

COLLECTIVE IMPACT IN PROGRESS: COLLABORATIVE APPROACHES TO ADDRESSING MINORITY LANGUAGE COMMUNITY VITALITY IN THE EASTERN TOWNSHIPS

Rachel Hunting
Townshippers' Association

Abstract

The Collective Impact (CI) model for organizing multi-stakeholder collaboration enables agents of change to move beyond the specific needs of each partner and their available resources to establish a common agenda and develop a clear roadmap for its achievement. This paper explores the socio-economic characteristics of English-speakers in the Historical Eastern Townships within the context of youth retention and access to health and social services, and provides examples of how the Townshippers' Association has used the framework provided by the CI model to address these issues and work with community partners towards improving community vitality for English-speakers in the Historical Eastern Townships region.

Résumé

L'impact collectif (IC) est un modèle visant la mise sur pied de collaborations à acteurs multiples permettant aux agents du changement de dépasser les besoins spécifiques de chaque partenaire et les ressources dont ils disposent pour établir des objectifs communs et une trajectoire de réalisation. Cet article explore les caractéristiques socioéconomiques des membres de la communauté d'expression anglaise de la région Historical Eastern Townships (HET) [la région élargie que formaient historiquement les Cantons-de-l'Est], et ce, dans un contexte de rétention de la jeunesse et d'accès aux services sociaux et de santé. Des exemples sont présentés sur la façon dont l'Association Townshippers a utilisé le cadre conceptuel du modèle IC pour aborder ces enjeux et travailler avec les partenaires de la communauté afin d'améliorer la vitalité collective des membres de la communauté d'expression anglaise des HET.

Introduction

Founded in 1979 by a handful of community members to ensure that the English-speaking community would remain visible despite a dwindling population, the Townshippers' Association has spent more than 35 years at the forefront of community engagement, pursuing its mission to promote the interests of the English-speaking community in Quebec's Historical Eastern Townships (hereafter referred to as HET), strengthen its cultural identity, and encourage the full participation of the English-speaking population in the community at large.

Through the years the Association's programs have addressed heritage and culture, community development, access to health and social services, intergenerational projects for English-speaking seniors, and youth recruitment and retention. The organization's input is regularly sought at the municipal, provincial, and federal levels as well as by other decision-making bodies on a variety of issues touching on the lives of English-speakers in the HET region and across the province. Townshippers' works on behalf of more than 46,000 English-speakers who are spread across a region that is larger than Belgium in its geography, stretching from Philipsburg in the west to Megantic in the east, and from Inverness in the north to the U.S. border in the south (see Figure 1).

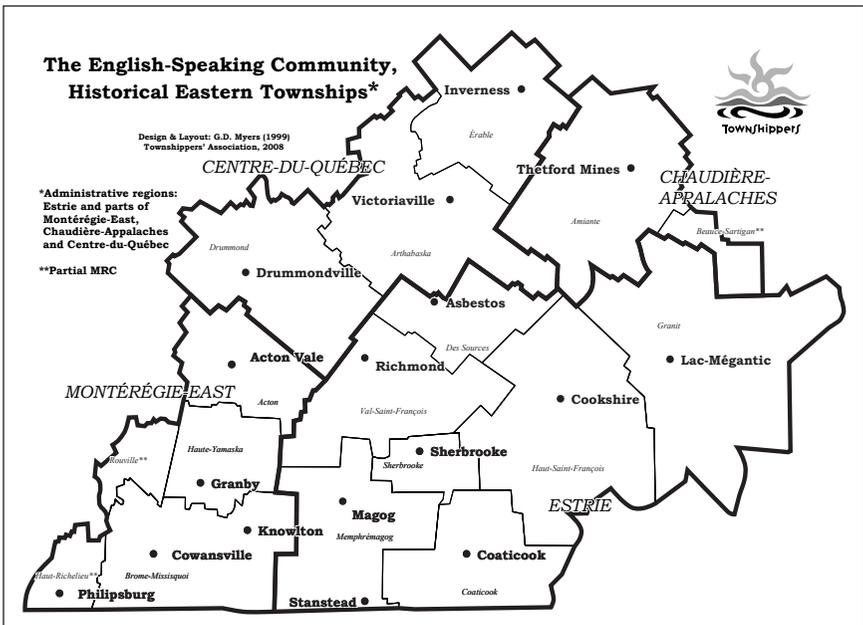


Figure 1:
The English-Speaking Community, Historical Eastern Townships

The aim of this paper is to explore the socio-economic characteristics of English-speakers in the HET within the context of youth retention and access to health and social services, and to provide examples of how actions taken by the Townshippers' Association to address these issues reflect the Collective Impact model as outlined by FSG.org (2012) and the Tamarack Institute for Community Engagement (2013, 2014).

Socio-economic trends among English-speakers in the Historical Eastern Townships

The proportion of individuals aged 45 and up outweighs the proportion of those aged 0–44 among the English-speaking community in the HET. As a result, out-migration among young English-speakers continues to threaten the vitality of the English-speaking population in the Townships with a high percentage of young English-speakers still exiting the region in favour of larger urban centers within the province or cities outside of the province altogether (Floch 2010; Pocock 2015). This out-migration of the youth population has left the Eastern Townships' English-speaking community with an absence of middle-generation individuals whose profession, education, and income typically make up the middle-class (Kischuk 2010). Community members who remain tend to be socio-economically vulnerable, with high levels of unemployment, low levels of income, and low education levels (Floch 2010).

Unemployment remains, in particular, a formidable obstacle for English-speakers living in the Eastern Townships. In 2011, a quarter of HET English-speakers were without a high school certificate and their tendency to have a low income was elevated (46.2%) when compared to French-speakers (40.9%) in the region (Pocock 2015). Levels of unemployment were also higher among English-speakers in the HET when compared to their French-speaking counterparts (Pocock 2015).

Access to health and social services in English remains a high priority for English-speaking communities across Quebec regardless of high levels of bilingualism (Pocock and Hartwell 2010).

Studies have confirmed that language barriers affect access and quality of care for linguistic minority communities. Obstacles to communication can reduce recourse to preventative services; increase consultation time, including the number of tests and possibility of diagnostic and treatment errors; affect the quality of services requiring effective communication such as social services; reduce the probability of treatment compliance and reduce users' satisfaction with the services received (Pocock 2012, 8).

Evidence suggests that the under-representation of the English-speaking community when it comes to using available health services is linked to both a fear of not being able to adequately understand and navigate the system, and to a lack of knowledge about the services available to them. It has been shown that if the English-speaking community is aware that services are offered in English, usage levels will increase (Kishchuk 2010). This evidence demonstrates a need for a Collective Impact approach to supporting the vitality of the English-speaking community in the province of Quebec.

Review of the Literature

The concept of group vitality provides a lens through which to analyze the different variables that affect the resiliency of individual language communities negotiating multilingual environments (Bourhis and Landry 2012). Vitality for Official Language Minority Communities (OLMCs) is, according to the fullest statement on the subject, expressed through:

- Individuals who have a sense of belonging to the language community, who have linguistic aspirations and relevant practices;
- A community that has a collective leadership and an ability to mobilize its people and community organizations;
- An environment that: offers the possibility of receiving an education in your own language; provides recreational and cultural activities in your own language; includes the presence of institutions and an active offer of services; offers the possibility of participating in the economic and social expansion of the community; and encourages the visibility of language;
- Relationships with the majority that lead to support and cooperation between the two language groups, recognition and respect of language rights, and influence and authority within the majority institutions;
- Demographic and demo-linguistic renewal through natural population growth, immigration, and language practices that ensure the retention and transmission of the language;
- A community's ability to subscribe to a wider linguistic environment (Canadian Heritage 2013, 2).

As an organization working to support and bolster the vitality of the English-speaking minority in the HET, the Townshippers' Association purposely develops its strategic plan and associated activities with these vitality factors in mind.

Increasing the vitality of a minority language community increases that community's ability to maintain its strength and flourish as a collective body within the intergroup context it is situated. Likewise, language communities that lack vitality face the end of their existence as distinct within the intergroup context (Bourhis and Landry 2012; Jedwab 2012).

Breton (1964) describes institutional completeness as the number, variety, and nature of institutions specific to a minority community such as schools, places of worship, and community centres which serve as important communal reference points and provide opportunities for minority group members to meet and interact. When applied to the situation of the English-speaking minority community in Quebec, the link between institutional completeness (and lack thereof) and a vital minority community is evident. Being a member of a linguistic minority often leads to increased barriers to education, employment, and communication; contributes to a sense of exclusion and isolation; results in low levels of representation in leadership roles (QCGN 2009). Cultural and linguistic institutions render possible the transmission of a minority group's identity and make important contributions to its historical continuity (Landry, Allard and Deveau 2013). Having an institution within which one can affirm one's identity and access resources becomes a crucial necessity for those who negotiate Quebec society in an official minority language context, especially when it is taken into account that the English-speaking community is diverse and dispersed across the province (Lamarre 2008; QCGN 2009).

What is Collective Impact?

Collective Impact (CI) is described as a model of social progress that draws its power from providing a common lens through which multiple stakeholders can look for resources and innovative methods with which to approach a shared goal (FSG.org 2012). In the context of collaborative action, CI provides a wide variety of community stakeholders with a methodology that strives to maximize learning, encourage communication among sectors, and reduce delays when developing a holistic approach to a particular need or issue (Tamarack 2014).

The Tamarack Institute for Community Engagement (2014) refers to four key phases in the CI process: the creation of ideas and dialogue; commencement of action; creating a structure for impact (organization); maintaining action and impact. The presence of "influential champions of the issue; a sense of urgency around the issue and adequate resources of all types to make progress on the issue" (Tamarack 2014, 1) are identified as three important pre-conditions to achieving long-term collective impact. Five additional

conditions are also considered necessary in regards to the successful implementation of the framework: “an established common agenda, shared measurement, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication, and backbone support [coordination of participating organizations and agencies]” (Tamarack 2014, 1). The latter demonstrates a strengthened and attainable model for social progress compared to the usual paradigm of isolated impact in which actors from nonprofit, business, and government organizations work to address social problems in silos - the multifaceted nature of social issues alone prevent any single program or organization from creating long-term, large-scale change (Hanleybrown, Kania and Kramer 2011).

As the model gains momentum, examples of CI are varied: *Strive*, a Cincinnati based not-for-profit brought together over 300 individuals identified as leaders in the public and private spheres to attack the issue of low student achievement and work towards improving education in both Cincinnati and northern Kentucky; the *Elizabeth River Project* in southern Virginia mobilized more than 100 stakeholders in an effort to clean up the Elizabeth River; *Shape up Somerville*, a city-wide effort to combat childhood obesity in primary school aged children in Somerville, Massachusetts, are concrete examples of how large-scale social change has been achieved through cross-sector synchronization in the United States (Kania and Karmar 2011). The *Calgary Homeless Foundation* is a recent Canadian example of how the CI model was used to develop a collective plan to house over 3,000 people in response to what had been the fastest growing rate of homelessness in Canada; the more broadly based *Vibrant Communities* CI initiative, described as “a learning community of members, from diverse sectors, multi-sector roundtables who share a common interest in reducing poverty, community engagement and collaboration” (www.vibrantcommunities.ca/about), coordinates the input and expertise of members from across Canada to empower individuals and organizations in their efforts to reduce poverty levels in cities all over the country (Hanleybrown, Kania and Kramer 2011).

Adapting the Collective Impact Model to frame collaborative community action: Two case studies –

Make Way for YOUth Estrie and the Partnership project for the vitality of the English-speaking community of the Val-Saint-François

The Townshippers' Association has adapted the CI model for use within its linguistic minority language context by placing a higher degree of emphasis on the aforementioned pre and additional conditions for long-term success than on its four phased process. The

Townshippers' Association plays the adapted role of *backbone support* – coordinating community initiatives with the aim of accelerating change. To this effect, the Townshippers' plays an important role in securing resources for fostering or otherwise providing support for these specific initiatives.

Fostering community development and the growth of initiatives that support the pursuit of economic, entrepreneurial and educational opportunities for English-speakers who call the Eastern Townships home is a primary objective of the Association's strategic plan (Townshippers' Association 2012). Its history of working in collaboration with community stakeholders to ensure that existing and future resources within the English-speaking community are maximized demonstrates our recognition that successful and sustainable economic development requires a holistic approach that draws from the expertise of all the actors in the milieu.

Case study one: As noted when observing socio-economic trends among English-speakers in the HET, a major factor in the erosion of the demographic weight of the English-speaking minority in the region (and across the province) is their high rate of emigration to other Canadian provinces (Bourhis and Landry 2012; Floch and Pocock 2012).

The Association's *Make Way for YOUTH Estrie* initiative, funded provincially through Quebec's Secrétariat à la jeunesse as part of the *Place aux jeunes en région* initiative, has been supporting the migration of English-speaking graduates and professionals aged 18–35 to the Estrie administrative region since its early incarnation in 2006 as *Place aux jeunes Anglophones pour la MRC de Coaticook "Make Way for Youth"*. In nine years, the Make Way for Youth (MWFY) program has expanded to include five more MRCs and the development of various sub-activities with community partners to attract newcomers and work to retain the region's youth.

MWFY Estrie provides a coordinator for the individual support of eligible professionals and graduates seeking employment and housing in the Estrie region. It is linked to an interactive web platform where interested candidates can find information and resources on the MRCs in the area, and holds "Discovery Days" weekends designed to showcase the six MRCs surrounding Sherbrooke in the Estrie region and put potential newcomers in touch with members of the community to help them establish a network in the area they may eventually move to. "Discovery Days" weekends are host to a variety of activities and can include visits to historical sites and important institutions, meeting informally with local and regional employers,

touring available homes and apartments with local reality agents, and experiencing local festivals and area cuisine – these weekends are free of cost to eligible participants.

In addition to regular project programming, MWFY has been a focal point of innovation since 2013. Through this initiative, the Townshippers' Association has begun to work with partners in the field of economic development such as the Community Economic Development and Employability Corporation (CEDEC) and employers from the private sector across HET including Charles River Laboratories, Global Excel Management, Wulters Kluwer, and BRP to develop networking activities that bring human resource and recruiting personnel from the private sector together with English-speaking job seekers. Collaborative efforts of this kind allow organizations such as the Townshippers' Association to support English-speaking job seekers throughout the year and not just once a year at community events such as the "Townshippers' @ Work" section at Townshippers' Day, an annual large-scale cultural festival dedicated to the English-speaking community in the HET. Activities such as the "Employers Panel" and "5 à 7 Connect" give local and regional employers a chance to interact directly with English-speaking job seekers, give advice about interviews, resume writing, and introduce individuals from the minority language community to the employment sector in a hands-on manner.

In 2013–2014, the MWFY project component dedicated to adolescents in the region (Make Way for YOUth Teens), along with partners from the Eastern Townships School Board (ETSB) and private sector developed an annual Career Day activity to be held during the *Hooked on School Days*, *School Perseverance Week* that highlights post-secondary opportunities for English-speaking graduates in the Eastern Townships, introducing them to the local employment market and encouraging young graduates to remain in the region. These kinds of collaborative initiatives are fundamental to demonstrating to the region's English-speaking youth that diverse employment and post-secondary opportunities are available in the Eastern Townships, and that remaining in the region can lead to success.

In 2014–2015, a MWFY Estrie Consultation Committee was created and its members include partners from the community sector, private entrepreneurs, economic development agents, and volunteers from inside and outside of the Estrie's English-speaking community. The scope of the Association's MWFY program (covering six municipalities where its majority community counterparts cover one) makes it a challenge to develop and maintain some of the key networking relationships in each part of the region. The consultation committee meets approximately four times a year with a mandate to support

the coordinator (officially titled the *Desjardins Migration agent*) in their role of recruiting new participants and partners for the MWFY program (particularly in urban centers such as Montréal, Ottawa, Quebec City). The committee works with the Desjardins migration agent to develop participant activities for the MWFY Discovery Days exploratory weekends, help increase awareness of the MWFY Estrie program and its benefit to the Estrie region, and represent the program at various events and participate in some of the exploratory activities (ex: networking suppers, 5 à 7s, job-seeker/employer activities, etc.).

With the MWFY Estrie program providing backbone support, CEDEC, and private sector partners acting as influential champions and ensuring adequate resources, the Townshippers' Association and its partners have had success in connecting English-speaking job seekers with employers from the region by using a CI model approach to support the community's vitality.

In 2013–2014 alone, 80 participants and volunteers benefited from five workshops and two networking events developed with partners and focused on economic development and employability for multilingual job seekers and English-speaking entrepreneurs; 2014–2015 saw 26 participants benefit from a single networking event. Over the last nine years, the Townshippers' Association has contributed to the successful migration of 35 English-speaking professional or post-graduate newcomers to the Estrie region through its MWFY Estrie program. There were 171 individuals who discovered the Estrie region through the Discovery Days exploratory weekends, and 349 English-speaking professionals and post-graduates have benefitted from individual support offered by the program's migration agent. The MWFY Teens component of the program has benefitted more than 1,800 of our region's English-speaking youth and given them the opportunity to discover a multitude of ways they can stay and flourish across the territory. The recruitment and retention of young professionals in regions such as the Eastern Townships contributes not only to its economic growth, but also to the global vitality of our linguistic minority community.

Case study two: Increasing the access to health and social services for English-speakers in the HET through strategically coordinated initiatives and enhanced collaborations with various stakeholders is another key objective identified in the Townshippers' strategic plan (Townshippers' Association 2012). The goal of such coordinated actions is to empower the English-speaking community by enhancing their access to comprehensive, quality health and social services and encouraging/increasing their usage (Townshippers' Association 2012).

In its 2013–2014 Annual Report, the Centre de santé et services sociaux du Val-Saint-François (CSSS du Val-Saint-François) indicated its desire to increase service usage among populations it had identified as vulnerable, placing emphasis on members of the English-speaking population on its territory (CSSS du Val-Saint-François 2014). In the summer of 2014, the Townshippers' Association was approached, via its Eastern Townships Partners for Health & Social Services project's Estrie Network, to assist with the development of an outreach model targeting the English-speaking minority that would consolidate the various actions and activities already in place in support of the vitality of the English-speaking community in the MRC of Val-Saint-François.

A steering committee was formed in collaboration with personnel from the CSSS du Val-Saint-François, the Eastern Townships School Board and its Richmond Regional Community Learning Center (Richmond CLC), the Table des familles du Val-Saint-François, and the Townshippers' Association to support the expansion, implementation and evaluation of a "Community Watchdog" program (where key minority community members are trained as reference resources for other minority community members) run through the CSSS du Val-Saint-François with the ultimate goal of creating two innovative human resource positions, an English Community Outreach Liaison, and an English Community Program Coordinator as part of a pilot program.

This pilot project, focusing on the accessibility of services for the English-speaking community in the Val-Saint-François, is based on the collectively identified values of partnership and the power to act (empowerment). By taking into account the specific needs of each partner and their available resources, four partners from three different sectors (public health, education and community) were able to come together and establish a protocol for positive community support and develop an evaluation component for the initiative that will investigate its exportability to other English-speaking minority communities in the province of Quebec.

Steering committee members representing each project partner worked together to establish the objectives of the pilot project, the profile of the candidates sought to fill the newly created positions, and a collective agreement that clearly identifies the role and obligations of each partner for each of the three years of the project. The steering committee also engaged and consulted with a team of independent researchers affiliated with the Université de Sherbrooke and Bishop's University to develop the evaluation components of each project year. The pilot identifies four main objectives: increase accessibility to social and health services for the English speaking community of Richmond

and region; develop capabilities and empower citizens and Watchdogs in their ability to take care of their health and help others to reach appropriate services (education, engagement, and empowerment); support the vitality of the English-Speaking Community (ESC); and, enhance links among the different stakeholders.

Within the context of the *Partnership project for the vitality of the English-speaking community of the Val-Saint-François*, the Townshippers' Association shares core organization tasks and responsibilities with the ETSB; this division of labour ensures that each partner's expertise and resources are maximized to the benefit of the pilot. Running from 2014–2017, the initial year of the project focused largely on structuring the initiative and setting the stage for the hiring of the community resources. Years two and three are action and evaluation oriented with the steering committee, newly engaged community liaison resources, and the evaluation team meeting regularly to monitor project progress and identify challenges; there is great anticipation on behalf of the pilot's partners to examine the results of the three-year initiative and determine not only its impact on the vitality of the ESC in the Richmond region of the Estrie but also the model's exportability to other regions where community stakeholders are interested in exploring the benefits of CI.

Conclusion

A framework for organizing multi-stakeholder collaboration such as the CI model enables agents of change to move beyond the specific needs of each partner and their available resources to establish a common agenda and a clear roadmap for its achievement.

The application of the CI model in the context of the MWFY Estrie program demonstrates the acknowledgement from organizations locally, regionally and provincially that MWFY is a necessary and important project for the vitality of English-speakers in the Estrie. The *Partnership project for the vitality of the English-speaking community of the Val-Saint-François* demonstrates a similar acknowledgment, in this case across multiple sectors at the local and regional levels, of a project's potential to positively impact the vitality of the OLMC in the Val-Saint-Francois.

These case studies, describing initiatives that employ the CI model in multi-level and cross-sectoral ways, support several of the 2012–2017 community priorities identified by the English-speaking Community of Quebec during a 2012 *Community Priority Setting Conference* “that included [input from] 19 regional and sectoral consultations, five focus groups and an online survey of more than 500 English-speaking Quebecers...on the priorities for a vital and sustainable English-speaking

community” (QCGN 2013). These two examples also show how the CI model can facilitate enabling strategies that were identified by the ESCQ as effective in the pursuit of its established priorities, such as fostering a collaborative environment and working with stakeholders and different levels of government to develop a community action plan (QCGN 2013).

In order to support the needs of the English-speaking members of the minority language community and increase its vitality within the HET and across the province of Quebec, stakeholders must work together at all levels – locally, regionally, and provincially. Due to the complex nature of OLMC issues, close collaboration between sectors and both official language communities is also imperative in order to create a sense of urgency around a matter and bring individuals, organizations, and government agencies together in their work towards a common goal.

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