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**Subject:** Niagara Ambassador Program

**Report to:** Planning and Economic Development Committee

**Report date:** Wednesday, May 8, 2019

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## **Recommendations**

That Report ED 6-2019 **BE RECEIVED** for information.

## **Key Facts**

- Niagara Economic Development is working to develop more robust marketing activity in 2019 and build the Niagara brand for business investment.
- A best practice in economic development marketing is using credible third parties to help tell a region's success stories as a support to brand building.
- Niagara Economic Development has explored how other economic development groups have successfully engaged with local stakeholders to support business investment.
- Niagara Economic Development will be launching a Niagara Ambassador Program by May 1, 2019.

## **Financial Considerations**

There are no financial implications.

## **Analysis**

In reviewing economic development marketing best practices, a key factor that emerged is the importance of word of mouth as it relates to business investment decisions. Development Counsellors International has surveyed business decision makers and sites selectors regularly since 1996. They ask the question "what sources of information influence your perception of city's business climate?" In 2017, 68% mentioned either dialogue with industry peers, or word of mouth. (*DCI's Winning Strategies in Economic Development Marketing 2017*).

This helps to explain why many communities across Canada and the U.S. use ambassador programs as a critical element of their marketing and communications strategies. In Ontario, cities like Cambridge, Richmond Hill, Oshawa and Aurora have established similar programs. Each of these programs is structured slightly differently: some focus on digital ambassadors, others on an invitation-only format, and others with an application for membership.

Niagara Economic Development has developed a Niagara Ambassador Program designed to generate excitement and positive conversation about the region's business climate. The program is intended to engage local business leaders, community leaders, politicians and general cheerleaders for Niagara to promote Niagara as a great place to do business.

The program has been developed with three key objectives:

- **To develop a community of digital ambassadors** who are willing to share news, information and good news stories with their social media networks. The communication to this group would range from bi-weekly to monthly.
- **To identify ambassadors who would be willing to meet with potential investors** when they visit Niagara. Communication with this group would be intermittent and dependent on investor meeting needs. For example, a German investor would be paired with a German company in Niagara, or a food manufacturing investor would be paired with a similar company.
- **To develop content from ambassadors** by way of quotes and testimonials, business profiles, or case studies to add to the information and content we can share more widely.

The Niagara Ambassador Program complements both attraction and retention efforts, and provides Niagara Economic Development with an opportunity for greater reach and brand awareness. It will also increase and improve communication between Niagara Economic Development and the business community.

The structure of the program will be open to anyone who wants to participate. Local businesses and community leaders are encouraged to participate. To communicate the launch of the program, Niagara Economic Development will develop a media release, will engage the municipal Economic Development Offices, and will share the program with local business groups and associations via email and social media.

**Members of the Planning and Economic Development Committee are invited to join the program and become Niagara Ambassadors. More information and a sign up form can be found at [niagaracanada.com/Ambassadors](http://niagaracanada.com/Ambassadors).**

### **Alternatives Reviewed**

None applicable.

### **Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities**

Economic development activities described in this report directly support two of Council Strategic Priorities:

- Fostering innovation, investment and entrepreneurship
- Positioning Niagara globally

### **Other Pertinent Reports**

None applicable.

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*This report was prepared in consultation with and reviewed by Valerie Kuhns.*