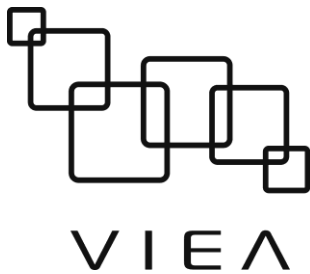


Vancouver Island Regional Immigrant Integration Strategy

**Report on the Strategy Session
June 16, 2008
Parksville, BC**



VANCOUVER ISLAND
ECONOMIC ALLIANCE



AGENDA

Monday, June 16th, 2008

10:00 a.m. Welcome: Introductions, Opening Remarks & Overview

10:15 a.m. What do we mean by “welcoming community”?

- What does a welcoming community look like?

What things are we currently doing well in terms of welcoming newcomers?

In what areas do we need to improve?

11:00 a.m. What can we do to facilitate immigrant integration in our region?

- Where should we focus our efforts?
- What initiatives are currently in place?
- What gaps do we need to address?
 - within communities
 - between communities

12:00 p.m. Lunch Break

12:45 p.m. Strategies for Successful Regional Immigrant Integration

- What initiatives can be put in place (short and long-term)?
- How do we build on our current successes?
- Who needs to be involved?
- Who will take the lead?

2:30: Next Steps

3:00: Meeting Adjourned

List of Attendees

Tod Godlien – BC Ferries

Peter Doukakis – Parksville Chamber of Commerce

Arnold Harasymchuk – Ministry of Economic Development

Douglas Smith – City of Parksville

Lesley White – Global Vocational

Brook Pearce – Vancouver Island University

Amber Scotchburn – City of Nanaimo

Marilyn Hutchinson – City of Nanaimo

Rick Roberts – Vancouver Island Economic Alliance

Kathy Landry – New Employee Wage Subsidy

Tek Manhas – Community Future of Cowichan

Ron Acros – Community Futures of Alberni Clayoquot

Jack Tieleman – Employment Navigators

Caroline Spira - Town of Ladysmith

Laurie Jones - Concepts Unlimited

Kevin Douville – Community Future of Central Island

Wanda Zink – Community Futures of Central Island

Joy Andrews – Parksville Career Centre

Cheryl Fortin – Ministry of Economic Development

Paul Mitchell – ISTEP Program

Maggie Ma – Comox Valley Chamber of Commerce

Angela Fang – Nanaimo Multicultural Society

Hilde Schlosar - Nanaimo Multicultural Society

Jean McRae – Greater Victoria Multicultural Society

Dave Ahjla – Greater Victoria Multicultural Society

Douglas Campbell – North Island College

Bronwyn Brown – Vancouver Island University

Dennis Silvestrone – Vancouver Island University

Meeting Notes

Visioning Process:

Participants were asked to look into the future and describe the things that would be in place in the region if it were truly effective in welcoming and integrating new immigrants, including the services that would be readily available to newcomers. What would this “Vision of the Future” look like?

Vision

- Easy access to information
 - Packaged in simple, easy to access language
 - Hard copy available at Visitor Info centres and BC Ferries
 - Internet linked
 - Standardized information/format for each community
 - Multi language and basic English version
 - Volunteers provide information to immigrants
- Sustainable employment opportunities
- Local government involved in formally welcoming newcomers
- “Welcome Wagon” approach to initial greeting
- Newcomer groups are actively engaged in community activities
- Mentoring and coaching are offered in the workplace
- Employers are aware of the benefits of cultural diversity in the workplace
- Employers embrace diversity in their workforce
 - appreciate immigrants as an asset
 - supporters of immigration
- Housing affordability concerns are addressed
- Communities embrace diversity
 - the population is sensitive to immigration issues
 - there is an appreciation for different languages and cultures
 - schools are actively involved in ensuring youth are properly integrated
- Sense of community is promoted (resources are available)
- Faith community engaged in integration process
- Strong leadership at the community and regional level

- Language support is readily available for new immigrants

Gap and Needs Analysis:

Through small group discussion, participants were asked to identify the gaps and what needs to be addressed to achieve this vision. Each group assigned a recorder and spokesperson to report back to the larger group. The discussions focused on six key areas:

1. Information
2. Employment
3. Community Receptivity
4. Community Awareness
5. Communications
6. Policy Issues

The following provides a summary of the small group discussions:

Information

- tourism/visitor information centres need information packages that are geared to immigrants
- local population needs to be informed so they can provide information by word of mouth
- information needs to be available on the employment opportunities and immigrant services that are available
- hard copy information should be available through a variety of agencies, such as:
 - Chambers of Commerce
 - Welcome Wagon
- identify a project champion to compile information on the region and develop a comprehensive information package for immigrants
- need to disseminate the information as widely as possible
 - utilize BC Government Welcome BC Site
 - develop a regional website for Vancouver Island
 - sites need to be interactive
 - need to have resource person that can follow-up on inquiries
 - ability to tracking results

Employment

- funding is needed for settlement services to be provided throughout the region
- job coach model should be introduced (can act like a mini settlement service)
- establish an employer engagement process
- municipal governments and large employers could show leadership by employing and retaining immigrants (using mentoring/job coaching and other methods)
- need to define best practices
- Chambers of Commerce could provide leadership for SME's
- utilize social events to help integrate immigrant workers
- need for process to assess immigrant's skills before they arrive
 - identify need for language training
 - other specialized training requirements
- enlist experienced employers to promote the benefits of mentoring and coaching
- encourage professional associations to remove policies preventing foreign credential recognition
- need delivery of English language training that is industry- specific
- better linkage and coordination is needed between service providers

Community Receptivity

- faith-based organizations should be engaged in immigrant integration process
- effort needs to be made to prepare the workplace for a diverse workforce (cultural sensitivity training)
- organize a buddy system in the workplace and community
- engage industry sector associations
 - look at existing models nationally
- make community aware of why immigration is a good thing. Use local organizations such as Rotary, Chambers of Commerce, etc.
- local leadership is needed
- larger institutions in the community should serve as role models - letting community at large know what they are doing to integrate immigrants
- need for Welcome Wagons to be established by newcomer groups

Community Awareness

- media needs to be engaged – to provide news, analyze issues and share stories
- engage the community in identifying and sharing immigrant success stories
- lead by example, showcase good news/success stories
- establish diversity awards and acknowledgements
- need to host regional round table on immigration
- hire a coordinator to work with each community to identify gaps in service delivery
- coordinate “marketing” to communities

Communication

- communities need to know more about what is going on around them:
 - general job fairs
 - health care fairs
 - education fairs
 - multicultural fairs
- a coordinated marketing effort is needed between communities and for the region as a whole
- need to get success stories out to community
- need for public recognition of “good works”
- need for awards to businesses, community associations, and others that excel in immigrant integration

Policy Gaps and Issues

- government immigration policies should reflect inclusivity and diversity
- business management or board members need to support “affirmative action” type of solutions
- fast track process for obtaining work visas
- assistance should be provided to employers for cultural sensitivity training
- centralized human resource assistance to employers who hire immigrants
- support should be provided to temporary foreign workers
- fair allocation of resources for immigrant services is needed (address imbalance in rural versus urban)
- need to deal with foreign credential recognition
- need to shorten time taken to process immigration paperwork
- long term commitment is needed from all levels of government

Strategies for Successful Regional Immigrant Integration:

The participants were asked to develop a list of initiatives that could be implemented to address the gaps and needs that were identified in their previous discussions. It was agreed that the key focus areas for the Vancouver Island Regional Immigrant Integration Strategy would be as follows:

1. Information
 - a. Packaging
 - b. Dissemination
 - c. Tracking
2. Employment
 - a. Access
 - b. Retention
3. Community Receptivity
 - a. Orientation
 - b. Connection
4. Community Awareness
 - a. Opportunities
 - b. Challenges
5. Communication
 - a. Expectations
 - b. Opportunities
 - c. Successes
6. Policy issues

The participants were directed to develop practical, immigrant integration strategies that could be undertaken within the region. The following summarizes their discussions:

1. Information

- develop branding for Vancouver Island
 - survey immigrants/foreign workers to get their input
- develop web-based information that incorporates the brand
- make use of existing resources – Welcome BC as well as local and regional websites
- expand the Vancouver Island “Job Shop” model
- use media such as Craig’s List and Facebook
- create a consistent look for all websites
- develop a “Welcome to Vancouver Island” theme
- streaming testimonials of the region’s established immigrants should be posted on the websites
- provide follow-up service to inquiries from immigrants
- ensure access is available to persons speaking the language of inquiry
- the implementation of a regional immigrant integration strategy should be managed by local groups active within the region (i.e., – chambers of commerce, community futures, economic development organizations, service clubs and community service agencies)
- target marketing – such as India, Asia
- develop and disseminate a community profile package for immigrants
 - include a map of services and specific information catering to immigrants
- promote instant recognition window decal for immigrant friendly businesses (e.g., Safe Harbour program)
- produce an E-newsletter with updates on immigration activities throughout the region
- provide support for first language newspapers, ads and/or information articles
- ensure above information is shared with established immigrant families
- offer a feedback option on all information that is disseminated to ensure interested parties are getting what they need
- ensure that reputable, accredited immigration lawyers are identified within the region

2. EMPLOYMENT

- identify job opportunities for immigrants through employer workshops/job fairs
- match potential employees and under-employed to employers
- showcase employers that are “immigrant friendly” through business bureau initiative
- introduce a mentoring/coaching program (from interview to job placement onwards)
 - enlist help of experienced employers & former newcomers
- assist spouses in finding employment
- screen employers before they attempt to access “PNP” type programs
 - screen employees also
- engage foreign workers to help bridge the gap between employers, immigrant employees and the community
- contract with industry organizations and associations to provide services
- provide businesses with information on how to hire immigrants/foreign workers and how to retain them
- develop and disseminate an employer “tool kit” to assist employers in hiring and retaining foreign workers
- assist employers in understanding the benefits of hiring foreign workers
- recognize “word of mouth” power in recruiting employees – business to business networking
- facilitate communication between new immigrants and employers
 - provide cultural sensitivity training for employers
 - provide information on where workers have come from – culture, past work systems, expectations, etc.
 - clarify opportunities for advancement within the workplace – succession
 - develop generic handbook (culture/language/terminology/sexual harassment/resource guide)
 - implement buddy systems
- encourage Economic Development Officers to work more closely with settlement services providers
- develop and deliver basic training programs for immigrant entrepreneurs
- implement mentoring and coaching services for immigrant entrepreneurs

- provide information on types of businesses immigrant investors might be looking for
- matching service between business owner that wants a succession plan to immigrant investor - perhaps a website with business opportunities

3. COMMUNITY RECEPTIVITY

- raise awareness within communities regarding the positive contributions of newcomers
- conduct a community audit of what services are currently lacking
- community infrastructures need to be assessed for “immigrant friendliness”
- create a community ambassador program that could be integrated into existing Welcome Wagon and/or other newcomer services
- assist spouses in becoming active in community activities
- local, provincial and federal government could partner to host bi-annual welcome to community receptions

examples:

- newcomer tea party
- parent advisory committees hosting fun-nights for newcomers’ family
- promote and raise awareness of other multicultural activities that are already happening in our communities
- have local media involved as a stakeholder
- develop and deliver a program for training businesses on how to be “welcoming” similar to the Francophone Association Program called “Bonjour”
- develop and disseminate a welcoming package of information for new employees
- ensure that immigrant information packages are available at schools, chambers of commerce, churches (consistent content for each package)
- promote immigrant success stories (i.e., multicultural role models)
- increase awareness of social/community networks
- develop and disseminate an active list of related interests that appeals to new immigrants
- develop more community outreach – more long term engagement with newcomers
 - identify community sponsor to serve as coach/mentor (most programs)
- facilitate access to familiar food supplies – educate food stores
- establish an immigration column in local newspapers, church bulletins, etc.

- facilitate connection of immigrants with people who speak same language
- ensure regular offering of ESL classes
- coordination of service providers to ensure more efficient program delivery

4. COMMUNITY AWARENESS

- engage local media in raising public awareness regarding immigrant integration issues
 - “sell” what immigrants bring to the table
- organize annual welcoming event such as Canada day “citizenship swearing in ceremony”
- use other media such as Facebook, podcasts, vodcasts and DVD
- promote benefits/value of hiring immigrant workers
- engage media and initiate community dialogue to reduce fear of other cultures, especially in rural communities
- create more broad-based and equal access to immigrant services in the region
- provide information to local service providers so they become more aware of immigration issues
- ensure immigrants have access to multi-cultural employment service providers
- work with local First Nations organizations – they encounter similar cultural challenges

5. COMMUNICATIONS

- survey recent immigrants to understand what they expect of us and how we should communicate what we expect of them
- utilize local cultural organizations as a mechanism to communicate with newcomers
- ensure media messaging through cultural channels
- engage community leaders as spokespersons
- profile existing immigrant success stories in local media
- develop a communications strategy that includes presentations to service clubs, faith-based communities
- host community-based events to recognize/celebrate different cultures and use these as a mechanism to share information with immigrants

- use new media such as BLOGS, podcasts, vodcasts, Facebook, Craig's List, websites
- work towards achieving better coordination of service delivery between settlement agencies
- promote/raise local awareness of language services – promote buddy system
- newcomer club with greater outreach – remove stigma of _____ immigrant
- identify and promote first points of contact for immigrants
 - realtors
 - church groups
 - schools
 - financial institutions
 - grocery stores
 - community associations
 - sports organization
- increase outreach to new immigrants – through visitor info centres, church groups, sports organizations, schools, grocery stores, community associations, special interest clubs, etc.
- managing expectations from both sides (i.e., immigrant and community)
- publicize past successes
- develop strategy to encourage immigrant tourists to consider permanent residency
- provide more Vancouver Island regional information on Welcome B.C. site

6. POLICY

- advocate to improve the lack of settlement services for temporary foreign workers
- since settlement funding is driven by community size, explore opportunities to collaborate and establish partnerships with several smaller communities to access resources i.e. Cowichan Valley
- need to develop secondary migration tracking
- advocate for family retention strategy and make funds available to support this
- work to eliminate inequity in funding for settlement services across Canada
- advocate for extension of employment terms for temporary workers
- make foreign credential recognition easier – look at policies/practices in other countries
- establish process for credential recognition before immigrants leave home country
- speed up timing in processing applications

- stress the need for clear/accurate communication on available programs and services
- encourage the use of plain, simple language in all communications
- increase accessibility to employment programs for temporary workers
- lobby for support of website development
- advocate for increased regional funding for settlement services
- address difficulties in opening bank accounts by immigrant entrepreneurs

Next Steps:

- Issue press release regarding this meeting
- Prepare and distribute notes to the participants
- Participants to review document for discussion at follow-up meeting
- Host a follow-up meeting to identify key action items to be pursued – short and long term
- Encourage those who did not attend the strategy session to participate in future meetings
- Develop plan to move initiatives forward
- Explore the opportunity to engage regional coordinator to help facilitate the implementation of action items
- Proposal development