

CASIP
Governance &
Leadership
Capacity
Development
Project



CASIP GOVERNANCE AND LEADERSHIP CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT PROJECT: OVERVIEW OF THE CASE STUDY

This case study summarizes the CASIP (Consortium of Agencies Serving Internationally-trained Professionals) Governance and Leadership Capacity Development Project undertaken by the 11 CASIP member organizations that deliver employment services and training programs to skilled immigrants in the Greater Toronto Area. The project focused on mobilizing strategic collaboration at the governance and leadership levels and on building the collective capacity of the sector to respond to shared needs and policy changes overall. Collaboration at this level also served as a forum for the exchange of best practices, a space for arriving at consensus and an opportunity to utilize shared resources to achieve common goals and objectives. This project was undertaken over three years beginning 2011 and concluding in 2014.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Funded by:



CONTEXT AND NEED FOR THE PROJECT

The state of the current labour market in Canada calls to attention the mismatch between jobs that are available and the skilled workers that can fill them. The employment services sector has the opportunity to play a significant role to ensure that skilled immigrants can integrate into the local labour market and find positions that utilize their experience and education. This project aims to strengthen the capacity and infrastructure of the sector so that it is better able to respond to the rapidly changing landscape of the economy, immigration, government policies and the needs of immigrants and employers both now and in the future.

The need for the project came directly from our collective experience, knowledge and direction. CASIP is a consortium of independent, community-based agencies and colleges that have worked together since 1998 to drive innovation, advocacy and excellence in employment services for skilled immigrants and employers in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). Despite an agreement towards collaboration, our members still compete for funding and are primarily single agency oriented. *The rationale of the project was to engage leadership and governance representatives to adopt collaboration in more strategic ways and to see the value of collaborative and collective responses to the challenges facing the sector.*

The project set out to address the following two needs through strategic collaboration:

Governance and board engagement is a significant issue facing many non-profit organizations. Board representatives are often an “untapped” resource in terms of building partnerships in the private sector, identifying new funding opportunities, and exercising their influence and networks to assist organizations with furthering their mandate. The overall goal of the project was to engage Board members in both acquiring knowledge and awareness of the employment services sector to help them see the value of collaboration as a benefit for their organization.

The project further emphasized the need to invest in **leadership and the development of future leaders** within existing organizations. Much like other non-profit organizations, the employment services sector regularly faces the challenge of recruiting and retaining high-performing managers and leaders. The project created an innovative forum and opportunity for future leaders of each organization to come together to tackle key issues and changes facing the sector. The purpose of this component was both to invest and recognize the potential of these individuals, and also, to start them towards the path of strategic collaboration for the benefit of future sector activities.

“An aging population means that there is an impending retirement wave. In the nonprofit sector this will play out most significantly at the leadership level, where 55 per cent of Executive Directors (EDs) have said they plan to leave their current position within four years...”

Human Capital Renewal in the Nonprofit Sector, Framing the Strategy, Ontario Nonprofit Network, 2013

MAJOR LEARNING AND OUTCOMES

The project developed an innovative model focused on building the capacity of members to be able to engage in strategic collaboration, while at the same time developing leaders in collaborative management and governance. The various components of the project provided significant learning and outcomes that could support other umbrella groups as they look at ways to strengthen their leadership at the governance levels and build capacity to be able to make significant impact in the non-profit sector.

1

Understanding shared issues, and the potential for collective action (collaboration)

One of the goals of the project was to look at opportunities to engage and develop current Board of Directors and Senior Executives to be able to collaborate at a strategic level to identify shared or sector-wide issues, and gain a greater understanding of their impact on the sector.

The formation of the CASIP Strategic Governance Committee (made up of all CASIP Executive Directors and Senior College Leads), as well as the active involvement of Board members (through activities such as Board Dialogues), facilitated the learning and engagement process and a greater understanding of issues affecting the sector. The high-level engagement of leaders at the governance levels identified common ground for collaboration and highlighted the need for collective policy development and strategic planning to remain responsive and relevant to future economic and political changes.

2

Succession planning and working towards a collaborative future

Incorporating collaboration as a strategy was identified as a key to succession planning for the member agencies. The need for collaboration at all levels was a resounding theme, particularly when looking at how to cope with the challenges and level of uncertainty facing the sector. At the governance level, the Board Dialogues illustrated that there was a need to instill collective engagement, commitment and “buy-in” from all members to support the work and goals of their organizations and the sector overall. The project also demonstrated that the ability to collaborate was a skill that needed to be identified and acknowledged when recruiting management and leadership. The benefit of preparing future leaders to work collaboratively was also illustrated through the *Collaborative Leaders for a Collaborative Future* program. The model focused on nurturing collaboration by strengthening the skills of future leaders in the member agencies.

3

Building trust and opening channels of communication

From the Executive Director and senior management level, to Board members, and future leaders identified by each organization – opportunities were identified where individuals from otherwise “competing” organizations could openly share concerns, knowledge, best practices and discuss ways to mobilize their influence as a whole. The project placed a heavy emphasis on building trust and encouraging open communication between the governance levels of the member organizations. Opportunities to engage in strategic and generative thinking in a collaborative environment were provided to encourage the development of pro-active, rather than reactive solutions and the collective mobilization of resources (from securing sponsorships to engaging the support of the private sector). A model of Working Groups (WGs) was developed and implemented to bring together staff from all levels across CASIP’s member organizations. Four WG’s were established and members shared expertise, resources and other supports to resolve issues and to develop solutions and tools.

“Boards set organization policy course and direction. They need to get involved. CASIP has an opportunity for a leadership collective which can influence and effect change, they can paint the picture of what this sector can be.” Anthony McNamee, Board of Directors, ACCES Employment

GOVERNANCE AND BOARD ENGAGEMENT

The role of Boards in the sector is to drive the strategic direction of organizations. One of the goals of the project was to challenge Board members to think beyond their individual organizations, to see the broader sector issues, and to recognize the value of collective action and collaboration. Engaging and involving leaders at the governance level encourages Board members to play a stronger role in understanding the nature of the changes involved, and further, mobilizing their influence, knowledge and professional circles to support the work and goals of their organizations and the sector overall.

The following activities were undertaken to encourage greater engagement and overall strategic knowledge at the governance and board levels:

- A business case for collaboration was developed and presented at Board meetings at the 11 organizations
- A series of four Board Dialogues were held with various high profile keynote speakers. The goal of the Dialogues was to bring together Board members and executive leaders to engage in strategic and generative thinking to determine how to stimulate collaborative activities among the governing bodies of CASIP's members
- The facilitated discussions built awareness of common governance issues in the sector, identified common goals and established areas of collective action
- Topics included: Leadership, Collaboration and Modernization in the Non-profit Sector; The Precarious Sector - Non-profit Service Providers and the Challenge of Precarity; Shaping the Future - Canada's rapidly changing immigration and labour market policies and possible implications for CASIP; and, Agency of the Future

E-Learning tools were developed and used to facilitate the learning and engagement process:

- [CASIP Introductory Video](#) - This overview of CASIP and its collaborative work was developed and shared with board members of CASIP member organizations
- [Collaborative Leaders for a Collaborative Future](#) featured a discussion among Board members and senior leaders from CASIP organizations on the necessity of a collaborative leadership approach and what makes a collaborative leader
- [Shaping the Future: Leadership, Collaboration and Modernization in the Non-profit Sector](#) was developed from Elizabeth McIsaac's keynote address at the *Collaborative Leaders for a Collaborative Future* program launch
- [Shaping the Future](#) was developed from Naomi Alboim's keynote address at Board Dialogue #3 on the topic of recent changes to immigration and labour policies and possible implications for CASIP members
- An additional e-Learning tool was developed to orient Board members of CASIP's member organizations to the employment services sector

OUTCOMES

Overall, there was a high level of engagement at the Board level and many potential benefits for greater collaboration were identified in the course of the Dialogues and other activities. This area of the project illustrated the benefits and potential of "collaboration by doing." At the governance level, this involved engaging Board members in learning activities, active discussion and strategic planning for future activities. This activity also demonstrated the tremendous potential of collaboration and the collective mobilization of resources (i.e., securing sponsorships, oversight and management, communication and strategy for future activities).

MOBILIZING STRATEGIC COLLABORATION

CASIP – Consortium of Agencies Serving Internationally-trained Professionals: 11 agencies

ACCES Employment
Collège Boréal
COSTI
Humber College

JobStart
Job Skills
JVS Toronto
MicroSkills

Skills for Change
Seneca College
Woodgreen

CASIP Strategic Governance Committee

GOVERNANCE & LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

[Four Working Groups]



1 Collaborative Governance

6 MEMBERS



2 Collaborative Leadership Development

6 MEMBERS



3 E-Learning

6 MEMBERS



4 Communication Tools & Support

5 MEMBERS

GOVERNANCE & BOARD ENGAGEMENT

4

Board Dialogues



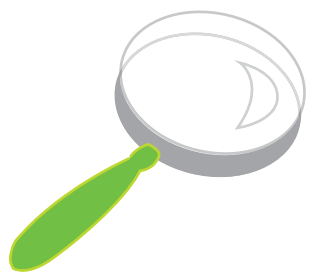
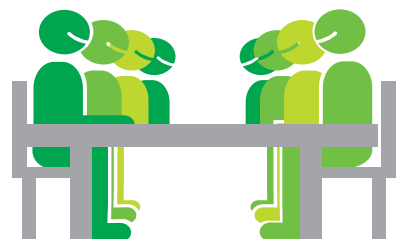
255

Participants



100+

Board Members



Increasing awareness & engagement across

11 member agencies at all levels

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

6

Workshops to develop collaboration between leaders



19

Participants / Future Leaders



5 ACTION PROJECTS



Responding to a Changing Immigration Landscape

Project 1

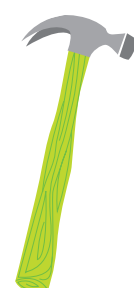
Implications of new express entry process

Project 2

Strategies for coordinated service response

Project 3

Explore emerging employer needs



Building Internal Capacity

Project 4

Managing Performance Targets

Project 5

Models for Collaborative Staff Training

WHAT WE ACHIEVED

UNDERSTANDING OF SHARED ISSUES

Immigration

Staff & Leadership

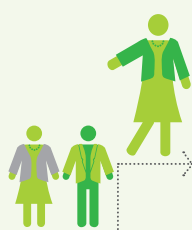
Resources

Funding

ESTABLISHED TRUST & OPEN COMMUNICATION CHANNELS



STRENGTHENED SUCCESSION PLANNING FOR A COLLABORATIVE FUTURE



DEVELOPED TOOLS TO PROMOTE CASIP'S COLLABORATIVE MODEL



BROUGHT KEY LEADERS TOGETHER TO SHARE BEST PRACTICES IN SERVICE DELIVERY



ESTABLISHED A COLLECTIVE SECTOR VOICE ON KEY ISSUES



There were several action items that were collectively agreed upon as areas for governance and Board level collaboration:

- “Getting business outside” and aware of what the sector has to offer. A collaborative voice in this area would create the opportunity for joint action to engage the private sector in order to enhance the relevance and practicality of the sector’s work
- Collective policy development and strategic planning to better position agencies to remain relevant and responsive to future changes in the political and economic environment
- It was recognized that there is a need to instill collective engagement, commitment and “buy-in” from all members of the Board of Directors to be aware of changing issues affecting the sector and to mobilize their resources to support agencies in their goals and actions

In the course of the Dialogues, several challenges to collaboration were also noted:

- There is a need to address the potential capacity of sustaining continued engagement following the end of the project. There is a degree of “volunteer fatigue” evident in the course of the delivery of the events
- The challenge of arriving at a consensus on areas that require greater collaboration, sharing of knowledge and planning of collective action
- The need to overcome the sector’s funding model and structure which tends to encourage competition for limited resources and subsequently discourages collaboration
- Organizations have different priorities when it comes to collaboration, the value of cooperation and collective action are not always recognized by all participants

Board members saw the potential for future collaboration at the governance level. Overall, it was agreed that while the foundation for governance and board level collaboration was effectively established through the project, sustaining engagement and commitment to collaboration would be the challenge in the future. The dialogue events opened up opportunities for discussion; however, future collaboration will depend on maintaining and encouraging Board members to continue in the process of strategically moving forward on the agreed upon items. Several key Board members emerged as leaders and individuals with significant interest in the activity. These individuals could in turn serve as advocates for future collaboration in the individual agencies.

“CASIP’s strengths are in its focus on raising the standard of service to skilled immigrants and its capacity to take on major projects because it can pool the capacity of its members... CASIP, with its roots in service, is well positioned to more deeply understand the barriers to employment.”

Mario Calla, Executive Director, COSTI Immigrant Services

COLLABORATIVE LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

The project designed a comprehensive leadership development program to train up-and-coming managers to collaborate across organizations and the sector. The program *Collaborative Leaders for a Collaborative Future* created the opportunity to nurture collaboration with the aim of strengthening the capacity of current and future leaders at all levels of the organizations.

The training and collaboration model included the following overall goals:

- Establishing a community of practice to share ideas and information
- Using online technologies to support collaboration
- Creating working groups from across organizations to collaborate, build relationships and tackle pressing issues facing the sector

The leadership training workshops created a forum that focused specifically on the theme of leadership and collaboration as well as building the capacity of individuals to identify and action opportunities for strategic collaboration. The workshops were designed to enhance and mobilize each participant’s ability to address pressing issues in the sector and to do so as a collaborative unit.

“This group has been a rich resource for our industry. It is encouraging to see the talent and passion.”

Participant, Collaborative Leaders for a Collaborative Future

The six workshops developed were:

1	2	3	4	5	6
<p>Setting the Context: Identifying and introducing the issue of leadership gaps in the non-profit sector</p>	<p>Collective Impact: Exploring complexity thinking; the model and definition of collective impact as a specific strategy for working together</p>	<p>Strategic Issues for the Immigrant Employment Sector: Working through strategic issues and policy changes for the employment sector that shape the collective reality of all agencies</p>	<p>Collaboration Experiences and Lessons Learned: Examining an interagency collaborative in a different sector (Toronto Supportive Housing Network) as a case study and exploring online collaboration tools</p>	<p>Leadership for Collaboration: Identifying different lenses for collaboration and leadership including a self-assessment of individual leadership styles and strengths</p>	<p>Dialogue with Executives and Board Members: A dialogue with CASIP member organization executives and Board members exploring issues of interest to emerging leaders</p>

“I am looking at my interactions within and outside my organization from a more collaborative viewpoint. I now look for ways to engage with others in productive and respectful dialogue and to encourage this in colleagues who have not had the opportunity to participate in this program.”

Participant, Collaborative Leaders for a Collaborative Future

“I’m always thinking about what we have learned... being open and inclusive to others. Ensuring partnerships are a true collaboration.”

Participant, Collaborative Leaders for a Collaborative Future

“I am able to articulate the big picture in a more meaningful way.”

Participant, Collaborative Leaders for a Collaborative Future

Upon completing the series of workshops, participants formed project teams that put into action the lessons and strategies that they acquired. Participants and the CASIP Strategic Governance Committee of senior leaders then identified strategic areas where collaboration would benefit all participating organizations. The focus of the action project teams was to collaboratively research and present strategies addressing both internal and external factors that affect the immigrant employment services sector.

The following action projects were undertaken:

Responding to the Changing Immigration Landscape			Building Internal Capacity	
Project 1	Project 2	Project 3	Project 4	Project 5
Explore implications for the sector of the new express entry immigrant selection process	Explore emerging employer needs under the express entry model and position CASIP to best meet those needs	Explore CASIP strategies for a coordinated service response to emerging newcomer needs under express entry	Explore management strategies and practices among CASIP members for managing performance targets	Explore possible models for continued collaborative staff training/development for CASIP

OUTCOMES

Individuals that participated in the training and action projects acknowledged the sector’s history and the competitive environment, but agreed that client focus is the primary driving force and “common ground” for all organizations. They agreed that one of the greatest outcomes of the program was the creation of a *Community of Practice* of future leaders who now have a shared history of working collaboratively. This would strengthen the sector’s ability to respond to changing policies, and operational and capacity issues.

The model of the action project groups provided an opportunity to deepen appreciation for the value of collaborative work and provided hands-on experience of interagency collaboration for participants. It allowed participants to identify challenges and potential areas of transformation in the way that services are delivered. The action projects will serve as valuable resources for the planning and implementation of changes related to immigration policy, as well as adding to each agencies individual capacity to operate under increasingly limited resources.

CONCLUSION: IMPACT ON THE NON-PROFIT SECTOR

Collaboration in the non-profit sector, visible through organizations such as CASIP, serves as the impetus for continued sector sustainability, growth and impact. It allows for the cross-pollination of ideas and best practices sharing while helping each organization to build internal capabilities. Moreover, it lays the foundation to identify and leverage new opportunities that enables participants to continue to meet the evolving needs of our two client groups: skilled immigrants and employers.

The project mobilized existing leadership within individual organizations to focus on areas of common interest, to establish a consensus on the need to develop collective and shared responses to the issues facing the sector, and to highlight the increasing need to engage Boards in expanding their participation and advocacy for their respective organizations and the sector at large.

At the operational level, the project brought together key leaders within the consortium to identify and share best practices in service delivery. This opened up opportunities for discussing best practices and approaches along with the additional benefit of encouraging professional relationships that facilitate both current and future collaboration.

The project highlighted the need to begin considering the value of establishing a collective “sector voice”, one that can respond to the rapid pace of change in the immigration sector. The value of arriving at a consensus and moving forward collectively as a network was demonstrated throughout the various activities of the project.

Finally, there was the realization that establishing and expanding CASIP as a forum for collaboration that can respond to the many internal and external changes facing the sector strengthens the position of each individual organization. Further, the project helped to establish a joint responsibility towards collaboration and the effective use of resources overall.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE VISIT WWW.CASIP.CA

“Without an effective, immediate push by employers and their public sector partners in government to address the issues of immigration through improved policies and practices, Canadian economic performance at the firm, city, province, and national levels will suffer severely.”

The Conference Board of Canada, Immigration Knowledge Area, 2010



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