



ST. THOMAS • ELGIN

Local Immigration Partnership

Building Welcoming, Caring, and Inclusive Communities

Settlement Strategy - Executive Summary

WORKING TOGETHER TO BUILD WELCOMING, CARING,
AND INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES IN ST. THOMAS AND ELGIN



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Citizenship and
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We are grateful to individual participants and organizations who offered their commitment, time, and expertise that enriched the ST-ELIP consultations and planning meetings. Your contribution became tangible with the creation of the County-wide, innovative Settlement Strategy that is described in this Executive Summary.

Finally, the ST-ELIP Council appreciates the generous financial contribution of Citizenship and Immigration Canada, which made this project possible.

ST-ELIP COUNCIL

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Partners:

Elgin Business Resource Centre

Elgin County Economic Development

Elgin, Middlesex, Oxford Workforce Planning and Development Board

Employment Services Elgin

Fanshawe College

Mennonite Community Services

Mennonite Savings and Credit Union

St. Thomas and District Chamber of Commerce

St. Thomas Economic Development

The City of St. Thomas

The Township of Malahide

YWCA St. Thomas-Elgin

Executive summary

The St. Thomas–Elgin Local Immigration Partnership (ST-ELIP) began this project in February 28, 2011 to achieve the following: (1) establish a multi-sectoral council of stakeholders to facilitate the development and implementation of sustainable solutions for the successful integration of newcomers to St. Thomas and the County of Elgin, (2) enhance understanding of non-settlement service providers and the community at large of newcomer’s challenges, needs and services , (3) facilitate a community consultation and a planning process that would produce a practical and achievable Local Immigration Strategy to improve St. Thomas and Elgin’s capacity to attract, settle and successfully integrate immigrants into our community and promote their social, economic, cultural, and civic engagement.

On behalf of all ST-ELIP Council partners, we are pleased to present the fruits of our labour of the past 12 months: The St. Thomas-Elgin Local Immigration Strategy.

The St. Thomas-Elgin Local Immigration Settlement Strategy has been enriched by participants who worked together to incorporate the diverse perspectives of individual immigrants, service providers from the settlement, social, health, and education sectors, employers, government officials, and civic groups.

All voices were instrumental in the creation of the Settlement Strategy. The sharing of their experiences, information, opinions and stories led to the development of what we hope are meaningful priorities that when implemented will contribute to build welcoming, caring and inclusive communities where everyone matters.

This Settlement Strategy builds on the St. Thomas-Elgin’s history of collaborations and has as its foundation the local expertise, unique assets, qualities and strengths so vital to address present challenges and needs in an innovative and proactive way.

We want to emphasize the importance of collaborative leadership that will sustain its successful implementation.

We look forward to working with you in the near future

Sincerely yours,

The St. Thomas-Elgin Local Immigration Partnership

Snapshot of Demographics of Elgin County and St. Thomas in 2006/2011

Derived from 2006 Census and Workforce Data

Population

- » In 2006 there were 85,351 people living in the region of Elgin County and St. Thomas with 36,110 in St. Thomas
- » The population has grown 4.6% in the County and 8.4% in St. Thomas since 2001
- » The age distribution has also changed since 2001. The largest growth was seen in those aged 55 to 64. Declines were seen in the age 5 to 14 and 25 to 44 populations.

Population Characteristics

- » 86% in Elgin County and 88% in St. Thomas are Canadian born.
- » 2,020 (2%) of people in Elgin County and 1,310 (3%) in St. Thomas are visible minorities.
- » 1% of the population of Elgin County has no knowledge of English or French

Labour Force

- » 56.7% of all workers in Elgin are employed by Small and Medium sized enterprises.
- » Participation rates in 2006 in St. Thomas was 66.1%, and 67.9% in Elgin County, however rates have been decreasing since 2007 and was 67% in 2010.
- » Employment rates in 2006 in St. Thomas was 61.9%, and 65.6% in Elgin County, the employment rate dropped to 59.6% in 2010
- » Unemployment rates in 2006 in St. Thomas was 6.3%, and 5.5% in Elgin County, in 2010 the unemployment rate was 11.1%, an improvement on the 13% in 2009.

Household and Family Characteristics

- » There are 24,675 families in Elgin County and 10,450 families in St. Thomas.
- » On average there are 3 people per family.

Education and Income

- » On average people earned \$27,982 in St. Thomas and \$27,182 in Elgin County in 2005.
- » 6.2% of people in Elgin County are considered below the low income cut-off compared to 11.1% in Ontario

Priorities

To identify the priorities, The St. Thomas-Elgin Local Immigration Partnership engaged interested citizens in the community in community consultations across Elgin County.

At these consultations participants were asked to rank priorities according to what they thought their community assets, capacity and needs were. While there are priorities that apply to the entire county across the board, there is a need to preserve the diversity of responses expressed in the different municipalities and townships.

The following are general priorities gathered through the variety of methods. Through the regional approach, we found similar priorities county wide; however, the specific action plans and emphasis will be different for each region.

Overarching Priorities

The overarching priorities were identified through the feedback provided in consultation meetings, and surveys. These priorities were developed by taking note of participants’ and service provider’s feedback, and by analyzing the presence of gaps to address these needs.

OVERARCHING PRIORITIES	
Strategy	Motivation
Increase funding for Settlement Services providers in the region	Availability of resources is crucial as settlement service providers will need to respond proactively to an increased participation of immigrants, employers and non-settlement agency representatives in the areas of building interagency supports, collaboration, diversity training and creative, sensitive and responsive services for immigrants.
Inclusion and civic participation	In order to create a sense of belonging, there is a need to create opportunities for immigrants to participate in social, cultural, economic and political activities free from discrimination.
	There is a need to increase outreach to immigrants to offer them the opportunity to volunteer so that they extend their social network and gain work experience.
	In order to promote successful integration of immigrants, we need to look at removing barriers to encourage their participation in leadership positions within boards, working committees or as paid staff to help organizations be exposed to and value diversity.
Advocacy: Systemic Change	Most of the time programs, services and activities have been developed to respond to the needs of those who have lived in St. Thomas and Elgin for a long time. This population is usually the one that have achieved certain stability and are, for the most part, more established than others. If this system is working for a particular group who has benefited from these services, it is difficult to see when change is needed.
	As the conditions of today’s society change and new learnings become available, new creativity and imagination is needed to harmoniously co-exist with others who are not from the same background and who also need to be included. Municipalities, workplaces, service organizations, institutions and host community will need to engage in an exciting exercise to build on what already exist. There is a need to remove systemic barriers and examine what are programs, services and activities that would take into account the needs of newcomers to empower immigrants to successfully engage in the affairs of the community.

Coordination of Services

Need or Gap identified

Often newcomers, immigrants and other service providers do not know what is available within a community

Strategy #1

Create opportunity for local and regional Service Providers to network and develop referrals

Action Step(s)

In conjunction with multiple stakeholders, develop networking opportunity for Service Provider Organizations

Strategy #2

Raise awareness with businesses, employers, agencies of the services available

Action Step(s)

Provide coordination of dissemination of information to agencies, employees and businesses to increase familiarity of services and programs

Strategy #3

Enhance information provision to newcomers and immigrants about existing services and programs (see section Settlement and Integration for more action steps to address access)

Action Step(s)

- ✓ Collaborate with relevant stakeholders to identify a process to facilitate the sharing of relevant and up to date information to newcomers and immigrants in the urban and rural areas of the County
- ✓ Provide coordination of dissemination of information to newcomers and immigrant to increase familiarity of services and programs

Employment and Labour Market Access

Need or Gap identified

Immigrants and Newcomers do not have experience in accessing the Canadian Employment market

Strategy #4

Increase networking between employers and newcomers and immigrants

Action Step(s)

- ✓ Foster the organization of networking and support groups for newcomers and employers
- ✓ Develop partnerships with relevant stakeholders to provide newcomers with orientation regarding workplace culture and workshops to assist newcomers in understanding how to access the labour market

Strategy #5

Provide Employment Agencies specific training to increase awareness about labour market challenges faced by immigrants and newcomers

Action Step(s)

- ✓ Develop collaboratively a clear understanding of labour market demands, opportunities and challenges and provide recommendations and actions that facilitate the effective inclusion and integration of skilled newcomers and immigrants in the local economy
- ✓ In conjunction with Employment Agencies and Settlement Agencies develop cultural sensitivity training
- ✓ Coordinate the provision of cultural sensitivity training to employment agencies
- ✓ Facilitate the organization of events to provide employment agencies with accreditation information and referrals to accreditation boards

Strategy # 6

Increase employer's awareness of the various programs, services, and web-based resources available to support the hiring, integration, training and retention of skilled immigrants

Action Step(s)

- ✓ Promote access to newcomer potential employees through search engines among businesses
- ✓ Promote the utilization of skillsinternational.ca to businesses in the area

Strategy # 7

Provide immigrants and newcomers information and training about obtaining and retaining employment

Action Step(s)

- ✓ In conjunction with Employment Agencies and Settlement Agencies develop a training package that emphasizes the importance of hard skills and soft skills in obtaining and retaining employment
- ✓ In conjunction with Employment Agencies and Settlement Agencies develop a practical and hands-on job skill training for newcomers
- ✓ Promote the utilization of skillsinternational.ca to newcomers

Need or Gap identified

Immigrants and Newcomers lack Canadian Experience

Strategy # 8

Provide opportunities for newcomers to gain Canadian work experience

Action Step(s)

- ✓ In conjunction with Employment Agencies and Settlement Agencies develop mentorship programs
- ✓ Research and promote internships for Internationally Trained Professionals
- ✓ In conjunction with Employment Agencies and Settlement Agencies develop a volunteer program for newcomers and immigrants
- ✓ Research and promote apprentice programs for newcomers and immigrants

Need or Gap identified

Lack of support for employers to hire immigrants

Strategy # 9

Investigate benefits and incentives to hire newcomers

Action Step(s)

- ✓ Research SME's to understand potential benefits of hiring internationally trained professionals
- ✓ Research succession planning
- ✓ In conjunction with Employment Agencies and Settlement Agencies explore ways to support employers in hiring and retaining newcomers and immigrants

Need or Gap identified

Lack of supports to hire agricultural workers

Strategy # 10

Investigate the benefits and incentives to hiring newcomers as agricultural workers

Action Step(s)

- ✓ In conjunction with Employment Agencies and Settlement Agencies explore ways to support agricultural employers in hiring newcomers as agricultural workers

Settlement and Integration

Need or Gap identified

Newcomers and Immigrants are overwhelmed with the Canadian system and often do not know where to start

Strategy # 11

Disseminate information to newcomers at one access point

Action Step(s)

- ✓ In collaboration with relevant stakeholders, develop an information package with useful information about services and suggestions on how to navigate the system
- ✓ Facilitate the identification process of a centralized access point in order to increase practicality and efficiency and therefore reducing the potentially overwhelming experiences of newcomers when navigating the Canadian system
- ✓ In conjunction with relevant stakeholders (i.e. real state, banks, supermarkets, churches , etc) work with community to promote the centralized access point

Need or Gap identified

Newcomers and Immigrants cannot navigate the Canadian landscape and need assistance with basic life needs

Strategy # 12

Integrate newcomers into Canadian norms

Action Step(s)

- ✓ In conjunction with Settlement Service Agencies, religious institutions, cultural associations, service clubs, etc., work to establish a Host Program
- ✓ Coordinate the development of creating Fact Sheets about different aspects of Canadian living
- ✓ In collaboration with relevant stakeholders, foster partnerships to re-Establish a program similar to "Welcome Wagons"

Need or Gap identified

Disconnect between the source Country and Canadian life, do not understand Canadian rights and services available

Strategy # 13

Orient Newcomers and immigrants to the Canadian system

Action Step(s)

- ✓ Coordinate efforts to increase awareness of Mental Health to community leaders
- ✓ Coordinate efforts to increase understanding of the Canadian Health Care System by facilitating the continued process of bridge-building with mainstream service providers, as well as between the diverse groups within the newcomer community
- ✓ In conjunction with local Settlement Service Agencies, Legal Aid Ontario and provincial initiatives (i.e. Connecting Communities-Community Legal Education Ontario, Family Law Education for Women), work to increase awareness of housing rights and responsibilities and about other systems in Canada
- ✓ In conjunction with appropriate stakeholders increase awareness of environmental concepts and practices in Canadian life
- ✓ In conjunction with appropriate stakeholders, increase awareness and educate newcomers on application process regarding citizenship
- ✓ In conjunction with appropriate stakeholders advocate to increase the time and availability of Citizenship classes

Need or Gap identified

Information on the internet is difficult to access, or non-existent

Strategy # 14

Increase access to settlement and integration information

Action Step(s)

- ✓ In collaboration with relevant stakeholders, foster partnerships to develop a newcomer portal to access all information about the county from one interface
- ✓ In collaboration with relevant stakeholders, foster partnerships to develop orientation podcasts for newcomers in diverse languages
- ✓ In collaboration with relevant stakeholders, work to identify additional actions to address this need

Language, ESL and Communication

Need or Gap identified

Although language is considered a priority the limited class location, times and lack of child care is an issue

Strategy # 15

Create more diverse opportunities for language training

Action Step(s)

- ✓ In conjunction with Agencies providing ESL and Settlement Agencies explore ways to increase access to ESL (i.e. on-the-job and on-site training for ESL, funding for child minding)
- ✓ Collaborate in the investigation to identify technology that increases access of language training to isolated newcomers and immigrants

Need or Gap identified

Often newcomers try to access language classes that are only funded for immigrants

Strategy # 16

Increase access to classes

Action Step(s)

- ✓ In conjunction with relevant local, regional and provincial and stakeholders advocate with government policy to remove barriers of status to access English Language training
- ✓ In conjunction with Agencies providing ESL and Settlement Agencies explore ways to provide literacy classes for newcomers

Need or Gap identified

Newcomers are unaware of language training opportunities

Strategy # 17

Increase awareness of language training opportunities

Action Step(s)

- ✓ Collaborate with relevant stakeholders in finding ways to promote language classes
- ✓ Collaborate with relevant Language Training providers to offer flexible learning opportunities across the County regardless of literacy levels

Public Awareness

Need or Gap identified

Lack of integration between the immigrants and the established communities, few opportunities for integration exists

Strategy # 18

Develop public campaign of multiculturalism of County

Action Step(s)

- ✓ Work collaboratively with local news sources to include immigrant and newcomer stories and experiences
- ✓ In conjunction with appropriate stakeholders identify opportunities to increase cultural presence at community events. i.e. fairs, festivals

Strategy # 19

Cultural and Diversity awareness to Youth

Action Step(s)

- ✓ Work with schools to promote ethnic and cultural diversity training and awareness

Need or Gap identified

Community does not know history, benefits of immigration to the area has been lost within the generations.

Strategy # 20

Highlight history and potential of diversity

Action Step(s)

- ✓ In conjunction with appropriate and interested stakeholders foster the establishment of a community Cultural Diversity Committee
- ✓ Work with historical societies to understand the history of immigration in the County

Conclusion

Citizenship and Immigration Canada has highlighted the Local Immigration Partnerships as a best practice for collaboration and information-sharing, and most view the Local Immigration Partnerships as having a role beyond the creation of an immigration plan.

The question is: How do we sustain our work?

It is imperative to emphasize that the Local Immigration Partnership model requires looking at sustainability beyond its much widely used connotation. We need to look at sustainability from the truest sense of the word so that longer term objectives related to collaboration can be realized and developed. Short-term commitment and limited resources are not compatible with meaningful change. The key concept is: Community engagement.

Community engagement provides opportunities for developing a holistic sense of sustainability, where people make decisions using local wisdom, values, information and knowledge.

This sustainability does not only refer to obtaining resources such as funding to continue this process of community engagement and coordination of collaboration, but also to the aspect of governance, the mobilization of key people and resources to implement priorities identified in the Settlement Strategy.

We sincerely hope that the Settlement the Strategy contributes through innovation to the improvement of the human condition, economic development, enhancement of service delivery and coordination, civic participation and bring groups, sectors and institutions closer.

The St. Thomas-Elgin Immigration Settlement Strategy was developed collectively; therefore its successful implementation will require committed and coordinated actions taken by stakeholders from multiple sectors, as well as the collaborative leadership of our institutions.

We look forward to working with you as we plan the next steps: to implement the Settlement Strategy.

We kindly ask you to continue the journey from ideas to action.