

Final Evaluation of the Northwest
Scarborough Local Immigration Partnership

Increasing Community Capacity through the LIP Process

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1.1 Understanding the background to the LIPs

The Canada-Ontario Immigration Agreement signed in November 2005 created the foundation for a strategic plan aimed at supporting the successful social and economic integration of immigrants in Ontario. The strategic plan sought to encourage strategies and actions which would promote the following long-term outcomes:

- Newcomers are welcomed and fully integrated into Canadian and Ontario communities;
- Newcomers are engaged and participate in all sectors of Ontario/Canadian society – economic, social, political and cultural;
- Ontario/Canadian society and communities benefit from the contribution of newcomers.

Consultations in support of the development of the strategic plan highlighted three main needs: employment, language training, and better information and guidance. In order to facilitate the ability of local communities to achieve these objectives, the concept of Local Immigration Partnerships (LIPs) was proposed. LIPs are local planning and implementation bodies that are to engage local stakeholders in a planning process to develop a local strategy for integrating newcomers. CIC set out the following purposes and parameters in the development of the LIPs:

“LIPs will provide a collaborative framework for, and facilitate the development and implementation of, sustainable local and regional solutions for successful integration of immigrants to Ontario.”

CIC CFP identified four specific objectives and outcomes:

- 1) Improve access to, and coordination of, effective services
- 2) Improve access to the labour market
- 3) Strengthen local and regional awareness and capacity to integrate
- 4) Establish or enhance partnerships and participation of multiple stakeholders in planning, and coordinating delivery of integration services of both CIC and MCI

The government commitment behind LIPs was significant:

The Standing Committee March 2010:

“The Committee believes LIPs have great potential. They could bring together diverse parties who might not otherwise collaborate on immigrant settlement. The LIPs provide a vehicle to move collaboration beyond their original purpose”.

Government response September 2010:

“The principles of the LIPs are in line with government priorities in the Speech from the Throne, namely that the GOC will take steps to support communities in their efforts to tackle local challenges .. LIPS are the best example of existing projects that foster partnerships ... LIPs’ efforts have also involved examining needs of immigrants and refugees in order to render mainstream services more responsive”.
LIPs as the key legacy from first COIA (context of 2006 settlement funding increase but limited program uptake or evidence of better outcomes)

NWS LIP Structure

A Local Immigration Partnership represents both a process and a plan, the process of engaging local stakeholders in planning, and the development of a settlement strategy that can guide the work of supporters of the plan. To meet these objectives, the NWS LIP relied on the following structures:

- The Toronto NWS Partnership Council, the main organizing body for the LIP, providing strategic direction for its work, comprised of local partner service providers and organizations concerned with immigrant and newcomer issues;
- Committees/Workgroups, created to undertake the analysis and produce recommendations:
 - Committee #1: Access to Information
 - Committee #2: Employment, Education & Training
 - Committee #3: Health & Wellness
 - Committee #4: Community Engagement & Social Inclusion
 - Committee #5: Family Settlement & Legal Support

These Committees have been created based on the identified priority areas by newcomers to northwest Scarborough. The overall goal for the implementation phase was to establish the necessary infrastructures and facilitate different delivery models to enhance newcomer settlement process into northwest Scarborough neighbourhoods.

1.2 LIP Midterm Evaluation Summary (see midterm evaluation report for full findings)

Our research approach was to undertake surveys, focus groups and a document review. We focused the evaluation questions on three issues:

- 1) Process
- 2) Structure
- 3) Outcomes

Summary of Results: Structure

Strengths

- Generally a sound structure
- Brought different stakeholders together
- Synergistic potential

Areas of Improvement

- Value of committee membership is not always clear
- Avoid duplication of other networks with the same group of participating partners/stakeholders
- Wider range of opinions solicited

Summary of Results: Outcomes

Strengths

- Increased awareness about settlement issues
- More connections between participant agencies

- Increased opportunities for newcomers involvement

Areas of Improvement

- Fewer outcomes than some expected
- Most outcomes mentioned are still at the foundational level
- Participants struggling to identify tangible community changes
- More local networking, collaboration and partnerships needed (LIP needs to encourage interactions that would not have otherwise existed)
- Survey participants not widely involved in LIP activities/outcomes

Summary of Results: Process

Strengths

- LIP continues to bring stakeholders around a common issue
- Convergence of different views is one of the LIPs strengths
- Overall participant satisfaction at many LIP meetings
- Website is useful

Areas of Improvement

- Enhanced communication and information sharing
- Eroding sense of community ownership
- Lack of clear focus and role

1.3 LIP Final Evaluation

Recognizing the changing needs of the LIP, the goal of the final evaluation process was to understand the strengths of the LIP process, the challenges, and recommendations from partners going forward.

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) formed the analytic framework to guide our evaluation process. Many elements of this project were anchored in a generative approach, which draws on the principles of Appreciative Inquiry (AI). This orientation to research, planning and other stakeholder conversations is based on the idea that ‘what you feed grows’. It locates and articulates what is working in an organization, group or system and creates future-focused possibilities that use existing strengths to reach new heights. AI assumes that people and groups are continually in the process of generating a new future, and that focusing energy in that direction allows us to bring that future to life.

Results

Interviewees identified the multi-faceted nature of the LIPs process as a strength. Comments included:

“LIPs are national in governance and local in terms of strategy development”

“There were municipal bodies at the table that it is normally very hard to get access to”

“We would share research and discuss action items emerging from that research”

I grouped these dynamics as a series of “institutional hybrids” (as termed by Prof Bradford, Western University)

1. Federal governance *and* Local Action-Planning
2. Municipal *and* Community ‘co-production’
3. Newcomer Representation *and* Mainstream Organizations
4. Community of Place *and* Communities of Interest/Identity
5. Economic Development *and* Social Inclusion
6. Community Action *and* Community Research

When asked the question “What were the top three strengths of the NWS LIP process” comments included:

“ACSA took a strong leadership role that allowed partners to contribute their expertise without having to worry about administrative tasks”

“The structured allowed us to contribute in the areas we were strongest”

“It was great to have stakeholders such as the City and school board at the table.

In summary, the top three strengths were identified as:

- 1) Strong leadership, prior settlement experience of lead agency important
- 2) Prior history of collaboration important factor in LIP council formation (trust and capacity and leadership)
- 3) Broad range of stakeholders engaged everywhere and new partnerships eg. school boards, health, and police ‘at the table’

An issue that had arisen in the mid-term evaluation was about the capacity of certain agency staff to participate in LIP, when there was not a significant investment from their agency leadership in the processes of LIP. Some staff felt that they were not given the time needed to be full contributors to the LIP process. We therefore wanted to identify whether participation in LIPs was a priority for agencies. All the agencies interviewed said LIP was a priority. 50% said the participation of the agency ranged according to other partnership commitments. The other 50% identified LIP as their main settlement-related partner. Comments included:

“ The best outcome about LIP is the better settlement services via coordination of many existing agencies “

“It’s great to be part of a collaborative network of organizations that has common operational priorities: employment, language, settlement, housing, health, justice, civic participation”

“I appreciate that the vision of LIPs has not been about eliminating service duplication but rather about community-driven innovation and collaboration.”

We were also interested in finding out what were some ideas as to what issues LIP should be moving forward on (Are there additional ways the NWS LIP can effectively move forward in the future?). Those comments included:

“We need to have a stronger connection with employers, to help our clients to find good jobs”

“Partnerships with the private sector”

“Continued coordination between the committees”

“Education is really important for the immigrant population. In my opinion, post-secondary institutions should consider a more comprehensive, realistic and effective way to the integration, access and inclusion of immigrant adults to the educational system ,especially in cases where people have previous education/backgrounds. The chances or opportunities for foreign trained professionals to access education are still at the very low level. This issue needs to be addressed in this community as soon as possible.”

Recognizing that there are challenges inherent to any process of bringing a broad range of stakeholders to the table, we were interested in exploring what the key informants viewed were the challenges to the *process* making sure that the feedback was specific to structural or procedural change and not focused on administrative abnormalities. Comments about challenges included:

“ After year 2 we had begun to think about the LIPs as a permanent vehicle. These new changes feel like they are slowing down some great momentum”

“We have had a very difficult time securing non-government funding for settlement services as is. Where are we supposed to go if the LIPs are not funded federally?”

“As an agency we struggled with how to be involved with LIP – we didn’t know if we could participate in the implementation stage of a project if we hadn’t been involved with the planning and vice versa.”

“It felt like a lot of time was spent planning and that momentum was lost when it came to the actual ‘doing’”

“At the end of the day, it didn’t feel like many of the partners were involved in implementation”

In summary the challenges arising were:

1. Funding: Availability, and balancing two legitimate goals: community-driven innovation and federal accountability
2. Steering: Ensuring consistent messages to LIPs on parameters (eg. what’s planning v. implementation?);
3. Coordinating: Longer term options for LIP role? (eg. permanent planning arm, best practice network and tools, pilot project vehicle?)
4. Implementation stage challenges: selecting the projects; securing funding; mobilizing the ‘doers’

1.4 Conclusion

This summary of outcomes lead to some key take-aways from the NWS LIP Process:

- 1) LIP produced important outputs, and to continue to be effective in the future must have concrete goals and outcomes developed through consensus with the partnership council at the front-end of the planning process.
- 2) The creation of an inclusive process and the identification of a wide range of substantive, concrete initiatives must continue.
- 3) Locally-based planning can be productive and can generate meaningful plans of action.
- 4) A holistic approach, identifying the benefits of newcomer/immigrant integration at an individual, community and systemic level is helpful and advisable throughout continued discourse and discussion related to newcomer inclusion.

Overall, the NWS LIP has effectively mobilized the community to develop the LIP and to coordinate and partner to deliver integrative services. NWS LIP is changing the landscape of how we work together as organizations and systems and moving forward with a common goal of ensuring that collaborative settlement services is on everyone's planning agendas.