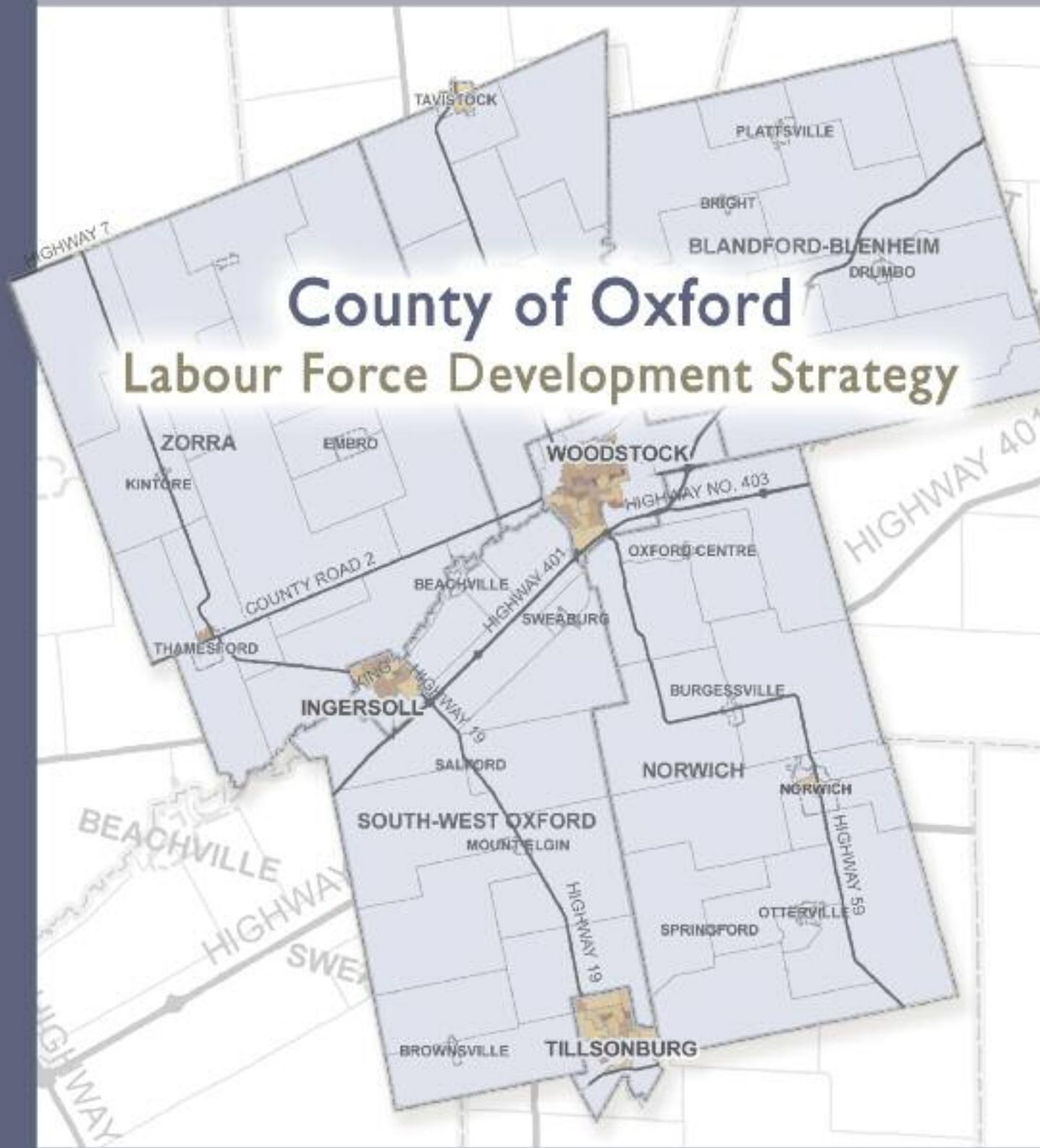


# County of Oxford Labour Force Development Strategy



# Acknowledgements

This initiative was made possible by the following community partners, who provided a vision and contributed expertise and resources. Their efforts have created a roadmap that if followed will support the economic vitality of the Oxford County community.

- Community Employment Services
- Chambers of Commerce in Woodstock, Tillsonburg and Ingersoll
- Fanshawe and Conestoga Colleges
- London District Catholic School Board
- Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities
- Ontario Ministry of Agriculture , Food and Rural Affairs
- Oxford Small Business Support Centre
- The Elgin, Middlesex, Oxford Workforce Planning and Development Board
- The City of Woodstock
- The Towns of Ingersoll and Tillsonburg
- The Township of Norwich
- The Thames Valley District School Board
- The County of Oxford
- Tillsonburg and District Multi-Service Centre



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# Executive Summary

Recently, several municipal economic development offices within the County of Oxford have undertaken the development and updating of their Strategic Plans. The Labour Force Development Strategy is designed to support these efforts by reflecting on and giving consideration to the work already undertaken by the County, its municipalities, and regional partners that is serving to shape the growth and sustainability of the local and regional economies.

The Labour Force Development Strategy has been undertaken in a time of change. Changes at the global, national and provincial level have impacted Oxford's key industries: Manufacturing has exhibited a decline in employment in Ontario since 2005, well before the onset of the 2008 recession, with immense opportunities in new and innovative industries producing high-value products; Agriculture has been in steady decline, measured by number of farms, farmers and contribution to GDP for many years with opportunities being seen in agri-food manufacturing and the "creative" food economy.

The *service sector* and *knowledge economy* are the new drivers of employment and economic growth in Ontario, creating high-wage, professional careers that are highly valued by economic development departments. Now is the time for a comprehensive labour force strategy to accommodate for these changes and prepare Oxford County for the needs of the future.

## Objectives

The Labour Force Development Strategy is intended to

- Develop a comprehensive situational analysis,
- Conduct a statistical assessment of skills gaps in the local labour force,
- Include extensive community and stakeholder consultation to understand the County's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats,
- Develop themes, priorities and actions to allow the County and its partners to move forward in comprehensive labour force planning.

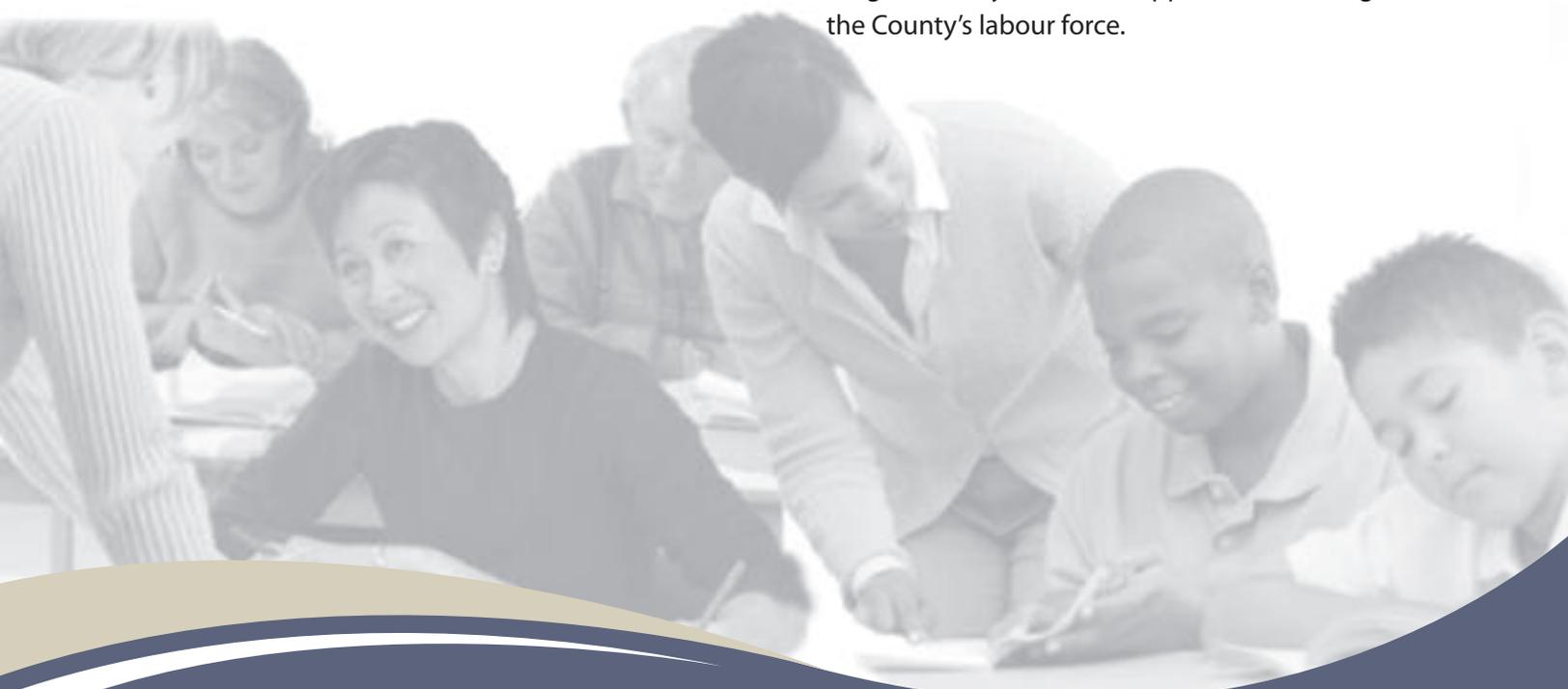
## *Methodology*

The creation of a Labour Force Development Strategy for the County of Oxford necessitates a thorough review of the recent initiatives and strategies already in effect in the County, a clear understanding of the current economic base of the community, a skills assessment to identify gaps in the labour force and community consultation to gain feedback from community members and key stakeholders to inform the priorities and actions of the strategy.

In creating the Labour Force Development Strategy a comprehensive review of the local employment, training, education, and business development and entrepreneurship programs initiatives was undertaken to provide context and guidance to the present strategy development process. In addition, an economic base assessment was conducted to understand population composition and change, labour force characteristics and industry strengths and characteristics.

As a supplement to the economic base assessment a skills assessment was conducted to investigate more closely skilled occupations within a range of target industries, possible skill gaps in those industries and to provide an understanding of how these skills and occupations are related or transferable across other industries.

Finally, community consultations were conducted to gain the experiences, opinions and ideas shared by Oxford County's business community, industry leaders, community service organizations, educators and regional institutions. The consultation process included interviews with 42 stakeholders in the region, an online survey which received input from 211 businesses and community members, as well as, a labour force development summit held on November 2<sup>nd</sup> 2010 that attracted more than 75 participants. This broad-based engagement with the community enabled considerable insight into key issues and opportunities facing the County's labour force.



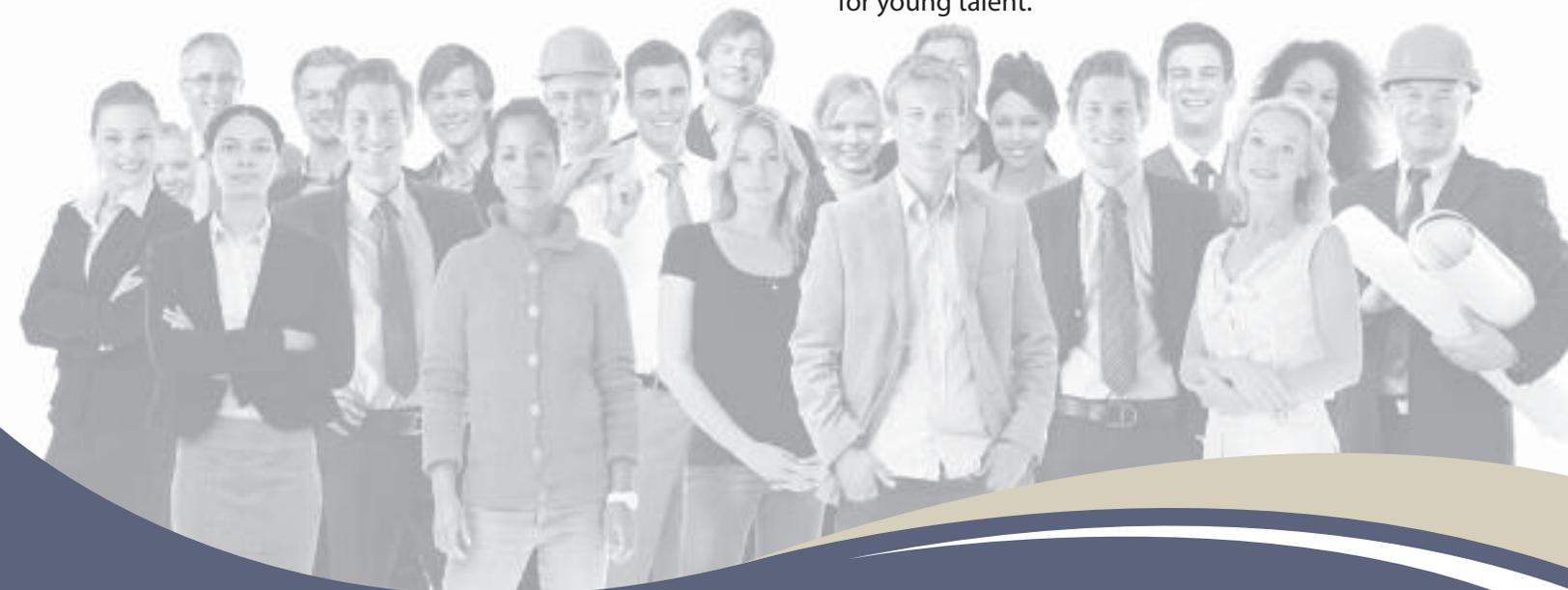
## *Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats*

The county boasts a number of strengths based on the strong employer base and quality of place in the region. The main strengths emerging from the consultation are: a skilled and experienced workforce, coordinated education efforts in creating education to employment pathways, home to satellite campus' of post-secondary institutions, a developed agricultural base, initiatives undertaken to address shortfall in creative workers, strong work ethic, attractive quality of place, strategic geographic position, community and employment service providers.

In order to ensure that the labour force strategic plan is balanced, consideration must be given to the weaknesses outlined. Weaknesses identified during the community consultations include: relatively low levels of educational attainment, unclear employment pathways, insufficient support to small businesses, skills shortages in key occupations, lack of skills and work ethic in youth, lack of labour market awareness in the business community.

Opportunities are based on internal and external factors that affect the labour force and are critical to examine in developing strategic actions for the region. Opportunities identified for Oxford include: enhanced collaboration, developing youth leadership, developing pathways to employment, occupations in green energy, diversifying the skills base, fostering entrepreneurship, integrating diverse community members, and developing retention programs.

While a number of opportunities have been identified by community members, in order to capitalize on such opportunities, consideration must be given to the internal and external threats that Oxford County faces. Threats hinder Oxford County's ability to implement an effective labour force development strategy. Threats to labour force development in Oxford are: increasing requirement for educational attainment and demand for higher order skills, as well as, other centres with post-secondary institutions are offering greater opportunities for young talent.



## Labour Force Development Themes

Drawing on the background research, community consultations and SWOT assessment, a number of key themes emerged. The themes include: Fostering Collaboration, Reinforcing Career Pathways, Cultivating Entrepreneurs, and Attracting and Retaining People. Each theme considered synergies with existing programming in developing priorities and recommended actions to undertake.

### **Foster Collaboration**

Based on the consultation with key industry and community stakeholders, as well as, the broader business community, it was remarked that there are a number of actors implementing projects related to labour force development in Oxford County. To be effective at a regional level will require more leadership and collaboration among the various players

### **Reinforce Career Pathways**

Career opportunities in Oxford extend beyond manufacturing and agriculture to include work in other sectors such as the creative cultural sector and the emerging green economy. In addition, occupations and careers available within all sectors are diverse and include professional occupations such as accounting, law, engineering and others. However, during the consultation process with key stakeholders and the business community, it was suggested that workers and potential workers in Oxford are unclear as to the opportunities available for careers (Career Pathways) in the County. Equally unclear are the skills, credentials and training required to move into these careers. Understanding all of the opportunities available will assist in meeting the goals of developing a skilled labour force and in retaining youth and skilled workers.

## Emerging Themes in the Oxford County Labour Force Development Strategy



### **Cultivate Entrepreneurs**

As a primary source of employment growth for the county, entrepreneurs and small businesses have the potential to retain and attract workers while diversifying the economy. Coordinating and enhancing existing support provided to entrepreneurs and small businesses will assist small businesses in fulfilling their role as the drivers of the local economy.

### **Attracting and Retaining People**

Trends such as the aging workforce, coupled with youth out-migration indicate that in the future Oxford County will be challenged to generate sufficient workers in emerging industries and occupations. Retaining the existing workforce, while integral to replacing retiring workers, must be supplemented with efforts to attract new workers to Oxford.

## Progress on Actions

At the time of writing this executive summary, Oxford County Community Employment Services has already begun action on the first theme of Building Collaboration recommended in this Strategy. The development of a Multi-Stakeholder Advisory Committee (MSAC) is currently underway where various committees and partnerships have already begun to be assembled based on the following chart. The MSAC will be responsible for overall oversight and guidance while individual committees will address individual themes.

