

Comparing the Provincial Nominee Program and the Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot in Manitoba, Canada: Four Communities, Four Approaches

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Canada, like other developed nations, faces challenges in dispersing immigrants beyond major urban centers. In response, the federal government has introduced policies to promote immigration to rural municipalities, beginning with the Provincial Nominee Program (PNP). This program grants provinces and communities a degree of autonomy to assess their labor market needs and select suitable candidates for immigration. In Manitoba, the PNP has achieved relatively high long-term retention rates for newcomers compared to other rural areas in Canada. Building on this, the government launched the Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot (RNIP) in 2019, a five-year initiative that differs markedly from the PNP regarding selection processes and the visa status of successful applicants. This research conducts a comparative analysis of the PNP and RNIP implementations in four Manitoba communities: Winkler, Morden, Brandon, and Altona/Rhineland. It provides a detailed explanation of each program and a succinct overview of the four communities. Furthermore, the study identifies commonalities and significant differences between the PNP and RNIP, drawing on interviews with immigration coordinators conducted in 2022 and 2023. This comparative approach aims to illuminate the strengths and weaknesses of each program, thereby offering insights into how regional immigration strategies can be optimized to enhance the retention and integration of newcomers in rural areas.

1. Introduction

Like other developed countries, Canada faces the challenge of depopulation of the countryside, which has gone from 37 percent of the population in 1966 to only 17 percent in 2024 (Singer, 2024). At present, large urban centers account for more than 80 percent of Canadian residents despite comprising less than 1 percent of the total land area (Finlay, 2022). This phenomenon relates to shifts in agriculture, an occupation that accounted for one-third of Canadians in 1921 (Statistics Canada, 2011) but that represents only 1.6

percent of the population today (Statistics Canada, 2023a).

The Government of Canada, through Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), has encouraged the immigration of over five million persons since 2000 (OECD, 2024), with foreign-born residents comprising over 23 percent of the total population (Statistics Canada, 2022). However, Canada’s flagship Federal Skilled Worker Program (FSWP), implemented in 1967 and employing a point-based selection process (Dirks, 2006), has struggled to facilitate settlement outside major urban centers. It is estimated that just three major cities, Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver, currently receive over 70 percent of immigrants to the country (El-Assal, 2020). There are various reasons why small and medium rural population centers fail to attract immigrants. According to a 2022 Action Canada Fellowship Report, six primary challenges to settlement in rural areas need to be addressed to make settlement more attractive:

Table 1: Challenges to settlement in rural areas

#	Challenge
1	Limited employment opportunities, underemployment
2	Inadequate housing
3	Inadequate public transportation services
4	A lack of connectedness and a support network, and a feeling of isolation
5	Discomfort living outside an urban center
6	Racism, xenophobia, and intolerance

(Source: Affonso et al., 2022)

The above list outlines problems many small Canadian towns and cities must consider carefully to attract and retain new residents. To begin, they need to offer employment opportunities, housing, and services to meet the basic needs of newcomers. However, even with such conditions met, they must also consider strategies to welcome new members and bring them into the community. Failure to do so risks immigrants behaving in predictable ways: migrating to locations where they feel their economic and social needs are being fulfilled.

Considering this reality, a predictable measurement of the success of a given immigration initiative is its ability to retain newcomers post-arrival. While immigrant retention one year following arrival is typically recorded, more extended measurements provide increased insight into the success of a given initiative. According to Dennler (2023), “onward migration is the highest four to seven years after arrival, indicating that positive early experiences may be key to retaining immigrants in Canada and reversing the recent spike in onward migration (p4).” As this indicates, monitoring of retention rates has

prompted recognition of the importance of preparing communities for newcomers with positive early experiences, which can be seen in the inauguration of the Welcoming Communities Initiative (ICI), launched in 2006 to create connections and eliminate barriers between newcomers and Canadians (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2010), resulting in the creation of a 2023 toolkit in which nineteen characteristicsⁱ⁾ of welcoming communities are outlined, along with a five-step process to measure communities' preparedness to welcome and integrate new arrivals (Esses et al., 2023).

As recognition of the importance of building welcoming communities has expanded, the Government of Canada has partnered with provinces to initiate localized immigration initiatives. Beginning with the signing of federal/provincial agreements in 1996, the Provincial Nominee Program (PNP) was designed to address the unique demographic and economic challenges faced by provinces by granting provincial autonomy to the design and management of immigration programs for skilled workers (Picot et al., 2024), with some of the first test cases undertaken in the four Atlantic provinces—New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador (1999), Prince Edward Island (2001), and Nova Scotia (2002) (Everden, 2008). While the PNP has been credited for raising the share of immigration to the Atlantic provinces from 1% to 7%, (Picot et al., 2023a) note that economic immigrants to Newfoundland and Labrador were very few during the period.

Furthermore, analysis in the years following the inauguration of PNP in Atlantic Canada revealed that the region faced a high rate of outmigration relative to other provinces, with initial retention rates failing to reach 65% (Baldacchino, 2015), and that 74.3% of interprovincial out-migrants have moved to Alberta and Ontario over the past two decades (Whalen, et al., 2021). While some evidence indicates that the PNP program successfully retains immigrants for one year, retention rates in New Brunswick at 3 and 5 years reportedly dropped to 60% and 50% respectively (McDonald & Miah, 2019). Among the reasons for outmigration, there is some indication that local resistance to immigrants in areas such as Prince Edward Island is a factor limiting the success of immigration initiatives (Baldacchino, 2015).

The challenges to facilitating rural immigration notwithstanding, some areas of Canada have demonstrated an ability to retain newcomers following their arrival. In particular, the Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program (MPNP), with a 5-year retention rate of 84.7% (Picot et al., 2023b), has demonstrated the capacity for rural regions in Canada to attract and settle immigrants. That PNP programs across Canada have not always met expectations is underscored by the introduction by the federal government of the Atlantic Immigration Pilot Program (AIP) in 2017 and the Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot

Program (RNIP) in 2019 in eleven communities across Canada, with the stated objective of extending the benefits of immigration to Canada’s rural and northern communities (Hagar, 2021). Preliminary results have been positive in the RNIP communities included in this study. ⁱⁱ⁾

As a pilot program scheduled to conclude in July 2024, minimal research exists outlining the RNIP program and how it differs from PNP programs in place for over two decades. Furthermore, despite growing recognition of the importance of creating welcoming communities, there is limited investigation of the differences between communities in which the above immigration initiatives are being facilitated. To address this situation, a comparative analysis is necessary to elucidate systemic factors mitigating newcomer retention across communities. This research examines the implementation of two immigration programs, the Provincial Nominee Program (PNP) and the Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot (RNIP), in four rural Manitoba communities that display significant differences in ethnicity, economy, and culture, and yet are all experiencing success attracting immigrants.

Figure 1: Location of Winkler, Morden, Altona and Brandon



(Source: FreeUSandWorld Maps, n.d.)

Explanations of both programs are followed by a brief description of each community, after which a comparison of each community’s approach is offered. Finally, factors impacting the success of the PNP in Morden and Winkler in newcomer retention, as well as preliminary positive results in Brandon and Altona, are discussed.

2. The Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program

Among modern federated states, Canada is distinctive in that although the national government exercises final authority in determining who can immigrate to the country, federal and provincial governments share jurisdiction, particularly in the selection of immigrant candidates (Seidle, 2013). The Provincial Nominee Program (PNP)⁽ⁱⁱⁱ⁾ was created to address two fundamental concerns: first, as mentioned above, the majority of immigrants coming through the Federal Skilled Worker Program (FSWP) were choosing to settle in only three provinces: Ontario, British Columbia, and Quebec. By allowing provinces to nominate candidates using specialized selection criteria, the PNP was intended to promote the retention of immigrants in the areas to which they were selected (Hornstein, 2022). Second, the criteria of the FSWP resulted in immigrants entering the country qualified for occupations that did not always reflect the job demand in rural areas (Seidle, 2013).

Although located in the geographic center of Canada, Manitoba is isolated from Canada's major urban centers. The capital city, Winnipeg, is home to a population of over 780,000 (City of Winnipeg, 2023), with the provincial population standing at 1.34 million (Statistics Canada, 2021a). Facing a gradual decline in the national fertility rate (1.33 children per woman in 2022; Provencher & Galbraith; 2024), the Province of Manitoba has been aggressive in facilitating immigration, with the result that the City of Winnipeg (2023) projects its 2046 population to grow to over 1 million, and the province continuing at an annual compound growth rate of 1 percent to reach 1.47 million (Ferris, 2023). These growth projections stand in contrast to past difficulties experienced by the province in attracting newcomers, which between 1971 and 2006 saw the provincial population grow only 16.2 percent compared with national growth of 46.6 percent (Carter et al., 2010).

With an initial PNP agreement signed between the Province of Manitoba and the Federal government in 1998 (Seidle, 2013), the MPNP has quickly become an important stream for immigrants into both Winnipeg and surrounding rural areas. Beginning with 1,097 nominees in 2000 (Carter et al., 2009) Manitoba has increased nominations over time so that 9,076 candidates were selected in 2023 (Province of Manitoba, n.d.).

The MPNP currently accepts applicants in the following categories: 1) Skilled Workers (SW) Stream for skilled workers currently working in Manitoba or residing outside of Canada; 2) International Education Stream (EIS) for international students who have graduated from a university or college in Manitoba and who wish to live and work in

Manitoba; and 3) Business Investor Stream (BIS) for international business investors and entrepreneurs who wish to start or purchase a business in Manitoba (Lewis, 2010). The following table offers a simplified example of the MPNP application process.

Table 2: MPNP Application Process

#	Step
1	Applicants create a profile account on the Government of Manitoba (GOM) website.
2	Applicants submit an Expression of Interest (EOI).
3	Selected applicants receive a Letter of Advice to Apply (LAA) from GOM.
4	Applicants submit MPNP application + supporting documents.
5	GOM approves nomination.
6	Applicant applies to Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) for permanent residency status.

(Source: Province of Manitoba, 2022)

Similar to the Federal Skilled Workers Program, the MPNP employs a 6-factor points scale (Appendix A). However, unlike the FSWP, the MPNP includes a factor for Risk Assessment, which deducts points from applicants who studied or worked in a province other than Manitoba.

Table 3: MPNP Expression of Interest Ranking Points Grid

Assessment Factor	Maximum Points
Language Proficiency	125
Age	75
Work Experience	175
Education	125
Adaptability	500
Risk Assessment	-200
Maximum Overall Points	1000

(Source: Province of Manitoba, 2018)

The Province of Manitoba also delegates authority to local municipalities to select nominees under strategic initiatives (Lewis, 2010), who award successful candidates 500 Community Points in the Adaptability factor. In the case of Morden, which inaugurated the Morden Community Driven Immigration Initiative (MCDII) in 2012, applicants first submit an application to the City of Morden website, after which they undergo a comprehensive screening, including a one-week exploratory visit, which is made at the expense of the applicant.^{iv)}

Table 4: MCDII Application Process

#	Step
1	Applicants submit an application on the City of Morden website.
2	Selected applicants are subject to screening including online interviews and one-week exploratory visit.
3	Successful applicants are awarded Community Points by the City of Morden.
4	Applicants create a profile account on the Government of Manitoba (GOM) website.
5	Applicants submit an Expression of Interest (EOI).
6	Selected applicants receive a Letter of Advice to Apply (LAA) from GOM.
7	Applicants submit MPNP application + supporting documents.
8	GOM approves nomination.
9	Applicant applies to Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) for permanent residency status.

(Source: City of Morden, n.d.)

Community Points are applied when submitting an Expression of Interest to the province. These points ensure that applicants who are evaluated as most likely to settle in Morden receive preferential treatment over MPNP applicants who may have higher points for education and work experience but have not obtained points from a rural Manitoba community participating in the MPNP.

An important characteristic of the MPNP is that although points are awarded to applicants with long-term job offers from Manitoba employers, once approved by IRCC applicants receive permanent resident status, which allows them to change employers and/or relocate to any region in Canada once approved.

3. The Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot

Launched in 2019, the Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot (RNIP) is a five-year pilot program aimed at further addressing the difficulties experienced by rural Canadian communities in facilitating long-term immigration. According to the federal government, the RNIP was inaugurated to assist “smaller rural and northern communities to attract, integrate and retain foreign skilled workers” in order to meet economic development and labor needs (Government of Canada, 2019, para 1). While the MPNP has functioned to increase overall immigration to the province, research has shown that although 94.4 percent of PNP nominees resided in the province one year after immigrating, that number dropped to 84.7 percent after five years (Picot et al., 2023b).

RNIP differs from PNP in several fundamental aspects. To begin, while PNP allows

communities to select nominees based on assessments of labor needs, RNIP nominees are nominated based on existing job offers for skilled positions. IRCC explains:

The RNIP is an economic pilot program targeted to foreign nationals who have received a recommendation from a participating community and obtained a job offer within the same community's boundaries; who meet minimum education, work experience, language proficiency, and settlement fund requirements; and who intend to reside in the recommending community. (IRCC, n.d., para 1)

In addition to all nominees securing employment prior to immigration, a second fundamental difference from PNP involves the status of immigrants upon arrival to their communities. While a small number of RNIP nominees do obtain permanent residence status prior to entering Canada, the vast majority come with temporary work visas. This allows nominees to engage in work while their applications for permanent residency are being processed; however, their visa status limits opportunities to change employers or move outside the community until their PR is approved.

A further difference between RNIP and PNP concerns the involvement of the Province of Manitoba. In contrast to PNP, where applicants must be approved by the province before making an application to IRCC, RNIP nominees apply directly to IRCC once they have gained a community recommendation from a RNIP-participating community. Table 4 contains an overview of the RNIP nomination process in the Town of Altona and the surrounding Municipality of Rhineland.

Table 5: Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot in Altona/Rhineland

Step	Explanation
1	Local employers agree to participate in RNIP to secure workers following a screening by the immigration office (SEED).
2	Jobs are posted on SEED website, etc. Candidates create a profile on the SEED website, after which they apply for posted positions.
3	Immigration officers screen applicants and then send qualified candidates to employers for further screening.
4	Employer screens candidate independently, provides Offer of Employment to candidate, candidate completes IRCC form IMM 5911 and submits to immigration office.
5	Immigration office conducts face-to-face (in person or online) interviews to verify information, and assists applicants in submitting necessary paperwork for RNIP community recommendation. This process also includes a points-based assessment of community-specific criteria. Successful candidates are recommended to an independent selection committee.
6	Independent selection committee provides final approval. Candidate awarded community recommendation.
7	Candidate applies to IRCC for a permanent residency visa, as well as a temporary working permit to enter Canada expediently to work in Altona (PR applications require longer processing times than temp. work permits). In many cases, candidates enter Canada on temporary work permits.
8	Candidate comes to Altona (with spouse/children) and begins working immediately.
9	Permanent residency approved approximately 6 to 12 months following entrance to Canada.

(Source: Supporting Entrepreneurs, Economic Development (SEED), n.d.)

In selecting candidates, each RNIP community develops community-specific evaluation criteria assigning points for applicant characteristics deemed beneficial to long-term adaptation to the community. In the case of the two communities in this research, Altona/Rhineland and Brandon, the former assigns more points for applicant age, industry-specific work experience, and experience living in small communities, while the latter assigns points for language ability, past residency in Brandon, and the presence of family members already living in the community (for a breakdown of both point systems, see Appendix B).

Before making further comparisons of the four communities in the research, a brief summary of the characteristics and economies of each region is offered.

4. Four communities in Manitoba

The four communities in this research, Morden, Winkler, Brandon, and Altona/Rhineland, are located in the geographic south and southwest of the Province of Manitoba. The region is characterized by short, warm summers, that give way to long, cold winters,

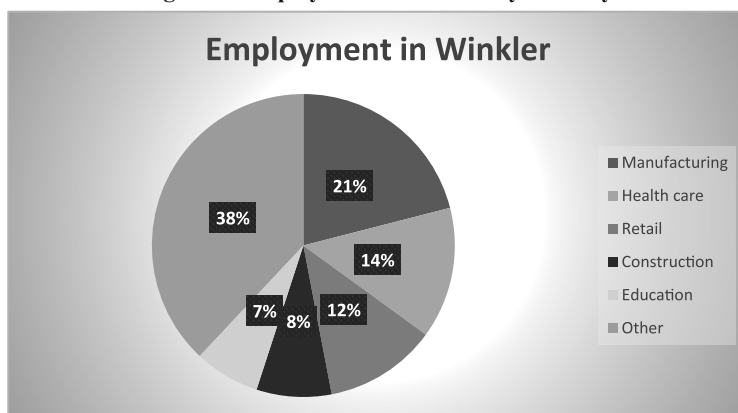
with an annual snowfall of 115cm. The daily mean temperature is around four degrees Celsius, which is often considerably colder than what many immigrants have previously experienced (Environment Canada, 2023).

4.1 Winkler, Manitoba

Of the four communities in this study, Winkler was the first to aggressively employ immigration for economic development. Settled primarily by Russian Mennonites in the late 1800s (Lyon, 2012), in response to labor shortages and a declining population Winkler began settling immigrants in 1997 in what was referred to as the “Winkler Initiative.” This began first in cooperation with Citizenship and Multiculturalism Manitoba, and then from 1999 as part of the MPNP, with a total of 1832 immigrants settled between 1999-2004 (Silvius, 2005). One of the first groups to settle in Winkler under the new PNP initiative were fifty families from Germany and Russia of predominantly Mennonite background (Regional Connections Immigrant Services, n.d.). Of these first individuals, many of whom lacked the requisite language skills or university education to enter Canada through the Federal Skilled Worker Program, 42 of 50 families continued to reside in Winkler ten years after their arrival (Dharssi, 2016).

Although Winkler and the surrounding area are home to immigrants from more than 75 countries (Regional Connections, 2023), of the 43 percent of residents who indicated that their mother tongue was not an official language (i.e., English or French), 34 percent were native German speakers (Statistics Canada, 2021b), reflecting the community’s preference, at least initially, to select immigrants for considerations related to cultural compatibility.

Figure 2: Employment in Winkler by industry



(Source: created by the author using data from Statistics Canada, 2023b)

Winkler has a strong manufacturing base, including leading companies such as Triple E Canada Ltd., a recreational vehicle manufacturer, and Grandeur Housing Ltd., a manufacturer of modular buildings. Winkler Meats, a pork and poultry processor, is also a major employer. Although manufacturing represents the largest single industry, Winkler enjoys a mixed economy.

4.2 Morden

Founded in 1882 around a Canadian Pacific Railway water station, the City of Morden was named for an early resident on whose land the community was established (Manitoba Historical Society, 2023). Morden was incorporated as a town in 1903 (Lyon, 2012) and granted city status in 2012 (The Canadian Business Journal, 2023). Situated roughly twenty kilometers from the United States/Manitoba border, Morden stands near the geographic center of North America and roughly one hour from the Manitoba provincial capital of Winnipeg.

From 1961 to 1996, Morden saw its population fall by 7.1 percent (Rounds, 2001). Following Winkler's example, Morden slowly began to turn to immigration to meet its demographic and economic needs. Initial activities saw Morden accept 142 immigrants between 1999-2004 (Silvius, 2005); however, in the period from 2006 to 2011, the population grew more than 19% (The Canadian Business Journal, 2023) and another 13% from 2016 to 2019 (Statistics Canada, 2021c). Furthermore, almost half of the growth (47%) in this latter period came from immigration (Government of Canada, 2019b). In a time when many Manitoba rural communities are shrinking, Morden has become one of the fastest-growing communities in the province (Henderson, 2022).

Aggressive immigration policies in Morden began in 2012 with the inauguration of the Morden Community Driven Immigration Initiative (MCDII), which according to former mayor Brandon Burley, was designed to address specific labor shortages in high-skilled occupations, such as accountants, doctors, and dentists, but has grown to expand to other skilled categories, including tradespeople and other occupations requiring specialized skills (Henderson, 2022). As of 2019, immigrants make up 19% of Morden's total population (Government of Canada, 2019c) which reached 9,103 in 2021 (Government of Canada, 2021c).

Unlike neighboring Winkler, from its inception Morden has always been home to residents from various cultural backgrounds. Following the early buffalo hunters, settlement by European settlers engaged in agriculture began in 1874, who were soon joined by settlers of Jewish and Mennonite backgrounds (Lyon, 2012). The role of Morden as an

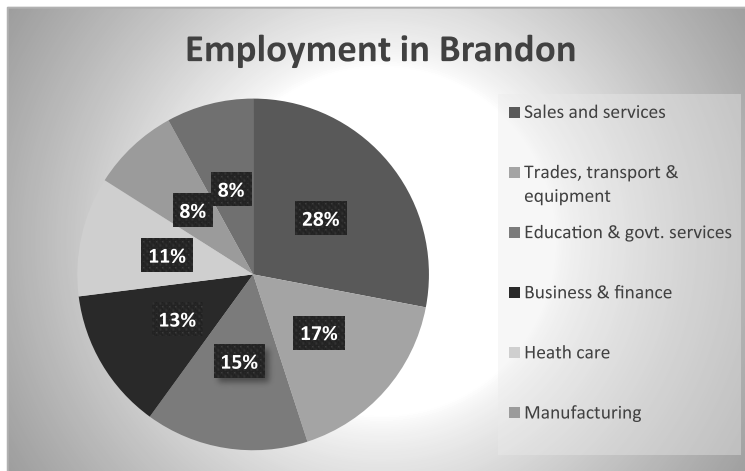
agricultural hub was further bolstered by the establishment of a Federal Research Station for horticulture research in 1915 (Jones, 2013). In addition to being more culturally diverse, Morden’s early existence as a “government town” has resulted in it being more economically diverse than its manufacturing-focused neighbor, Winkler.

4.3 Brandon

Located roughly two hours to the west of the capital city, Winnipeg, Brandon has seen its population grow to over 51,000 residents, a 22 percent increase from 2001 numbers (Economic Development Brandon, n.d.). According to 2021 census data, the average age of the population is 39.1 years; however, residents 65 and over represent only 16 percent of the population (Statistics Canada, 2021d). The majority of Brandon residents speak English as a first language, with only 17 percent reporting that their mother tongue was neither English nor French (Statistics Canada, 2021d).

As a service and educational hub for a surrounding population of slightly less than 200,000 (City of Brandon, n.b.), Brandon has long outgrown its agricultural roots. In addition to a university and college, the city is also home to a 650,000-square-foot pork processing plant opened by Maple Leaf Consumer Foods in 1999 (Maple Leaf Foods, n.d.).

Figure 3: Employment in Brandon by industry



(Source: created by the author using data from Economic Development Brandon, n.d.)

Compared with Winkler, Morden, and Altona/Rhineland, Brandon has developed non-agricultural-related industries. In addition, its role as an educational hub facilitates a steady stream of international students, some of whom remain in Brandon following graduation. According to Economic Development Brandon, prior to the opening of the Maple Leaf

plant, Brandon did not actively search for immigrants. However, to source the first shifts of workers, Brandon turned first to the Temporary Foreign Workers Program (TFWP), before utilizing the MPNP (Interview with B1 on 11/9/2023). It has been employing the RNIP since 2019. Following large hiring in 1999, immigration remained modest until 2003, after which Brandon officials began to increasingly turn to immigration to meet labor needs, with over 7,900 immigrants arriving over the past decade (Economic Development Brandon, n.d.).

4.4 Altona/Rhineland

The combined Town of Altona and the Municipality of Rhineland boast a total population of slightly more than 10,000 (Statistics Canada, 2021d; Statistics Canada, 2021e). The town was settled in the 1870s, primarily by Mennonites from the Ukraine region of Russia (Lyon, 2015). While the economy remains centered on field-crop agriculture, it also contains small-to-medium livestock operations and a growing agricultural-related manufacturing sector (Rhineland Municipality, n.d.). The largest employers are Friesens, a printing company founded in 1907 and is currently home to over 500 workers (Friesens, n.d.), and Elmer's Manufacturing, which employs over 180 workers to manufacture implements such as crop cultivators, grain carts, and bale processors (Elmer's Manufacturing, n.d.).

Rhineland residents are young (31.0 years; Statistics Canada 2021f) compared with Altona (41.0 years; Statistics Canada, 2021e), with the availability of retirement facilities in Altona being a partial explanation for the discrepancy. Since the start of the RNIP program in 2019, Altona/Rhineland has grown its population by 355 people (3.5%; Derksen, 2024).

5. Comparing four communities

The following sections contain data obtained from interviews conducted by the researcher with immigration coordinators in Morden in 2022, and Altona and Brandon in 2023. Table 6 compares salient factors of the MPNP and RNIP in the four communities.

Table 6: A Comparison of PNP and RNIP

	Winkler	Morden	Brandon	Altona & Rhineland
Population (2021)	32,655 (includes surrounding area)	9,929	54,268	10,086
Program	MPNP	MPNP	RNIP	RNIP
Business Surveys	Required	Required	Not Required	Not Required
Online Interview	N/A ^{v)}	Yes	Yes	Yes
Exploratory Visit	Not Required	Required	Not Required	Not Required
Visa on Arrival	Permanent Residency	Permanent Residency	Work	Work
Job Status on Arrival	Employed,			
Unemployed	Employed,			
Unemployed	Employed	Employed		
Settlement Services	Regional Connections	Regional Connections	Westman Services	Regional Connections
Work Mentor	N/A	No	Yes	Yes
Community Mentor	N/A	No	No	Yes

(Source: Ostman, in press 1; in press 2)

One difference between the PNP and RNIP involves the use of business surveys to assess community labor needs. The immigration coordinator (IC) in Morden indicated that the regular conducting of such surveys was a stipulation for community participation in the PNP. However, both immigration coordinators in Altona/Rhineland and Brandon indicated that such surveys were not required for RNIP. Additionally, one IC expressed the opinion that survey activities were of minimal value compared with direct relationships with local business owners when attempting to assess local labor needs.

A similarity between communities involved the use of multiple online interviews and community-specific criteria to assess candidate suitability for life in the community. All three ICs indicated that Skype interviews also functioned to reduce the use of agents or brokers in the application process^{vi)}, as applicants are forced to communicate face-to-face to confirm application details. All ICs indicated that the final decision concerning appli-

cant nominations was made by independent selection committees.^{vii)} In this way, business owners, politicians and other members of the community are given a say about who will come to their community. It is significant that although employers have significant input regarding candidate selection, they do not have the final say regarding newcomer selection.

Of the four communities, the use of the exploratory visit was unique to Morden, whose IC indicated that it was an important factor in determining candidate adaptability before granting community points. Conversely, ICs involved in RNIP indicated that exploratory visits represented a significant financial burden to applicants and that high retention rates were more the product of aftercare and settlement services in the initial period following the arrival of immigrants.

Another point common to ICs implementing PNP and RNIP was their careful evaluation of spouses/partners, often to find candidates for local job positions not open to PNP/RNIP applicants. Among the four communities in this research, attitudes towards applicants' children differed; however, in all cases, applicants were allowed to immigrate as families.

A significant difference between PNP and RNIP involves the visa and job statuses of immigrants on arrival to their respective communities. Whereas successful PNP candidates are granted permanent residency (PR) prior to embarkation in Canada, most RNIP candidates initially enter Canada with work visas, often obtaining PR within a year following arrival. Although it is possible for RNIP candidates to enter Canada with PR status, the IC in Brandon indicated that immigrants entering on working visas was preferable as it guaranteed residency in the community and provided an opportunity for long-term settlement to take place.

Concerning job status, PNP and RNIP often differed. Although it is possible for PNP candidates to secure job offers prior to immigrating, the IC in Morden related that many candidates come to the community with skills for in-demand jobs but not secured positions. By contrast, RNIP begins with job offers from employers, ensuring that immigrants begin employment shortly after arrival.

Settlement services were provided in all four communities by a federal office (Regional Connections) or a private settlement service provider (Westman Services). ICs in Morden and Brandon indicated that the demand for settlement services was greater than currently provided and that newly arrived immigrants often came for help to ICs, who were forced to send them to the settlement service provider operating at a separate location.

Another difference between PNP and RNIP involves the use of workplace mentors in RNIP. ICs in Altona/Rhineland indicated that an employee was assigned to work with a newly arrived immigrant for six months to facilitate a smooth transition to their new work environment. Additionally, Altona/Rhineland (through the Regional Connections office) matches new arrivals with community mentors. These are volunteers who work with immigrants for one year to aid in their adjustment to the community.

A final difference involves how communities approached the question of cultural diversity in the selection process. In its initial stages, Winkler aggressively sought candidates whose cultural background was similar to that of the local population (i.e., German-speaking). By contrast, Morden's IC indicated that candidate selection involved balancing various ethnic groups and that cultural diversity was an important community characteristic. Brandon, by far the largest community of the four, initially sourced workers from a single cultural background (Filipinos) to staff entire shifts in preparation for the opening of Maple Leaf Foods' pork processing plant. The IC in Brandon related that this was done for practical concerns (i.e., to avoid workplace confusion at the outset); however, while they also indicated cultural diversity was a consideration in the candidate selection process, this was primarily to mitigate problems stemming from any one cultural group dominating a given workplace. Finally, although Friesens Corporation has historically recruited from specific areas (The Philippines; South Africa), the IC asserted that under the RNIP, Altona/Rhineland recruits candidates based on their compatibility with the community rather than their cultural background.

6. Factors underscoring long-term retention

The PNP in Winkler and Morden has demonstrated above-average long-term retention rates, while the RNIP in Altona is on track to meeting immigration goals.^{viii)} While geographically concentrated, each community presents salient differences in their economies, ethnic composition, transportation infrastructure, and educational opportunities for newcomers and their families. Analysis of the four communities indicates several areas that may contribute to long-term retention.

Although PNP and RNIP employ distinct application processes, the communities surveyed utilized extensive online interviews and community-specific selection criteria to ensure that candidates were suited for rural life. Furthermore, selection committees, where employers and other stakeholders jointly decide applications, contribute to newcomer selection being a community decision. It is worth noting that during the immigration

process, immigration coordinators indicated that they attempted to minimize the influence of immigration agents, whose interests may differ from those of the community.^{ix)}

While immigration has contributed to ethnic diversification in all four communities, the perceived importance of ethnic factors in the selection process differed. Winkler, the first community to implement large-scale immigration, initially sought workers whose ethnic background matched community members (i.e., German speakers),^{x)} while the immigration coordinator in Morden related that ethnic considerations were given to ensure that the community maintained a balance of ethnicities.^{xi)} Immigration coordinators in Brandon and Altona, however, insisted that more critical than candidate ethnicity was applicants' ability to fit into the community and the workplace.^{xii)} Given the relative success of immigration policies in each community, newcomer ethnicity may be a less salient factor than pragmatic considerations related to an individual's ability to adapt to rural life and their workplace.

A further factor that may positively influence retention is the settlement services each community offers. In the case of Morden and Altona, this often includes airport shuttles and initial accommodation. Frontloading settlement services for newcomers and their families may help to reduce the initial stresses experienced in adjusting to a new community. The use of workplace mentors in Altona and Brandon and community mentors in Altona may represent a short-to-medium-term approach to mitigating settlement anxieties experienced by newcomers post-arrival.

Settlement services for the spouses and children of newcomers may also represent an opportunity for increased retention. Immigration coordinators in Altona, Brandon, and Morden indicated the importance of facilitating entrance into schools for children and work opportunities for spouses.^{xiii)} While newcomers who immigrate alone may be attracted to opportunities in urban areas, candidates whose family members are in school and employed may function to mitigate the desire to relocate for higher wages.

Finally, it needs to be clarified what impact differences in visa status and employment may have on long-term retention. While RNIP candidates arrive with jobs and often with temporary work visas, PNP candidates in Morden and Winkler frequently arrive without employment but with permanent residency. Further research is required to elucidate the influence of visa-related factors.

7. Conclusion

This research has attempted to summarize how two rural immigration initiatives, the Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program and the Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot, are functioning in four communities: Winkler, Morden, Brandon, and Altona/Rhineland. In profiling each community, it is possible to identify similarities and differences in how these programs are adapted to meet their specific labor needs, economic objectives, and cultural characteristics. Unlike the Federal Skilled Worker Program, PNP and RNIP afford communities a degree of autonomy through community-specific candidate criteria and selection committees entrusted with deciding eligibility for community nomination.

The PNP and RNIP differ significantly in terms of the visa status of successful candidates and their employment situation upon arrival. However, thorough, community-led selection processes, comprehensive post-arrival settlement services, and the encouragement of migration in family units may represent factors underscoring the relative success of these communities in retaining newcomers. Further research is required to determine the effects of specific policy differences on long-term retention rates.

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Appendix A: MPNP Expression of Interest Ranking Points Grid

Assessment Factor	Ranking Points
Factor 1: Language Proficiency	
<i>First Official Language</i>	
CLB 8 or higher	25 per band
CLB 7	22 per band
CLB 6	20 per band
CLB 5	17 per band
CLB 4	12 per band
CLB 3 or lower	0
<i>Second Official Language</i>	
CLB 5 or higher (overall)	25
Maximum Points – Factor 1	125
Factor 2: Age	
18	20
19	30
20	40
21 to 45	75
46	40
47	30
48	20
49	10
50 or older	0
Maximum Points – Factor 2	75
Factor 3: Work Experience	
Less than 1 year	0
1 year	40
2 years	50
3 years	60
4 years or more	75
Fully recognized by provincial licensing body	100
Maximum Points – Factor 3	175
Factor 4: Education	
Master's degree or Doctorate	125
Two post-secondary programs of at least 2 years each	115
One post-secondary program of three years or more	110
One post-secondary program of two years	100
One-year post-secondary program	70
Trade Certificate	70
No formal post-secondary education	0
Maximum Points – Factor 4	125
Factor 5: Adaptability	
<i>Connection</i>	
Close relative in Manitoba	200
Previous work experience in Manitoba (6 months or more)	100
Completed post-secondary program in Manitoba (2 years or more)	100
Completed post-secondary program in Manitoba (one year)	50
Close friend or distant relative in Manitoba	50
<i>Manitoba Demand</i>	
Ongoing employment in Manitoba for 6 months or more with long-term job offer from the same employer	500
Invitation to Apply under a Strategic Initiative	500
<i>Regional Development</i>	
Immigration destination in Manitoba is outside of Winnipeg	50
Maximum Points – Factor 5	500
Factor 6: Risk Assessment	
Close relative in another province and no close relative in MB	0
Work experience in another province	-100
Studies in another province	-100
Previous immigration application to another province	0
Maximum Points – Factor 6	-200
Maximum Overall Points: 1000	

(Source: SEED and Economic Development Brandon websites)

Appendix B: Community-specific Evaluation Criteria for Altona/Rhineland & Brandon

Criteria	Altona/Rhineland	pts	Brandon	pts
Language (applicant)			Exceeds minimum levels required for candidates TEER	15
Language (spouse)			Equal or exceeds CLB/NCLC 4	8
Education (applicant)			Completed 2 years post-secondary in Brandon	10
Education (spouse)	Has post-secondary education enabling work in specific industries	10	Completed 2 years post-secondary in Brandon	5
Age (applicant)	Is between ages of 25 - 38	10		
Work (applicant)	Has job offer in agriculture or manufacturing	20	Has job offer or already working in Brandon	20
Work (applicant)	Has job offer in established employer in another sector	10		
Work (spouse)	Has experience in and can work in specific industries	10	Has worked in Brandon 6 consecutive months in past 3 years	5
Experience (applicant)			Has lived in Brandon 6 consecutive months in past 3 years	15
Experience (spouse)			Has lived in Brandon 6 consecutive months in past 3 years	5
Experience (applicant)	Has lived in community of under 10,000 people for at least 6 months	5		
Personal Connections (applicant)	Close family connection (parents, siblings, children) in Altona who have lived at least 2 years	20	Close family connection (parents, previous legal guardian, siblings, or children of applicant or spouse / common law partner of applicant) in Brandon who have lived at least 2 years (10 pts x max 3 people)	Max 30
Personal Connections (applicant)	Medium family connection (grandparent, uncle, aunt, cousin, niece, nephew) in Altona who have lived at least 2 years	10	Medium family connection (grandparent, aunt, uncle, cousin, niece, nephew) Brandon who have lived at least 2 years (5 pts x max 3 people)	Max 15
Personal Connections (applicant)	Friend in Altona who has lived at least 2 years	10	Friend in Brandon (2 pts x max of 3 people.	Max 6

(Source: Province of Manitoba, 2018)

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- i) The 19 characteristics are as follows:
1. Access to Affordable, Adequate, and Suitable Housing
 2. Employment and Entrepreneurship Opportunities
 3. Access to Suitable Health Care, Including Mental Health Care
 4. Positive Attitudes Toward Immigrants of All Racial, Cultural and Religious Backgrounds
 5. Access to Immigrant-Serving Agencies that Meet Immigrants' Needs
 6. Access to Transportation
 7. Educational Opportunities
 8. Ongoing Commitment to Anti-Racism and Anti-Oppression
 9. Access to Services and Supports for French-Speaking Immigrants by French Speakers
 10. Immigrant-Responsive Municipal Features and Services
 11. Coordination and Collaboration Among Community Organizations and Different Levels of Government Working Toward Welcoming Communities
 12. Equitable Neighbourhoods
 13. Opportunities to Form and Join Social and Community Networks
 14. Immigrant-Responsive Police Services and Justice System
 15. Access to Inclusive Public Spaces, Facilities, and Programs
 16. Positive Indigenous-Immigrant Relations and Understanding
 17. Access to Diverse Religious and Ethnocultural Organizations
 18. Civic and Political Participation Opportunities
 19. Equitable Media Coverage, Representation, and Content For further discussion, see Esses, et al., 2023.
- ii) According to the immigration coordinator in Altona, the program aims to fill one hundred jobs, and including spouses and children, is predicted to expand the population by 3% at the end of five years. As of September 9, 2023, 60 positions were filled, with 4 successful candidates choosing to leave Altona after arrival (for further information, see Ostman, in press 2. Brandon, as a larger community, employs multiple immigration programs, which resulted in over 2,000 newcomers to the city in 2022 (McDougall, 2023).
- iii) The two territories (Northwest Territories; Yukon) are also enrolled in the PNP.
- iv) The exploratory visit is a characteristic of the Morden MPNP program. Winkler's MPNP program does not require it, nor do participants in the RNIP program (i.e., Brandon and Altona).
- v) Although the immigration coordinator in Morden suggested that there were many similarities between the functioning of the PNP in Winkler and Morden, the researcher was unable to secure an interview with an immigration coordinator in Winkler. As such, some data for Table 5 are indicated as "Not Available".
- vi) In the case of RNIP and PNP, applicants are allowed to employ the services of an IRCC-registered immigration representative (i.e., private agents). However, all three immigration coordinators indicated that they attempted to discourage applicant use of immigration representatives through the conducting of face-to-face online interviews. Morden, through the use of a one-week exploratory visit, is especially aggressive in attempting to limit the influence of intermediaries.
- vii) Altona employs a Vetting Committee, while Brandon employs a RNIP Recommendation Committee. Morden employs a Selection Committee. At the time of this research, it was not clear if Winkler employed an independent selection committee. In the case of all four communities, the final decision for nomination rests with the community, rather than the employer.

- viii) As of interviews conducted in September 2023, immigration coordinators in Brandon and Altona indicated that their programs were on target to meet immigration goals.
- ix) After giving examples of cases of fraud involving immigration consultants, Brandon's immigration coordinator candidly related the relationship between agents and the City's immigration office: *"With RNIP we don't allow any consultants in any of our decision-making processes. We will treat a consultant like we would any other consultant. If you want basic program information, we'll answer that because we would answer that for any individual. We will not align with a consultant. We do not take photos with the consultants because they take such photos and use them for promotional materials. However, we can't eliminate them from the process because if an applicant wishes to use a consultant or an employer wishes to use a consultant, IRCC guarantees them that right. However, candidates have to provide us with the immigration consultant form that declares who they are and provides us with their legal registration, their contact number, and then with that we can communicate through them. In this way, the consultant becomes the applicant or the employer [acts on behalf of either the applicant or the employer], but it prevents them from using our information to sell their wares, though they try. But yeah, we can't outright cull [ban] them because IRCC allows them in the process." Although instances of fraud were not mentioned, Altona's immigration coordinator stated that use of consultants/agents was discouraged: "We do have a disclosure on our website that just lets them [candidates] know that they do need to be using somebody who has been approved by IRCC, but also lets them know it's not going to expedite the process for them, and that they're not going to get their PR any faster. So they are aware that an immigration consultant is not going to help them get through the process quicker and faster. Whatever the case may be, we really discourage against using them. In my in my time working with immigration consultants on applicants' files, it's been quite frustrating because the immigration consultants are not aware with how the RNIP program works, and have incorrectly completed forms on behalf of their applicants."* For further discussion, see Ostman, in press 2.
- x) Morden's immigration coordinator related circumstances surrounding Winkler's initial selection process: *"Immigration started slower (than in Winkler), which I think helped us. Winkler got dumped ten, fifteen years ago with people all from one culture, all from Germany. Huge numbers. This consultant working out of Winkler set up practice there and did really well."* For further discussion, see Ostman, in press 1.
- xi) When interviewed in September 2022, Morden's immigration coordinator directly stated the policy and rationale for considering the ethnicities of candidates during the selection process: *"We also try to make sure that we're not flooding Morden with one group of people doing one type of job. We want different levels of jobs filled by different ethnic groups... Often you walk into small towns and all the people that you see that aren't white are the people that are working at McDonald's or in the hog barns. Who wants to live in a society where all of our immigrants are on food banks because they're doing minimum wage, while everybody that's supervising them isn't, right? We tried pretty hard to make sure that even if it's not the most sought after thing [i.e. job], if someone wants to come in and has their CPA designation and is from India, for example, then we would be open to bringing in that applicant. We try to make sure that we've got diversification at all levels of jobs. So that kind of separates us from a lot of small towns in that we're not using immigrants as the cheapest labor. Actually, we're trying to saturate all levels of society."* For a complete discussion, see Ostman, in press 1.
- xii) When interviewed in September 2023, Altona's immigration coordinator disagreed that culture was a salient factor when selecting candidates stating: *"It's been more about who's a good fit for the community, who can do the job, who's got the job offer, and who as an individual is a good fit. We're not looking at where a candidate comes from as a factor in determining if they're a good fit for the community or not."* Brandon's immigration coordinator, also

interviewed in September 2023, indicated that considerations of culture were undertaken for practical reasons related to workplace operations: “When we started off, there was no foreign recruitment there. No capacity to incorporate people from other ethnic backgrounds with non-English languages. Then they [Maple Leaf Foods] made a conscious decision and they hired within certain ethnic groups so that language was shared and they could support one another.” Furthermore, they expressed the belief that allowing ethnic communities to be established positively impacted long-term retention rates: “If you have people from your country, you’re more likely to stay. If they have their religious organizations, they are more likely to stay. There are also other social factors that make people more willing to stay.” For a full discussion of these interviews, see Ostman, in press 2.

- xiii) Morden’s immigration coordinator indicated the desirability of candidates with young children: *“We like to see little kids. We don’t like to see high-school kids. And the only reason for that is not all cultures are used to sending their 18-year-olds away for university. We would not necessarily disqualify somebody because they have older kids. It’s just something we don’t love to see. Little kids are more likely to fit in better.”* Altona’s immigration coordinator was more explicit: *“Our ideal candidates through this program have been young families, where one spouse is the primary applicant filling a specific need, with the other spouse capable of filling other positions in the community. The children are in school, and they’re making friends. Those are our best opportunities to integrate a family in the community.”* When asked if an applicant having children would receive preference in the selection process, Brandon’s immigration officer’s response was qualified: *“[Having children] is considered a bonus in the sense that it usually speaks to stability because people are less likely to yank a whole family up and move. But conversely, it also then creates a childcare issue because we have a childcare shortage. Depending on the availability of childcare, it could be an advantage or it could be a disadvantage, so nothing is hard and fast, but rather it is always based on that unique family.”* For further discussion, see Ostman, 2025(1); Ostman, 2025(2).

カナダ・マニトバ州における州指名プログラム およびルーラル地域パイロットプログラムの比較： 4つの地域、4つのアプローチ

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抄録

カナダは他の先進国と同様に、移民を主要都市圏以外に分散させるという課題に直面しています。これに対応するため、連邦政府は、地方への移民を促進する政策を導入しており、その始まりが**州ノミネートプログラム（PNP）でした。このプログラムは、州や地域社会に、労働市場のニーズを評価し、移民に適した候補者を選定する一定の裁量権を与えています。マニトバ州では、PNPはカナダの他の地方と比較して、新規移民の比較的高い長期定着率を達成しています。これを踏まえ、政府は2019年に地方・北部移民パイロット（RNIP）**を開始しました。これは、選考プロセスや承認された申請者のビザステータスにおいてPNPとは大きく異なる5年間のイニシアチブです。

本研究では、マニトバ州の4つのコミュニティ（ウインクラー、モーデン、ブランドン、アルトナ/ラインランド）におけるPNPとRNIPの実施状況について比較分析を行います。各プログラムの詳細な説明と、これら4つのコミュニティの簡潔な概要を提供します。さらに、2022年と2023年に実施された移民コーディネーターへのインタビューに基づき、PNPとRNIPの共通点と顕著な相違点を特定します。この比較アプローチは、各プログラムの長所と短所を明らかにし、それによって地方における新規移民の定着と統合を強化するために、地域の移民戦略をどのように最適化できるかについての洞察を提供することを目的としています。