

Local Immigration Partnerships: Building Welcoming and Inclusive Communities through Multi-Level Governance

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Introduction

There is heightened interest from many sectors in the development of welcoming and inclusive communities. Provinces, territories, municipalities, and neighbourhood associations are developing plans to attract and retain newcomers to Canada - while libraries, schools, employers, police services, health centres, and others focus on responding to the unique needs of immigrants and refugees.

The value of community-level planning and localized responses is progressively being recognized. Accordingly, meaningful public policy requires a local lens. As Bradford (2009:14) stated, “policy interventions must increasingly work from the ground up to generate solutions rooted in the particular concerns of local communities, attuned to the specific needs and capacities of residents”.

Community Connections is a key component of Citizenship and Immigration Canada’s (CIC’s) modernized Settlement Program and an essential thread that influences all aspects of integration. The work of Community Connections is twofold: foster active and meaningful connections between newcomers and host communities, and enable newcomers to develop a sense of belonging while helping communities better understand the interests and potential contributions of newcomers.

Local Immigration Partnerships (LIPs) embody the evolving work of Community Connections. Through LIPs, CIC supports a new form of locally based collaboration among multiple stakeholders. These partnerships enable communities to develop strategic plans to address the opportunities and challenges associated with fostering inclusive and responsive environments. They also signify an innovation in multi-level collaborative governance – encouraging co-operation among federal, provincial, and municipal governments. Local Immigration Partnerships play an essential role in organizing various groups to develop coordinated strategies and target mainstream institutions, with the ultimate goal of factoring

immigrant settlement and integration into the broader community planning process. It is clear that LIPs represent a significant opportunity to build welcoming communities.

Building Welcoming Communities: A Two-Way Street

Integration is a two-way process, requiring adjustment on the part of both newcomers and host communities. The *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA)* of 2001 reflects this, stating that the successful integration of permanent residents into Canada involves mutual obligations for new immigrants and Canadian society. Ultimately, the goal is to support newcomers to become fully engaged in the social, economic, political, and cultural life of Canada.

Based on the principles of acceptance and respect, a welcoming community should:

- openly receive newcomers and create an inclusive environment;
- strive to understand the needs of newcomers and provide access to a full range of services and programs; and
- ensure newcomers are able to participate fully in all aspects of community life and Canadian society.

Newcomers, in turn, should endeavour to act on opportunities for participation; strive to contribute to community life within the context of Canadian laws and customs; and help others in the community.

Research undertaken by Esses et al. (2010) outlined further characteristics that enable communities to attract and retain newcomers. Linkages between the main actors working toward welcoming communities and the presence of newcomer-serving agencies that can successfully meet the needs of newcomers were among the features mentioned in the analysis. Table 1 illustrates the impacts of adequate versus inadequate social supports and highlights the need for interventions at the local level.

Table 1 Importance of Social Supports for Newcomers

| When Settlement Services Work | When Settlement Services Are Not Accessed |
|---|---|
| Adequate social support positively impacts newcomers: | Inadequate social support negatively impacts newcomers: |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Enhancement of integration, network building, and empowerment – Facilitation of employment and sharing of experiences – Reduction of stress, loneliness, and despair – Improvement of physical and mental health | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Social isolation – Loneliness – Depression – Inadequacy – Being in limbo – Lack of identity – Difficulty seeking employment |

Source: Stewart et al. (2008).

Establishment of Local Immigration Partnerships

In November 2005, Ontario signed the first Canada-Ontario Immigration Agreement (COIA) with the federal government. Through the Agreement, federal funds are provided for settlement and integration programs and services in Ontario communities, and for innovative services and delivery mechanisms to improve outcomes for newcomers. The Agreement recognizes that municipalities have an important role to play with respect to the integration of newcomers in Ontario.

The Municipal Immigration Committee (MIC) was established under COIA to explore municipal interests in immigration, and is co-chaired by CIC, the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration and the Association of Municipalities of Ontario. Through the MIC, municipalities from across the province have identified attraction and retention as well as settlement and integration as key municipal priorities. Further, the MIC highlighted the need to propose new strategies and structures to address complex social issues and service gaps. Consequently, LIPs were introduced through COIA.

Forming Strategic and Sustainable Partnerships: LIPs in Ontario

Citizenship and Immigration Canada has a history of supporting partnerships driven to meet community needs. Community Connections funds place-based initiatives, such as Library Settlement Partnerships, Settlement Workers in Schools and In-School Supports, which provide valuable assistance to many newcomers. While these programs give essential support, there is an appetite for broader engagement; LIPs are a very concrete way to assist a much wider array of mainstream institutions beyond schools and libraries to provide access to newcomers and address their needs.

Local Immigration Partnerships originated from two calls for proposals in early 2008. One targeted communities throughout Ontario, and the other was directed at neighbourhoods in Toronto. The calls were issued by CIC in partnership with its Ontario counterpart to establish strategic partnerships that would co-ordinate and enhance services and programs with CIC as the funder for all agreements. The calls for proposals were flexible with reference to applicants, recognizing that local leadership in immigration can vary depending on the place. As a result, municipal or regional governments lead some LIPs while community organizations lead others.

Both calls received keen responses. There are now 45 LIPs in Ontario: 30 in Ontario communities outside Toronto and 15 in Toronto neighbourhoods, including a Toronto city-wide LIP. Three Francophone Immigration Networks in Ontario - Réseau Est, Réseau Nord, and Réseau Centre Sud-Ouest – complement these partnerships.

| Community-wide LIPs in Ontario | LIPs in Toronto Neighbourhoods |
|---|--|
| 1000 Islands Regional Workforce Development Board - Renfrew | Agincourt Community Services Association |
| Catholic Immigration Centre - Ottawa | Jewish Vocational Services of Metropolitan Toronto |
| City of Hamilton | Rexdale Women's Centre - North Etobicoke |
| Corporation of the Town of Smith Falls | JobStart |
| Corporation of the City of London | Delta Family Resource Centre |
| Corporation of the City of Sault Ste. Marie | St. Stephen's Community House - West Downtown |
| Corporation of the City of Windsor | Catholic Cross-cultural Services |
| County of Simcoe (18 communities) | Community Social Planning Council of Toronto - York South Weston |
| Eastern Ontario Training Board - Prescott-Russell | Thornccliffe Neighbourhood Office |
| Halton Region | Warden Woods Community Centre - South West Scarborough |
| Kingston Community Health Centres | WoodGreen Community Services |
| Municipality of Chatham-Kent | Working Women Community Centre - North York East |
| New Canadians Centre - Peterborough | Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture - East Downtown |
| North Bay & District Multicultural Centre | ACCESS Employment Services |
| Northwestern Ontario Municipal Partnership (32 communities) | Toronto City-Wide |
| Peel Newcomer Strategy Group | |
| Quinte United Immigrant Services - Belleville | |
| Regional Municipality of Durham | |
| Regional Municipality of Waterloo | |
| The Corporation of the City of Greater Sudbury | |
| The Corporation of the City of Guelph | |
| The Corporation of The County of Huron | |
| The Corporation of the County of Lambton | |
| The Regional Municipality of Niagara | |
| The Regional Municipality of York | |
| Thunder Bay Multicultural Association | |
| Timmins Economic Development Corporation | |
| United Way of Leeds & Grenville | |
| Workforce Planning Board of Grand Erie | |
| YWCA - St Thomas/Elgin | |

As outlined in the initial calls for proposals, CIC intended to achieve certain objectives through the LIPs. These objectives, which have guided the LIPs in their early stages of development, are highlighted in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Overall Objectives of the Local Immigration Partnerships



Steps in the LIPs process include:

1. Establish a partnership council.
2. Create terms of reference for the partnership council.
3. Conduct research and establish a local settlement strategy to be implemented over three years.
4. Develop an annual action plan that addresses local priorities for that fiscal year.
5. Report on implementation of the action plan on an annual basis.

The LIPs noted above are at various stages of advancement, though many have developed their settlement strategies.

The partnership councils formed to date have engaged a wide range of stakeholders. The London LIP provides a fine example, including members from the following spheres on its council: settlement agencies, community organizations, health centres, police services, seniors services, government representatives, child and family services, French and English language training providers, employers, housing services, immigrants, legal services, schools, women's

services, libraries, and refugee services. Many LIPs also have a community consultation mechanism which seeks the involvement of newcomers and people from the host community. Most LIPs also have a community consultation mechanism which seeks the involvement of newcomers and people from the host community to assess needs, identify assets and gaps/barriers, and coordinate services at the local level.

Bradford and Andrew (2010) note that LIPs have adopted a number of effective practices, including a strong client focus, broad-based leadership and membership, cultural competence, transparency, empowerment, positive communication strategies, and social learning/information sharing.

Comparable Approaches

Although the LIPs are based in Ontario, a comparable strategy is being employed in British Columbia. With funding provided by the federal government under the Canada-BC Immigration Agreement, Welcome BC has created the Welcoming and Inclusive Communities and Workplaces Program (WICWP). This initiative has four community-level elements: community partnership development, knowledge development and exchange, public education, and demonstration projects. In one case, partners in Burnaby including the board of trade, school board, chamber of commerce and service provider organizations (SPOs) organized learning tours for newcomers, which focused on face-to-face mentoring to dispel myths about the workplace and raise awareness among employers. Drawing on these tours, videos entitled *Breaking Down the Barriers*, were developed and have received a great deal of attention in the community.

Breaking Down the Barriers
**A Demonstration Project of the Welcoming and Inclusive
Communities and Workplaces Program (WICWP) of Welcome BC**

Learning tours for newcomers In Burnaby, British Columbia

[First Tour](#)

[Second Tour](#)

Similar efforts are under way in other regions across Canada to engage mainstream institutions and collaborate with a range of stakeholders in the development of strategic community plans for the settlement of newcomers. Much like LIPs, these initiatives are at various stages. For example, cities in Manitoba and Alberta are developing their own settlement policies, and Quebec's regionalization councils of locally elected officials are creating strategic plans. Further, a range of approaches are being piloted to engage the broader community, most notably, the Francophone minority communities in New Brunswick.

On the Horizon: Greater Opportunities and Inevitable Challenges

Reflecting the keen interest in the launch of LIPs (greater-than-anticipated uptake and partnerships that have proved more robust than envisioned), a general consensus exists that LIPs are a much-needed innovation that can make a positive impact. The Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration's report on Best Practices in Settlement Services (House of Commons, 2010) recommended that the Government of Canada continue to support and expand LIPs in Ontario and explore the potential for pilot projects in other interested provinces. CIC has indicated agreement with the Standing Committee's recommendation.

The recently created action-research group, Welcoming Communities Initiative, funded under the terms of a Community-University Research Alliance, is also devoting significant research capacity to explore the dynamics of LIPs.

Despite broad-based support, challenges remain. A number of outstanding research questions need to be examined as the LIPs evolve.

1. How can participation and momentum be sustained over time?
2. How can LIPs achieve a healthy balance between pursuing genuinely community-driven approaches and meeting the expectations of funding organizations?
3. How can accountability frameworks and suitable performance measurement indicators be developed collaboratively? Both the process (range of membership, engagement and consultation, empowerment) and outcomes (increased linkages and co-ordination across sectors, enhanced services, reduced institutional barriers) would need to be evaluated.

Conclusion

The vision for LIPs is to support the development of self-sustaining multi-sectoral partnerships at the local level to integrate newcomer needs into the municipal planning process, while influencing provincial and federal priorities and processes. Local Immigration Partnerships typify the two-way street approach to integration, which regards all newcomers and members of the host community to be equal and important agents of change.

As noted in the [2010 Speech from the Throne](#), “the best solutions to the diverse challenges confronting Canada's communities are often found locally.” Torjman (2007: 3) explained: “Recognizing the potential of place as a strategic focal point is not new. What is new is the sophistication of emerging community approaches, the scope of the work and the range of actors involved in these local efforts.”

Local Immigration Partnerships are unique in that they represent federal, provincial, and municipal collaboration. The Canada-Ontario Immigration Agreement affirms that municipal involvement and investments in local and regional communities can strengthen and leverage capacity to attract, serve, integrate, and retain newcomers. Community Connections and

other partners will continue to innovate in exploring opportunities for co-constructing policy and supporting collaborative governance mechanisms. As Bradford and Andrew (2010: 6) remarked: “Such joined-up arrangements enable governments and communities to address shared, complex problems in more flexible, responsive, and participatory ways.”

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