

Increasing Civic Engagement Among Non-Citizens in Hamilton, ON



Hamilton, Canada

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Throughout the course of the last three months, our team has researched Participatory Budgeting and the impact it has had on municipalities that have chosen to implement it. Before beginning our research, our team was asked to identify and recommend a feasible mechanism to increase civic engagement among non-citizens within Hamilton, since they are not given the right to vote. Working alongside the Immigrant's Working Centre located in Hamilton, Ontario, we have been able to collect and analyse

data from non-citizens in the area. Based on our findings, we found that Participatory Budgeting would be an effective means to increase civic engagement among non-citizens within Hamilton. Also, we identified barriers that non-citizens face in their attempt to participate in political matters, and have provided some recommendations in order to remedy it. This would in turn generate increasing rates of civic engagement and community involvement among newcomers.

INTRODUCTION

Policy Issue to be Addressed

Canada is strongly recognized for its emphasis on multiculturalism and diversity. The Canadian population is largely composed of various cultures, ethnicities and religions. The diversity of this country is a direct product of Canada's acceptance of immigration through the Canadian Multiculturalism Act that was passed in 1988. This Act demonstrated the Canadian government's devotion to building a multicultural and tolerant society. Immigration in Canada is valued for its contributions toward the economic and cultural growth of Canadian society. In the Government of Canada's 2020 Annual Report, research suggested that Permanent and non-Permanent immigrants accounted for over 80 percent of Canada's population growth. The report additionally predicted that by the year of 2030, population growth in Canada will be exclusively reliant on immigration (*Government of Canada*, 2020). This demonstrates the vital role immigration represents in Canadian society.

Local Context/IWC Context

To address this issue and advance the social and political engagement by immigrants in Canada, the research being conducted is primarily focused on the municipality of Hamilton, Ontario. According to the Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton, demographics imply that Hamilton is one of Canada's top cities with a foreign-born population. This can be historically explained by "Hamilton's 'steel rush' era of the 1940s to 1970s" (*SPRC*, 2016) when immigration was highly active. Furthermore, according to the *SPRC's* analysis, 25% of Hamilton's residents were born outside of Canada (*SPRC*, 2016). Consequently, the high levels of immigration in Hamilton make this jurisdiction ideal for our study. To further engage with the immigrant population of Hamilton, our research will strongly rely on our partnership with the Immigrant Working Centre of

Hamilton. The IWC is a non-profit organisation dedicated to improving the newcomer experience in Canada. This group offers immigrants in Hamilton a variety of resources and educational programmes to foster civic and political participation. The IWC is currently in charge of supporting newcomers in overcoming social and financial barriers to further promote their social integration. Using the resources and connections provided by the IWC, we were able to work closely with a group of immigrant women whose ethnicity, culture and language varied. This provided us with a diverse perspective on the immigrant community's views regarding their levels of civic and political engagement. In attempting to discover new mechanisms of political engagement, this information is crucial to successfully integrate newcomers into society.

Methods

For the purpose of our research project, we had to identify the group of individuals so that we could conduct the most ethical and accurate research. From the individuals that participated in our research, all of them were women that came from different parts of the world, of whom were mostly from Asia and South America. When discussing the type of research that was used for our project, a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods were used. We found that using different forms of social experiments would allow us to get first-hand experience from immigrants themselves based on their personal experiences both in their country of origin and in Canada. Based on the time our group was given to conduct and complete the policy brief, we decided to use two approaches for collecting the data. The first was conducting surveys that were given to the students participating in our research. The surveys consisted of eight questions that were in a closed ended manner so our group could get an understanding of the background of the participants. The questions consisted of topics such as rates of political participation in both their country of origin as well as Canada, participatory budgeting, and the importance of being involved in civic and political engagement. Furthermore, the second way in which we collected our data was through focus group discussions. For the purpose of collecting the data in the most friendly way for our participants, we decided to split the group in half so that respondents would feel more comfortable sharing their responses. The group discussions revolved around the same eight questions asked in the survey but in a more open manner, so we were able to collect key ideas from the discussion. By conducting both surveys and group discussions, our group was able to find key ideas, which led to our results having recurring significant themes.

When looking at our group's main focus, the target is to discuss how participatory budgeting would be effective in a city like Hamilton. Based on preliminary research we conducted as a group, we found two jurisdictions that have successfully implemented participatory budgeting into their municipal governments. The jurisdictions we looked at were New York City, in the United States and the second Dundee, which is located in Scotland.

We chose New York and Dundee among many cities for a number of reasons.

1. Both New York and Dundee's processes have legal backing. This means that funds would always be allocated to participatory budgeting. The participatory budgeting process did not last in some places due to the lack of continuous funding, Ward two (2) in Hamilton is a good example.
2. Participation in the participatory budgeting cycle in both cities are open to immigrants who are at the centre of our research. So, choosing cities that did not allow holistic participation would not serve the purpose.
3. Both also have immigrants from diverse demographic backgrounds which is similar to Hamilton. This makes it easy to do comparisons and make appropriate recommendations.

By comparing both jurisdictions, our group is confident in suggesting an effective approach to engaging newcomers and non-citizens in political matters within their municipality. New York City and Dundee are both jurisdictions that have been successful in their approaches to civic engagement through participatory budgeting despite having varying demographics. With Hamilton having similar demographics to Dundee, our group is optimistic that if our recommendations are implemented appropriately, participatory budgeting will benefit the entire city, especially newcomers and immigrant communities.

SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATIONS OF PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING



New York City, United States of America

New York City has since 2011 successfully implemented participatory budgeting (“About PBNYC”, 2021). This has caused a positive increase in civic engagement among immigrants. Participatory budgeting has several benefits including community engagement, inclusivity, providing immigrants with some degree of political engagement, and prioritizing community needs. Considering the strategies in New York City, which were modelled after those of Porto Alegre, Bateman (2020) states that participatory budgeting in New York City ensured that city agencies were not able to put their own priorities over those of the community. In addition, New York City’s large immigrant community has been able to take part in participatory budgeting, thus leading to ways in which non-citizen and immigrants who are not able to vote, are still able to be involved in municipal politics to

some degree. The process of participatory budgeting in New York City follows a very community-based, step by step approach. This ensures that the community is involved throughout the entire process. This process consists of an idea collection and volunteer recruitment followed by proposal development. Once proposals have been decided, budget delegates and residents are able to vote. This is then followed by evaluation and planning phases (Participatory Budgeting, n.d.). Multiple districts in NYC have seen many community projects receive funding through PB such as libraries, parks, and school upgrades. From NYC we were able to deduce that higher degrees of engagement from community members in determining how public funds were allocated ultimately strengthened the community and encouraged other forms of political engagement.



Dundee, Scotland

To be able to make sound and feasible recommendations, we also examined the participatory budgeting (PB) process in Dundee, Scotland. Although various forms of participatory budgeting had previously existed in the country, there was no national consensus/strategy on it until 2014, when the Scottish Government initiated the 'Community Choices' programme, that gave Local Authorities and third-party organizations the opportunity to bid for the Scottish Government funding to support local participatory budgeting development programmes (PB Partners Report, 2018). As the first mainstream participatory budgeting project in the country, it was rolled out in 2018 and the project was dubbed 'Dundee Decides'. It saw the allocation of £ 1.2 million from Dundee City Council Community Infrastructure Fund, with each of its eight Electoral Wards pocketing £ 150,000 to be expended on various winning projects.

The participatory budgeting cycle involves a number of procedures; approval of funds by the City Council from its Community Infrastructure Fund budget. 1.2 million voted for this inaugural project: consultation with communities to propose projects to create the Local Community Plans document: the Council's Development department makes public the list of projects for each Ward. (note: selected projects must meet some criteria; affordable, new or adds

value to an existing one, meet any legal requirements, deliverable within a reasonable time frame): online voting over a period of 8 weeks and an event to declare winning projects: evaluation of process/monitoring of projects.

In between the above stages, there are other mini events or processes such as public sensitization, community meeting, showing of video documentaries etc. all targeted at making the process a success. This case is particularly useful for our research because the participatory budgeting process is open to all residents of Dundee who are 11+ old, and thus, noncitizens can take part in all the processes including proposing and voting on the selected projects. Technically, it provides an avenue for immigrants to propose projects that can address their particular needs. It also serves as grounds for children to learn and embrace democracy at a tender age. A 2018 PB Partners Report found out that the project was largely successful, for instance, more than 75% of those who responded to the feedback questionnaires said it was the first time they had taken part in decisions in their community. Also, the majority (86.7%) expressed their interest to partake in future participatory budgeting cycles. The introduction of e-voting ensured that residents could vote at the comfort of their homes, schools or workplace (PB Partners Report, 2018).

RESULTS

After conducting and analyzing the results from both the surveys and focus group discussions, we found it necessary to create a table to help better represent our findings. The table is broken up into two sections, "theme" and "summary". The "theme" discusses the questions from the surveys and interviews in a brief context. On the other hand, the "summary" portion of the chart discusses the major topics and responses to

the questions. In addition, the "summary" is more of a collective synthesis of the answers provided by the participants based on how they felt about each question. Although each participant was given the choice in answering any of the questions, there was enough concrete evidence from the responses that helped our group summarize the results.

The table below presents a summary of our research findings:

	THEME	SUMMARY
1	Previous/past experience of civic engagement (home country)	The majority of the interviewees were active in civic engagements. I.e., protests, demonstrations.
2	Current/present level of experience (Canada)	Most interviewees have not taken part in any form of civic engagement, with the exception of one participant.
3	Barriers or challenges	Aside from the language barrier as a problem for the participants, most of them are working multiple jobs, married and taking care of their homes. In addition, they felt there was a lack of information on the means of participation available.
4	Future prospects about engagements	All students interviewed expressed their willingness to partake in participatory budgeting if implemented.
5	Benefits of civic engagement (Participatory Budgeting)	An opportunity to have their voices heard within their community. Also an avenue for socialization and integration into the community.
6	Recommendations	Interviewees suggested that local politicians should help immigrants improve their language skills, hold regular community meetings and engage in community sensitization. In addition, they should advertise at supermarkets about civic engagement.

WHY PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING?

Participatory budgeting refers to a democratic process whereby citizens and non-citizens alike are able to decide how public funds are allocated. In addition to increasing political and social engagement, participatory budgeting also ensures that community needs are met through propositions that derive directly from community members, not just politicians. Thus providing all community members with a voice.

In proposing a civic engagement mechanism for immigrants in Hamilton, we settled on participatory budgeting for two main reasons;

Firstly, it provides a platform to address some pertinent needs of immigrants which otherwise may not be captured by the Federal and Provincial governments. Mostly, immigrants who are new to Canada do have some pertinent needs which either for cultural, environmental, or geographical reasons may not be factored into the plans of government officials since it may not pertain to the general demands of the residents of Hamilton. However, through participatory

budgeting, government officials would be able to make provisions for such needs, especially those that have to do with women and children. For example, women can propose the building of a skills development and training centre at the municipal or community level to equip immigrants with employable skills.

Also, participatory budgeting helps in building financial trust between political officials and taxpayers by allowing them to decide *where* and *how* to spend funds. Since people ask questions every day about how their taxes are being used, allowing them to suggest projects for some part of public funds to be expended on would help residents to repose their trust in their politicians about the allocation of funds. This trust could potentially motivate people to voluntarily pay taxes since they know there will be value for their taxes in addition to promoting a healthy relationship between politicians and residents (immigrants). The overall outcome will be more effective community-based projects.

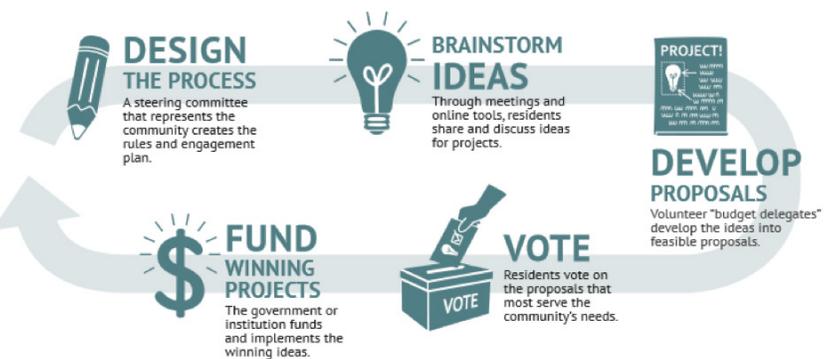
DISCUSSION

This brief provides insight on some challenges that non-citizens in Hamilton, Ontario may face when considering matters of civic and political engagement. Through our research and data collection, we have been able to conclude that if implemented efficiently, participatory budgeting could increase levels of civic engagement among non-citizens within the municipality of Hamilton. Diversity is a positive aspect of the varying demographics within Hamilton. As the rate of non-citizens within Hamilton increases, as will the need for civic engagement within these demographics. This research hopes to serve as a guide to help implement

ways in which non-citizens are able to participate civically within their communities. In addition to increased rates of civic engagement among non-citizens, participatory budgeting could also increase overall satisfaction among non-citizens in areas such as: community involvement, inclusiveness, and feelings of togetherness and belongingness. Throughout the course of our research and data collection, all participants responded positively to the implementation of participatory budgeting, indicating that this is a concept that should be considered.

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

For the implementation strategies, we have done a comparative analysis of both jurisdictions and we concur that the model implemented in New York City is the ideal model for Hamilton. This model would implement participatory budgeting at the municipal level, rather than by ward (a method which was previously tried in Hamilton but ultimately dropped due to inefficiency). This diagram shows the participatory budgeting process in a clockwise direction, starting with the design phase and ending with the funding.



Proposed PB cycle (adopted from New York)

RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommend that the city of Hamilton should set up two bodies; one would supervise over the participatory budgeting design and implementation process, and the other would be responsible for monitoring the progress and evaluating the execution of the voted projects, and in turn report to the City Council. Based on the results of our research and in order to ensure a successful implementation of participatory budgeting in the Municipality of Hamilton, Ontario, we recommend that the following should be considered:

Firstly, multiple language committees (Spanish, Arabic, French) should be formed to breach the communication barrier since our respondents spoke different languages. A case study from Chicago conducted by Meléndez and Martinez-Cosio (2019) found that forming a committee for Spanish speakers encouraged participation in participatory budgeting

by allowing for diverse individuals to take part.

Secondly, information concerning ways to get involved both in political and civic engagement (participatory budgeting) should be readily available and easy to access. It is important to provide information for newcomers about participatory budgeting so that the immigrant community is aware of the concept itself, as well as how to get involved in the community. The means of providing information should include online websites, in person meetings, advertisements at shopping centres and classes for students to become familiar with the topics being discussed. By informing the immigrant community about processes such as participatory budgeting, it will create a more effective approach in effort to implement the processes discussed above into the city of Hamilton.

Also, we recommend that residents should be given at least two months to assess their needs and propose

projects to the city officials. They should be made aware about the kind of policies that can be proposed, thus, a criteria should be established. This would help limit the expectations of immigrants and avoid unnecessary dissatisfaction. Again, Rules and regulations should be set and clearly spelt out regarding the discussion and deliberation processes, and where necessary, sanctions should be applied. This would prevent people from hijacking the process or disrespecting other participants who they may disagree with.

In addition, video documentaries should be used to educate children about participatory budgeting, projects to be voted on, and the importance of taking part in political matters to promote a willingness to engage in civic and political activities. We suggest that the voting age should be 12 and above. We also suggest a voting period of six weeks. This would afford all

qualified voters enough time to be able to cast their votes, given that most of these immigrants work multiple jobs to make ends meet.

Ultimately, different voting mechanisms should be made available. We suggest the following; manual (voting booths), online(e-voting) and mobile voting booths which will be driven from one place to another at periodic intervals. These flexible voting methods would ensure greater participation by removing the barriers to voting.

Finally, there should also be a robust monitoring and evaluation mechanism to ensure that the resources allocated to various projects are efficiently used; ensuring value and efficiency within the process. During the monitoring period, residents should be provided with periodic updates on the progress of projects once the implementation stage sets in.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROPOSING PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING TO HAMILTON CITY COUNCIL BY IWC

The IWC should begin by identifying and proposing the idea to a Hamilton city council member who can lobby for the support of their colleagues. With the support of a counselor(s), IWC can organize a meeting with the City Council to demonstrate the need for participatory budgeting and its feasibility in Hamilton. We suggest that the IWC use this policy brief as the basis for their proposal. The IWC should advocate for participatory budgeting through social media and other media outlets to put pressure on the City Council to adopt participatory budgeting

as a means of civic engagement for community members. Our findings demonstrate the effectiveness of participatory budgeting if properly implemented. We have also accurately identified barriers faced by newcomers in the area, along with steps to remedy these barriers. If taken into consideration, our recommendations could effectively mitigate the barriers to civic engagement while increasing community involvement and trust between non-citizens and the municipal government.

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