

May, 2015

**Evaluation 2014 - 2015 Final Report
Waterloo Region Immigration Partnership**



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Introduction

The Waterloo Region Immigration Partnership is a community-wide commitment to support and integrate immigrants in Waterloo Region. The Immigration Partnership (IP) is premised on the conviction that successful settlement and integration is a mutually-beneficial process that involves both immigrants and the broader community engaging in a process of mutual learning and inter-relatedness. The vision of the IP is that Waterloo Region will be a community where immigrants and refugees can settle, work, and belong.¹

Formalized in 2010, the IP is comprised of a Partnership Council, Steering Groups and a staff team, which is hosted by the Region of Waterloo. Citizenship and Immigration Canada funds the work of its backbone structure. Additional funding is provided by Ontario's Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration, the Region of Waterloo, and the United Way.

Achieving Change in a Complex System

The Immigration Partnership emerged as a collaborative to address challenges and fragmentation with the settlement and employment sectors. The three pillars of the partnership – Settle, Work and Belong – were intentionally designed to improve the systems and conditions that were keeping immigrants in the region on the margins of the community.

Each of the three pillars encompasses a broad array of knowledge and at times divergent opinions about the nature of the issues and appropriate responses. Each requires the leveraging of community strengths, assets and partnerships. Further layered into the three pillars are very real experiences of immigrants in Waterloo Region. Experiences of housing instability, of unemployment and underemployment, of financial and social exclusion, and disconnects from the broader community and systems of support are the kinds of issues that the pillars are designed to address.

It is not easy to achieve the kind of systems change the IP is working towards. It means coordinating, supporting and nurturing a diverse collection of stakeholders and relationships to move the needle on settlement, integration and community involvement. It means shifting cultures and attitudes; making the connections between individuals, services, communities and the broader systems; and then sustaining achievements. For the Immigration Partnership, it also means fostering values reflective of community empowerment, inclusion, social justice, and diversity.

¹ For the Immigration Partnership, the use of the general term “immigrants” refers to people who immigrated a long time ago and more recently, refugees and refugee claimants, immigrants who are and are not Canadian citizens and all newcomers to Canada, who are living in Waterloo Region.

It would be easy to get lost in the complexity of systems change and become overwhelmed by the myriad of activities, processes and outcomes. Indeed, there are challenges within the IP that reflect the complexity of the kind of work it undertakes. At the same time, the IP has a number of current advantages which can help the collective navigate the complexity and create the conditions for a community where immigrants can settle, work and belong.

The Immigration Partnership Evaluation

With a new manager in place and movement towards improved engagement processes, the opportunity in the fall of 2014 was to take the time to reflect on where the IP was and what it had achieved. There was also the opportunity to identify where the IP could further build upon its strengths, fill gaps, and make a greater contribution to systems change.

To help realize this opportunity, the Immigration Partnership engaged The O'Halloran Group to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of its processes and outcomes. The purpose of the evaluation was to gain a better understanding of the value and impact of the Partnership. The insights and lessons learned through the evaluation will guide strategic decision making and set priorities for moving forward.

The evaluation was completed between November 2014 and March 2015. The evaluation was guided by an Evaluation Consultive Group (ECG) which included members of the Immigration Partnership and the IP manager. This group provided input and guidance on the evaluation. In April 2015, The O'Halloran Group led a Sense-Making workshop with members of the IP Council and Steering Groups. The workshop engaged members of the IP in collaboratively surfacing insights, learnings and new strategies for action.

Evaluation Questions

The evaluation address process, outcome and developmental evaluation questions. These questions were developed in collaboration with the ECG and used to guide the evaluation.

Process Questions:

1. In what ways and to what extent are a cross-sector of stakeholders engaged in the Immigration Partnership?
2. What is the quality of this engagement?
3. What is the value of the collaboration? How does it enhance mission achievement?

Outcome Questions:

4. What is the contribution of the Immigration Partnership to successful settlement, integration and community involvement of newcomers and other immigrants?

5. To what extent are outcomes emerging in connection with the Council and Steering Groups at the organizational level, partnership level and community level?
6. What difference are these outcomes expected to make for immigrants and refugees in the community?

Developmental Questions:

7. What are the lessons learned from past experience, and what insights need to be carried forward?
8. Where are the opportunities to further enhance the effectiveness and contribution of the Immigration Partnership?

Methods

We used a mixed-methods design, including both quantitative and qualitative methods. Data collection tools were designed to capture information related to each evaluation question from various perspectives. Tools were shared with the ECG for feedback and validation prior to data collection.²

Methods included meeting observation, key informant interviews, focus groups and a partnership assessment survey. See Appendix A for a detailed discussion of the evaluation methods.

A summary of stakeholder participation in the evaluation is presented in Table 1.

² This project has been reviewed and approved by the Community Research Ethics Board, Kitchener ON.

Table 1: Summary of stakeholder participation in the evaluation

	Survey	Focus groups	Meeting observation	Interviews
Number of participants	57	19	-	14
Participation rate	66%	30%	-	-
Council	15		✓	2
Staff team	6	6	✓	1
Belong Steering Group	16	4	✓✓	1
Public Education Campaign Action Group	5		✓	
Municipal Services Action Group	5		✓	
Work Steering Group	11	11	✓	1
Immigrant Employment Awareness Group	6		✓✓	
Settle Steering Group	12	4	✓	1
Health Supports Action group	5			
Other	7			
Community consultation participants				8

Following the data collection, a half-day sense-making workshop was held with members of the Immigration Partnership. All members of the IP were invited to attend, and the session drew approximately 25 participants, with representatives from Council and the Steering Groups. For many of the sense-making workshop participants, it was the first time they had met each other. A summary of the evaluation data was sent in advance. The conversation during the workshop was focused on applying the data to further develop and strengthen the partnership and its contribution to the community.

In the report that follows, the first three sections share detailed evaluation findings. The final chapter presents strategic recommendations for moving forward.

Evaluation Findings

1. ENGAGEMENT OF MEMBERS

Overall, we heard about a wide range of engagement from IP current members. This range included some very different kinds of experiences, including characterizations of a supportive, open environment within meetings to experiences of uncertainty and feelings of not being able to contribute in a way that was comfortable.

Reflecting on and refining engagement processes is a core opportunity for the IP moving forward. Engagement is the core of meaningful action and systems change. There are areas where processes are already improving, such as in communication (e.g. the newsreel to provide regular updates on IP activities). At the same time, the evaluation brought forward a number of aspects of engagement where the Council and Steering Groups could pay further attention. These include cross-sector representation, quality of engagement, communication, and principles in practice.

Cross-sector representation in the IP

The Immigration Partnership Council and Steering Groups includes close to 100 members, representing 46 unique organizations. There is a good range of service providers, including settlement, employment and community services. A review of the IP member list³ shows that about 36% of members represent community groups and settlement services, followed by 26% representing the business sector. Immigrant community members make up another 16% of the IP membership. Government (11%) and education sector (11%) representatives also help to make up membership.

While many were satisfied with the representation of sectors within the IP, some consistently noted a need for even greater diversity.

According to some key informants, having more immigrants and refugees around the table would be important to better understand lived experience and direct needs. Participation in the IP was also seen as an opportunity for immigrants to get more involved in their community. A few members noted the importance of hearing directly from immigrants who are not also service providers. These members believed that while it was a strength to have service providers who also identify as immigrants, immigrants who are not service providers would bring a different set of insights about the system.

³ Core membership includes Council, SSG, BSG, WSG and IEAG.

The Settle Steering Group specifically identified the need to engage more experts outside of settlement services (e.g., employers, the public sector, cultural groups and mainstream service providers). They believed that they could use broader perspectives to help devise and implement actions that would better meet the needs of immigrants.

Quality of Engagement

The evaluation revealed a range in terms of the quality of engagement experienced by IP members. The partnership assessment survey showed that many rated their experiences as being somewhat in the middle – not bad, but not as good as it could be either.

The partnership assessment survey showed⁴:

- 79% of partners who responded to the survey reported their point of view and opinion are respected by others
- 64% reported they were able to participate in a meaningful way to discussions
- 64% felt comfortable voicing their concerns or disagreement during discussions
- 58% report having been involved in decision making during IP meetings
- 54% indicated there is space for difference of opinion and diversity
- 39% indicated that meetings and discussion promote creativity

The quality of member engagement varied between and within IP groups. Some members reported that the meeting environment was open, safe and welcoming of different opinions. Others described meeting discussions as rushed, unengaging and controlled by dominant voices. Some members also felt that their ability to respond to emerging issues was hampered by the slow decision making structure.

The experiences of Council members were the most divided. Some Council members felt that group discussions could be more generative and in-depth by taking more time to explore and understand various points of view. It was noted that Council tends to “shy away from tough discussions” and meetings don’t feel “mission driven.” It was also noted that having a funder on Council may impact members’ comfort level raising certain issues

⁴ Survey respondents rated each item on a scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree). Throughout the report, percentages are calculated based on the number of respondents to rate an item 5 or above (Agree to Strongly Agree).

(i.e., government policies). Some members reported that too much time was spent talking about the past, processes and structures, and funding. Other Council members had opposite experience, noting that Council had “perseverance to work through difficult issues and look at the pros and cons of actions.” Members felt the chair was effective in engaging various points of views and facilitating decision making.

Influences on Engagement

Members identified the following factors as influencing the quality of their engagement:

- **Meeting frequency and time commitment**

Members noted that the meeting frequency impedes flow and momentum around actions and issues. At the same time, members felt that they didn’t have enough time to attend meeting regularly and contribute as fully as they would like to.

“Due to the overwhelming administration demands from funders and the ongoing changes in the settlement sector, it’s very difficult to find time to attend meetings and engage as I wish.”

“When we had meetings every month it was hard to get people. Every other month, we lose momentum.”

Members of the Settle and Belong steering groups identified declining and inconsistent meeting attendance as a barrier to meaningful engagement. This was echoed by Immigration Partnership staff. Members noted that when partners miss meetings or send someone in their place, it takes time to bring them up to speed and “get on the same page.” It also hinders members’ ability to develop meaningful relationships. Inability to attend meetings was attributed to lack of time by many partners.

“Multiple commitments of everyone on the committee has meant there is often a different configuration of people at every meeting which can be challenging for the decision making process.”

- **Managing varying interests and mandates**

Members in all IP groups recognized the challenge of managing diverse interests and the funding pressures of organizations around the table. This was said to be tricky when the “agency’s program mandate is not in line with Immigration Partnership’s action areas.” It was also noted that it’s sometimes not clear if members are acting in the interest of their organization or of the IP as a whole. This lack of clarity was confusing for coming to shared understanding about the specific priorities and actions necessary for the IP.

“Most of the time, members reflect or support their agencies' policies, which makes it difficult to make decisions that fall away from their own agency.”

“I need to bite my tongue when some about me are focused on 'their' challenges and solutions and not those of the group.”

“At times conflict of interest becomes a factor when dealing with certain issues, especially among agencies providing the same services.”

- **Role clarity**

It was noted by members of Council, the Settle Steering Group and the Belong Steering Group that a lack of role clarity impedes members' ability to fully engage. This lack of clarity related to what Groups could make decisions about, and the kind of contribution that was expected from members. Some members noted that this has gotten better over the last year.

“The most challenging thing for me has been to understand what my role is on the Council and how I can be of assistance. Now that the CAP is finalized, I think we have a more clearly defined understanding of our role, as a whole. I'm hoping this will help us move forward and start to work together and support the pillars.”

- **Making Space for All Voices**

The Chair's ability to facilitate decision making and encourage participation was seen to influence engagement. Members of the Council and Work Steering Group commented that the Chairs of those groups were very effective. Feedback related to facilitation in other groups was mixed, with the main challenge being making sure everyone's voice gets heard.

“The chairperson has been excellent at encouraging members to participate”

“At the steering group level, it is apparent that there are a few voices that are often heard over others and I am not sure that others feel comfortable sharing differing opinions in the group setting... this negatively impacts decision making at the actual meeting”

“Meetings are often dominated by strong voices. There are often people not speaking up that have valuable contributions but may not thrive in that type of environment trying to compete for air time. Meetings often do not stay on topic and the conversation is swayed by the strongest voices.”

- **Staff support**

Members reported that the coordination role performed by staff is critical to “keep things moving.” Members appreciated being kept informed and up to date through meeting materials (minutes, agendas) and meeting reminders sent by staff. They described staff as responsive and accommodating. Members of the Settle Steering Group noted that the staff coordinator plays a key role in sharing information between the action groups.

One member noted that it is important to recognize that while staff provides the backbone to the IP, the responsibility for the moving actions forward needs to rest with the full partnership.

“The only thing we need to keep mindful of is that the staff is not the partnership, we are the partnership... Sometimes it is easy to say the partnership is [the staff]. It’s not us versus them. It’s all of us together and they just help to make it work by getting the work done behind the scenes.”

- **Communication**

The evaluation revealed the need for more strategic communications. The feedback from members suggest that improving communication across and within IP groups is not necessarily about sharing more information, but the right kind of information, depending on the decisions and actions needed.

Members of steering and actions groups noted they didn’t have the right understanding of what other groups within the IP are doing. Not understanding what other IP groups were doing was seen to affect the ability to make decisions and move forward. As one member commented, there was so much going on, it was hard to keep track of everything. Some members also noted that there is a disproportionate amount of meeting time spent talking about process and structure of the IP and this gets in the way of action.

“I can’t be on every Committee and I can’t keep track of everything. I think there is a lot going on... that is a personal frustration.”

“The communication is very inconsistent. Sometimes you know what is happening and sometimes you go a month of not knowing what is happening.”

One focus group participant recognized that there are Council updates on their agendas and that the meeting minutes of all groups are posted on the Partnership’s website, but she also pointed out that people didn’t have time to read them and that more structure for information sharing would be helpful. This group appreciated the opportunity to come

together with the entire IP membership at a community forum and suggested that these events take place more frequently.

Some members expressed that they feel disconnected from Council. In one focus group, members admitted that they didn't know who the Council chair was and requested a list of the members. These members suggested holding more IP wide events with opportunities to share information across IP groups.

"I think we can have structure and provide an opportunity more often for people to come together regularly. I see people want that. People want to collaborate and connect more meaningfully. I think we can provide that opportunity - do that more."

Reasons for Leaving

When we spoke to past members of the IP who remain community stakeholders, their reasons for leaving the Partnership included: lack of time, frustrations about the changes in management, frustrations about bureaucratic nature of the Partnership, and lack of action and ability to see outcomes.

"It is more than I am able to give without being certain what the results or outcome would be that would be worthwhile" – Community Stakeholder

Principles in Practice

Through the partnership assessment survey, IP members were asked to reflect on the principles of the Immigration Partnership and the extent to which they experienced those principles in the practice. Overall, most members saw the partnership as somewhat reflective of its core values and principles. Being respectful and non-judgmental were the strongest principles in action.

The following table shows the percentage of respondents who positively experienced the principle as part of their engagement with the IP.

Table 2. Principles in Practice

Is respectful and non-judgmental	70%
Makes decision by consensus	67%
Is immigrant-focused	65%
Consults before making decision	65%
Acts with transparency	64%
Is community-driven	63%
Is purpose driven	61%
Is inclusive	55%
Follows best practices	44%
Is flexible	43%
Is accountable	43%
Is responsive	41%
Is results-focused	39%
Is action-oriented	37%
Is innovative	35%
Is efficient	31%

2. THE VALUE OF THE COLLABORATION

The majority of members saw their engagement in the collaborative as valuable. Members noted that the IP provides a forum for connecting with diverse community stakeholders around issues facing immigrants and refugees. They see the Immigration Partnership as a place to create new connections and strengthen existing relationships.

“I have seen that in my time with the partnership, relationships form and blossom and has been great to see. Such a wonderful responsibility of partnership to continue to help people network, form relationships, and really build community.”

Benefits

Benefits and positive outcomes of the collaboration included:

- The development of a stronger network: 70%
- New connections with IP partners within the last year: 64%
- Enhanced existing or developed new relationships: 64%
- New insights and learning: 59%
- Greater exchange of information between participating organizations: 55%
- Positive change in how they relate to the community: 53%

The Immigration Partnership was also seen as valuable because it:

- **Provided a forum to share and voice concerns/issues** - Members noted that they appreciated the opportunity to address issues as a community, rather than as an individual organization. The IP provided a forum to do this.

“We are such small organization and deal with such a small part of immigration population. [Our voice] was not being heard amongst all the other voices and the other issues. This has provided a great way to meet with others service providers to bring some of the issues we are dealing with to the table.”

“It just feels like there is more weight behind some of these issues that we would have as a solitary agency.”

- **Contributed to better understanding of needs of immigrants** - Members reported that the connections they made through their involvement in the IP has helped them gain knowledge about the needs of immigrants, which in turn helps them design or adjust services and internal practices. Immigrant community members appreciated the opportunity to shape local services and share their experience with decision makers.

“[Being part of the IP is] useful for building networks, understanding range of services available, practical for considering immigrant and settlement needs and issues when planning services.”

“It gives me a platform to share my experience as an immigrant.”

- **Increased understanding of immigrant serving organizations, services and resources** - Members appreciated the opportunity to learn more about local services, which in turn helps them refer clients to the appropriate services and resources.
- **Supported sharing best practices** – Some members appreciated the opportunity to share best practices and ideas with other organizations.

“This has been a good venue for sharing the best practices, experiences in dealing with different service providers and also talking about common challenges.”

3. THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE IMMIGRATION PARTNERSHIP

The leading contribution of the Immigration Partnership was the influence on member capacity and organizational change. Respondents were less confident in the contribution of Immigration Partnership to broader community level change. This lack of confidence may reflect the sense that there is not a clear line of sight between the activities of the IP, the impact on the system and the benefit to the community. Though members value the collective and see that their engagement has clear benefits, they are not connecting these benefits to the kind of systems change the IP is working towards.

The following table shows the percentage of survey respondents who reported that the IP had contributed to each of the identified outcomes.

Table 3. Because of the Immigration Partnership...

There is greater exchange of information between participating organizations	55%
There is increased awareness among partners of the services offered by other agencies	50%
We have been able to develop strategies and solutions that will allow us to meet our goals	39%
We have been able to connect multiple services, programs and systems	37%
There is greater collaboration among partner organizations	37%
There are new ideas for making the system more integrated, accessible or efficient	33%
We are improving access to and coordination of services/programs that facilitate immigrant settlement and integration	28%
We have been able to respond to the needs of immigrants in Waterloo Region	24%
We have fostered a more inclusive and responsive environment for immigrants	20%
We are improving access to the labour market for immigrant	20%
We are effectively communicating to stakeholders and the broader public	17%
We have been able to respond to the needs of refugees in Waterloo Region	16%
We are strengthening awareness and capacity to integrate immigrants in our community	15%

Organizational Change

The Immigration Partnership has contributed to organizational change. Through members' involvement in the IP, organizations have made changes in policies, programming, and communications to better support immigrant and refugees.

As a result of their involvement in the Immigration Partnership:

- 79% reported that they adapted/improved their service delivery
- 68% indicated their internal policies were aligned with the CAP priorities
- 64% indicated they were developing new programming
- 54% indicated they had done staff development and made human resource changes

Examples of specific changes made are listed in Table 4.

Table 4: Organizational Changes Attributed to Members' involvement in the IP

Communications
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Revamping materials that are lent out to immigrant families.• Revisited promotions be more inclusive.• We had our program information translated into 11 languages.• Accessibility to website.• Changes in communication; not using language which is unfamiliar to clients.
Programming
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Revisited programming to be more inclusive.• Developing a strategy to increase access to our services, including improving access to translation and interpretation.• Has helped staff recognize the need for more inclusivity; our membership with the IP has bolstered our strategic plan commitment to ensure newcomers/non-English speakers have access to and are outreached for services.
Policies
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Adapting our hiring practices with the goal of having a work force that is reflective of the demographics in our community• Put in place interpreter policies.

Concerns Regarding Capacity for Impact

The partnership assessment survey explored members' perception of the IP's capacity for achieving community contribution and impact. Member responses suggested a number of areas where the IP can pay greater attention and where it could develop strategies for increasing its impact.

- **Level of buy-in and commitment**

Less than half of survey respondents (43%) reported a sense of shared responsibility for the success of the IP. As well, less than half (40%) reported there was a shared vision for the IP. Only a third reported that members were motivated to contribute and follow through with actions, while just less than a third of respondents (30%) reported there was a common language and understanding around points of interest.

- **Capacity and influence**

Survey respondents were asked to think about whether the IP had what it needed to be effective and achieve its mission. Overall, some believed that the Partnership had the

administrative structure and skills and expertise to be effective to achieve its mission. Respondents were less certain that the IP had the influence it needed to make change.

The following table reflects members’ perceptions about the capacity of the IP to achieve its mission. Most members reported that the IP only somewhat has the capacity and influence it needs.

Table 5. Perceived Capacity to Achieve Mission

Skills and expertise among staff (64%) Management and administrative support (58%) Experience (55%) Skills and expertise among volunteers (53%)	
Insight about immigrant experiences in the community (49%) Data and information (37%) Insight about refugee experiences in the community (35%)	
Influence to make change within participating organizations (24%) Influence to make change in the settlement sector (22%) Influence to make change in the community (22%) Influence to make change in the employment sector (20%)	

- **Need for broader scale of systems change**

Some members felt the IP could be doing more to coordinate large scale action that would influence system change (e.g., systems changes like better access to healthcare for immigrants and refugees). There was a perception among some members that the IP puts more effort than it should into activities that do not have community impact.

“[We need] to not do ‘make work projects’ but to actually do what can make a difference even if it is just one impactful thing vs. several small and ineffective actions.”

“The lack of large scale action. When I look at other Immigration Partnerships, they have accomplished some big achievements. For example, designating low income housing for Newcomers. But most of our efforts appear to result in small wins rather than large scale, impactful wins.”

- **Competition for funding**

It was recognized that many community agencies compete for the same funding. Members asked how to solve this challenge, suggesting the IP facilitate conversations about how to

collectively leverage the available funding (to avoid overlap and duplication of efforts). As well, members suggested the Council leverage relationships with government decision makers and community stakeholders to influence policy.

- **Prioritizing within the Community Action Plan**

There was some uncertainty among members about the intended use of the CAP. Some saw the CAP as a tool to guide actions and decision making; others felt restricted by the CAP and weren't clear on how to go about addressing emergent issues. Some others noted that they saw the CAP as too ambitious. Members of the Working Steering Group suggested that the IP identify a small subset of tasks to focus their energy on.

"If we address these [emergent] issues, then we may not be addressing our other strategic work directly in the CAP. How can we document these emergent issues as well and reflect that in our work/report of work accomplished?"

"I approved the Settling Steering Team Community Action Plan with concerns because I wasn't confident that our group...could actually accomplish all of the tasks on the plan."

- **Unclear decision-making authority and processes**

Some steering and action group members were unclear about how decisions were being made at the Council level and at the Region level. They noted that decisions had a direct impact on their work. There was also a suggestion that the IP allow for more bottom up, community-driven actions. Some members had the sense that the Council drives the decisions and action, that ideas and information "come from the top" (e.g., Council) down to the organizations. This perception is also reflected in some members' uncertainty about their responsibility for making decisions.⁵

⁵ Evaluators note: Though there were members that believed most IP decisions are made at the Council level, this is not the case in reality. Most IP decisions are made in the Steering Groups. The fact that this perception exists suggests a need to build a stronger sense of shared responsibility and decision-making. (See more under Governance theme below.)

Appreciations and Ideas Regarding Capacity for Impact

Members offered a number of ideas and thoughts about increasing the IP's capacity for achieving greater impact in the community. These ideas included:

- **Leveraging the Membership**

There are many passionate and committed people around the IP tables. Members recognized that collectively the IP is an amazing resource of skills, networks and capacities that could be better leveraged in achieving its goals. Many believed that greater mission achievement could be enhanced by leveraging the capacity of existing partners.

"I believe we are moving beyond waiting for the staff team to do the heavy-lifting, more and more community partners are eager to take on pieces of the planned collective actions"

During our conversations with IP members, and through the Partnership Assessment survey, IP members offered a number of ideas and suggestions for how to strengthen the work and contribution of the Immigration Partnership. These suggestions included:

- **Taking an Advocacy Role**

There is a strong desire from members for Immigration Partnership to increase its advocacy efforts. A few believed that advocacy should be the main role of the Council. Some members believed that the public needs to see the IP acting as advocate for immigrants and refugees and as a change agent around their issues and barriers to full integration. Some thought that greater community profile would build the IP's presence and credibility to influence change.

- **Sharing Data**

Some members would like to see the IP take a lead increasing access to local data related to immigrant needs. Up-to-date, relevant data was seen as a valuable asset for planning services, clarifying advocacy issues and support more action.

- **Changing the Narrative**

Some members emphasized the need to communicate a shared vision about the assets that immigrants bring to the community, rather than encouraging a “charity mentality.” They noted that the business case for immigrant employment was strong, and promoted taking a more of a business/strategic approach to communicating. Another goal was to change the perception of international students in the community, so that they were better recognized as talent to be recruited and supported for keeping the best minds in the Region.

“How is this council going to promote overall growth in the community? There is so much room for innovation and growth. How can we better recognize what newcomers are bringing to the community; how can we learn from them? We need to get rid of the charity attitude...these [immigrants] are world class leaders.”

- **Connecting with Other Communities**

Some members suggested that the Immigration Partnership could benefit from connecting with similar partnerships in other communities⁶ to share best practices, tools and resources and to coordinate efforts. They saw the opportunity to learn what was working well, as well as what the similarities and differences were. They believed that this insight would help the IP develop its own strategies. In particular, they mentioned the Guelph LIP as an initiative they could learn from.

- **Innovating**

Almost all recognized the opportunities in being more innovative, working more closely with businesses to develop new strategies, encouraging more outside the box thinking, and being more visionary. One member suggested greater outreach out to corporate sponsors to build more support and connections for greater immigrant employment. Others encouraged more innovative and visionary leadership within the IP.

Summary

Overall, the evaluation showed that there is a clear value and benefit of the Immigration Partnership. The IP is most effective in building connections between stakeholders, building greater understanding of each other’s work and the system, as well as in

⁶ Evaluator’s Note: This activity is currently taking place.

encouraging change in individual and organizational practice. These positive outcomes reflect the strength the collaborative.

The evaluation findings also reflect the recognition that there are ongoing needs and challenges in supporting a large, diverse membership and in working on complex social change. The evaluation demonstrated that, in the short-term, the IP supports change at the individual and organizational level. To move further towards its long-term goals and outcomes, one of the most pressing needs is to address the range of engagement experiences. If the IP can strengthen engagement, support positive experiences and foster opportunities for contribution and change amongst most of the members, it increases the likelihood of even greater coordinated action and community impact.

Based on these evaluation findings, the theme of engagement was selected for the sense-making workshop. In that half day session, IP members dove deep to identify key priorities for building stronger and more consistent engagement across the partnership. Engagement is critical as members are the IP's most valuable resource for activating the CAP and in realizing its vision. The final section of this report shares strategic recommendations for building engagement and better leveraging the membership.

4. MOVING FORWARD

The Immigration Partnership is a dynamic and evolving initiative, and there is a great deal of important history, energy and potential residing within the IP. The skilled staff and their strong team culture, the individual members, and the broad partnerships are all critical resources to leverage. Our work to evaluate this collaborative provided a snapshot of members' experiences and perceptions. Since that time, there has been movement forward, changes in processes and new approaches that respond to many of the challenges that were identified in the evaluation.

In this final section of our report, we offer some reflections for the IP to consider. These reflections are grounded in what we heard through the evaluation and the conversations that occurred during the sense-making workshop. These reflections are presented as opportunities to further your work together and achieve even greater contribution and impact.

Seek Out the Openings

The evaluation identified engagement as a priority for organizing and strategy development. Our *Seekout the Openings* reflection recognizes and honours the uncertainty of some member within the Steering and Action Groups, who, like in a maze, are not sure which way to turn. It also honours their unquestionable desire to bolt through the nearest opening towards tangible and impactful action. To guide members to the most valuable openings for self-initiated actions, there can be further attention to minimizing perceived challenges and maximizing energy and interest. To support this, the leadership within the Council and Steering Groups can:

Better Leverage the IP Principles

A respectful and non-judgemental environment, as well as the emphasis on consensus are positive influences of members' experience and enhance the quality of their engagement. At the same time, a number of principles were perceived to be less present in the operation of the IP. There is the opportunity to reflect on the principles of the IP, refine these to focus on what the collaboration needs to be at its core, and then work to realize these principles in practice. Shared principles that remain constant combined with a shared understanding of their application are an incredibly valuable asset for any large partnership. They can help members navigated complex environments and decisions, such as those required to put the CAP into action.

Desired implementation impact:

- The Principles become a valuable guide for creating process and strategy
- The Principles help the IP build its capacity to adapt to emergent issues and opportunities in its complex environment

Application options:

- facilitate short interactive sessions to determine indicators for the IP Principles and the weight of how they are valued by members
- for a period of time, create time at meetings for story telling regarding how the principles come into play in at the IP and in their work together or in the community, and how these stories address the objectives of the IP
- Make room to reflect on challenges and opportunities to build further principle-based engagement and action
- Observation and note taking templates for all meetings with an evaluation function to harvest examples of the principles manifested during the meetings and in the community as a result of the IP

Leverage existing governance structure and policies to increase partner engagement

The evaluation suggested the need to build shared awareness and leadership, and nurture the conditions for collective action. The IP Governance Document clearly outline roles and authorities of the IP groups (Council, Steering Groups, and Action Groups) and the decision making roles of each. Moving forward, regular check-ins, communications and clarifications roles, decisions, and power to act can benefit the membership of the IP. The principles and leadership style of the current IP staff and Council present an opportunity to facilitate an empowering and practical interpretation of the Terms of Reference for each of the operating IP groups.

Desired implementation impact:

- Understanding for all members, especially those closest to the ground, of their authority and the processes in-place designed to support and empower them in action
- Increased innovation in addressing the IP mission
- The Steering and Action Groups increase their leadership and strategic actions to address the Community Action Plan

Implementation options:

- Host a conversation with IP members regarding their authority and abilities to act as part of the IP,
- Create an adapted visualization of the IP structure and Terms of References that highlights the ecosystem of decision making and action within the IP
- Create a simple and readily accessible tool of the IP consensus-based decision-making model and apply it for appropriate decision-making at all IP groups

Adapt current meeting formats, and introduce new gatherings

The quality of engagement plays out in the meetings of each group. We hear about range of experiences, where some members report their participation is limited, they feel uncertain and unable to make a contribution. We also heard about the need to get know to each other further and to build stronger relationships with those they don't already know well.

Adapting current meeting formats and introducing new ways to gather that generate richer

exchanges between IP participants and with community members can help build a stronger network, with greater participation and contribution.

Desired implementation impact:

- Increased cross-pollination and learning among IP members leading to well-informed and quality discourse, and enhanced participation in decision making
- More understanding and a stronger collaboration between IP members from the business-sector and those from the social sector

Implementation options:

- Support the chairs within the IP with the availability of a facilitator (from external or internal sources), and use the facilitator's expertise when advantageous to have a chair more fully engaged in a particular discussion or when addressing a particularly complex item
- As a complement to current meeting formats, introduce proven whole systems change methodologies (e.g. six conversations that matter, world cafe, design labs, open space) for meetings with a planning, learning and or design purpose
- Host learning and informal social exchanges for IP members in a manner that leverages the members interest in good food

Final thoughts

These reflections and suggestions have been thought out as ways tackle the key theme of engagement that emerged through the evaluation. It is our hope that with some innovation and careful reflection on processes and actions already in place, the recommendations put forward in this report can be introduced over a comfortable time period with minimal interruption of current work flow. Others will take a more concentrated effort. These adaptations and new practices when accumulated across areas of practice can substantively influence the culture and impact of the Immigration Partnership.

These opportunities however, do not exist outside the context of needing move forward with the IPs objectives and realize the strategies of its action plan. Investing time in nurturing stronger, more consistent engagement across the IP does need to be focused on strategic issues, priorities and actions. The IP exists for a clear purpose. Movement towards that purpose can only be facilitated by the collaborative inquiry, activity and energy within the Steering Groups.

..... WHO WE ARE



RESEARCH & EVALUATION

How do we know we are making a difference?

INSIGHT

SOCIAL CHANGE

How do we build stronger, more effective systems?

STRATEGY

THE O'HALLORAN GROUP

EXPERTISE IN ACTION

..... O'HG SOLUTIONS

The O'Halloran Group is guided by a deep commitment to promoting greater well-being, dignity and inclusion for all



KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION

Generate meaningful and actionable applied research and evaluation



KNOWLEDGE TRANSLATION

Support the communication and sharing of needs, practices and impact



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Facilitate collaborative processes to elevate collective thinking and action



DECISION MAKING

Aid strategic decision-making in a world of complexity and change



SOCIAL SECTOR CAPACITY

Build the capacity of the social sector to better meet the needs of the community



..... COMMON CHALLENGES



Limited Stakeholder Engagement



Unguided Decision Making



Disconnected Partners



Unmeasured Impact



Unmet Community Needs



Undirected Development



Resistance To Change

Appendix A: Evaluation Methods

We used a mixed-methods design, included both quantitative and qualitative methods. Data collection tools were designed to capture information related to each evaluation question from various perspectives. Tools were shared with the ECG for feedback and validation prior to data collection.

Meeting Observations

Research team members attended a total of 10 Immigration Partnership meetings between October 2014 and February 2015. The purpose of the meeting observations was to assess partnership engagement and processes. At the beginning of each meeting, the research team member introduced the evaluation, the purpose of the observation, and how the observation notes would be used. A standard template was used by the team to record observations notes in a consistent manner.

Partnership Survey

An online survey was conducted to assess partnership engagement, experience of values and principles in practice, and the perceived contribution of the Immigration Partnership to mission achievement. 66% of partners completed the survey, with a balanced distribution across groups and sectors. Immigration Partnership staff circulated the survey link to the membership by email. The research team managed the survey responses and followed up with members by phone and email to encourage participation.

Focus Groups

Focus groups were held with each of the three Steering Groups (Work, Settle, and Belong) to gain deeper insight into the strengths and challenges of current processes and structures, value of the Immigration Partnership, perceived contribution to the community and opportunities for moving forward. When possible, the focus group was joined to an existing steering group meeting. When this wasn't possible, efforts were made to choose a date, time and location convenient for the participants. Nineteen (19) partners participated in total, which represents a participation rate of 30% across all three groups.

A focus group was also held with staff to learn more about the operational side of the Immigration Partnership, including communication and management.

Interviews with Community Forum Participants

Eight (8) telephone interviews were conducted with representatives from community organizations who attended the Immigration Partnership's community forum in 2012 and who are not currently involved in the work of the Partnership. The purpose of the

interviews was to explore the perceived value and contribution of the Immigration Partnership to the community. Participants represented educational institutions, community funders, and cultural/religious organizations. Potential interviewees were identified by members of the ECG.

Ethics

The evaluation plan was reviewed by the Community Research Ethics Office. The following measures were taken to protect participants' confidentiality and privacy:

- Participants in the evaluation were fully informed of the purpose and use of the information they provided, including their right to withdraw at any time during the study.
- Verbal or written consent was obtained from each participant.
- Data was stored on password protected devices accessible only to the research team. Identifying information was removed from all files.
- Files containing personal contact information were password protected.

Analysis

We completed a thematic analysis of our qualitative data, including from the key informant interviews, focus groups and open-ended survey questions. This thematic analysis was completed using MAXQDA Themes were analyzed across groups and between groups to explore differences in each group's experience. Quantitative survey data were analyzed using SPSS. Findings from the different data sources (key informant interviews/focus groups, assessment survey and observations) were triangulated, and summarized in to detailed themes for each evaluation question.

Over the course of data collection, we shared three preliminary evaluation briefs with the ECG. These briefs were designed to share early observations for discussion and reflection.