

St. Thomas-Elgin Local Immigration Partnership **Terms of Reference**

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St. Thomas-Elgin
Local Immigration Partnership



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Preface: Shifting Toward Affirmation and Systemic Change

This revised Terms of Reference reflects the ongoing evolution of the St. Thomas-Elgin Local Immigration Partnership (STELIP) in its approach to community planning and governance. It builds on previous work and aligns with our updated Community Plan, placing equity, affirmation, and systemic awareness at the centre.

It affirms our commitment to anti-oppressive and anti-racist practice, newcomer agency, and relational responsibility, and responds to feedback from community partners and Indigenous educators.

Key changes include:

- Evolving language from “newcomer needs” to a recognition of systemic barriers and the community’s shared responsibility to address them
- Expanding representation and affirmation of diverse immigration statuses, including Canadian citizens, permanent residents, refugees, international students, and temporary workers
- STELIP also affirms the presence and contributions of Indigenous Peoples who choose to make St. Thomas and Elgin County their home. While not immigrants, their experiences of relocation, community-building, and systemic barriers are important to acknowledge and honour in our shared work
- Broadening our lens beyond economic narratives, recognizing that immigrants and newcomers are not solely labour market inputs. STELIP supports individuals in thriving on their own terms, whether they choose to build a home in St. Thomas and Elgin County or pursue other paths
- Shifting from “inclusion” to affirmation, centring the voices of newcomers and immigrants in decision-making and community-building. Creating spaces where they do not just adapt but feel safe and proud to share their culture, lead, teach, and shape the community
- Embedding STELIP’s guiding principles, Affirmation, Collaboration, Empowerment, and Sustainability, more intentionally throughout Council structure, roles, and operations
- Deepening our commitment to anti-oppressive and anti-racist practices in decision-making, communications, and community engagement
- Adopting the term “key internal, external, and community partners ” in place of “stakeholders” in response to feedback from Indigenous Education staff at public and post-secondary institutions. These partners emphasized that “stakeholder” is rooted in colonialism and advocated for language that reflects relationships, responsibility, and community connection



This Terms of Reference is a living tool, responsive to evolving community realities. It affirms our collective commitment to shaping St. Thomas and Elgin County into a place where everyone belongs, thrives, and feels at home.

We invite all Council members to engage with this revised Terms of Reference not only as a governance tool, but as a reflection of our shared values and vision for systemic change.



1.0 Introduction

Local Immigration Partnerships (LIPs) were created in recognition of the important role that municipalities and communities play in fostering equitable, affirming, and sustainable pathways for newcomer and immigrant integration. These partnerships support systemic change by coordinating efforts across sectors to address barriers and build welcoming communities.

In St. Thomas and Elgin County, early planning tables recognized the importance of preparing the community to affirm the dignity, strengths, and contributions of newcomers. In 2010, the Elgin and St. Thomas Labour Force Development Strategy identified immigration as a key priority for community growth and transformation. Agencies also acknowledged the need to take concrete action to understand and address systemic barriers impacting newcomers and immigrants.

As a trusted settlement service provider, the YWCA St. Thomas-Elgin submitted a successful proposal to Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), formerly known as Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC), to lead the Local Immigration Partnership in the region. The St. Thomas-Elgin Local Immigration Partnership (STELIP) began its work on February 28, 2011, with a commitment to equity, justice, and belonging.

Note: This Terms of Reference is a dynamic document and may be revised by the Partnership Council in alignment with evolving community realities and funding cycles.

1.1 Project Timeline

STELIP began in February 2011 and has received continuous multi-year funding. The current grant cycle spans April 2025 to March 2028.

1.2 Project Scope of Work

STELIP works toward a strategic, equity-driven approach to supporting immigrant and newcomer integration and retention in St. Thomas and Elgin County. This includes addressing systemic barriers, affirming diverse identities, and fostering community growth and transformation.

STELIP recognizes that while our primary focus is immigrant and newcomer integration, we also support initiatives that address settlement-related barriers for Indigenous communities (e.g., Indigenous Peoples relocating to the St. Thomas-Elgin region).

The scope of work includes:

- Aligning with existing community initiatives to optimize resources and avoid duplication
- Promoting cross-sector collaboration to build inclusive, affirming systems



- Ensuring service access for individuals born outside Canada, including Canadian citizens, who experience settlement or integration barriers
- Supporting immigrant Francophones and advancing the Francophone Integration Pathway

Definitions:

Immigrants: Individuals born outside Canada who reside here with a range of immigration statuses. This includes permanent residents, temporary residents (e.g., students, workers), and refugees. STELIP also recognizes that some individuals born outside Canada may have reclaimed or now hold Canadian citizenship but still face integration barriers and require support.

Newcomers: Individuals who have recently arrived in Canada and are in the early stages of settlement and integration. This may include people with permanent or temporary statuses. STELIP recognizes that the term “newcomer” reflects a stage of transition, not a measure of belonging.

1.3 Role of the Partnership Council

The Partnership Council (“the Council”) guides STELIP’s strategic direction and contributes to the implementation of the Community Plan. Council members collaborate to build community capacity, address systemic barriers, and foster equity and belonging for immigrants and newcomers.

Council members will:

- Elect a Council member to serve as co-chair for every two-year terms
- Participate in strategic planning to implement the Community Plan
- Identify priorities related to systemic change, community capacity-building, and public awareness
- Support implementation of identified priorities
- Share funding opportunities and professional networks
- Contribute to the development of indicators and share data to measure progress
- Strengthen links across programs and organizations to address systemic barriers
- Advise on promising practices to engage the community and service providers
- Actively support implementation of Community Plan activities within their organizations



2.0 Partnership Council

2.1 Composition

The STELIP Partnership Council is a collaborative, equity-driven body composed of local and regional members committed to advancing systemic change and fostering belonging for immigrants and newcomers in St. Thomas and Elgin County. The Council includes sector representatives and policy and resource advisors, each bringing unique perspectives and expertise.

Sector Representatives include:

- Organizations with a primary mandate to provide services for immigrants and newcomers, including settlement, language, and wraparound supports
- Organizations, employers, and municipal representatives serving the St. Thomas-Elgin region, with a demonstrated commitment to equity and inclusion
- Community members who identify as immigrants and/or newcomers, including those with temporary and permanent immigration statuses

Sector representatives are not required to seek formal endorsement from their sectors but are expected to engage and consult with broader networks to inform Council discussions.

Policy and Resource Advisors represent:

Organizations that fund or influence services for immigrants and newcomers. These may include:

- Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC)
- Provincial Ministries
- Service Canada

These advisors provide guidance on policies, programs, data, and tools relevant to the Council's work and may also serve as sector representatives.

The Council is committed to ensuring representation across:

- Geographic areas within St. Thomas and Elgin County
- Sectors impacting newcomer integration
- Diverse immigration statuses, racial and cultural identities, and lived experiences



2.2 Sector Rationale

Each sector contributes to STELIP's goals by addressing systemic barriers and fostering affirming, inclusive practices:

Sector	Rationale
Municipal, Provincial, and Federal Government	Advance community capacity-building; promote equity-focused policies; engage leaders in public education and systemic change; strengthen cross-sector collaboration[PH1]
Settlement Sector	Co-create culturally affirming strategies; strengthen service navigation; promote trauma-informed, anti-oppressive practices
Employment and Labour Market	Support equitable employment practices; educate employers on cultural competency and systemic barriers; connect internationally-trained professionals with opportunities; support business development
Health Sector	Expand access to interpretation and culturally responsive care; address systemic health inequities; promote wellness resources and supports
Education and Skills Training	Promote inclusive learning environments; support youth and families; expand access to language and literacy supports and skills development
Community, Ethnocultural, and Faith Organizations	Foster cultural connection and belonging; co-lead community engagement initiatives in collaboration with diverse groups and Indigenous Peoples
Media	Promote public awareness of diversity, equity, and newcomer contributions; amplify affirming narratives
Immigrant Community Members	Share lived experience to inform systemic change; advocate for affirming, inclusive practices across sectors

Council membership may evolve based on community priorities and agreement by voting members. The above list reflects current representation and is not exhaustive.



3.0 Partnership Council Structure

3.1 Role of Project Team

The STELIP initiative is overseen by the YWCA St. Thomas-Elgin. The STELIP project team will:

- Coordinate and support Council meetings and activities
- Facilitate collaboration among local, regional, and provincial partners
- Participate in immigration policy consultations at the provincial and federal levels
- Support implementation of the Community Plan in alignment with the IRCC contribution agreement
- Ensure financial accountability and adherence to protocols for third-party contracts and intellectual property
- Lead community engagement and communication strategies
- Coordinate media relations for STELIP initiatives
- Monitor progress and outcomes in alignment with the project's outcome framework
- Provide regular updates to municipal councils on STELIP's work and impact
- Meet all reporting requirements set by IRCC

3.2 Role of the Co-Chairs

The Co-Chairs will:

- Facilitate Council meetings in a way that promotes equity, affirmation, and inclusive participation
- Ensure meetings are well-organized, collaborative, and focused on strategic priorities
- Promote partnership and shared responsibility among community organizations and key internal and external partners
- Champion the STELIP Community Plan and Action Plans.
- Ensure transparent decision-making and equitable engagement across Council members

3.3 Role of Council Members

Council members will:

- Collaborate on STELIP initiatives that advance systemic change and community growth and transformation
- Support the Community Plan and Action Plans through action teams, sharing expertise, and sector connections
- Participate regularly in Council meetings and STELIP-led activities



- Provide input informed by their sector and lived experience, while considering the broader community context
- Engage with sector peers to ensure diverse perspectives inform Council decisions
- Recommend mechanisms to keep key internal and external partners informed and connected to newcomer and immigrant experiences

3.4 Operating Commitment of Council Members

Council members will:

- Participate in an environment that promotes affirmation, equity, collaboration, empowerment, and sustainability
- Share resources, expertise, and opportunities for co-creation
- Support innovative, community-driven strategies that address systemic barriers and affirm newcomer contributions
- Promote equity and belonging through Council membership and all facets of its work
- Work transparently and collaboratively to advance the Council's objectives

3.5 Recruitment and Selection

3.5.1 Election of Sector Representative Co-Chair

1. The sector representative Co-Chair will be elected by Council members within the first fiscal year for the new term. They will serve a two-year term, which may be extended with the approval of Council members if there are no new nominations
2. If only one candidate is nominated, the Council may approve the candidate without an election.
3. If no candidates are nominated, the election will be deferred until a candidate is available.

3.5.2 Nomination Process for Sector Representative Co-Chair Position

1. Nominees for the sector representative Co-Chair position must be Council members.
2. Council members must consent to being nominated. This may happen in one of two ways:
 - a. A Council member or STELIP staff may suggest a potential nominee. STELIP staff will contact the nominee to confirm interest and eligibility, as outlined in Section 3.8. If the nominee agrees and meets the criteria, their name will be added to the candidate list.
 - b. A Council member may self-nominate by contacting STELIP staff. If eligible, their name will be added to the candidate list.
3. Nominations will close one week before the election. At that time, the final list of eligible and confirmed candidates will be shared with Council members.



4. Elections will take place at a designated Council meeting. Members will be notified in advance.

3.5.3 Voting Process for Sector Representative Co-Chair Selection

The current Chairs will oversee the following steps:

Before the Meeting:

1. Share the election date with Council members in advance.
2. Confirm with each candidate that they accept the nomination.
3. Ensure the candidate list is distributed to Council members at least one week before the election.

On the Day of the Meeting:

4. Request a motion and a second from the floor to approve the list of candidates.
5. If more than one candidate is nominated:
 - a. Distribute ballots to all Council members. The current sector representative Co-Chair will cast a tie-breaking vote only if needed.
 - b. Collect all ballots.
 - c. STELIP staff will count the votes.

3.6 Recruitment of Council Members

Council members may recommend organizations or individuals to join the Partnership Council based on identified priorities. Efforts will be made to ensure representation across geographic areas and sectors, and to include diverse backgrounds and perspectives. The organization's mandate or the individual's lived experience should align with STELIP's objectives.

3.7 Assigning a Designate

Council members will be asked to name a designate or alternate contact to represent their organization if they are unavailable. Designates must meet the qualifications outlined in Section 3.8.

If a Council representative is no longer available, STELIP staff will contact the organization to confirm whether the designate or another qualified individual will take their place.

3.8 Qualifications

- Council seeks members who identify as newcomers or immigrants and can share insights from their lived experiences to inform decisions. Members are encouraged to contribute



perspectives that reflect newcomer and immigrant realities in St. Thomas and Elgin County and participate in collaborative discussions that shape policies and practices impacting communities. Members representing organizations must have decision-making authority and be able to speak to the needs and experiences of the sector they represent.

- Experience working in collaborative planning groups is considered an asset.

Organizations must meet one or more of the following criteria:

- Have an established governance structure (e.g., Board or Charter).
- Provide services or programs for newcomers and immigrants in St. Thomas-Elgin or the surrounding region
- Have experience implementing programs that support newcomer and immigrant needs and integration
- Be familiar with the challenges newcomers and immigrants face when integrating into the broader community, including through lived experience

3.9 Term

The term of the Partnership Council will extend to March 31, 2028, in alignment with the current IRCC funding agreement.

If additional funding is received from IRCC, the term of the Council will be reviewed and adjusted based on funding requirements and project timelines.



4.0 Procedures and Processes

4.1 Meetings

The Partnership Council will meet a minimum of four times annually between April 1 and March 31 each year.

Meetings will be facilitated in ways that promote:

- Equitable participation
- Cultural safety
- Affirmation of diverse identities and lived experiences
- Respectful dialogue and collaboration across sectors

STELIP staff will coordinate meeting logistics and ensure accessibility for all Council members.

4.2 Media Contact

STELIP staff and the Council Chairs will serve as spokespersons for matters related to the STELIP initiative.

All external communications, including press releases, will be submitted to IRCC for approval. Communications will:

- Acknowledge the contribution of the Government of Canada
- Use affirming language and accurately represent immigrant and newcomer communities
- Promote public awareness of systemic barriers and highlight the strengths, contributions, and diversity of newcomers

4.3 Contractual Relationship between STELIP and IRCC

Funds for the STELIP initiative are administered by YWCA St. Thomas-Elgin, which holds the contribution agreement with IRCC.

YWCA St. Thomas-Elgin is responsible for:

- Financial accountability to IRCC
- Oversight of deliverables and reporting
- Ensuring all activities align with the terms of the contribution agreement

IRCC is the final decision-making authority on matters related to the contribution agreement.



5.0 Governance

The STELIP Partnership Council provides a collaborative, equity-driven framework for implementing the Community Plan and Action Plans. Council members work together to identify priorities, address systemic barriers, and foster community growth and transformation in St. Thomas and Elgin County.

Sector representatives help shape issues, activities, and strategies that reflect the lived experiences and strengths of immigrants and newcomers, and the shared responsibility of the broader community.

5.1 Reporting Structure

Council members are collectively responsible for reporting to STELIP staff on the implementation of activities and progress toward measurable outcomes identified in the Action Plans.

STELIP staff, operating within the YWCA St. Thomas-Elgin's contractual relationship with Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), are responsible for:

- Supporting implementation of the Community Plan
- Coordinating reporting to IRCC
- Ensuring transparency and accountability in all deliverables

The STELIP Manager at YWCA St. Thomas-Elgin will report on project progress and outcomes to IRCC and relevant internal and external partners.

5.2 Conflict of Interest

Council members are expected to act in the best interest of the community and uphold the principles of equity, transparency, and integrity.

Information shared by Council members should reflect the broader sector and community context and not solely the interests of their organization, business, or personal affiliations.

Council members must:

- Declare any actual or potential conflicts of interest
- Excuse themselves from deliberations or decisions where a conflict exists
- Uphold community trust by ensuring decisions are made transparently and equitably