

From Government to Governance: The city of Toronto’s role in immigrant settlement service coordination since the Canada-Ontario Immigration Agreement

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Introduction

This research examines the issue of immigrant settlement in Canadian cities. It focusses on **why the inclusion of municipal governments in the 2005 Canada-Ontario Immigration Agreement (“COIA”) has resulted in a model of collaborative governance within the city of Toronto.** Since COIA, federal initiatives such as Local Immigration Partnerships have formalized the involvement of municipal governments in the immigrant settlement process. This research finds that the inclusion of local government in issues related to immigrant settlement has resulted in a shift from “government” to a more collaborative form of “governance”, where decision-making involves the systematized inclusion of key community stakeholders. As the Canadian city to welcome the largest newcomer population, the case study of Toronto provides the opportunity to witness two significant shifts to the immigrant settlement sector in Canada:

1. from *bilateral to multilevel oversight of settlement* through the inclusion of municipal Governments, and
2. from *government to governance through formal collaboration between governmental and non-governmental stakeholders* on decisions related to immigrant settlement.



Methodology

In order to understand how the role of the City of Toronto has changed in the coordination of immigrant settlement services since COIA, I gathered information on what role the City played prior to, and following, implementation of the agreement. I used multiple methods of data collection in order to gather this information.

Document Analysis: By analyzing City of Toronto Council and Committee agendas, reports and minutes from the years leading up to 2005, I gained an understanding of the role that the City had played in coordinating services to the newcomer population prior to the signing of COIA. These documents provided information on policies related to immigration in the city and a deeper understanding of the City’s interest in becoming more involved with newcomer settlement issues.

Key informant interviews: I constructed semi-structured key informant interviews that provided a more detailed understanding of how the City had become involved with the coordination of immigrant settlement services since COIA. These interviews conveyed the important role that the Quadrant Local Immigration Partnerships play in collaborating with the City of Toronto. I gathered more information about how the City’s role had changed since COIA and the subsequent introduction of the Local Immigration Partnership model to Toronto.

Research Findings

Local Immigration Partnerships, (or “LIPs”) have had a significant impact on settlement service provision throughout Ontario. The development of LIPs in Toronto has been markedly different to other municipalities in the province. Following the introduction of LIPs to Toronto was the establishment of a “**Toronto Newcomer Initiative**”, and the subsequent development of the Toronto Newcomer Strategy. Finally, the introduction of a “**Newcomer Leadership Table**” introduced formalized collaborative governance to the immigrant settlement sector of Toronto.

Toronto LIPs

As a result of the immigrant population and high volume of service organizations, the mandate for Toronto LIPs was slightly different than for those of other Ontario municipalities. When Citizenship and Immigration Canada (“CIC”) issued the Call for Proposals in 2008, they issued a separate one specifically for the City of Toronto. In May 2010, a federal-municipal contribution agreement was signed to the City of Toronto for initiatives related to the support of “City settlement planning and community capacity building”, including the establishment of a “Toronto Newcomer Office” (“TNO”, previously “TNI”) within the municipality.

Toronto Newcomer Office

The Toronto Newcomer Initiative (later, “Toronto Newcomer Office: “TNO”) was originally formed in May 2010 as a result of the contribution agreement between the City of Toronto and CIC. The current work of the Toronto Newcomer Office involves deep collaboration with Quadrant LIPs and City departments, and is based on the Four Pillars that were outlined in the “Toronto Newcomer Strategy” document. These four pillars apply to the newcomer population of Toronto and relate back to the priorities outlined in the most recent funding agreement with CIC:



Four Pillars of the Toronto Newcomer Strategy
Advancing Labour Market Outcomes
Promoting and Supporting Good Health
Improving Access to Municipal Supports
Supporting Civic Engagement and Community Capacity

Toronto Newcomer Leadership Table

The Toronto City-wide LIP, or “Newcomer Leadership Table” (“NLT”) held its inaugural meeting in November 2012. The NLT consists of representatives from Quadrant LIPs, immigrant-serving organizations, and both the provincial Ministry of Citizenship, Immigration and International Trade, as well as Citizenship and Immigration Canada. By explicitly stating at the outset that “at this table, everybody has an equal voice”, the City of Toronto created a Table that allowed for a collaborative decision-making process. The Steering Committee of the NLT consists of: the Executive Directors of the Social Development, Finance, and Administration division at the City of Toronto, the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants/OCASI and the Chief Operations and Strategy Officer of the United Way.

Research Results - NLT

Some Quadrant LIPs saw the NLT as a place to focus efforts on settlement issues that were present in all 4 Quadrants, while others felt that the work of the NLT was a “corporate process”, focussed primarily on the priorities of the municipal government. While the NLT is not an arena for policy formation, it does allow conversations that may not otherwise have occurred, some of which ultimately result in policy change. Examples of this are the City of Toronto’s involvement with the Eurocities Integrating Cities Charter, and the decision by City Council to petition the province of Ontario to provide permanent residents with the right to participate in municipal elections

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the support of Simon Fraser University, particularly the support of Professor Patrick Smith. I would also like to acknowledge the guidance of Professor Karen Ferguson from Simon Fraser University and Professor Caroline Andrew from the University of Ottawa. Finally, thank you to the many interviewees from both the City of Toronto and the Toronto Quadrant LIPs for your time and energy.

Conclusions

Changing Municipal Role

The initiatives outlined in the Research Findings provide evidence that *the role of municipal government in the coordination of immigrant settlement services since the Canada-Ontario Immigration Agreement has changed*, and that this role may continue to shift as the local government takes on additional responsibilities.

“Who knows where we’ll end up. There’s not a firm goal in my mind. This is an iterative process, it’s a developmental process and it has to be that, it has to be open”

(C. Brillinger, December 2013).

The consensus from those interviewed, however, is that the model will continue to follow the same guiding principles of intergovernmental collaboration and engagement with key community stakeholders involved in the immigrant settlement sector.

Increasing Municipal Interest in Settlement

The renewal of funding to 2016 for the Toronto Newcomer Office indicates a sustained support from the federal government for the involvement of the municipal government in the coordination of immigrant settlement services within the City of Toronto. The City Council decision to pass initiatives recommended by the Toronto Newcomer Office in coordination with the Office of Social Development, Finance and Administration indicate an interest on behalf of the municipality to continue investing staff and resources on immigrant settlement service coordination. As the Report to Council states the integration of newcomers is “an opportunity to enrich the city economically, socially and culturally”. Municipalities are referred to as “first responders” to matters of settlement.

Shift towards Collaborative Governance

The Toronto case study and the Newcomer Leadership Table exemplify *a shift towards collaborative governance, both vertically and horizontally*. In this case, the vertical collaboration is occurring primarily through ongoing federal-municipal negotiations and contribution agreements, while the horizontal collaboration is evident through sustained relationships with Local Immigration Partnerships and community stakeholders at the Newcomer Leadership Table. Community organizations in Toronto working on immigrant settlement had occasionally cooperated with various levels of government on initiatives, however, these instances were on a needs basis. The Newcomer Leadership Table marks the *first time that key players from across all three levels of government work in formal, ongoing cooperation with key community stakeholders for service-level planning of immigrant settlement* across the city of Toronto.