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Job Recruitment & Retention in Rural Ontario: A Model of Physician Recruitment, Applied to the Recruitment of Local Government Professionals in Bruce County

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Job Recruitment & Retention in Rural Ontario:
A Model of Physician Recruitment, Applied to the Recruitment of
Local Government Professionals in Bruce County

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MPA Research Report

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The Local Government Program
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The University of Western Ontario

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Abstract

There are many differences between medical practices in urban and rural settings. As it relates to the recruitment of physicians, there is substantially more emphasis placed on the significance of physicians within rural municipalities and a number of resources are employed to recruit physicians to those areas. Similarly, rural local government organizations experience many of the same fundamental differences compared to urban local government organizations, but lack many of the resources necessary to recruit professionals to rural areas. As a result, rural municipalities struggle to fill vacancies and often lack the required knowledge and skills that are necessary to fulfill their professional responsibilities.

This research study explores the reasons why physicians and medical practitioners choose to practice in small, rural municipalities, and the extent to which physician recruitment specialists go to in order to recruit physicians to these communities. A review of the literature was used to analyze the practices associated with rural physician recruitment, and a number of recommendations were formulated based on these practices. The literature review identified factors that contribute to both the recruitment and retention of physicians in rural municipalities. These findings are applicable in the context of recruitment to rural local government organizations and assist in providing recommendations to improve current recruitment practices and hiring standards to ensure qualified professionals and senior managers are filling important municipal roles.

Through the analysis was confirmed that many of the factors that impact recruitment of physicians to rural municipalities are similar to those factors that constrain local government organizations. There are many opportunities that are available to local government

organizations including varying methods used to recruit suitable candidates in addition to benefits that may be able to entice qualified professionals to consider employment in small, rural municipalities.

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1.0 Introduction

There is significant emphasis placed on the recruitment of physicians to small, rural Ontario municipalities. These municipalities have a difficult time recruiting physicians due to a number of limitations including, but not limited to, geography, housing, financial incentives and available resources. These same municipalities face similar challenges recruiting and retaining professionals to work within their local government organizations as well, largely due to the same or similar factors. The big difference is that local government organizations do not appear to place the same importance on recruiting local government employees compared to the importance placed on physician recruitment.

Physicians provide a critical service to those citizens living in small, rural municipalities. Access to healthcare is important for the community, especially those in marginalized groups such as children and seniors. Residents in rural municipalities tend to be older than those living in urban centres and, as a result, have different healthcare needs (Daniels et al., 2007). But having professionals with the required knowledge and expertise providing services to a community is also important. Engineers, planners, accountants and senior managers, among other professionals, all have specialized knowledge that is beneficial to small communities. How can these small, rural Ontario municipalities compete with larger city centres when recruiting the talent that it needs most? Can improved recruitment methods result in better hiring practices and employment decisions to strengthen the workforce in these organizations?

Many of the factors related to recruitment and retention of local government employees are beyond the control of a local government organization. However, factors such as income,

education, benefits and professional development can play a large role in attracting employees and retaining them as well. In addition to those factors associated specifically with employment with a local government organization, rural municipalities have numerous other social and lifestyle factors which can be advertised as further benefits to potential employees as well.

This research study will identify the factors associated with the recruitment of physicians to small, rural municipalities. The research will further identify the lengths that Physician Recruitment Specialists in Bruce County go to in order to recruit top talent to the area. Finally, this research study will determine whether the methods used to recruit physicians can be applied to the recruitment of local government professionals in a rural context. For the purpose of this research, the focus is on the recruitment of local government professionals and senior management. In this context, professionals and senior managers are defined as those employees within a local government organization that require additional knowledge, education, skills and training in order to competently complete a job (e.g. land use planners, engineers, accountants, Chief Administrative Officers, etc.).

Recruitment is an extremely relevant topic in local government today amongst small, rural Ontario municipalities as they are constantly competing with larger municipalities that have access to greater resources, more money and offer a competitive lifestyle. It is the intention of this research to provide Bruce County and other rural municipalities in Ontario with recommendations that can be applied to the recruitment of professional talent and senior managers within their local government organizations.

2.0 Bruce County

Bruce County was chosen for this research study because of its unique rural attributes, local government structure, as well as the accessibility of health services and hospitals. It is important to understand the context of the area and what Bruce County has to offer when evaluating recruitment and offering recommendations and best management practices for the local municipalities. Grey Bruce Health Services (GBHS) has three hospitals in Bruce County while the South Bruce Grey Health Centre operates three hospitals (Grey Bruce Health Services, 2018; South Bruce Grey Health Services, 2018). The hospitals are strategically located through the Lakeshore, Peninsula and Interior areas of Bruce County, such that all citizens are within reasonable proximity to healthcare should it be necessary. Each of these healthcare service providers have additional facilities in the surrounding counties of Huron and Grey.

Unlike many other rural municipalities, Bruce County is seeing an increase in population largely due to the presence of the Bruce Power site and the economic opportunities and spinoffs that arise in association with this employer. As a result, there is a strong emphasis throughout the County on recruiting physicians to the area to support the growing population.

In addition to the accessibility and proximity to health services, the local area municipalities place significant importance on the recruitment of physicians and healthcare practitioners to service the region. Dedicated Physician Recruitment Specialists are tasked with not only finding suitable physicians, as well as promoting the hospitals, medical clinics and care facilities in need of full time physicians, but also promoting the communities as great places to

live, highlighting activities and services and offering support for the transition, including assistance with finding accommodation or employment for spouses.

Bruce County is a small, rural municipality located on the shores of Lake Huron and Georgian Bay in southwestern Ontario. The County is located two hours from London, Waterloo Region and Toronto positioning it well within close proximity to some of Ontario's largest urban centres. The County in total, among all eight lower-tier municipalities, is over 4,000 km² in area with more than 850 km of coastline along Lake Huron and Georgian Bay (Business to Bruce, 2018). While there are a few small, primary urban communities such as the Towns of Port Elgin, Southampton, Kincardine and Walkerton, most of the County is comprised of prime agricultural lands, lengths of Great Lakes coastline and significant natural heritage features.

In 2016 there were 68,147 residents in Bruce County, which was an increase of 3.1% from the 2011 Census (Statistics Canada, 2017). Many of the municipalities within the County see an increase in residents during the summer months due to the proximity to Lake Huron & Georgian Bay, and the tourism and seasonal recreation opportunities associated with the geographic location. This number also does not necessary reflect the influx of contract workers that attend the Bruce Power site during varying periods of the year when additional outside contract workers are required.

The increasing population means that additional services are required to serve the population. With new residential, commercial and industrial development comes additional pressures on infrastructure, development, emergency services and other essential services that the municipality needs to provide to its residents. In order to provide these services, staff with

appropriate knowledge, education and skills are required to ensure it is done in the most efficient and effective way.

The average age within the County is 44.8, almost 4 years older than the average age of the province (Statistics Canada, 2017). The trend of small, rural Ontario municipalities being older, on average, than the Provincial average is not unique to Bruce County alone. The surrounding Counties of Huron and Grey also have higher average ages, being 43.6 and 45.4 respectively (Statistics Canada, 2017).

The majority of the residents in Bruce County, representing 60.6% of the population, are between the ages of 15 and 64 (Statistics Canada, 2017). Residents aged 0 to 14 represent 15.8% of the population and residents 65 and older represent 23.6% of the population (Statistics Canada, 2017). Approximately 49% of the population is male and 51% is female (Statistics Canada, 2017). In consideration of the large number of adults who will age and require additional healthcare as well as seniors currently living in the area, it is not hard to understand why so much effort is being put into the recruitment of physicians and other healthcare practitioners.

There are three economic sectors in Bruce County that lead to a strong, educated workforce. The sectors are agriculture, due to the vast amount of rural and prime agricultural lands; tourism, due to the significant lengths of Lake Huron and Georgian Bay shoreline; and, energy, due to the presence of the Bruce Power site and the utility industry associated with Bruce Power. According to the Bruce County Economic Development Strategic Plan (2017), utilities represent 15% of the labour force (approximately 5664 jobs), tourism represent 11% of

the labour force (approximately 4042 jobs), and agricultural represents 7.8% of the labour force (approximately 2858 jobs).

Statistics Canada (2017) reported in the 2016 Census that the employment rate within the County is 56.4%, less than the Provincial rate of 59.9%. This may be directly related to the aging population and the fact that the average age in the County is greater than that of the Province. Statistics Canada (2017) further reported that the unemployment rate was 6.2%, less than the 7.4% unemployment rate of the Province, which is indicative of a strong labour force.

The Bruce County Economic Development Strategic Plan (2017) reports that more than half of the workforce have some form of post-secondary education identified as a trade (12%), college diploma or certificate (26%) or university (including graduate) degree (21%). Engineering and engineering-related technology, business management and public administration, and health-related fields are the top three fields of study, representing 62% of the workforce (Bruce County, 2017). These statistics suggest that the labour force in the area is well-educated and possesses the knowledge necessary to fulfill various roles, including those desired and much needed in healthcare and local government.

Although there is a strong, intelligent labour force in terms of employment and education, in general, income is lower on average in the County than in the rest of the Province. According to the 2016 Census, Statistics Canada (2017) reported that 57% of those residents aged 15 and older make less than \$40,000 per year. The median family income is \$87,786 which is lower than the median family income of the Province at \$91,089 (Statistics Canada, 2017).

In terms of recreation and amenities, Bruce County has a significant amount of recreation, services and amenities available to its residents. With 854 km of coastline along Lake Huron and Georgian Bay, two national parks and 264 km of the Bruce Trail recreational opportunities are available year-round (Business to Bruce, 2018). Each of the lower tier municipalities within the County also offer municipal facilities including arenas, libraries and swimming pools. As a result, there are a tremendous number of opportunities for indoor and outdoor recreation throughout the County at any time of the year (Business to Bruce, 2018).

Bruce County is governed as a two-tier Municipal government. At the County level, is a successful tourism program referred to as *Explore the Bruce*, run by the Planning and Economic Development Department. This program highlights the fascinating places to go, events taking place, things to do, places to stay and restaurants to eat at, among other highlights in the region and provides insight into the tremendous number of happenings in the area. The program has been successful in terms of engaging current residents of the County and encouraging tourists to visit and explore the area.

There are two school boards in Bruce County operating public and Catholic elementary and secondary schools. The Bluewater District School Board and Bruce Grey Catholic District School Board have schools in both primary urban and secondary urban communities throughout the County. Bluewater District School Board has 17 elementary schools and five secondary schools throughout the County (Bluewater District School Board, 2013). The Bruce Grey Catholic District School Board has six elementary schools and one secondary school throughout the County (Bruce Grey Catholic District School Board, 2017). Combined, these two school boards provide access to education throughout the County. Additional private

elementary schools are also located throughout the region for parents wishing to enroll their children in this type of institution.

Grey Bruce Health Services and the South Bruce Grey Health Centre operate a number of healthcare facilities throughout the County, including hospitals in Kincardine, Southampton, Walkerton, Chesley, Lion's Head and Wiarton, which provides healthcare services to residents throughout the geographic area. Chiropractic, physiotherapy and dental services are also easily accessible throughout the County for additional specialty care that may be required. Being approximately two hours to London, Kitchener-Waterloo and the Greater Toronto Area, additional healthcare facilities are easily accessible for additional specialist services that may be required.

Bruce County is an upper tier municipality that consists of eight lower tier municipalities. The County groups these lower tier municipalities by geographic region: the Lakeshore, the Peninsula and Inland. The Lakeshore area refers to the Municipality of Kincardine and Town of Saugeen Shores, on the shores of Lake Huron; the Peninsula refers to the municipalities of North Bruce Peninsula, South Bruce Peninsula and Arran-Elderslie, bound by Lake Huron and Georgian Bay; and, Inland which consists of the municipalities of Brockton, Huron-Kinloss and South Bruce.

The Council of the County is comprised of each of the eight mayors of the lower-tier municipalities. Each of the lower tiers, as well as the County, have their own dedicated Town Hall. They provide all of the support and services necessary to their residents from community services to building to public works and local roads. Social services, planning, paramedic

services and infrastructure including County roads and bridges are provided solely at the County level. As a result of the roles that each of these local government organizations play, it is critical that the professional staff are capable of performing the necessary duties to help the municipalities thrive and provide the greatest services to their citizens. Consequently, this research study will determine if the factors and strategies associated with the recruitment of physicians to rural practice would be appropriate and applicable in the context of Bruce County and other rural municipalities in Ontario.

3.0 Methods of Data Collection

This research project was conducted using both primary and secondary information, including a literature review and semi-structured interviews with professionals involved in the recruitment of physicians and local government employees.

First, a literature review was done to gather information on the state of physician recruitment to rural municipalities and identify the factors that contribute to the recruitment and retention of physicians in rural Ontario. Literature reviews are critical for providing a comprehensive overview of a particular topic (Denney and Tewksbury, 2013).

The purpose of this literature review was to gather as much information as possible on the topic that would translate into the local government context. While there was an abundance of literature available on the topic of rural physician recruitment, including a significant amount of literature in a Canadian context, there was virtually no information available on local government recruitment in these same rural municipalities.

While literature reviews can be successful in providing information on a subject, it is challenging to find information that is both applicable and from a reliable source (Ackerman & Arbour, 2016). In order to substantiate the findings of the literature and confirm that the same or similar factors apply in Bruce County, a phone interview took place with a Physician Recruitment Specialist in Bruce County who has years of experience recruiting physicians to the area. Physician Recruitment Specialists in the area are tasked with promoting the hospitals, medical clinics and care facilities in need of full-time physicians, but also promoting the communities as great places to live. The results of this interview not only confirmed the findings from the literature review, but also provided additional information specific to Bruce County and Ontario. The questions discussed during the interview with the Physician Recruitment Specialist are included in Appendix 'B'.

As a result of the lack of literature available on the topic of recruitment to rural local government organizations, interviews were required to provide information in a local government context and validate the analysis and findings in the literature related to physician recruitment. Phone interviews took place with two Chief Administrative Officers (CAOs) of lower tier municipalities within Bruce County. The purpose of these interviews was to identify the factors that inhibit or constrain professionals from choosing to work in small, rural municipalities and to identify what local government organizations are, or are not, doing to recruit and attract staff. The information from these interviews also confirmed that there are many similarities that exist when compared to physician recruitment and identified areas to be improved. The questions discussed with the Chief Administrative Officers during the interviews are included in Appendix 'C'.

4.0 Literature Review: Physician Recruitment in Rural Municipalities

There is a significant amount of literature on the topic of physician recruitment in rural locations. As a result, the information contained within this literature review is important in creating a foundation to understand the factors and strategies associated with this topic. Physicians and access to healthcare is incredibly important to rural communities and the citizens that live there. Healthcare professionals and physicians, like municipal professionals including engineers, accountants, planners and senior management, provide specific knowledge and skills within their areas of expertise to the communities and citizens that they serve. Within their professional capacities, these members of the community play an integral role in the community's development and citizens' livelihood.

Physician recruitment has been found to contribute positively to the larger economic system (Lauzon & McCordick, 2013). And further, healthcare is found to facilitate economic development by assisting in the maintenance of a healthy workforce and a vibrant healthcare system, creating jobs and attracting new businesses to a particular area (Lauzon & McCordick, 2013). As a result, a significant investment is made by municipalities ensure that a thriving healthcare system is available to citizens.

There are many reasons why physicians choose to pursue practice in small, rural municipalities, including variety of work, continuity of care, peer support and outdoor recreation (Witt, 2017). Hancock et al. (2009) note that exposure to a rural lifestyle through recreation, education, residency or a combination of these factors provides a foundation of familiarity as well as community integration and involvement that drives an interest in rural

practice. Financial incentives also have the ability to entice physicians and other professionals to these locations, but they are not always possible nor do they always provide a substantial reason for physicians to stay in these rural municipalities long-term. Regardless of the fact that a large number of people in Canada live in rural areas, healthcare is concentrated in urban areas (Strasser & Neusy, 2010).

Throughout the literature, it was consistently identified that the single largest influence on physician practice in rural municipalities is rural upbringing. According to Hancock et al. (2009), rural upbringing is defined as “spending all of one’s childhood in a rural location, more than ten years in a rural location, or calling a rural place one’s childhood home” (p. 1369). The reasons why rural upbringing was attributed to being the single largest influence on rural practice is likely due to familiarity and sense of place as well as community involvement and self-actualization (Hancock et al., 2009).

A study by Daniels et al. (2007) indicates that size of childhood town and completion of a rural work term as part of an education program were associated with both first employment in a rural location and with employment in a rural location in general. The study concludes the importance of recruiting medical students from rural municipalities, because of their awareness of the rural lifestyle and healthcare needs in a rural setting (Daniels et al., 2007). Similarly, Rabinowitz et al. (1999) conclude that those with a rural upbringing are more likely to practice in rural areas. In their study, Rabinowitz et al. (1999) find that of the physicians that participated in the study, those who grew up in rural areas and intended to become general family physicians following completion of medical school ended up in rural practice at more than five times the rate of those individuals who were raised in urban areas. The findings of

both these studies attest to the significant difference in rural upbringing and an inherent sense of familiarity and understanding of rural health issues and rural lifestyle as being key factors in recruitment.

A research study completed by Viscomi et al. (2013) explores the factors that contribute to the recruitment of physicians in underserved regions throughout Canada and compares these results to Australia. The study consists of a literature review which results in the identification of five life stages of physicians and the factors that contribute to pursuing a medical career in a rural municipality. It is identified that in a rural context, physicians become vulnerable to burnout due to high volumes of work with lower levels of support from staff and colleagues than those physicians working within an urban context (Viscomi et al., 2013) (Jutzi et al., 2009). The research does go on to state however that financial incentives, suitable housing, spousal employment and access to daycare are considered to be sufficient countermeasures (Viscomi et al., 2013).

It is widely agreed upon throughout the literature that physicians working in rural municipalities have a heavier workload, provide a wider range of services and have a large amount of responsibility beyond the typical responsibilities of a general physician in urban areas (Strasser & Neusy, 2010). Physicians in rural municipalities also are significantly involved in public health, which is an added responsibility that many of their urban counterparts are not responsible for (Strasser & Neusy, 2010). It is not surprising that physicians in rural municipalities experience a heavier workload since healthcare professionals, similar to local government professionals, are required to provide care for a wide-ranging demographic, with less support from other colleagues or professionals. Physicians in rural municipalities are

required to become skilled in a wide variety of medical practices and in a wide variety of situations, to treat patients as necessary.

Of particular concern as it relates to the recruitment of physicians in small, rural municipalities is that the education model that is provided to students is located in, and largely focused on, urban centres. Urban centres support new technology and specialty study not necessarily available in rural municipalities (Richards, 2001). As a result of study in these large, urban centres, graduates of healthcare programs often prefer to pursue employment in similar locations due to the lifestyle and amenities these areas are able to provide.

In contrast, formal education that is provided in a rural setting is more likely to produce graduates that will pursue a career in a rural setting. It is identified by Rourke (2008) that practice and training in a rural location also assists students from urban areas to develop an interest in rural medicine through life experience while being engaged with a rural community, as well as contributing to rural learning experiences.

The Northern Ontario School of Medicine was established in 2005 with a mission to “increase the number of physicians and health professionals with the leadership, knowledge and skills to practice in Northern Ontario” (NOSM, 2017). The school actively seeks to recruit students from rural, northern, aboriginal and francophone backgrounds with an interest in pursuing medical practice in similar communities. The school does not solely focus on medical practice, but also on unique characteristics and relationships necessary in rural and remote communities that may be different than those that exist in urban areas. In addition to traditional medical practice, community engagement is important, as is collaboration with rural,

aboriginal and francophone communities and organizations (Strasser & Neusy, 2010). This results in knowledge of the medical issues associated with these communities and organizations, but further allows medical professionals to immerse themselves in the culture and the community, and understand the rural lifestyle.

Since the school was established, it has been producing graduates of the program that specialize in medicine and healthcare specific to Northern Ontario. Approximately 67.5% of the graduates of the program are practicing in Northern Ontario or other rural and remote areas (Strasser & Neusy, 2010). The concept of rural education applying to future employment in rural areas is also likely applicable in a local government context as well. Introduction to emerging rural trends and issues through education can establish a positive impression of the benefits of living and being employed within a rural municipality.

Similar to rural background and education in a rural context, rural clinical experience may contribute to rural practice in the future in some instances. Strasser et al. (2010) undertook a study to determine if a background in rural medicine affects vocational training location and intended practice location after training was complete. The results of the study indicate that a background in rural medicine does not necessarily reflect a desire to practice in rural municipalities upon completion of medical school in the same way as other factors. In some instances, a rural practicum is a requirement that the student must complete as opposed to an inherent interest in rural clinical experience. As a result, rural clinical experience does not necessarily contribute to rural practice in the future.

Ethics and ethical issues that may arise from influences and factors that contribute to the recruitment of physicians to small, rural municipalities is a relatively under-researched area of study. A study by Jutzi et al. (2009) finds that despite concerns regarding financial or lifestyle incentives, the majority of respondents felt that it was ethical for incentives to be offered in order to attract physicians to small, rural municipalities. In the study, which surveyed medical students enrolled in the Schulich School of Medicine & Dentistry at Western University, an overwhelming majority of students felt that it was ethical for rural communities to offer lifestyle, financial and professional development incentives and that altruism should not be expected among the medical profession (Jutzi et al., 2009).

The Canadian Medical Association (CMA) has prepared a Code of Ethics which is identified as a “guide for Canadian physicians, including residents, and medical students” (Canadian Medical Association, 2004). The Code of Ethics is described as guidelines that provide a common ethical framework for Canadian physicians. Among the 54 guidelines, there are no ethical principles that relate directly to accepting incentives (financial or otherwise) as it relates to employment, but rather a focus on what is described as the core activities in medicine (i.e. health promotion, advocacy, diagnosis, treatment, education, research, etc.) (Canadian Medical Association, 2004). The principle related most closely to conflicts of interest is principle 7 which states that physicians must “resist any influence or interference that could undermine your professional integrity”. The concept of ethics in the recruitment of physicians is interesting in contrast to ethics associated with the recruitment of local government professionals which is discussed in more detail later in this paper.

In addition to understanding why physicians and other professionals choose to pursue employment in small, rural municipalities, one also needs to understand the factors that contribute to why these professionals leave. While the literature has identified factors that cannot be manipulated such as rural upbringing or rural education may be more important in recruitment, lifestyle factors are more important in retention (Hancock et al., 2009). It has been identified that the general factors that contribute to leaving these municipalities relate to heavy workloads, difficulty taking time off, professional isolation, lack of specialization and lack of professional support (Witt, 2017). It is noted by Hancock et al. (2009) that a smooth transition is important in retaining physicians in rural areas. It is further identified that improved integration into the community, including orientation and introduction to community contacts, increases the likelihood that a physician will continue practice in rural municipalities over the long term (Hancock et al., 2009). Consequently, this raises the importance of promoting the region and the rural lifestyle, as well as amenities and services that are provided in the rural context.

5.0 Physician Recruitment in Bruce County

Physicians can practice anywhere. There are many opportunities in Ontario and around the country for physicians to practice, including opportunities in urban centres with access to significantly more resources. According to a Physician Recruitment Specialist actively searching to bring physicians to the area, Bruce County is Ontario's best kept secret (Physician Recruitment Specialist, 2018). As a result, it was noted that it is incredibly important to sell the lifestyle associated with living in Bruce County to prospective physicians and their families.

Recruitment is multi-faceted and a number of outlets are used to recruit physicians to the area. Healthforce Ontario, a branch of the Provincial Ministry, is available as resource to recruiters (Physician Recruitment Specialist, 2018). This resource allows the Physician Recruitment Specialist to advertise vacancies and market the available positions to medical schools. One inefficiency of this advertising outlet is that there is no list of communities in need of physicians, but rather postings are based on geographic areas. If a prospective physician is not aware of Bruce County (or the specific lower-tier municipalities within it) and does not search that location specifically, vacant positions will not be found (Physician Recruitment Specialist, 2018).

Other avenues are available for recruitment including reaching out to medical residency coordinators who are forwarded vacant opportunities and post them within their respective organizations, and attendance at medical conventions and job fairs. Personal connections and networking through these events has proven to be effective in the recruitment process. More recently, the use of social media has been beneficial in recruiting physicians to the area. The Physician Recruitment Specialist indicated that they create a job vacancy flyer to be shared on social media (Physician Recruitment Specialist, 2018). It was identified that this is a successful method of recruitment because local physicians are able to share the vacancy easily within their professional and personal networks with friends and colleagues. The Physician Recruitment Specialist (2018) indicated that one of the reasons this method has been successful is because it often identifies a personal connection to the community which is an important factor associated with both recruitment and retention. If a prospective physician has a connection to the community, they are more likely to consider employment there, and more likely put down

roots and stay long term (Physician Recruitment Specialist, 2018). It was noted by the Physician Recruitment Specialist (2018) that if a physician has been practicing in the community for five years, they are likely to remain indefinitely.

The Physician Recruitment Specialist also noted that it was important to keep searching until a suitable candidate is found. It is often more important to find a suitable physician that can provide care to meet the needs of the community than having an unsuitable physician just for the sake of filling a vacancy. Although having a vacant position for an extended period of time may come with its own set of concerns, it is better than a physician that cannot provide the intended level of care their patients need, or is searching for a job for the purpose of gaining employment and leaves when a better offer becomes available.

It was noted that one of the biggest barriers to physician recruitment, not identified in the literature, is the Ministry of Health and the regulations associated with medical practice in Ontario (Physician Recruitment Specialist, 2018). The Ministry limits the number of practicing physicians based upon the population of a defined area, so fewer physicians may be required to provide a full scope of practice from emergency service to general practice, and in some instances, specialist care when a specialist is not immediately available.

Another barrier to physician recruitment in Bruce County, which again involves the Ministry, is the significant cost associated with opening a practice (Physician Recruitment Specialist, 2018). It was noted by the Physician Recruitment Specialist that typically, medical residents have approximately \$250,000 in student debt. In addition to the amount of debt accumulated, the physician needs to pay their living expenses, possibly support a spouse and/or

family, and pay for office space, staff and associated operating costs of a practice, without receiving their first pay cheque for about four to six months (Physician Recruitment Specialist, 2018). This financial burden is significant for physicians in Bruce County who may also not be paid as much as their urban counterparts. Unless another physician in the practice is willing to share staff and resources at the beginning, starting up a new practice in a County that is already limited in physicians and resources is often financially unattainable.

Physicians in Canada are compensated through either a fee-for-service (FFS) payment or an alternative payment plan (APP) (Canadian Institute for Health Information, 2017).

Alternative payment methods consist of a variety of programs which include salaries, hourly rates or contract-based payments (Canadian Institute for Health Information, 2017). The fee-for-service model is the traditional payment model for physicians in Canada, where the physician bills for each service provided (Canadian Medical Association, 2012).

Physicians in Bruce County are considered to be independent contractors, under an Alternative Payment Plan model, which consists of salaries and hourly rates regardless of whether or not the physicians see patients (Physician Recruitment Specialist, 2018). In this model, physicians may receive bonuses for different tasks, such as the number of mammograms referred. This blended model however does not typically result in remuneration as high as an urban physician in Toronto or London, who is making a salary between \$180,000 - \$220,000 per year and may have more regular hours with less responsibility (Physician Recruitment Specialist, 2018).

It was noted by the Physician Recruitment Specialist (2018) that turnover in the field of medicine can be positive for the community. There has been and continues to be a shift in rural medicine as the field becomes more global and information is more easily available. Turnover can present new ideas and practices from young physicians that may otherwise not be introduced to the community. New skills and knowledge are benefits as needs within the community change. The Physician Recruitment Specialist is not however typically involved with physicians when they choose to leave the area, and any exit interviews that do take place are typically done by the hospital or municipal Chief Administrative Officers.

There are many lifestyle benefits associated with living in Bruce County. A lower cost of living compared to Ontario's urban centres offers an affordable lifestyle with significant amenities not available in many other rural municipalities. In order to assist with living expenses when new physicians arrive, there are housing opportunities available for up to one year while the physician gets settled in (subject to availability of the dwelling unit). It was noted that daycare wait times have been a challenge for young families recruited to the area, with one physician's spouse choosing to stay home to care for the children, while in another instance it took a year to find suitable childcare (Physician Recruitment Specialist, 2018). The recreational amenities associated with the vast shoreline and natural landscape is appealing to those with an interest in outdoor-related activities.

Public Private Partnerships have proven to be important in the recruitment of physicians to Bruce County. Bruce Power has partnered with the Municipalities of Kincardine and Saugeen Shores to assist in recruiting physicians to the area. Bruce Power employs a number of highly skilled and qualified professionals who expect a high level of service in the communities they

live in. As a result, in order to attract the caliber of employee Bruce Power is looking for, investment in healthcare within the communities in which these employees will live is also important.

The partnership began in 2010 when Bruce Power invested \$500,000 into the joint Physician Recruitment Program (Physician Recruitment Program, 2018). Both Kincardine and Saugeen Shores received \$135,000 to assist with community incentives and the remaining \$230,000 was used to fund physician visits to the area, a Physician Recruitment Specialist's salary for three years and attendance at job fairs and medical conventions (Physician Recruitment Program, 2018). The partnership was so successful over the first three years that each partner agreed to invest \$35,000 annually to continue covering costs associated with physician recruitment. In the seven years since the program began, 25 physicians have been recruited to the area (Physician Recruitment Program, 2018).

In addition to the monetary investment that Bruce Power is able to provide, because of the size of the workforce, opportunities for spousal employment may also be available. Spousal employment was noted as a barrier to relocation, especially if the spouse of a physician is invested in their career in a professional capacity as well. Bruce Power, and many of its contractors located in the area, support a strong labour force with opportunities for employment not necessarily available in other rural municipalities.

Physician recruitment has been relatively successful in Bruce County because of the characteristics unique to the area and dedicated staff taking the time to ensure the right physicians are recruited for the right jobs. The Physician Recruitment Specialist uses all

available resources to market the community and the lifestyle available in Bruce County, and the Public Private Partnerships formed between local government organizations and local municipalities have allowed for additional incentives to be provided to prospective physicians.

6.0 Literature Review: Local Government Recruitment

In addition to the literature review that took place to identify and analyze rural physician recruitment, a review of the literature was initiated to understand factors that exist relating to local government recruitment. As stated by Lavigna & Hays (2004) “good government requires good people”, but the aging population, including aging local government employees, puts pressure on public systems to continue filling roles where there may be a lack of qualified candidates. Government organizations were at one time able to recruit qualified employees based upon Public Service Motivation and a desire to serve the public (Lavigna & Hays, 2004). We are currently at a time where trust in the government is at an all-time low, and it appears that public sector employment is not the most desirable sector to be employed in anymore.

There is a gap in the literature as it relates to recruitment of local government employees to rural municipalities. The topic of Public Service Motivation has been studied in detail, Millennials in the workforce have been studied in detail, but Human Resources Management fails to explore the topic of rural local government recruitment. These small, rural municipalities are finding it challenging to recruit the caliber of employee that they require when urban centres provide significantly more opportunities and resources.

In order for a physician or physicians to contribute to an economic system, there first has to be an actual economic system to contribute to, which is why it is also important to invest in

other professionals in the community to help facilitate how the municipality is run on a day-to-day basis. Like physicians, professionals that work in a local government organization contribute to a vibrant workforce and play a large role in maintaining a viable community.

It is noted consistently throughout the literature that providing education and training to public administrators and other professionals within a rural municipal setting may contribute to an increase in the recruitment of these individuals to rural local government organizations in the future. Unfortunately, the emphasis on local government, public policy and public administration in Ontario (and Canada) appears to be largely focused on the urban setting. The School of Environmental Design and Rural Development at the University of Guelph, a department within the Ontario Agricultural College, has a Masters Degree in Rural Planning and Development and a Doctoral Program in Rural Studies which offers studies focused on contemporary rural issues (University of Guelph, 2018). There may be co-op programs associated with other undergraduate or graduate degrees that take place within a rural setting, but these are not widely advertised and likely must be initiated by the student, who may be interested in pursuing employment in a rural municipal setting.

The research completed by Strasser et al. (2010) suggests that insufficient clinical experience within a rural context may contribute to the lack of desire to practice in a rural location once training is complete. This is an interesting concept when considering the context in which local government professionals choose to work. With the exception of the rural programs at the University of Guelph, there does not appear to be any other programs related to public administration with a focus on the rural context within Ontario. Unfortunately, rural municipalities do not possess the ability to influence curriculum and post-secondary programs.

If an interest exists in investing in professional development or additional education programs for rural citizens, local municipalities may be able to partner with universities, such as the Local Government Program at Western University, to offer a certificate or diploma program in public administration in a rural setting.

In a local government context, new graduates are very valuable to a small municipality, especially where resources related to increased salary expectations and financial incentives are not available to be offered. In the literature it is reported that there is some angst and hostility as it relates to the work ethic and abilities of younger generations, namely the Millennial generation. However, Millennials have been working collaboratively with others in a team setting since a young age which is an important and valuable skill that not all possess, especially for those jobs that are interdisciplinary in small municipalities. Millennials have grown up with a very busy schedule, having juggled multiple extracurricular activities from a very young age and because of this, tend to be effective at multitasking (Cahill et al., 2012). Investing in potential employees from the Millennial generation could ultimately have a significant impact on the workforce within a local government context.

While the literature generally does not provide much insight into rural municipal recruitment, from the research that has been done we know that rural clinical experience and education in a rural setting may contribute positively to future employment with a rural municipality. Consequently, municipalities should be encouraged to employ summer and co-op students to gain experience and be introduced to work within a rural municipality. This would encourage students familiar with a rural lifestyle and rural municipal issues and concerns to return upon completion of post-secondary education.

7.0 Local Government Recruitment in Bruce County

Like other rural and remote areas, Bruce County and the lower-tier municipalities within its jurisdiction struggle not only to recruit professional talent, but also retain it in the long-term, especially when employees feel that they have achieved all that they can achieve within the organization or wish to pursue opportunities in urban centres. Interviews with two Chief Administrative Officers (CAO) throughout the County provided insight into the recruitment of local government professionals, an area in which relatively little literature and research has been completed to date.

In local government organizations, job postings are typically displayed on the municipality's website and on job boards for municipal organizations that may have members that specialize in that field (Chief Administrative Officer A, 2018; Chief Administrative Officer B, 2018). Job vacancies may be posted on profession-specific job boards, province-wide, but infrequently are jobs posted nationally. It was noted that some very specific jobs were posted nationally, for positions such as the Police Chief, Fire Chief or Chief Administrative Officer which require specific qualifications and skills (Chief Administrative Officer A, 2018). It was noted that, compared to larger municipalities, budgets to widely advertise vacancies or hire recruiters to search for qualified candidates is not generally available. Staff are working with the limited resources they have for recruitment, in addition to their typical day-to-day activities.

Although it is desirable to continue searching for a suitable candidate until the right one is found, when rural municipalities are already working with limited staff and resources, this is not always an option. In rural local government organizations, staff are required to be

generalists, which results in fewer people doing the work that larger municipalities would have multiple employees doing (Chief Administrative Officer B, 2018). If there is a vacancy, it means fewer people in a rural municipality are doing even more and often the luxury of waiting to find the most suitable candidate and the calibre of employee a municipality should have is not realistic.

It was noted that marketing the geographical area is important, but municipalities typically do not spend as much time or resources emphasizing the lifestyle that is available as they should (Chief Administrative Officer A, 2018). In job postings, a brief description is given of the area, but beyond that, it is left up to the candidate to find information on the area, housing market, schools, etc. For higher profile positions, such as the Police Chief and Chief Administrative Officer, it was noted that additional time is spent showing the candidate the area and providing overnight accommodation during the interview process as part of a sales pitch for the job (Chief Administrative Officer B, 2018). For lower profile positions however, this is not the case. As the interviews progressed, it became apparent to the interviewees that providing more information about the geographic area and the lifestyle that exists in Bruce County would be beneficial in the recruitment process. This could be easily achieved by providing additional information to potential candidates that may be interested in applying, and including links to this information in job postings. Without any previous knowledge of or personal connections to the area, there are likely a large number of great candidates that would not even consider applying.

Throughout the interview process with the Chief Administrative Officers, it became abundantly clear that the effort afforded towards recruiting suitable candidates is significantly

more for higher profile positions and the status quo is maintained for all other positions. Accommodation and additional incentives, such as more money, gym memberships, etc. were identified as being offered for higher profile jobs but no other positions. An extra week of vacation for senior staff was identified as a potential incentive in one municipality, but it was noted that the same incentive was not offered to other levels of staff as well (Chief Administrative Officer A, 2018). A year's worth of rent was offered for a new Chief Administrative Officer recruit in one instance and continued membership in international associations, including travel, was offered in another (Chief Administrative Officer A, 2018; Chief Administrative Officer B, 2018). No examples were provided of similar incentives for new or mid-career professional recruits that may be relocating to the area for employment.

Both interviewees identified spousal employment as being one of the greatest barriers faced in terms of recruitment of professionals to their municipalities (Chief Administrative Officer A, 2018; Chief Administrative Officer B, 2018). Often, even with the lower cost of living in Bruce County, one income is not always enough to support a family. Additionally, a spouse may also be invested in a professional career of their own with limited opportunities for employment in rural areas, which may inhibit a qualified professional's ability to relocate to a small, rural municipality. With the changing economy and increased ability to work remotely from home, this barrier may improve over time (Chief Administrative Officer B, 2018). Bruce County is also fortunate as it relates to the presence of Bruce Power and its strong workforce, so there are opportunities for spousal employment within a close proximity.

A second barrier identified as it relates to professional recruitment to rural municipalities is the concept of isolation (Chief Administrative Officer A, 2018). Often, rural

municipalities have limited retail amenities, less opportunities for recreation, and other services that are typically expected in urban areas. Lack of resources, amenities and services could lead to a feeling of isolation. The concept of professional isolation was also discussed – if an employment position does not work out, the individual is likely required to move again for new employment opportunities. Luckily, Bruce County does not necessarily have the same isolation concerns as other rural or remote municipalities, such as those in Northern Ontario.

Small, rural municipalities do not offer many opportunities for movement within an organization. As previously noted, a smaller number of people are doing a larger number of tasks compared to urban centres, so career potential is limited. This often leads to a retention concern, where staff are leaving to pursue new career opportunities in nearby locations. It was noted in the interview with Chief Administrative Officer B (2018) that in Bruce County and surrounding areas (Grey County, Huron County) there is quite often a situation where employees are just moving from one adjacent municipality to another in order to gain additional experience. It was noted that overall throughout the general area there is a lack of qualified individuals to fill the necessary positions. As an example, one Chief Administrative Officer was required to fill the role of Public Works Director for two years, until a public works professional from an adjacent municipality filled the role, which left the adjacent municipality understaffed for a significant amount of time until they were able to find a qualified individual (Chief Administrative Officer B, 2018).

In order to retain qualified individuals in the long term it was noted that training, professional development and investing in current employees is an asset to a local government organization (Chief Administrative Officer B, 2018). It was noted by Chief Administrative Officer

B (2018) that professional development offers opportunities for networking, identifies new and best practices in the field, and contributes to a more positive culture within the organization. Regardless of the many benefits however, professional development is often one area of the municipal operating budget that gets cut first, leaving a limited amount of money for professional development.

In both interviews, it was identified that exit interviews almost always take place, but employees are not always transparent in their reasons for leaving if they do not feel comfortable discussing their departure with the individual conducting the interview (Chief Administrative Officer A, 2018; Chief Administrative Officer B, 2018). Exit interviews offer the municipality an opportunity to make systematic changes that need to be addressed and offer opportunities to improve culture in the workplace.

Interestingly, it was noted by both Chief Administrative Officers that the primary reasons their staff have left have not been related to the rural nature of the municipalities they work in, but rather for reasons related to opportunities for advancement, dissatisfaction with the culture or frustration with supervision or colleagues. It was interesting to realize that many of these employees are leaving to pursue employment in adjacent rural municipalities, not necessarily to move to large urban centres. Contrary to the information relating to rural physician recruitment in which it is identified that rural areas are constantly competing with urban areas, rural local government organizations appear to primarily be competing with each other. Although understanding the rural lifestyle and the opportunities and benefits of working in rural municipalities is important, local government organizations need to investigate

opportunities for career advancement within their organizations as well as other retention efforts that may keep qualified individuals employed with them.

The interviews conducted with two Chief Administrative Officers in Bruce County were useful to confirm that the factors and challenges associated with recruiting physicians to rural municipalities are similar to the factors and challenges associated with recruiting local government professionals. The interviews were also useful in determining that the methods used to recruit physicians can be applied to the recruitment of local government professionals to rural municipalities in Ontario. Spousal employment, housing and accommodation, as well as a sense of isolation (both personally and professionally) are similar in both instances. It was identified that Physician Recruitment Specialists in Bruce County go to significant lengths to market the County as Ontario's best kept secret and sell the lifestyle that the County is able to provide. Local government organizations provide little to any information related to the area when recruiting for professional positions, so this is an area that can be easily improved upon. Save for high profile positions such as the Fire Chief, Police Chief, or Chief Administrative Officer, it was determined that little additional effort is put into recruiting other professionals, such as planners, engineers or accountants.

Throughout the interviews and discussions with the Chief Administrative Officers, it became very apparent that there are opportunities that exist to reach out to potential candidates that would not put a strain on the municipality in terms of resources, financial or otherwise. The use of social media in recruitment and marketing is emerging and can be a valuable tool in finding suitable candidates, and promoting the County as a great place to live

and work in conjunction with advertising vacancies would be useful in possibly encouraging qualified individuals to apply that may not otherwise consider the position.

8.0 Ethics Associated with Recruitment of Local Government Professionals

In the context of the recruitment of local government professionals, professional ethics is an important consideration. Many professional institutes and associations are governed by codes of conduct which have explicit rules speaking to items such as conflicts of interest and acceptance of gifts. As a result, the consideration of personal and professional ethics requires special attention prior to accepting bonuses or other remuneration for employment. A potential employee could find themselves in a professional conflict of interest depending on the terms of employment.

As an example, the Canadian Institute of Planners (CIP) and Ontario Professional Planners Institute (OPPI) have a professional code of conduct that is required to be adhered to by all members. Section 2.7 of CIP's Professional Code of Conduct (2016) states that "members shall not offer or accept any financial or other inducements, including prospective employment that could, or could appear to, influence or affect professional opportunities or planning advice." As a result of this section of the Code, financial incentives for prospective employment could put the employee into a conflict situation depending on the parameters outlined in the employment contract.

Section 77 of the Professional Engineers Act of Ontario speaks to the Code of Ethics of the Association and the principles that guide professional engineers in fulfilling their duties

(Professional Engineers Act, 1990). Compared to the code of conduct for professional planners, there are no provisions specifically relating to financial incentives related to employment.

Regardless of the institute or organization, it is important for all professionals to consider their professional obligations as well as any conflict of interest, either real or perceived, that could arise. In the event of a conflict, the professional may be subject to discipline by the respective authority. Although this is a relatively understudied area of the literature, enough information exists from professional institutes and organizations to assist a professional in making an informed ethical decision about employment.

9.0 Recommendations and Conclusion

This study suggests that there are opportunities to learn from the recruitment of physicians in rural municipalities and that these findings are applicable to recruiting professionals in a local government context. Bruce County is unique in the opportunities and lifestyle it can provide in comparison to other small, rural municipalities in Ontario. With the presence of Bruce Power and the economic activities associated with the contractors in the area associated with Bruce Power, a strong workforce and wide variety of employers exist which results in additional opportunities for spousal employment. With a strong workforce comes an abundance of other opportunities such as schools, daycares, recreation and programs that are important to working professionals and families. In consideration of the success Bruce County has had recruiting physicians, area municipalities should take the opportunity to apply lessons from physician recruitment to recruiting professionals to their local government organizations.

Although differences exist between recruiting physicians and other professionals, there are many similar factors that contribute to why professionals may choose to pursue employment in Bruce County or other rural municipalities. It was identified that rural background is the single largest factor associated with rural medical practice, which is assumed to be the same in local government. Although this is not a factor that can be influenced later on in life, there are many other avenues that local government organizations can pursue to encourage professionals to seek employment with their organizations. Local government administrators should consider the best management practices and lessons learned from rural physician recruitment and consider the applicability to issues they may be facing related to recruiting professionals to their organizations. These recommendations are summarized in the following list:

1. Encourage the use of social media and multiple media outlets when recruiting and encourage staff to reach out to their professional networks. A personal connection to a rural or remote area can be a positive factor when considering prospective employment.
2. Continue searching until a suitable candidate has been found. You are not required to settle for a prospective employee that does not have the knowledge, skills or training that is needed. Find the right person for the right job.
3. Consider opportunities for rural work experience through co-op opportunities and summer jobs in specific fields (such as planning or engineering). Experience with a rural municipality may encourage a former short-term contract employee to return in the future. Collaborating with local colleges or universities to offer certificates, diplomas or

other professional development opportunities in the area of public administration can assist with recruiting qualified employees and retaining current employees as well.

4. Sell the lifestyle that small, rural municipalities provide. Along with job postings, make information about the community, recreational activities, schools and daycare, cost of living, etc. easily available.
5. Assist with short-term accommodation if a new employee is relocating from far away, either in the form of financial assistance for a defined period of time or assistance locating suitable accommodation.
6. Partner with community groups and local organizations to help welcome new employees as members of the community. Employees that are engaged and involved with the community inherently develop personal relationships and will experience an increased sense of place and belonging, with a higher likelihood of remaining in the rural area long-term.

In addition to the recommendations identified above related to recruitment, public administrators should investigate opportunities relating to retention as well. Through the interviews it was identified that rural local government organizations are not competing with urban centres to keep their staff, but rather competing with adjacent rural municipalities. As a result, it is further recommended that opportunities for career advancement within local government organizations be investigated in an attempt to retain qualified staff. Additional opportunities such as mentorship programs that contribute to a professional's development within an organization can be valuable in retaining staff, and can additionally result in a lesser need for recruitment if lower turnover exists.

Bruce County, and other rural local government organizations, should continue to be innovative in their recruitment practices and consider opportunities to accommodate prospective employees when filling vacancies. Although these recommendations and factors that contribute to rural recruitment are not a one-size fits all, reviewing current practices and adapting to the changing workforce will result in human resources efficiencies and improved recruitment of qualified individuals.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Map of Bruce County



Figure 1 Map of Bruce County (Bruce County, 2018)

Appendix B: Physician Recruitment Specialist Interview Questions

1. How do you advertise vacancies? Do you target advertisements among specific groups (i.e. medical societies, universities, etc.) or reach out to prospective physicians that may have an interest in employment in Bruce County (i.e. those that may be currently located in rural municipalities or have expressed interest in rural healthcare)?
2. Over what geographical area do you advertise positions that are available? Is it on a Regional, Provincial or National level? Are there any disadvantages to increasing the geographical area to which you advertise the position?
3. Do you market the benefits of the rural municipality in which the position is available? If so, how do you do so? Is special attention paid to marketing the Region itself, in terms of cost of living, education, recreational amenities, etc., or is the focus of the recruitment solely on factors associated with the job?
4. How long are vacancies posted for? If a suitable candidate is not found is the posting extended?
5. What benefits and incentives are you able to provide to prospective physicians? (Note: If the following items are not identified by the interviewee, they will be asked to comment on the following specific factors).
 - a. Flexible financial remuneration? Is there room for negotiating pay, bonuses, etc.?
 - b. Spousal employment? Are there relationships and opportunities with other employers in the Region to accommodate potential employment for spouses of physicians?
 - c. Daycare/education? Availability of daycare spaces are a concern in small, rural municipalities. Are there any accommodations that can be made for young children on short notice or is finding suitable daycare/education the responsibility of the individual?
 - d. Housing/accommodation? Are short-term housing opportunities provided (i.e. either hotel or rental accommodation) for new physicians until permanent accommodation is found?
6. What are the greatest barriers that exist in terms of recruitment that are experienced?
7. If recruited, how long do physicians tend to stay?
8. Are exit interviews completed when a physician chooses to leave their position? If so, what are the primary reasons physicians depart?

Appendix C: Chief Administrative Officer Interview Questions

1. How do you advertise job vacancies? Are ads targeted to specific groups (e.g. professional associations such as the Ontario Provincial Planners Institute, Ontario Municipal Administrators Association, etc.) or individuals that may have expertise in small municipalities? Do you advertise outside of the Region on a Provincial or National scale?
2. Do you market the geographical area or provide additional information as it relates to the area, housing, amenities, etc.?
3. Do you provide accommodations for potential employees attending an interview, either in the form of a hotel or short-term rental? Do you make any additional accommodations for potential employees while they are in the area, such as tours to highlight the Region, housing, recreation, etc.?
4. Do you have competitive benefits or incentives you are able to offer prospective employees (e.g. flex time, additional vacation time, etc.)? If not, would you be willing to offer competitive benefits or incentives to recruit professionals to your municipality?
5. Would you consider assisting prospective employees with housing accommodation within the short-term when they arrive in your municipality, either through hotel stay or short-term rental accommodation?
6. What are the greatest barriers you face in terms of recruitment?
7. What other factors do you believe inhibit your ability to recruit talent to your municipality?
8. Do you conduct exit interviews when an employee resigns? If so, what are the primary factors that contribute to the resignation? If not, why not?