

Rural immigration pilot launching Dec. 1

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A new immigration program aimed bringing in workers to fill chronic labour needs is set to launch in Brandon on Dec. 1.

Brandon was selected in June for the Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot program, which aims to fill job gaps in rural and northern areas of the country.

Sandy Trudel, the city's manager of economic development, said the department has been working for the past four months to get the program up and running and to map out how it will work in the Wheat City.

Ten other rural communities in the country were selected for the pilot, including the Gretna-Rhineland-Altona-Plum Coulee region in Manitoba. The program is designed to help employers hire people from outside Canada for hard-to-fill jobs.

On Dec. 1 the online platform for potential new immigrants to apply for jobs will go live. Trudel said it will be akin to a job board like Indeed.com, where employers can post jobs and people apply for them, but also encompasses immigrating to Canada.

Once someone applies for a job they will be screened for language and education to make sure they meet the base requirements for the position. After, the employer does their normal due diligence on the person who applied. If they pass that stage, a local committee evaluates them to make sure they intend to stay in Brandon — or whichever community they apply for — instead of going to another city once they receive permanent residency.

"We're going to be guarding very closely to make sure people aren't applying to Brandon's (Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot) process just as a means to get into the country and go somewhere else ... just like any other screening process that will be determined with each candidate," she said.

If there is a match between the person and the job, the employer can submit a request for a temporary foreign worker's permit and have the person come to Canada. Once in Canada, they can apply for permanent residency.

"We want to make sure the community recommendations we issue are the highest-possible likelihood of meeting the program objectives, which are filling that vacancy and making sure they are retained," Trudel said.

There is a cap of 2,750 people who can immigrate each year through the program across all 11 communities. Trudel said most communities are starting small in the first year and Brandon will aim to accept approximately 100 people in 2020.

"The most important thing will be making sure the people who do come in through the program fill the labour need and stay in Brandon, Trudel said, rather than approving people just to fill Brandon's quota each year.

"First and foremost we need to make sure those labour needs can't be met with people who are already here."

The earliest people could arrive under the program is in 2020, but that depends on how fast bureaucracy moves.

Westman Immigrant Services executive director Lois MacDonald deferred questions to Trudel when reached earlier this week.

The pilot program is set to end on Oct. 31, 2022, at which point the new immigrants can either stay as a permanent resident or apply for full citizenship.

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