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## Issue 11: Scaling Canada's Local Immigration Partnerships (LIPs) Model for Proactive Refugee Resettlement

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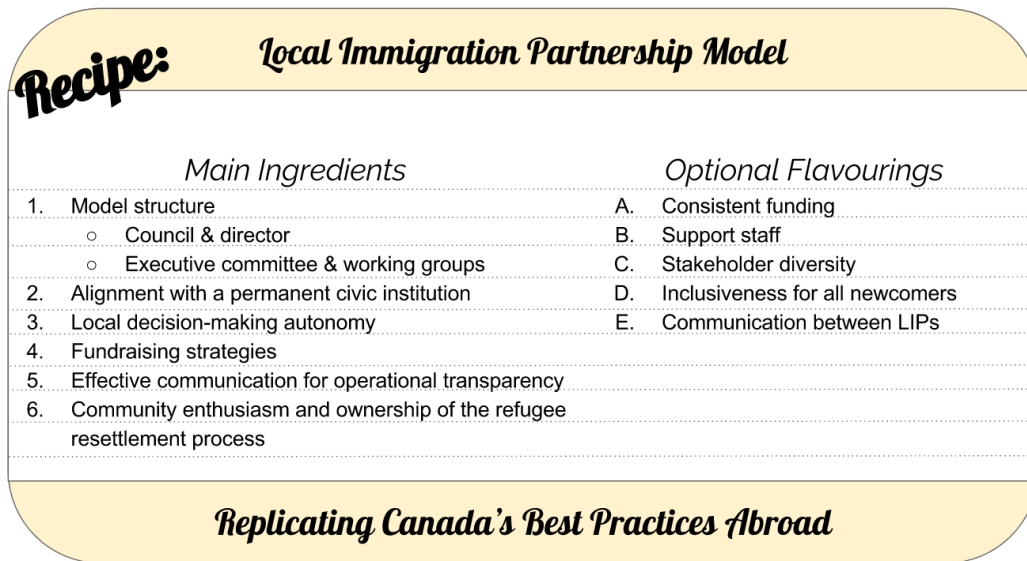
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## Scaling Canada’s Local Immigration Partnerships (LIPs) Model for Proactive Refugee Resettlement

Ahmed Mohamoud Elmi, Marina Ghosh, Sasha Oliveira and Margaret Walton-Roberts<sup>1</sup>



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**Figure 1:** Recipe for replicating Canada’s best practices for scaling up the LIP model.

### Introduction

*In this issue of Policy Points we provide a vision for scaling up Canada’s Local Immigration Partnership (LIP) model for refugee resettlement abroad. Global refugee resettlement is an issue that needs a coordinated and collaborative approach that includes communities as partners. Canada presents a proactive and responsive solution to this problem. First introduced in Ontario in 2008, LIPs are a community-based collaborative model for newcomer resettlement and integration that has proven successful in many local communities across Canada. Most importantly, LIPs played an important role in the resettlement of Syrian refugees in several communities across Canada in 2015-2016. The recommendation in this brief aims to offer details to scale up LIPs, a Canadian model of local community involvement in refugee resettlement for the international community.*

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## Background

The mass movement of Syrian refugees that peaked in 2015-2016 revealed the flaws of the international response towards refugee crises. As of 2015, 65.3 million people were forcibly displaced, of which an estimated 21.3 million were refugees (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2015). Global efforts to accommodate and resettle refugees have been politically divisive and fragmented. Many countries witnessed the development and reactivation of hostile xenophobic attitudes towards refugees that are “becoming more socially and politically accepted” (UN Secretary General Report, 2016, p. 2). Borders were sealed and many refugees were directed to camps. These policies not only prevented swift reception and resettlement of refugees, but were designed to deter the arrival of more refugees fleeing conflict zones. Canada did initiate a resettlement process for Syrian refugees, and their settlement in communities across Canada was facilitated in many communities through the work of Local Immigrant Partnerships (LIPs).

**What are LIPs:** LIPs represent a form of local collaborative governance. They coordinate existing newcomer services and agencies, improve communication between local stakeholders, and consolidate local partnerships in the settlement sector. As such, they enhance community effectiveness in building and promoting settlement services and creating a sense of belonging for newcomers (Burr, 2011). LIPs themselves do not offer newcomer services, but facilitate the coordination between existing service providers. Importantly, LIPs re-envision refugee resettlement as a process that has the interest, support, and involvement of their local communities.

This research offers a comparative examination of LIPs in Waterloo, Hamilton and Ottawa was undertaken by a collaborative team.<sup>3</sup> [This research](#) determined the role played by LIPs in the resettlement and integration of Syrian refugees under the federal government’s 2015/2016 resettlement plan. Research found that the LIPs:

- Acted as a catalyst for community-wide refugee resettlement planning and responses,
- created new working groups or bodies to oversee specific aspects of refugee resettlement,
- established new inter-sectoral partnerships,
- hosted welcome events and forums,
- published resource guides in multiple languages, and more.

**Recommendation:** *Scale up the LIP model as a proactive approach for refugee resettlement.*

Countries that are signatories to the UNHCR convention need to respond to humanitarian crises ideally by resettling refugees, but they must do so through community-centered processes that include communities in the response, planning and resettlement process by mobilizing resettlement and integration resources.

## Strategy for scaling the LIPs

### *1. Replicate the key features of LIP with local considerations*

To recreate a LIP model that will be beneficial to refugees and the receiving communities, we imagine its elements as a recipe that communities can follow (see figure 1). The six main ingredients of this recipe are as follows:

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<sup>3</sup> The research was funded through a rapid evaluation initiative funded by Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) and Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC). The research team includes the authors of this Policy Points, Blair Cullen (WLU), Huyen Dam (McMaster), Sarah Wayland (City of Hamilton) and Luisa Veronis (U. Ottawa).

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1. **Model structure:** A LIP structure should include four components shown to be important in existing LIPs: a council, director, executive committee, and working group(s).
  - Councils bring together leaders from various sectors of the community, act in an advisory capacity to coordinate and enhance services for newcomers, and develop strategy on, for example, integration and housing (Hamilton Immigration Partnership Council (HIPC), 2015; HIPC, 2016).
  - A director with effective leadership skills and charisma can act as a catalyst for LIP success, by empowering stakeholder groups to mobilize and coordinate the community response for refugee resettlement.
  - The executive committee is a group of leaders who help the director steer the LIP in the right direction by making key/executive decisions (e.g. on LIP structure, projects, funding, etc.).
  - Working groups are responsible for specific tasks, allowing focused attention on pressing issues, while the executive committees manage and coordinate the multiple operations of the task-oriented groups.
2. **Alignment with a permanent local civic institution:** It has proven important for a LIP to be housed by, or otherwise consistently affiliated with, a local permanent civic institution. Examples include a municipal government, chamber of commerce, an established local NGO or religious body active in the settlement sector. Such alignment can be achieved by the sharing of office and meeting space, as well as human resources, involvement with the executive committee, and more. This relationship positions the LIP as a consistent coordinating entity for the local settlement sector, encourages the formation of lasting and meaningful partnerships with stakeholders, and establishes a direct line of communication between the LIP and the entities that lead local resettlement efforts.
3. **Local decision-making autonomy:** LIPs, when affiliated with governments, need to be empowered to have local decision-making autonomy to better serve community stakeholders. This is what grants LIPs the ability to be proactive and flexible in response to humanitarian crises and mass resettlement events.
4. **Fundraising strategies:** Funding is important to cover LIP staff salaries where applicable, promotional material, and events for welcoming newcomers. In Ontario, LIPs receive a portion of their funding in the form of grants from the federal government's Settlement Program (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2014). However, LIPs must be wary of potential financial constraints that arise if government priorities and budget allocations change. As such, LIPs should be prepared to seek additional diversified funds.
5. **Effective communication for operational transparency:** The structural components of a LIP must communicate with one another, its member partners, the hosting entity, and other stakeholders in a transparent manner. This aspect is necessary for improving LIPs' responsiveness to local issues, their efficiency, and accountability to the public, stakeholders and funders.
6. **Community enthusiasm and ownership of the refugee resettlement process:** Community enthusiasm and ownership are essential for meaningful refugee resettlement responses. They mobilize resources (i.e. partnerships, funders, volunteers), and mitigate possible hostility and xenophobia. LIPs play a key role in bolstering community enthusiasm and ownership through their public engagement and education initiatives.

In addition to the six main ingredients outlined above, there are additional elements that can serve as optional flavorings in the LIP recipe to enhance the model:

- A. **Consistent funding:** While LIPs can be adaptive in their funding strategies (main ingredient #4), funding support

from the government sources enhances their operations. It reduces the amount of work directed to fundraising, allocating more time to the LIP mandate, allows LIPs to have a longer-term strategy and form lasting partnerships. The presence of government funding should not compromise LIPs' autonomy.

- B. **Support staff:** LIPs can operate on a voluntary basis, but in practice they function better with staff responsible for operational and administrative tasks. Moreover, permanent staff members can establish lasting relationships with partners and community stakeholders, which can enhance the sustainability of the LIP and the implementation (or execution) of its long-term vision for creating welcoming and inclusive communities.
- C. **Stakeholder diversity:** Aside from the actors directly involved in settlement services, LIPs need to be open to establishing partnerships with a variety of groups in other sectors including healthcare, education, research, finance and more. Partnerships with universities, for instance, present opportunities to share knowledge, expertise and resources and conduct collaborative evaluation of activities and results. Similarly, LIPs should seek to have a diverse set of stakeholders, including local agency representatives, prominent community members, and especially newcomers, on their councils, executive committees and working group(s).
- D. **Inclusiveness for all newcomers:** We propose the LIP model can be scaled up to increase the resettlement of refugees, yet LIPs should seek to remain flexible and aim to support resettlement and integration for all categories of newcomers.
- E. **Communication between LIPs:** Once multiple LIPs are operational in a jurisdiction they can share best practices through various forms of interaction. This can occur at and across all levels: locally, nationally and internationally.

Overall, the strength of the LIP models relies on their place-based nature, which allows them to remain adaptable to each community's unique features (i.e. history of refugee response, existing agencies, policies, etc.) when scaling up.

## ***II. Scale up the LIP model in countries offering refugee resettlement programs***

We recommend that LIPs, as a model for *permanent* or long-term refugee resettlement and integration, be scaled up in countries that offer refugee resettlement. As of 2016 there were 37 countries that fit this description (UNHCR, 2016).

## ***III. Look out for community attributes that signal predisposition for the LIP model***

Around the world nationalistic xenophobia is on the rise, with corresponding political and media reaction. Fortunately, strong welcoming responses exist alongside that hostility. One of the most apt community types for LIPs is a community where a welcoming dialogue already exists, and can be built on. Some examples include municipalities that participate in the "Welcoming Communities" initiative, sanctuary cities, or solidarity cities. The LIP model has operated well in communities with less than 1 million inhabitants where service overlap is reduced and populations and service provision locations are more concentrated.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, it ensures that the elements of a LIP are not overwhelmed, remain in touch with local priorities, and that the LIP maintain 'local' qualities and values.

## ***IV. Share the knowledge and promote the adoption of the LIPs model abroad***

Canada can take a lead role in showcasing LIP model as an example of best practices for refugee resettlement. Here we

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<sup>4</sup> In areas with over 1 million people, multiple LIPs can be put in place, and can be divided by districts for example.

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suggest three ways in which this can be done:

1. **Build on the Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative:** The international community currently regards Canada as a thought leader in refugee resettlement. This is evidenced by the Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative, which aims to support the replication of Canada's private refugee sponsorship model abroad. There is an excellent opportunity to extend this initiative to scale up the LIP model as part of the 'Canadian Refugee Policy Innovation Package'.
2. **Incorporate LIPs knowledge sharing into foreign affairs operations:** By allocating moderate funds towards LIP model dissemination, Canadian embassies could host LIP practitioners and academics to advocate for the LIP model in countries offering refugee resettlement.
3. **Engage with stakeholders and establish intersectional & international partnerships:** The LIP model can be disseminated through research and community networks in Canada and across national borders. SSHRC can be an important partner in this regard, and their programs and conferences can be a venue for knowledge sharing, as well as academic, leadership, and community conferences held by other organizations. Communicating key ideas and results of LIPs through media reports would help the strategy gain interest and traction. Those reading this policy brief should also consider sharing this model through their own networks and connections, including through social media (#ScaleUpLIPs & #WelcomeRefugees).

## Conclusion

If the LIP model can be scaled up, we expect there to be a greater uptake for refugees by communities, diminishing xenophobia, and greater support and commitment for the resettlement of refugees and other newcomers.

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## Resources

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