

Saskatchewan Municipal **Best Practice**

Immigration Initiative

CONTACT

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THE PRACTICE

Statistics, in 2004, also showed that of the immigrants who were coming to Saskatoon, approximately one-quarter do not stay in the city resulting in an immigrant retention rate significantly below the national average. City Council recognized this trend back in 2004-05 and proactively approved the development and implementation of an immigration action plan to address these concerns.

THE PROCESS

Upon hiring the Immigration Community Resource Coordinator, one of the first tasks the City undertook was the development of a Gap Analysis Report and a Checklist for an Immigration Action Plan. This was developed through extensive community interviews, in-depth research which included studying other city initiatives, and the hosting of a one day Visioning Conference with attendees from various sectors in the community. The report was released in the Spring of 2008.

We then took the 28 recommendations from the Gap Analysis report, and categorized them by the six identified sectors serving immigrants - policing/justice, education, employment/economic development, housing, settlement, and health. Then in the fall of 2008, we hosted sector specific forums where interested representatives were invited to share resources and develop strategies specific to their sector. The information shared at these sector forums was compiled into a publication entitled *Welcome Home – Saskatoon Immigration Action Plan*. This publication includes current initiatives underway, existing opportunities that may be enhanced, and action items to move commitments forward.

What we heard at these forums was not only a keen interest in what Immigration is all about (e.g.: how do immigrants get here?), but also, a desire to understand what is going on in other sectors. To address the first area of interest, we hosted an Immigration information session which was open to the public at large. This event included presentations done in collaboration with Citizenship and Immigration Canada, Service Canada, the Ministry of AEEL, Immigration Branch and the City of Saskatoon. There was extensive media coverage of the event, standing room only attendance and very positive feedback; all indicative of the interest at a community level. Then, to address the second area of interest (connections between the various sectors serving immigrants), in December 2009 we hosted an Immigration Symposium. This provided opportunities for inter-sectored awareness, exploration of collaborative models, as well as building on the momentum of all the initiatives undertaken until then. A report is due to be released at the end of March 2010.

In addition to some of these broader community engagement initiatives, an example of a smaller project that the City of Saskatoon undertook was the hosting of a media workshop. This was held in partnership with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), aimed at empowering immigrant serving agencies and ethno-cultural groups to get positive media attention and more representation in the media. Subsequently, we also facilitated the hosting of 'community snapshots' to ensure that radio and television programming is better reflective of our current demographics.

The above mentioned activities involved the external coordination of various stakeholders in our capacity as community developers. Recognizing that as a Corporation, the City of Saskatoon also needs to ensure its programs, services and supports are accessible and welcoming for newcomers, we undertook several internal program enhancements. Below are some examples of enhancements to programs that the City of Saskatoon has worked on:

- Using our current Summer Playground Program model, we piloted a multicultural playground program entitled "Fun for all". This two-pronged program required that a) the playground leaders incorporate activities from various parts of the world in their daily programming, and b) it created an opportunity for youths at immigrant serving agencies to develop leadership skills through job shadowing, and team building exercises such as the planning of activities for a two hour time-frame at the playground. This will be expanded to two more parks in the summer of 2010. This was done in collaboration with staff from our Neighbourhood Programming section.
- Municipal elections provided us with the opportunity to put the Voters Guide in plain language and update the information therein. We also hosted two Voter information sessions in Council Chambers, with many interesting questions being asked. These were all done in collaboration with internal staff from City Clerks and Communication office.
- In situations where cost is a barrier to participation for Leisure Centre activities, the City of Saskatoon offers a free Leisure Access Card for low income individuals and families. To ensure this information is readily available for all low income immigrants, we provided train-the-trainer sessions to staff that work with low-income immigrant clients, as well as worked on a protocol with Citizenship and Immigration Canada for Government Assisted Refugees to make the Leisure Access Cards more accessible to low-income cut off clients. Our staff in the Social Development section has been actively involved in ensuring that accurate information is given out.
- Through presentations in the schools, and open community dialogue we also heard about some new games from other parts of the world and other cultures such as Takraw that are currently being introduced in our Youth Centres and Community Associations, with the assistance of our sports, culture and recreation programming staff.
- The City of Saskatoon has produced a "Whose Job is It? Brochure which includes the frequently called numbers for programs and services provided by the municipality. This brochure has recently been translated into 14 different languages and will be distributed to the settlement serving agencies as well as the Newcomer Information Centre.
- With the help of our Human Resources Department, we are in the process of compiling a list of employees that speak a language other than English, with a view to help our front line staff in the event of having to serve a resident that does not have enough English.

As is evident from examples cited in this nomination, the City's immigration initiative has the support and involvement of civic staff throughout the Corporation.

Knowing immigration is a community issue, it has also been critical that we continue to reach out to the public at large, to create an awareness, understanding and mutual respect for the diverse cultures that make up this great city. To that end, we have undertaken awareness raising activities such as:

- The production and distribution of a utility insert entitled "Building Bridges with the Immigrant and Refugee Community" done in consultation with our marketing staff.
- Bill boards, posters and transit banner campaigns entitled: "Diverse City – We're all part of it". We have run these annually in the month of March (our Council declared "Cultural Diversity and Race Relations Awareness month".
- Immigration related articles on assorted topics have been published in a journal, community newsletters, newspapers, etc.
- Presentations to newcomers through various immigrant serving agencies and ethno-cultural groups on resources in the city.
- Presentations to stakeholders both internal and external to the corporation such as: the municipal business licensing section, front line leisure service staff, school boards, Community Association internal programmers, etc. These presentations provide staff with a big picture idea of what immigration is about as well as include components of diversity training.

Networking and collaboration has also been an integral component of all the initiatives and our role as community capacity builders. This has included having representation on and attending the meetings of committees such as the Saskatoon Settlement Support Workers in Schools, Saskatoon Settlement Coordinating Committee, Advisory Group of the Newcomer Information Centre, etc. Another demonstration of a truly collaborative approach and model is the fact that the resources for this initiative consisted of funds from our federal and provincial partners, as well as cash and in-kind contributions of the City of Saskatoon.

THE RESULTS

As with most social issues, the outcome measurements for social issues are not always scientific and numerical. One can say that the City of Saskatoon has been successful in two key areas in an incremental manner: *the external mobilization* of the community and establishing key relationships in a field that has traditionally been out of municipal scope, and secondly, *the internal mobilization* and awareness that has been created around this portfolio such that given the current exponential growth through immigration and increased diversity, immigration is an important element in the City of Saskatoon's strategic planning process.

As an intentional effort and initiative, some outcomes directly related to each of these two major successes are:

- In a span of 2.5 years, City of Saskatoon has planned, hosted and participated in two large scale community wide consultative processes, and six sector forums. Creating an increased awareness and understanding of emerging trends in immigration on a broader community scale.
- The top three recommendations from the Visioning Conference of Spring 2008 are already being implemented to varied degrees; this includes the setting up of a Newcomer Information Centre (a partnership of four immigrant serving agencies), the development of a new webpage for immigration (work in progress), and information contribution to Newcomers Guides developed by various agencies.
- Saskatoon has traditionally received 40-42% of immigrants coming to Saskatchewan; recent reports suggest that those figures are now approaching 45-60%. This can be attributed to simple growth and boom times in Saskatoon, but also tied to successful settlement and integration supports within the community.
- Until 2006, Saskatoon received on average 600-800 immigrants annually; current figures are closer to 4,000-5,000 annually.

- The networking opportunities created through this initiative have resulted in increased social networks and the bridging of social capital, thereby leading to more social inclusion. One specific example includes a community level partnership of the India-Canada Cultural Association with the Broadway theatre.
- Increased accessibility to our civic centres through increased awareness gained through presentations and availability of the Leisure Access Card to low-income immigrants.
- A more open minded and innovative approach to programming in civic programs – through this initiative, we have succeeded in developing and implementing resources that enable us to meet wide-ranging needs that address ethnic and racial diversity.
- Increased number of immigrants has led to the revitalization of certain parts of the city with the infusion of certain ethnic restaurants and stores. An example is the west end of the city where in the last couple of years have seen the establishment of at least three new ethnic restaurants and two multicultural grocers; truly exemplifies an economic outcome that directly leads to social engagement and success.
- There has been a greater awareness of who does what, related to the provision of programs, services and supports for immigrants, in each sector and thereby expanding possibilities of mutual or collaborative engagements.
- This initiative has also created an interest in our city from countries such as Venezuela, Iceland, United Kingdom and Nigeria, to name a few; thus not only putting us on a global map, but also increasing our global competitiveness by being able to attract a multi-lingual, multi-cultural workforce.
- With the municipal election initiative, an interesting outcome was the interest generated as a 'ripple-effect' amongst long-term residents in asking questions about electoral processes – an outcome that is a testament to a more vibrant democracy and increased civic participation.
- The creation of an email distribution list that allows people to receive updates on many community events, programs and services has led to the increased awareness of the economic, social and cultural vibrancy of our city.

LESSONS LEARNED

An initiative of this nature teaches us many lessons – the importance of building and maintaining relationships and allowing time to let them evolve would perhaps be of paramount importance. In conjunction with this would be to honour and recognize that this process of collaboration requires time.

Since immigration is primarily a Federal and Provincial mandate, an essential ingredient has also been the importance of the tri-government partnership, represented by the formation of a steering committee comprised of representatives from the federal, provincial and municipal governments.