



# Recruitment and Retention in Labrador:

## **A Report on Exit and Retention Surveys**

Recruitment and Retention Working  
Group for the Strategic Social Plan

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## INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND

Knowing why people choose to stay or leave in an area is an invaluable human resource tool. In December of 2001, the Labrador Strategic Social Plan Committee formed a Training, Recruitment and Retention Working Group. Its purpose was to investigate human resource issues specifically related to training, recruitment and retention of professionals in Labrador.

The Working Group included human resources managers and staff from Human Resources and Employment, Human Resources Development Canada, Grenfell Regional Health Services, Health Labrador Corporation, School District 1 and 2, the College of the North Atlantic, the Labrador Region for the Strategic Social Plan and the Department of Labrador and Aboriginal Affairs. This Working Group was brought together as a network of partners, who could identify recruitment, retention and training issues and solutions, from a service delivery perspective. This Working Group is a sub-group of a Human Resource Committee, which consists of the Managers and Regional Directors of the identified Departments and Boards outlined above.

To start the project, the Working Group conducted some initial research and prepared a Discussion Paper that summarized issues and possible solutions that were short term in nature. The Group identified six major issues believed to be barriers to effective recruitment and retention: 1) low market supply, 2) compensation/ benefits, 3) relocation costs, 4) housing, 5) isolation {professional & social} and 6) training.

Recruitment and retention as a whole, was identified as a concern for Labrador Strategic Social Plan Committee members, based on some statistical evidence, including:

- Statistics Canada data on out-migration trends; and,
- Labour force data and high turnover rates for some employers, particularly for teachers (70% turnover rate) and health professionals (50% turnover rate).

There is also substantial anecdotal information impacting recruitment and retention, including:

- Perception of a skills mis-match in the region ie. Education choices that do not lead to employment opportunities in the region.
- Ongoing vacancies and low retention in specific professions;
- Students not getting good career guidance and information on jobs in demand in the Labrador labour market;
- New skills needed for self-government;
- Resource development projects not hiring locally; etc, etc.

This anecdotal information needed to be confirmed in order to proceed with implementing new solutions. Therefore, the Committee needed to undertake a research project to gather actual evidence on some key points, including:

- Who is coming? Why?
- Who is staying? Why?
- Who is leaving? Why?

- Who should we target in recruiting?
- Can we do something different to ensure people stay in Labrador to work and live?

The working group felt it was important to take this is evidenced based approach to policy development, as outlined in the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador's Strategic Social Plan (Government of NL, People, Partners and Prosperity, 1998, p.30).

Elements of the research project included the design, implementation and analysis of two surveys: *Employee Retention Survey* and *Employee Exit Survey*. The surveys were based on other northern and rural human resource surveys.

- *Employee Retention Survey*: Directed at those living and working in Labrador five or more years to determine their characteristics, why they came and why they stay.
- *Employee Exit Survey*: Directed at those who left in the last six months to determine their characteristics, why they came and why they left. (Health Canada & ANAC, 2000)

## 2 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### 2.1 Retention Highlights

- 991 Retention Surveys were administered with a response rate of 57%. These respondents are referred to as stayers.
- 78% of stayers are married or living in common law.
- About  $\frac{3}{4}$  of stayers have worked in Labrador for more than 10 years.
- 90% of respondents have permanent jobs.
- 61% of respondents said were not aware of vacancies at their workplace.
- 1/3 of stayers said they were originally from Labrador while another 1/3 said they came because of family or partners.
- 61% of stayers report that their originally coming from a rural or small town, helped prepare them for working in Labrador.
- What keeps the stayers? A sense of home, the people, the community, salary and family – were listed as top reasons for staying.
- 69% of stayers have considered leaving Labrador at some point. The reasons cited include; cost of travel, family, lack of amenities and stress.
- People who are originally from Labrador are less likely to consider leaving.

### 2.2 Exit Highlights

- 104 exit surveys were administered with a response rate of 49%. These respondents are referred to as Leavers.
- Leavers tend to be younger, with 39% under age 35.
- Most of the leavers were women – 63%.
- 76% of the leavers were single, while another 24% were divorced, separated or widowed.
- 78% of the Leavers said they would recommend Labrador to others.
- The main reasons respondents would not recommend Labrador were the isolation, the lack of amenities and difficulties adapting to the culture.
- Suggestions from Leavers on what employers could do to create more positive environments include; better transition/ orientation programs, respectful workplaces, environments that support professional growth, and compensation for a higher cost of living.
- The majority of Leavers originally came to Labrador to get experience.
- Reasons they stayed as long as they did; good co-workers, family and friends, love of the outdoors / environment.

### 3 SURVEY DELIVERY

The Employee Retention Survey was sent to 991 individuals. Employers identified staff that had been working in the region for more than five years. There were 563 surveys completed, for an overall response rate of 57%. These individuals are herein referred to as “*Stayers*” – those who continue to work in Labrador.

The Employee Exit Survey was sent to 104 individuals, who had left within the last year. Fifty-one (51) surveys were completed and returned, for an overall response rate of 49%. These individuals are herein referred to as “*Leavers*” – individuals who worked in Labrador, but now work elsewhere.

#### 3.1 Limitations of the Surveys

There are several factors that must be considered in interpreting the survey results and which impose some limitations on the survey. These include:

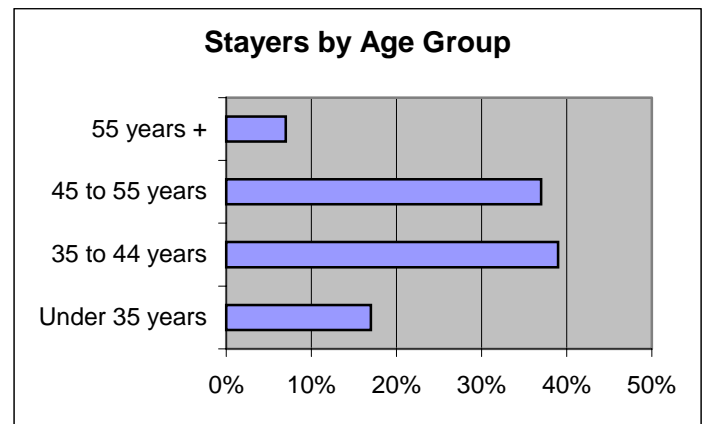
- Sample bias: the employers chose who and who not to send surveys to; not all employers participated equally.
- The results can’t relate results to “all who stay” or “all who leave”:
  - Not based on a random-sample of the total population of those who stay or leave;
  - Some occupations are better represented than others (i.e., high number of teachers in both surveys, low private sector response).
- Small number of “*Leavers*” (51 responses) is sufficient to identify general themes, but not to interpret detailed results.
- Timing and administration of the surveys as it was initially sent out prior to Christmas with a deadline date after the holidays.
- Despite the stated limitations, the surveys fill a gap in our knowledge, and CAN be interpreted within the limitations to give us a good sense of key issues and rankings (remembering the percentages may not be accurate for the wider population).

## 4 RETENTION SURVEYS “STAYERS”

### 4.1 Personal Characteristics of the *Stayers*

To get a better understanding of those who continue to work in Labrador, *Stayers* have been characterized by age, education aboriginal status, marital status, and gender and community size.

- 83% of respondents were over 35 years old, as shown below:



- The majority of respondents were women, two-thirds, while one third of the respondents were men.
- Respondents were asked to indicate their education levels. Some *Stayers* provided multiple responses, so the total exceeds 100%:

Education Level	Percent (N=531)
High school	4%
Certificate/Diploma	51%
University undergraduate degree	53%
University graduate degree	16%
Total exceeds 100% due to multiple responses	

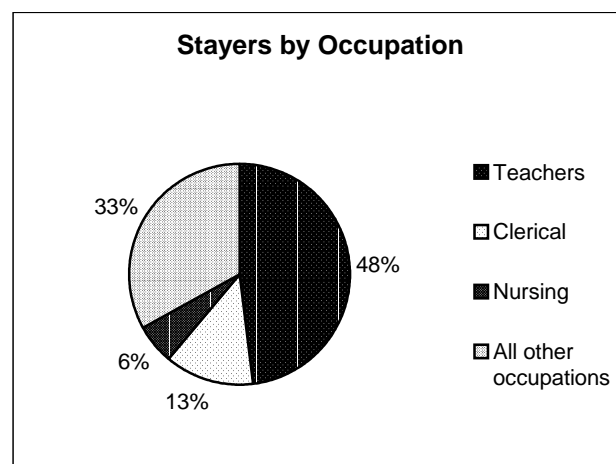
- 19% of respondents were Aboriginal. These individuals were asked if they had faced any challenges in their education and career, with over 63% saying “no” or they didn’t know.
- For the 37% of Aboriginals that said they faced challenges, the most frequently cited challenges were adjustment to a different environment and culture and discrimination.
- 78% of stayers are married or living common-law, while the remaining 22% were single, divorced, separated or widowed. 60% reported having children living with them and an additional 34% said they had children living elsewhere.
- When considering the size of the communities where employees live in Labrador, half the respondents indicated they lived in a small community, while half lived in a large community.
- When asked, in a separate question, the population of their community, the following is the percentage of respondents by community size:

Community Size	Percent (N=553)
Less than 500 people	12%
500 to 1000 people	12%
1000 to 2000 people	11%
More than 2000 people	65%
Total	100%

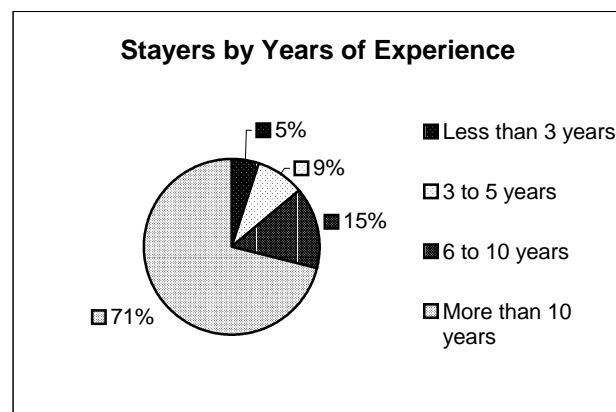
## 4.2 Work Characteristics of the Stayers

The survey also provided an indication of the work characteristics of *stayers*.

- Two-thirds of respondents were characterized under three occupations: teacher, clerical and nursing, with all other respondents spread across 55 different occupations. The other individual occupations constituted less than 5% of responses, each:

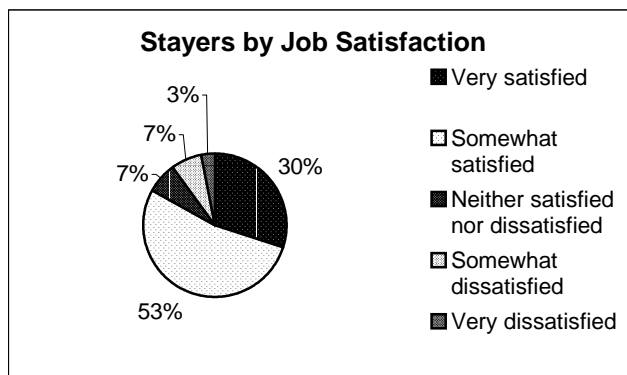


- About three-quarters of *Stayers* have worked in Labrador more than 10 years, with the remaining 24% living and working in Labrador between two and ten years. (This is expected, as the survey was targeted at those having lived and worked in Labrador for five or more years).
- 71% reported they have been working in their field for more than 10 years, with other responses summarized below:



- 90% of the respondents reported having “permanent” jobs, 8% had temporary jobs and 3% were relief/casual workers.
- 44% of *Stayers* said they had more than one employer in the region, with 55% having only one employer.
  - 36% of respondents said they were aware of vacancies at their place of employment.

- 61% were not aware of vacancies and the remaining 3% were not sure, thus indicating a need for increased internal communication.
- When considering job satisfaction, most *Stayers* (83%) indicated that they were fairly satisfied with their jobs, with 83% indicating they were somewhat or very satisfied, as shown below:



- The *Stayers* who have had more than one employer were asked the traits, conditions and qualities that they preferred, in employers. A large portion of this group (170 respondents) provided information on preferred traits, with some providing multiple responses.

Preferred employment traits	Frequency of Mention (n=202)
Supportive work environment where they are treated with respect	29%
Good work schedules, hours and workload	12%
Good co-workers and a team approach	11%
Independence, autonomy & freedom to make decisions	10%
Good salary, benefits and allowances	8%
Fairness in hiring and advancement	8%
All other reasons	20%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>

### 4.3 Reasons for Coming & Staying

The 563 *Stayers* were asked a series of questions regarding their reasons for coming to Labrador and reasons they have stayed. For these questions (unless otherwise stated) individuals could provide multiple responses.

- When asked “What led you to first come to Labrador”, one third of the *Stayers* said it was because they were originally from here and a third said they came because of family and partners. The percentages indicate the number of respondents who gave a specific response.

Reasons for first coming to Labrador	Percent (N=561)
They were originally from Labrador	34%
They came with their family / partner	34%
There were no jobs elsewhere	24%
Money/salary level	19%
Challenging work environment	15%
Total exceeds 100% due to multiple responses	

- Labrador has a unique working and living environment. When asked what, in their background, prepared them for working in Labrador, the *Stayers* most frequently mentioned their background of living in rural and small town areas (61%).
- General life experiences and education were also common responses that helped prepare people (53% and 36% respectively). Fourteen percent of respondents said their previous cross-cultural experience prepared them, and 12% said it was because they were Aboriginal persons.

- People decide to stay in Labrador because they become connected to the people and the environment, with job related issues such as salary, co-workers and work schedules being the next most frequent reasons. The top reasons for staying are shown in the following table:

Reasons they decided to stayed	Percent (N=562)
Family and Friends	67%
Love the outdoors and environment	46%
Money/salary	42%
Good co-workers	40%
Good work schedules/hours	34%
Originally from Labrador	31%
Good/supportive community to live in	30%
Total exceeds 100% due to multiple responses	

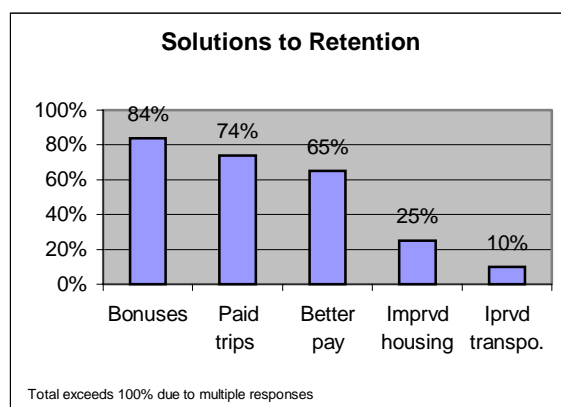
- 69% of *Stayers* reported they have considered leaving Labrador. These individuals were asked what are the reasons they consider leaving, with most frequent responses cited below:

Reasons the <i>Stayers</i> would consider leaving	Percent (N=398)
Cost of travel	73%
Family considerations	65%
Lack of amenities	39%
Stress/overworked	26%
Lack of management support and appreciation	15%
Political interference with work decisions	13%
Poor housing	7%
Total exceeds 100% due to multiple responses	

- With respect to retention of professionals, knowing why employees stay in Labrador is a great human resource tool. When asked what *keeps* them in Labrador, answers were similar to the reasons they decided to stay. The most frequently cited reasons included:

What keeps the <i>Stayers</i> in Labrador	Percent (N=558)
It is my home	60%
People in the community	40%
Love the my work	38%
Money/salary	36%
Family/partner in the community	36%
Originally from Labrador	32%
Total exceeds 100% due to multiple responses	

The *Stayers* were asked to suggest some possible solutions that might improve working and living conditions in Labrador. Not surprisingly, financial costs are associated with the primary solutions for such improvements. However, increased salary was not among the top two suggestions.



#### 4.4 Stayers who are Teachers

- 48% (262) of the retention survey respondents were from teachers. The importance of recruitment and retention in this profession is tremendous as it will impact the health and well being of communities. School boards obviously placed value on this process and were avid in assisting with distribution.
- Teachers differed from other *Stayers* in several ways.
- Teacher's reasons for coming to Labrador were slightly different: One-third indicated they originally came to Labrador because there were no jobs elsewhere. 26% came because of a family member/partner and 24% were originally from here.
- Teachers are slightly more likely than all *Stayers* to consider leaving (73% versus 69%).
- 11% of teachers who responded are Aboriginal persons (compared to 19% for all *Stayers*).
- More teachers are younger, with 15% under 35 years, compared to 3% for all *Stayers*.

#### 4.5 Stayers who are from Labrador

It is also of interest to identify the characteristics of *Stayers* who are originally from Labrador. A recent Recruitment and Retention Best Practices Inventory conducted through the Northern Development Ministers' Forum concluded that retention of professionals is much more successful when local people are employed (NMDF, Recruitment and Retention in Northern Canada, 2003).

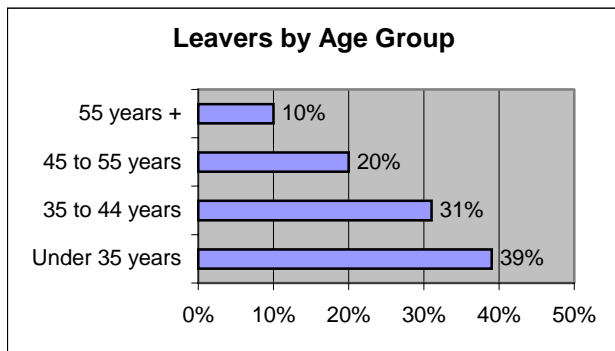
- About one-third of all respondents (184 of 563) of the Retention Survey indicated they were originally from Labrador.
- This group differs from other *Stayers* in several ways.
- Labradorian *Stayers* had a slightly different occupational mix than other *Stayers*, with just over half either teachers or clergy, with the remaining 47% spread across 38 occupations.
- Labradorians are less likely to consider leaving (53% compared to 69% for all *Stayers*).
- 52% are Aboriginal (compared to 19% for all *Stayers*)

## 5 Exit Survey - “Leavers”

### 5.1 Personal Characteristics of the Leavers

The survey results also indicate personal characteristics of *Leavers*, which differ from the *Stayers*.

- The *Leavers* tended to be younger, with 39% under 35 years old, as shown below:



With respect to education levels, the *Leavers* represent a highly educated group.

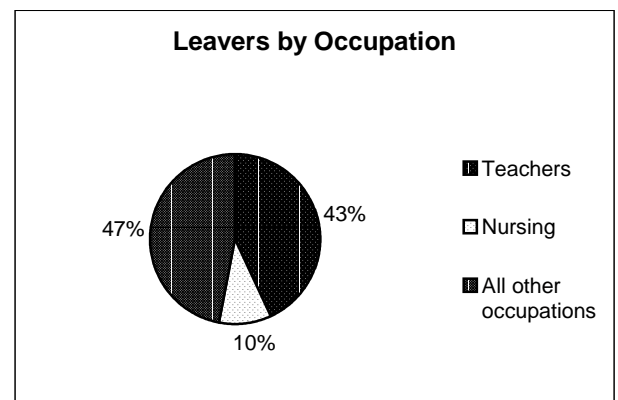
Education Level	Percent (N=48)
Certificate/Diploma	44%
University undergraduate degree	29%
University graduate degree	44%
Total exceeds 100% due to multiple responses	

- About 37% of the respondents were men and 63% were women.
- Only 6 of the 51 respondents were Aboriginal. These individuals were asked if they had faced any challenges in their education and career. Only one individual said they had, and commented on difficulties adjusting to university.

- Interestingly, none of the *Leavers* surveyed were married or living common-law. Seventy-six percent (76%) were single with the remaining 24% being divorced, separated or widowed.
- This is not to say that family issues were not of a concern, as 39% have children living with them and 20% said they had children living elsewhere.
- Eight of the *Leavers* (16%) said they were originally from Labrador. A further 63% were from the Island, with a small number from the Maritimes (six) or other parts of Canada (four).
- Just over half (53%) of the *Leavers* said they had lived in a small community, as their place of origin, with the remaining 45% having lived in a large community. This question was included to see if growing up in a small town made a difference with regards to expectations and adjustments to working in rural Labrador communities.
- 78% of the *Leavers* said they would recommend working in Labrador to others.

### 5.2 Work Characteristics of Leavers

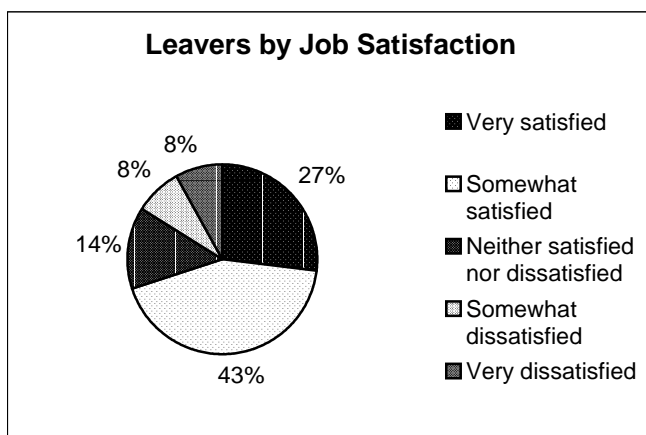
- Over half of respondents worked as teachers or nurses, with all other respondents' occupations spread across 15 different ones, with less than three respondents for each occupation type:



- About an equal number of *Leavers* had worked in Labrador less than 2 years as those working here for more than 10 years.

Length of time working in Labrador	Percent (N=51)
Under 2 years	41%
2 to 10 years	22%
More than 10 years	37%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>

- The *Leavers* were somewhat satisfied with their jobs, with 70% indicating they were somewhat or very satisfied, as shown below:



- *Leavers* were asked to identify the employment traits, conditions and qualities that they preferred about their employers in Labrador. Less than half of the respondents (24 of the 51 respondents) provided responses to this question. The only traits given by more than 2 people were knowledgeable and supportive supervisors and co-workers (6 respondents), flexible working conditions (5 respondents), and friendly staff (4 respondents).
- *Leavers* also provided a variety of suggestions on what employers could do to create a more positive work environment. Interestingly, the most common suggestion was to provide better mentoring and transition / orientation programs (31%) closely followed by a respectful and supportive work environment, which

supports professional growth (30%).

- Providing compensation for higher cost of living was suggested by 24% of the *Leavers*, and higher salary, travel support and better accommodations/housing each were mentioned by 16%.

### 5.3 Reasons for Coming & Leaving

The 51 *Leavers* were asked a series of questions regarding their reasons for coming to Labrador, why they stayed as long as they did, and the reasons they left. For these questions (unless otherwise stated) individuals were allowed to provide multiple responses.

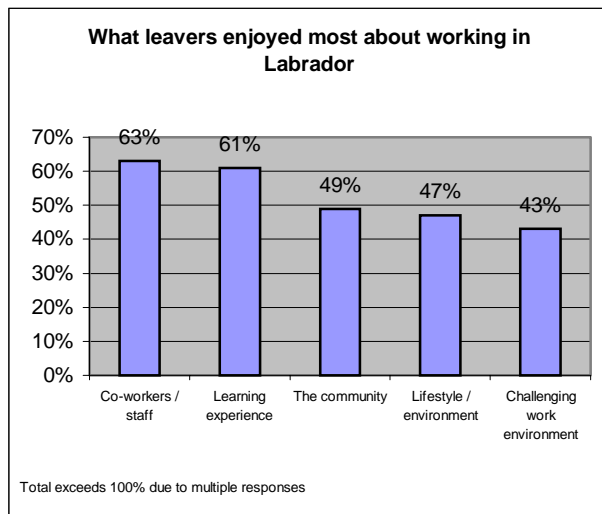
- When asked “What led you to first work in Labrador?” the *Leavers* most frequently said they came to gain work experience or because of family and partners.

Reasons for first coming to Labrador	Percent (N=51)
Needed experience	37%
They came with their family / partner	33%
There were no jobs elsewhere	25%
Money/salary level	25%
Challenging work environment	22%
Total exceeds 100% due to multiple responses	

- When asked what, in their background, prepared them for working in Labrador, the *Leavers* most frequently mentioned their background of living in rural and small town areas (59%).
- Their education and general life experiences were also common responses (57% and 51% respectively). Eighteen percent of respondents said their previous cross-cultural experience prepared them, and 10% said it was because they were Aboriginals.

- Good co-workers played a role in why people stayed in Labrador as long as they did. The top reasons for staying are shown in the following table:

Reasons they stayed as long as they did	Percent (N=50)
Good co-workers	42%
Family and Friends	38%
Love the outdoors and environment	36%
Money/salary	36%
Learning opportunities	34%
Total exceeds 100% due to multiple responses	



- *Leavers* provided many reasons why they left Labrador. Many reflected their individual circumstances, such as promotions and relocating with their spouse. However, some reasons for leaving Labrador were based upon general conditions in the community.
- The responses cited by ten or more of the *Leavers* are provided below:

Reasons the <i>Leavers</i> left	Percent (N=49)
Lack of amenities	55%
Family considerations	43%
Cost of travel	41%
Social isolation	35%
Lack of management support and appreciation	29%
Stress/overworked	27%
Total exceeds 100% due to multiple responses	

## 6 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 6.1 Comparing Stayers and Leavers

Although we need to exercise some caution in comparing the results of the Exit and Retention Surveys (because of the limitations discussed previously, particularly the small sample of *Leavers*), there are some key points of commonality and difference that can be identified.

Differences between *Stayers* and *Leavers* include:

- None of the *Leavers* were married, while 78% of the *Stayers* were.
- *Leavers* tend to be younger, with 39% of respondents less than 35 years old compared to 17% of *Stayers* in this age category.
- A greater portion of *Leavers* had university graduate level degrees than *Stayers* (44% versus 16%).
- Fewer *Leavers* than *Stayers* were originally from Labrador (16% versus 32%).
- More *Stayers* were somewhat or very satisfied with their jobs (83%) than *Leavers* (70%).
- *Leavers* tend to come to Labrador because they needed the experience and the money (62%) while only 24% of *Stayers* came because “there were no jobs elsewhere”.

Common findings between *Stayers* and *Leavers* include:

- More women responded to both surveys, with 66% of the *Stayers* and 63% of the *Leavers* being women.
- About a third of both *Stayers* and *Leavers* first came to Labrador because of their family or partners.
- Both *Stayers* and *Leavers* gave the same top four responses when asked why they decided to stay or stay as long as they did:
  - Family and friends;
  - Love of the outdoors and natural environment;
  - Money/salary; and
  - Good co-workers.
- Both *Stayers* and *Leavers* gave the same top three responses when asked why they consider leaving or left:
  - Lack of amenities;
  - Cost of travel; and
  - Family consideration;

### 6.2 Recommendations

As a part of implementing of the Strategic Social Plan in Labrador, the Training, Recruitment and Retention Working Group has been tasked with developing strategies to address concerns that were highlighted in this report and during “Opening the Door to the North – A Human Resource Forum” that was held in May of 2003. Keeping in mind that the Working Group represents a network of different organizations, boards and departments - strategies and activities will evolve over time. This collaborative approach will provide tools and some possible solutions for many Labrador employers but it will not be the solution to all training, recruitment and retention problems. The recommendations listed below are long term but there are also short term measures that all employers can consider.

## EMPLOYER CONSIDERATIONS

- Ensure that new recruits are aware of the cultural and geographic challenges of working in Labrador. Fully utilize established marketing products to help answer questions of potential staff.
- Consider mechanisms that will assist people with the transition to Labrador communities. Provide them with tools and products that may answer questions before they arrive. Maintain connection with professionals once they come.
- Increase communications within your organizations about staff vacancies, as informal networks are great avenues for promoting positions.
- Support and foster opportunities for interaction as a way to help reduce the feelings of social and professional isolation.
- Consider preferred employer traits listed on page 9 of this report.
- Employers should consider implementing their own exit interview process. Several Labrador employers already engage in this process and could be a valuable resource.

## LONG TERM RECOMMENDATIONS

- Develop a long-term human resource strategy, with schools, to train Labradorians for core occupations. People from Labrador are more likely to be the “*Stayers*” of the future, and in the long-term, should be the target of recruitment initiatives.
- Encourage and work with partners to identify Labradorians that have left, to find out if they would be interested in returning.
- Consider lifestyles when recruiting:
  - Individuals come for the people and the environment;
  - Connections with the community help retain single individuals need to connect with others in the community, both socially and professionally.
- Develop creative solutions to overcoming the costs of travel and living in Labrador.
- Continue to gather information:
  - Develop generic exit survey and implement as widely as possible for all Labrador employers.
  - Repeat Retention survey after a period of time, to monitor changes.

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