare sector require their own assessment process, which can actually cause hiring delays. Many aspects of the assessment criteria are legislated for public protection, and require registration with a regulatory body to ensure education and experience requirements are met. For this reason, recruitment is often through internships. It was stated that there is a need within the nursing profession for more transparency to the public about working requirements and opportunities. One respondent suggested that there is a need to provide more awareness-building for newcomers about professional requirements to better equip them to access the professions.

For those who did not recognize credentials, respondents explained that it was often due to prior experiences. In the instances recounted, the credentials demonstrated by newcomer candidates had not met Canadian standards.

When respondents were asked whether there were incentives that would help them to hire newcomers, 60% responded 'yes'. Several supports were identified as particularly useful, including:

- Financial support to train and orient recent immigrants (58%);
- Wage Subsidy Programs (47%);
- In-house language training (37%);
- Help verifying foreign education, training and work experience (21%)

For those respondents from larger corporations that have well-resourced human resource departments, in-house language training was already a reality, whereas others saw potential for this intervention to grow. Further development of diversity and inclusion policies was cited as another area that could support newcomer hiring.

For others, educating employer service providers about the needs of their particular business, rather than about the industry as a whole would be a step in the right direction. For example, a local bakery describes a need for bakers who can “make dough by hand the old-fashioned way”. This is a difficult skill to communicate in a posting, therefore building relationships with well-connected sources of candidates like employment service providers is seen as a real opportunity.

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 Bathurst-Finch. 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 engaged stakeholders to the potential for growth that lies just outside their doorstep.