



Settlement and Integration Capacity Development

Strategic overview

This domain results from a combination of two sets of strategic priorities in the Ottawa Immigration Strategy: Settlement Sector Priorities and Integration Capacity Development Priorities. The combined priorities are being addressed by one OLIP sector table that brings together executives and managers from settlement sector, health and resource centres, City of Ottawa, immigrant civic associations, Youth Services Bureau, and the Ontario Trillium Foundation.

The mandate of the Sector Table includes building capacity, creating synergies, and promoting partnerships among stakeholders with a view to developing a coordinated, inclusive, and seamless and effective system for providing settlement, health, education, and social services.

After analyzing the concerns addressed by this Sector Table, we recommend that the name of the table be changed to *Settlement and Socio-Civic Integration Sector Table*.

The Sector Table focused on the following five strategic priorities in the first implementation period:

1. Creating interpersonal bridging opportunities between new immigrants and established residents
2. Expanding capacity and appetite within mainstream institutions for equity and inclusion
3. Promoting partnerships among settlement service providers and with institutions in all sectors addressed by OLIP
4. Expanding the capacities of settlement counsellors to provide information, referral, and orientation on multiple domains
5. Strengthening the ability of immigrants and ethno-cultural minority to participate in civic society and mainstream institutions

The Sector Table reported that it has leveraged close to \$900,000 and engaged in the neighbourhood of 80 participating organizations.

Activities

The activities associated with the strategic priorities of the Settlement and Social-Civic Integration Sector Table are presented below. In addition to the items described, the Table has numerous projects that are at early stages of development. These are not included in this report.

Priority 1: Creating interpersonal bridging opportunities between new immigrants and established residents

Action 1: Develop and promote Welcoming Ottawa Week (WOW)

Welcoming Ottawa Week (WOW) is an annual celebration of diversity and immigration designed to convey the idea that Ottawa is a welcoming community. Its aim is to enhance Ottawa's reputation as an attractive, cosmopolitan community with an inclusive civic culture.

Welcoming Ottawa Week takes place the week before Canada Day which celebrates Canada's collective national identity, including multiculturalism. The events of the week include knowledge sharing activities, artistic and recreational activities - including music, film and dance - and public celebration of diversity, culminating in the Community Cup and a Citizenship ceremony.

According to members of the Sector Table, the initiative has been well received by local institutions. Since its inception, the number of events has quadrupled; media coverage has increased; new components have been introduced, notably art and photographic exhibits; and new actors have begun to participate, including the media, business, and academia. There is also a greater willingness to contribute, both financially and in-kind, to support the weeklong activities.

"All the events that I went to were great – WOW gives a sense of a community trying to improve its attraction and retention [of immigrants]!"

2014 WOW Participant

One hundred percent of the Sector Table's partners confirmed that WOW was successful in creating social and cultural bridging opportunities. This was also reflected in the 2014 evaluation which showed that 9 out of 10 participants judged the events to be either excellent or very good.

Priority 2: Expanding capacity and appetite within mainstream institutions for equity and inclusion

Action 1: Ottawa Equity Project

Under the Ottawa Equity Project, twelve OLIP partners have established a 'community of practice' aimed at strengthening mainstream organizations' capacity for equity and inclusion in five areas: (1) governance; (2) human resources; (3) planning; (4) service delivery; and (5) community connections. The partners in the initiative rely on peer learning, collaborative leadership, and communications technology to help organizations change their practices. The partners include health, education, child welfare, youth, women, and justice organizations. The initiative is co-led by OLIP and the Centretown Community Health Centre.

"We are excited about what we can accomplish together...With increased capacity for inclusion, we will be able to enhance our services; and very importantly, we will be able to draw greater benefit from the strength and knowledge of diverse constituents- it takes all of us to serve our community."

Simone Thibault, Executive Director of Centretown Community Health Centre

The Equity Project relies on establishing a dialogue with and among the practitioners of participating organizations in order to identify common challenges, validate good practices, share information and devise ameliorative strategies. The project also sponsors knowledge events where experts help practitioners delve into specific issues. Lastly, the Equity Project promotes leadership and identifies champions in order to promote wider change.

Best-practice strategies advanced by the Equity Project include:

- organizational equity plans with clear targets, indicators, and responsibilities
- outreach and recruitment plans that reach out to diverse communities
- inclusive workplace culture that supports retention and promotion
- cultivating relationships of trust with external community groups
- adjusting screening and selection processes to remove hidden biases
- providing training for members of hiring committees
- Ally ship to build strong network of supporters to help promote equity & inclusion
- Understanding the foundations on race, culture, and structures of inequity

The project is currently in second phase and has secured multi-year funding from the Ontario Trillium Foundation.

The Equity Project promotes increased awareness of systemic inequities and development of relationships of trust among participants in the dialogues, with the aim of improving organizations' practice of equity and inclusion.

Equity Project Lead

Action 2: Diversity on Boards: Fostering Immigrant Leadership

The DiverseCity on Board Program is being implemented by Volunteer Ottawa, supported by an advisory committee of community stakeholders. Its goal is to foster diverse leadership and to introduce plural perspectives on boards. The project aims to replicate an award-winning initiative by the Maytree Foundation. Specifically, the idea is to recruit qualified individuals from racialized communities, train them in how to participate effectively on boards, and signal their availability through a well-advertised web-based database. The targeted institutions include non-profit boards, quasi-public health and educational institutions, and economic development bodies.

Action 3: Strengthening the Capacity of Francophone organizations to promote equity and inclusion

In collaboration with the Ottawa Equity Project and participating institutions, the Lowertown Community Resource Centre is forming a community of practice involving francophone organizations that operate in the Lowertown neighbourhood. The Centre aims – with the help of Equity Project participants - to adapt the lessons generated by the Project, to the work of Lowertown Francophone organizations, followed by a city-wide expansion. The needs and experiences of francophone organizations are unique and therefore requiring tailoring.

Priority 3: Promoting partnerships among settlement service providers and between service providers and institutions in all sectors addressed by OLIP

Action 1: Establish a mechanism for Ottawa settlement service providers to collaborate on new business and service opportunities

This project (reported under the Economic Sector Table) seeks to establish a durable partnership, and collaborative mechanism, among immigrant service provider organizations to develop, market, and sell specialized services to potential clients in the education sector and to private employers.

Action 2: Bridge the divide between Ottawa and Gatineau: Establish a partnership between settlement providers on either side of the Ottawa River

This project (reported under the Economic Sector Table) seeks to establish partnerships between the two municipal governments as well as between Ottawa-based and Gatineau-based immigrant service provider organizations. The project will focus on the identification of ways of enhancing the settlement and integration experience newcomers in both cities by leveraging respective strengths and creating synergetic collaborations. The project is still in its early stages of development.

Priority 4: Expanding the capacities of settlement counsellors to provide information, referral, and orientation on multiple domains

Action 1: Health Skills, Health Smarts

This project (reported under the Health and Wellbeing Sector Table) provides settlement workers with training on health information for newcomers, including where to find community health services and medical practitioners, when to go to the hospital or call emergency services, as well as how to manage health through nutrition and physical activity. Resource materials were developed to support frontline staff.

“Quick access to compiled, condensed, structured health information helped me to serve clients confidently.”

Settlement Worker & User of HSHS resources

Action 2: Housing Navigation Workshops

Ottawa Community Housing, the City of Ottawa, and other community agencies have developed Housing Navigation Workshops. The workshops are aimed at settlement counsellors and are designed to improve their knowledge of housing services and how best to access available housing.

Priority 5: Strengthening the ability of ethno-cultural communities and newcomers to participate in civic society and mainstream institutions

Action 1: Youth Futures Program

Youth Futures is a seven-month program that targets first-generation youth living in low-income neighborhoods. The program fosters leadership and encourages young people to consider post-secondary education and the career opportunities this provides. Youth Futures is supported by the City of Ottawa (Housing and Poverty Reduction Investment Plan), and by all five of Ottawa's post secondary institutions. Most recently, it has attracted a private sector corporation.

Participating youth are exposed to post-secondary learning programs; they are provided with summer employment – so they

can gain work experience and earnings; they receive leadership training; and they receive practical instruction in such matters as preparing resumes.

There is no cost to participating in the program and youth are supported by paid, post-secondary student mentors, and by partner staff.

The program now has 75 annual

participants. An overwhelming majority of Sector Table partners regard the initiative as successful.

"It has been enormously rewarding ... both as a program and as a research project. The University of Ottawa has been very supportive ... and has never seen it as being only for the promotion of [the university]. The program has been good for the University of Ottawa and I think good for all the 5 post-secondary institutions."

Caroline Andrew, co-founder of project and chair of the Sector Table

Action 2: Making votes count where we live

This project encourages immigrants living in low income neighbourhoods to become politically active and to make their needs known through the political process. Specifically, it promotes voting, running for office, and other forms of political engagement using measures such as the formation of local teams

that encourage neighbours and friends to vote and to raise issues they are concerned about with political candidates.

The initiative is co-sponsored by The Coalition of Community Health and Resource Centres and the City for

All Women Initiative (CAWI). While the initiative does not specifically target immigrants, it engages them because of its focus on lower income neighbourhoods where many new immigrants reside. This activity and focus has been encouraged by the OLIP partnership.

We appreciate the important role that OLIP has played in facilitating immigrant engagement in the electoral process. Newcomers becoming active voters is key for the well-being of immigrants, but also for the wider society, which benefits from the insights and experience that immigrant have to bring to Canada's democratic process.

Suzanne Doerge, project lead

Achievements, challenges and future directions

Achievements

The Settlement and Integration Capacity Development Sector Table and OLIP have worked successfully to bolster the effectiveness and efficiency of settlement organizations and other actors in the social, civic, and settlement domain. They have accomplished this by leveraging the reach and convening capacity of OLIP and the Sector Table and which extends to other sector tables and to a wide range of community organizations across the city. Numerous cross-sectoral initiatives have been implemented with the assistance of the Table, achieving gains by combining programs, skill sets, and networks.

The Table has also succeeded in greatly raising the profile of OLIP and the larger partnership through bold and innovative projects – most notably, Welcoming Ottawa Week – which effectively reaches out beyond the immigrant community to engage the wider citizenry. The fact that this was accomplished so quickly, without a massive injection of fresh funds, is especially praiseworthy. Instead, WOW was assembled by coordinating and shifting the scheduling of existing activities by cultural communities, and settlement groups, and by drawing on the networks and resources of Sector Table partners. This speaks to the strength of OLIP's relationship with the City, with the local civic and political process, and with the settlement sector. Welcoming Ottawa Week has allowed the partnership to attract the attention of the mainstream media, further raising the event's profile and securing the core objective of building bridging relationships.

Similar success in building integrative capacity is being achieved on the institutional front by the Ottawa Equity Project. The Project aims to achieve transformational change by, first, developing more equitable organizations and, then, leveraging the success that has been achieved to diffuse equity 'lessons' throughout the wider community using a purpose-built leadership network and supportive diffusion tools.

Another noteworthy example of a well thought out initiative is the Youth Futures Program which has

The Equity Project focuses on “the importance of having the ‘difficult and courageous conversations’ about systemic racism in organizations as part of a positive change process, and strategies to counter resistance.”

galvanized the City, all of Ottawa's post-secondary educational institutions, and other organizations to create opportunities for first-generation youth, many from minority communities, to acquire work experience and education. OLIP and the Settlement Table did not initiate the project but the OLIP partnership has been instrumental in its expansion as well as in securing permanent funding. Not only does the Youth Futures program have considerable potential for growth, but it also offers the possibility of achieving that growth without continual injections of government largesse by expanding the engagement of the private sector. The achievements of the Settlement and Integration Capacity Development Sector are reflected in the Table's leverage of financial and in-kind resources, which has been substantial. It is also evident in the positive assessments by Sector participants of the collaborative initiatives that the Table has helped bring to fruition.

Challenges

“So many challenges: sustainability and growth are certainly two of the major concerns at the present time”

Caroline Andrew, Youth Futures Co-founder

Like other Sector Tables, the Settlement and Integration Capacity Development Sector faces challenges in converting its projects and ideas into ongoing, standalone or mainstream programs. This is a crucial step to freeing up Sector capacity so it can be reallocated to other ideas and projects. Failing this reallocation, the Sector Table and OLIP will continually need to identify and recruit new partners, an unlikely solution which would quickly run into diminishing returns. As it stands, a number of project leads have raised concerns about the pressure of time and resources, both on individual practitioners and their organizations. This is especially acute in the case of successful, high profile projects that have considerably raised expectations.

A somewhat different challenge that faces the Settlement and Social-Civic Integration Table concerns the need to fully capitalize on the strengths, knowledge and reach of all its members. Currently, the Sector’s projects do not take full advantage of the cultural networks and individual strengths of its members in these areas. This constitutes a loss of potential.

Future directions for discussion

The Sector Table and OLIP will need to maintain investment in the Table’s four signature initiatives: Welcoming Ottawa Week, Youth Futures, Making our Votes Count, and the Equity Project. Each of these initiatives offers major growth potential and constitutes a best practice in the field.

Related to these initiatives, but positioned more broadly, a major concern of the Settlement and Integration Capacity Development Sector Table, as with other tables, is the need to mainstream current projects. OLIP has created an effective machinery for developing ideas and mounting pilot projects, the next big effort should focus on converting those projects into sustainable programs. The existing relationships with the City of Ottawa and the Local Health Integration Network around planning and priority setting may offer models that could be applied to other situations. The other opportunity that the Sector may wish to pursue more systematically is to foster greater involvement by the private sector.

Another area in which the Sector has expressed interest concerns the use of technology for conveying information, for maintaining extended partnerships, and for building and sustaining communities of practice. Coincidentally, technology may offer the Table a degree of relief from its current resource pressures.

In terms of subject matter, Sector Table members have raised a number of topics and opportunities for its work in the future. These include:

- The desirability of expanding current service navigation initiatives to include additional service areas that are important for immigrants’ settlement and integration, such as justice and culture.

- The desirability of expanding settlement worker training and expertise beyond the two areas that have been developed to date – health and housing – to include justice, recreation, and education
- Greater efforts to engage arts and culture organizations, many of which already have links with newcomer communities and youth. There would appear to be a greater openness towards newcomers in the culture sector and there are ready ‘champions’ who would be interested in providing assistance. There has not been much research into the possible role of the arts in fostering newcomer integration. This is also true for sports and sports organizations as possible contributors to integration.
- Sector members have expressed interest in working with religious institutions to develop an initiative that would raise awareness about Islamophobia and attempt to reduce misunderstandings and fears.
- Sector table members are supportive of OLIP Council’s decision to mount a collective planning process on immigrant youth outcomes.