

Help Wanted—Confronting Labour and Skills Shortages in Toronto

A Consultation on the Findings and Recommendations
of the Toronto Labour Force Readiness Plan

Thursday, March 25, 2004, 8:30 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.
Metro Hall, 55 John Street (at King), 3rd Floor, Room 308

Welcoming Remarks by Karen Thorne-Stone Executive Director, Economic Development, City of Toronto

Good morning and welcome. My name is Karen Thorne-Stone. I am the Executive Director of Economic Development for the City of Toronto. On behalf of Mayor David Miller, Toronto City Council, and staff, I am very pleased to welcome you to the Seventh Annual ICE Network Meeting. I also would like to thank you for participating in this event, as it is *your* knowledge, expertise and involvement that will make this meeting a success.

The topic of today's session—"Help Wanted: Confronting Labour and Skills Shortages in Toronto"—is a very timely one. The Toronto Labour Force Readiness Plan (a copy of which is in your registration package) forecasts the creation of an additional 400,000 new jobs in the Toronto region over the next ten years. Our research concurs with the research of many others: the impending retirements of an ageing workforce coupled with Canada's low birth rate means that over the next decade Toronto will face very real labour and skills shortages.

Where will we find the people with the skills to fill these jobs? There are three main groups which comprise the primary pool from which we can draw. The first are immigrants and newcomers to Toronto; the second are young people entering the workforce; and the third are those currently working. You will be hearing from our panellists in a few minutes about the strengths and potential that each of these groups bring to the labour market in terms of their skills, experience and enthusiasm.

Drawing on the themes that are developed this morning, it is our hope that we can explore ways to help increase the ability of young people and immigrants to move quickly and easily into the labour market, and ways to help current employees to obtain the necessary skills to keep pace with the many changes taking place in the workplace. The Labour Force Readiness Plan identifies a number of recommendations to help move these issues forward. Over the course of today's session, you will be invited to prioritize and add to these recommendations.

This work has been a collaborative process. The City's Economic Development staff have worked closely with several other City divisions and departments in developing policy, strategies and recommendations to address the impending labour and skills shortages. Staff from Toronto Social Services, Social Development and Administration, the Chief Administrator's Office, and Human Resources have all made significant contributions to the project by facilitating training and labour force development on both the policy and program fronts. This interdivisional, interdepartmental collaboration effectively brings together the social and the economic agendas towards building a community that makes Toronto the best place in the world to live, work, invest and visit; where both businesses and individuals flourish and prosper.

This approach is consistent with the City of Toronto's Economic Development Strategy that states:

"No one agency can take on the breadth and depth of actions necessary to advance the City's economy. It will take the collective know-how, skill, resources and energy of the private sector, labour, volunteer sector, all orders of government including public institutions such as universities, colleges and hospitals, and communities working in concert..."

We also find ourselves at unique political crossroads at this time that has the potential to open up new opportunities. We have a new mayor, a new premier, and a new prime minister. Each of these leaders has made a commitment to working together in new collaborative ways and each has highlighted that skills and labour force development are among the keys to ensuring our economic and social health over the next decade.

Your input today will inform the final Labour Force Readiness Plan and the recommendations for action that are incorporated within it. These recommendations will then be forwarded to City Council, to the Province and to our Federal leaders to provide direction for future programs and strategies at all levels of government.

I hope you enjoy today's session – I am confident that it will be a productive, learning experience for us all. Thank you.