



SELECTION OF GOOD PRACTICES IN VANCOUVER

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GOOD PRACTICE 04

“Vancouver City Government Initiatives for Multiculturalism and Diversity”

INTRODUCTION

In 1988, City Council of the City of Vancouver adopted a Civic Policy on Multicultural Relations. The policy addresses the issues of recognition of diversity as strength, freedom from prejudice, access to civic services for all residents regardless of backgrounds, including those who have language barriers.

Since the late 1980s, the City of Vancouver has undertaken many different initiatives in response to the needs of the city's culturally diverse communities. Examples of these include:

- The City's Equal Employment Opportunity Program, which has policies and guidelines for hiring a diverse workforce and reports to Council periodically on progress made by all city departments.
- In 1993, the city hosted a Community Conference called “From Barriers to Bridges,” and Council reaffirmed its policy of reflecting cultural diversity in all aspects of civic involvement and participation, and instructed that key departments provide information on cross-cultural initiatives.
- In 1995, City Council adopted a Diversity Communications Strategy which was developed by staff and community representatives. Based on recommendations from the Strategy, the City has implemented a Multilingual Information and Referral Phone Service in four languages.
- In the last civic elections, special efforts were made to reach out to diverse cultural communities in the city and particularly to those residents who have language barriers.
- The City's Social Planning Department, working with all civic departments, launched the Newcomer's Guide to the City of Vancouver in 2001. This guide is available in five languages.

1. PROJECT PROFILE

1.1 Project Promoter(s)

Social Planning Department of the City of Vancouver
Multicultural Community Organizations

1.2 Project Name

Multiculturalism and Diversity

1.3 City(ies) where it has been implemented

City of Vancouver

1.4 Level

Municipal

1.5 Period of implementation

Since 1993 the City of Vancouver has officially recognized the multilingual nature of the citizenry and since then has had a process of public engagement; the implementation of different strategies has been increasing since then.

1.6 Budget

This differs depending on the project; some of the multicultural projects are supported by non-profit and community agencies that receive funding from the three levels of government (federal, provincial and municipal) as well as having their own funding. For example, the publication of the Newcomer's Guide was generously supported by: Scotiabank, LM TV (Local Multilingual TV), a division of Rogers Media, and the BC Ministry of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services.

2. DESCRIPTION OF THE GOOD PRACTICE

2.1 Field(s) of intervention

In 1988, City Council adopted a Civic Policy on Multicultural Relations. The policy addresses issues of recognition of diversity as strength, freedom from prejudice, access to civic services for all residents regardless of backgrounds, including those who have language barriers.

2.2 Main objectives of the project

- To provide recommendations to Council and other stakeholder groups concerning inclusive civic policies and strategies;
- To work with Council's Special Advisory Committee and other levels of government and jurisdictions to identify emerging issues concerning culturally diverse communities and their needs and to recommend appropriate actions or responses;
- To liaise or work with other civic departments and staff on issues related to cultural diversity and its challenges;
- To liaise with and assist diverse communities and organizations to address current and emerging trends and needs in this area;
- To recommend funding or seek resources to address critical and emerging issues concerning diverse communities.

2.3 Target group(s)

With a population of about 600,000 (BC Stats estimate), Vancouver lies in a region of more than 2 million people. Vancouver is the largest city in the province of British Columbia and the third largest in Canada. It covers an area of 114 sq km. The city has the second highest percentage in Canada of visible minority and immigrant populations. In 2001, 49% of the city's total population was of visible minority background, compared to 44.8% in 1996. In 2001, 45.9% of the total population was immigrants (defined as people who were not born in Canada). Vancouver has 14% of BC's population, but it has 24.5% of BC's total immigrants. The three most numerous groups of recent immigrants are of Chinese, Filipino and Indian origin. The classification of "recent immigrants" refers to those who immigrated in the last five years. The people of Vancouver also speak a multitude of languages. Based on the 2001 Census figures, 49.4% (261,365) of the city's population identified English as their mother tongue, while 50.6% (267,545) identified a language other than English as their mother tongue. Other than English, other languages spoken at home include: Chinese (26.6 % of total), Punjabi (2.7%), Tagalog (Filipino, 2.4%), Vietnamese (2.2%), French (1.7%), and Spanish (1.5%).

2.4 Number of beneficiaries

As the policies and related programs target those for whom English is not their native language, particularly immigrants and refugees, potentially half the population are beneficiaries.

2.5 Summary of the Practice

Strategy and Activities

Specific activities derived from the City's policy include:

a. The Newcomer's Guide to Vancouver

This has information about the City of Vancouver and other levels of government, as well as community agencies and services. Although intended for newcomers to our city, it is also be useful for long-time residents. This project was approved by Vancouver City Council as part of the Public Involvement Review initiative. In addition to English, the Newcomer's Guide is also available in:

- Chinese — 中文
- Punjabi — ਪੰਜਾਬੀ
- Spanish — Español
- Vietnamese — Việt Ngữ

b. Multilingual Phone Line

The multilingual phone line service helps in providing basic information about City of Vancouver Services in Mandarin/Cantonese, Punjabi, Spanish and Vietnamese.

c. Cultural Harmony Awards

In 1996, the city established the Cultural Harmony Awards to recognize individuals and organizations who display a significant and sustained commitment to the promotion of cultural harmony in the City of Vancouver. This award built on the work of the Special Advisory Committee on Cultural Communities, which was formed by Vancouver City Council in 1994. The Committee has a mandate to act as a conduit towards forging and enhancing cohesive values in Vancouver's diverse communities and to promote harmony through the involvement of cultural communities. The goals of the committee include promoting the inclusion of all cultural communities in neighborhoods and communities of Vancouver; facilitating communications between cultural communities and the City of Vancouver; and promoting sensitivity, fairness and effectiveness of City policies, action plans, strategies, services, programs and systems that impact cultural communities.

d. City Hall Lights Program

The City Hall Lights Program is a pilot initiative to acknowledge significant cultural and religious dates that is celebrated by Vancouver's diverse communities. The program is about recognizing and sharing the many different important dates celebrated by members of the community throughout the year. Community organizations are invited to request a display of lights on the two large trees outside City Hall on West 12th Avenue and provide informational materials in the lobby of the building during the period of their celebration or event. While the lights are on display, information about the celebration is provided to the public through pamphlets available at the City Hall. Groups may also wish to provide a banner with a greeting or the name of the festival that may be displayed at the entrance to City Hall. The program was created in response to requests from community members and is part of the City's ongoing commitment to recognize and integrate the mosaic of cultures and faiths that make up Vancouver.

Results

- Besides the different initiatives that were implemented since 1993, the City of Vancouver through the Social Policy Department is in the process of development of a language policy for the City.
- During elections they include outreach staff to talk to the community in different languages about the voting process.
- They are planning to advertise these language services during public hearings and community engagement processes.
- Networking: public libraries, multilingual librarians, media, literacy and other policies
- Governmental mailing has a note in 8 different languages to say that it contains important information that may affect the people so that they have to ask someone to translate it.
- Guide to Municipal Services in Cantonese, Mandarin, Punjabi, Vietnamese and Spanish.

3. STRENGTH AND WEAKNESSES

Sustainability and Risks

It is important to move at a policy level when the diverse communities already achieve recognition and participation. The challenges are the limited resources for the different projects that address social issues including the multicultural projects. One of the most important challenges to consider is that it is necessary to move from the level of translation in the multilingual services to an interpretation and understanding level.

There is an important opportunity of empowerment or risk of disempowerment if policy only addresses the issue of translation among minorities, as members of these groups need to understand and know their rights as any other citizen in Canada.

There is a need for understanding among government offices and staff of what happens with minority groups if they face problems that derive from limited access due to language. Translation alone may deny the understanding of services and rights and may eventually lead to exclusion and other social problems.

There is also a debate regarding definitions of integration in multicultural communities that could be misleading. On the one hand, language policy is seen as an important step for fostering integration, though there is also the criticism that it may lead to ghettoization.

4. POTENTIAL REPLICABILITY IN CITIES OF DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

4.1 Conditions and prerequisites

It is important that the minority groups have a strong presence in the city or region where such initiatives may be undertaken. Successful undertakings require a balance between the community and the government. A specific goal of any multicultural initiative is to promote equitable access to services. Policy makers should emphasize the need for a variety of different initiatives so that politically there would be a higher profile for such activities. Public servants, members of non-profit organizations and members of the community should advocate in a knowledgeable way to promote awareness about racism within the bureaucracies and among the general public. It is very important to iteratively question the need and the outcomes throughout the whole process of implementation in order to make adjustment to changing needs on the ground. All services should be practical, accessible, and should encourage networking and capacity-building within the communities.

5. LINKS AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Social Planning Department City of Vancouver
<http://www.city.vancouver.bc.ca/commsvcs/socialplanning/>
- New Comers' Guide City of Vancouver
<http://vancouver.ca/commsvcs/socialplanning/newtovancouver/pdf/fullbook.pdf>
- New Comers' Guide City of Vancouver (Spanish Edition)
<http://vancouver.ca/commsvcs/socialplanning/newtovancouver/pdf/Spanish.pdf>
- City of Vancouver
<http://vancouver.ca/>
- Information was also obtained through an interview with Baldwin Wong, Senior Planner of the Social Planning Department, City of Vancouver, to whom we would like to express our thanks.

GOOD PRACTICE 05 – “The Immigrant Services Society of British Columbia (ISS)”

INTRODUCTION

Since the time of the Immigrant Services Society of BC's incorporation in 1972, this non-profit organization has developed considerable expertise and experience in the delivery of services and programs for immigrants and refugees. Highlights over these years are as follows:

- 1972 - registered as the first immigrant-serving agency in BC – pioneered the concept of “settlement services” in the province;
- 1973 - initiated the first English as a Second Language (ESL) language classes;
- 1975 - set up branch offices in South Vancouver, Surrey and Kamloops (which have since gone on to become their own agencies);
- 1979 - played a key role in response to the plight of the “Vietnamese Boat People”;
- 1983 - started the first training program for immigrants: Housekeeping Services;
- 1985 - registered as a Training Institute;
- 1987 - opened Welcome House, providing temporary accommodation for government-assisted refugees;
- 1990 - underwent considerable expansion and opened two new locations;
- 1995 - introduced the Adult and Continuing Education Program (a fee-for-service language and training program);
- 2001 - opened up the Richmond Employment Centre;
- 2002 - accredited under the BC Private Post Secondary Education Act;
- 2003 - introduced the deployment of Settlement Workers into New Westminster, Burnaby and Coquitlam;
- 2005 - opened up the Surrey Multilingual Employment Resource Centre; and,
- 2005 - opened ELSA office in Richmond;
- 2005 - Opened joint ELSA and Settlement office in Coquitlam.

1. PROJECT PROFILE

1.1 Project Name

Immigrant Services Society of British Columbia

1.2 City(ies) where it has been implemented

South Vancouver, Surrey and Kamloops, New Westminster, Burnaby, Coquitlam and Richmond in British Columbia

1.3 Level

Municipal

1.4 Period of implementation

Immigrant Services Society of BC (ISS) was incorporated in 1972 as the first immigrant-serving agency in the province. Since that time, ISS has grown to be the largest, multicultural, immigrant-serving agency in western Canada.

1.5 Budget

Since 1972, ISS has operated with funding from clients, other non-profit agencies and all levels of government (ISS is one of the largest deliverers of government-funded programs in the Metro Vancouver area).

Government Funders

- Service Canada;
- Citizenship and Immigration Canada;
- Canadian Heritage, Multiculturalism;
- Ministry for the Status of Women;
- Health Canada;
- Ministry of the Attorney General;
- Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance;
- City of Vancouver;
- City of Burnaby - Poverty Initiative; and
- Vancouver Coastal Health

Agencies

- United Way of the Lower Mainland;
- Vancouver Foundation;
- Vancity Credit Union;
- Vancity Community Foundation;
- Sharon Martin Community Health Trust Fund;
- Hamber Foundation;
- Whittal Family Foundation;
- Business Objects Foundation;
- The Canadian CED Network;
- Unitarian Church of Vancouver;
- Simon Fraser University – RIIM;
- Royal Bank of Canada; and
- North Growth Foundation

2 DESCRIPTION OF THE GOOD PRACTICE

2.1 Field(s) of intervention

The Immigrant Services Society of BC is committed to developing an integrated, equitable community that values diversity. Working together in local communities in a variety of programs, they create opportunities for sharing knowledge, skills and experience among cultures. The work of ISS is meant to help build a stronger, fairer, more compassionate multicultural society.

2.2 Main objectives of the project

Immigrant Services Society of BC is a leader in identifying the needs of immigrants and refugees and in developing, demonstrating and delivering effective, quality programs and services which meet those needs. ISS staff, members and volunteers work together to:

- provide integration services;
- deliver educational programs; and,
- advocate for their clients and communities

2.3 Target group(s)

Vancouver and the Lower Mainland immigrant and refugee communities

2.4 Number of beneficiaries

ISS has over 23,000 beneficiaries per year.

2.5 Summary of the Practice

Strategy

Over the years, ISS has developed and delivered a variety of successful programs, focusing on education, advocacy and settlement assistance for immigrant and refugee groups. Prominent among these are:

a. The Language College and Career Services

The Language College and Career Services offers employment services, a variety of English language courses, skills training and pre-employment programs that provide immigrants with the skills they need to integrate into Canadian society and successfully obtain employment in BC. The programs complement each other and are offered in a supportive environment for students from a variety of cultural and ethnic backgrounds.

b. Bridging for Women

Bridging for Women—Stepping-Up—assists women to gain practical skills and English upgrading to overcome employment and social barriers and find and keep a job.

- 21 week program: 17 weeks of classroom instruction, a volunteer experience and 4 weeks work experience placement
- Women receive life skills training, counseling and advocacy, English instruction, a volunteer experience, job shadowing, job search skills, and gain Canadian work experience
- Training in First Aid, Food safe and cashiers, WHMIS (Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System) and Personality Dimensions

c. English Language Services for Adults (ELSA)

ELSA provides English language training for adult newcomers in speaking, listening, reading and writing. Students learn basic settlement language topics such as housing, banking and about Canada's political system and laws.

- The ELSA program offers literacy, level 1, level 2 and level 3 ESL classes.
- Classes are in the morning, afternoon and evening and can be part time or full time.
- ELSA's Vancouver location has a licensed daycare centre for children 18 months up to 5 years.
- While taking ESL classes at ISS, students will also use various computer language software to learn English.

Activities

Employment Services

ISS provides a full range of employment services that assist immigrant jobseekers with a wide variety of needs, in order to enhance their ability to build a meaningful and

successful work life in Canada. These services are provided in multiple languages and at various locations in Greater Vancouver.

Foreign Credential Services

Foreign credentialing of skilled immigrants is an issue that ISS is actively addressing through specific initiatives such as the Occupational Fact Sheets and the BC Internationally Trained Professionals Network. ISS is also working on a number of initiatives with community partners that assist skilled immigrants to find and keep employment in BC.

Settlement Services

ISS provides a range of specialized services and programs to help newly arrived immigrants, government-assisted refugees and refugee claimants meet their initial adaptation and settlement needs in Canada. These services and programs are offered both at the main facility in downtown Vancouver and at various off-site locations throughout the Greater Vancouver area. Settlement Services include both Multilingual Counseling and Refugee Services.

Family and Youth Services

ISS supports newcomer families using various approaches including peer support methodology, leadership training opportunities, as well as social, recreational and academic programming. These approaches enhance the capacity of newcomers, in particular women and youth, to actively participate in Canadian society while building their confidence and self-image. At the same time, newcomers gain validation and understanding around the complex issues of integration and adjustment. Services and programs may be gender-, age- or ethno-specific depending on different factors and needs assessments. Programs may also be part of larger multi-year community development and community capacity building initiatives.

Multicultural Community Leadership

ISS' Multicultural Community Leadership division consists of three main programs:

- Cross Cultural Peer Support Program for Immigrant and Refugee Women (CCPSP)
- MY Circle Program for newcomer youth (MY Circle Program)
- African Youth Program

Results

ISS is currently involved in several multi-year community development/capacity-building initiatives targeting specific ethno-cultural communities, gender and/or age groups within the Greater Vancouver area. The underlying principle is to work with immigrants and refugees to enhance their capacity to address self-identified community issues and priorities. ISS has assisted a number of different groups over the years starting from the provision of adaptation and settlement services to community development and most recently community economic development activities.

- ISS and a group of Afghan women launched a multi-year process to assist in the creation of an Afghan Women's Sewing and Handicraft Co-op in partnership with various partners and funders -- the Canadian Community Economic Development Network, Vibrant Burnaby, Unitarian Church of Vancouver, VanCity Community Foundation and the Status of Women.
- ISS has been increasingly deploying staff to provide workshops and settlement services within various religious facilities. Building on their settlement services to the

Filipino community, ISS initiated a capacity-building project with eight Filipino church leaders in Vancouver, Burnaby and Richmond to better support the settlement process of newcomers who are members of their congregations. Specialized training and information sessions were designed and delivered to over twenty church pastors and lay counselors.

- The Smokescreen Project created by Access to Media Education Society (AMES) in partnership with ISS worked together with immigrant and refugee youth to develop anti-tobacco counter-marketing campaign messages that were aired on television in 2006.
- A multi-year Food Security program was established in partnership with Quest and Food Banks targeting primarily Afghan and Kurdish communities in Vancouver, Burnaby and the Tri-Cities (Coquitlam, Port Coquitlam & Port Moody) area. One specific outcome has been a highly successful Kurdish community kitchen in East Vancouver as well as an emerging community kitchen for Afghans in Coquitlam.
- Communication mechanisms within new and emerging communities are often a critical need in their community development process. ISS worked with Kurdish community leaders to create a Kurdish community bulletin as well as a Kurdish weekly radio program on Vancouver's Co-op radio station.
- Most ethno-cultural communities strive to form new organizations to promote their needs and issues. ISS has assisted several groups to receive Board orientation training. Most recently Kurdish community members took this training in order to develop a new society.
- With the steady arrival of high numbers of Afghan refugees over the past five years, ISS helped form the "Afghan Together" project consisting of various family support group activities involving grass roots community members/leaders.
- ISS has been working with the Burnaby School Board and the Afghan community as part of a two-year demonstration project to develop, test and evaluate a new integrated service delivery framework to better support newly arrived refugee children and youth entering the public school system with little or no formal education experience.

3 STRENGTH AND REPLICABILITY

The success and longevity of the Immigrant Services Society of BC demonstrates the value of collaborative networking between non-governmental, community, and governmental agencies in developing programs to assist with immigrant integration. ISS works with local communities and creates opportunities of sharing experience and skills among cultures. Rather than simply providing immigrant services, they rely on the potential and mutual responsibility of those in immigrant communities to build their own lives and shape their own communities.

They have a strong network with other organizations and communities that offer services to immigrant and refugee groups. They emphasize the need for immigrant groups to undertake the most important decisions in needs assessment, programmatic development and implementation; in so doing, immigrant communities themselves have the opportunity to address their most urgent needs and shape the strategies to address them.

ISS has strong support from both their clients and their donors. They are critical of their own processes and they are constantly open to revising their approach in response to the changing needs of specific immigrant communities. The organization's fundamental emphasis on community-building and empowerment has promoted quite a bit of among a

variety of different communities. They are an accountable organization that believes in constant change and on-going evaluation. Such principles of flexibility, pragmatism, and initiative driven by community needs are important to keep in mind in any effort to replicate their activities elsewhere.

5. LINKS

Immigrant Services Society of British Columbia
<http://www.issbc.org/index.htm>