

Harrogate Business Improvement District (BID)
International Work Exchange Grant 2024

Online Teams Meeting on Monday, 5 February, 2024 at 10 a.m. (EST)

Participants: Nora Gavarre – Business Development Officer, Economic & Creative Development, Invest Barrie, City of Barrie
Craig Stevens, Executive Director, Downtown Barrie Business Association (BIA)
Matthew Chapman, Harrogate BID, Manager
Bill Sergeant, Barrie International Relations Committee – Sub-Chair Harrogate

Matthew Chapman provided an overview of Harrogate's BID and the International Work Exchange Grant (IWEG) for 2024. He stated that as a result of BREXIT, Harrogate has less staff / workers available from Europe to be employed there, and their businesses want to have a program that will attract and retain employees over the long term. BID has 462 member businesses, and the majority are having the same issues. BID wishes to work with for the Harrogate International Partnership (HIP) towns of Luchon, FR; Montecatini, IT; Barrie, CA; and Wellington, NZ to see if they are interested in receiving participants from Harrogate as part of the IWEG program. Harrogate BID will provide match funding of up to £750 to eligible people from their businesses who wish to participate. The total BID budget is £10,000 per year, which means that 10 – 15 people would benefit from the Grant each year. They would be selected from across the retail, hospitality, professional services, or events sectors. The Grant program would run from 2024 – 2028 as part of the BID's second term mandate. BID would be responsible for selecting the businesses that would participate as well as the people who would receive the grant.

It was proposed that international work experience would last from 7 – 14 days long. It would allow the participants to gain new skills and bring their experiences back to their employer's business. It is hoped that this opportunity would encourage the participants to remain at their current employment longer and that they would seek leadership opportunities within that business. BID would encourage flexible employment models from each host business. It was not foreseen that the participants would be paid by the host business due to complications with work visas. It is important that this exchange is an experience exchange and not a "work" exchange as this can introduce a layer of complication with customs and immigration.

Craig Stevens, Barrie BIA, stated that he would support this proposal as it would provide great experiences for the Harrogate participants and provide opportunities for the host businesses in Barrie. One suggested employment opportunity in Barrie would be with the Flying Monkeys Craft Brewery, since Harrogate has a similar business called 'Cold Bath Brewing Company'. Such an exchange could lead to a twinning between the businesses, where they could sell each other's products.

Matthew Chapman also stated that a typical visit, as part of the exchange, could see the participant working for 3-4 days with the business, and this would be balanced with visiting

local attractions and cultural events, such as Kempenfest, Canada Day weekend, etc. The visits could be staggered during the year or be done all at once, it would depend on the applicants and the hosts.

Bill asked about the expectation from BID with respect to plane-to-plane hosting, i.e whether the host business would be expected to provide 'home stays' or not as well as showing the participant sites of interest in the local area. Matthew said that the IWEГ committee had not considered that, but he did mention that he did enjoy his home stay hospitality while he was in Barrie. In other words, traditional hosting by the IRC was not an expected part of the program.

In summary, Matthew stated that Harrogate prefers economic benefits from the HIP exchanges vice the traditional cultural exchanges, although that should not rule out cultural exchanges in the future.

Next Steps:

Nora told Craig and Matthew that a report about this online meeting would be presented at the IRC meeting on 6 February, 2024. The IRC would be asked whether they would support this proposal. Bill will let Craig and Matthew know what the IRC's decision is.

If the IRC was to move forward on this, Craig Stevens from the BIA would lead the Barrie business connections and support the IRC in developing the program.

Matthew is flying to Montecatini, Italy on 6 February, 2024 to discuss the IWEГ with them.

The next meeting of the BID will be at the end of February, 2024 when Matthew will talk to them about the feasibility of the IWEГ with the partner towns.

Respectfully submitted by:
Bill Sergeant, and
Nora Gavarre.