



Families in Community

A project of the Social Planning Council of Ottawa

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Best Practices In Supporting the Integration of Immigrant Families Through Small Ethno-cultural Organizations

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Introduction

This report examines best practices for supporting the integration of immigrant families. It focuses particularly on the role of small ethno-cultural groups. The report is part of a project of the Social Planning Council of Ottawa entitled « Families in Community », which has the following objectives :

- Increase understanding of best practices for small ethno-cultural organizations;
- Increase capacity of small ethno-cultural organizations;
- Improve supports to immigrant families in Ottawa ;
- Increase access by new immigrant families to existing mainstream family support services; and
- Document and disseminate learning from the project to diverse stakeholders.

This is the second report in the « Families in Community » project, following the publication in March 2010 of *Immigrant Children, Youth and Families : A Qualitative Analysis of the Challenges of Integration*, which provides an overview of the challenges facing immigrant families in Ottawa.

This project flows from previous research of the Social Planning Council of Ottawa (SPCO), which has identified the important role of small ethno-cultural organizations in supporting integration and inclusion of immigrants.¹ Inclusion of immigrants and visible minority residents in Ottawa requires a three-pronged approach, including addressing the living conditions, creating systemic change, and supporting the capacity of community organizations advancing inclusion and integration.

This is a participatory research project, based primarily on a series of 20 semi-structured interviews with the leaders of 20 different small ethno-cultural organizations in Ottawa. The interviews explored their perspective on integration and on best practices, the role of small and large organizations in relation to the main issues facing immigrant families, their assessment of what was working well, and their recommendations for improvement. Appendix A provides a copy of the interview grid which was used. The findings from the interviews were supplemented with a literature review. A summary of the preliminary research was presented to a meeting of over 50 community members from the small ethno-cultural groups and mainstream organizations, for verification. Participants in the meeting added their insight to the report through four discussion groups which elaborated some of the themes.

This document is divided into three sections : a brief overview of the context including the role of small ethno-cultural groups in the integration process, an exploration of « best » practices in supporting the integration of families, and a discussion of areas for improvement. The report clarifies the importance of the work undertaken by the many small ethno-cultural groups in Ottawa. In addition, it is important to understand what the groups identify as promising practices in supporting the integration of immigrant families, children, youth and seniors in all aspects of community life. The report provides insights for small ethno-cultural groups, mainstream organizations, funders and the three levels of government on strategies for improvement.

We are grateful for the support of Human Resources Development Canada, Social Development Partnerships Programs, for the resources for the Families in Community project and for this report. The information provided is the opinion of the Social Planning Council of Ottawa.

¹ See Social Planning Council of Ottawa (2004) *An Exploratory Overview of the Assets of Immigrant and Visible Minority Communities in Ottawa* and (2008) *Mixed Blessings and Missed Opportunities: The Intercase Study on Inclusion and Exclusion of Ottawa's Visible and Ethnic Minority Residents*.

The Context

Integration of Immigrants Is Of Key Importance to Ottawa's Well-Being

Immigration and Diversity are Important to Economic Growth

A significant body of research has documented the importance of immigration and increasing cultural diversity in strengthening the economy². Putnam, in his article, *E Pluribus Unum*, explains that immigration enables greater creativity and more rapid economic growth.³ He also writes, that it is easy to prove that the net effect of immigration is an increase in national revenue.⁴

Despite these obvious advantages, immigrant families continue to face multiple difficulties in their social and economic integration. In particular, although most immigrants experience good economic outcomes, it is taking longer for immigrants to achieve economic security. There is an increasing trend of economic exclusion, in which immigrants experience poorer economic outcomes than the general population. For example, in 2006 :

- The median income for immigrants was \$26,016, compared to \$13,531 for recent immigrants and \$32,991 for the general population ;
- The unemployment rate for immigrants was 7% compared to 13% for recent immigrants and 5.9% for the general population ;
- The percent of immigrants living below the low income cut-off was 22.7% compared to 43.4% of recent immigrants and 15.2% of the general population.

What is Integration?

We are taking the settlement process that focuses on primary needs in the short term to an integration process that focus on cultural aspects in the long term.

Representative from small ethno-cultural group

The United Nations Economic and Social Council defined integration as a "gradual process by which new residents become active participants in the economic, social, civic, cultural and spiritual affairs of a new homeland. It is a dynamic process in which values are enriched through mutual acquaintance, accommodation and understanding. It is a process in which both the migrants and their compatriots find an opportunity to make their own distinctive contributions" (cited in Kage, 1962:165). (CCR, 1998, p. 7)

The (re)settlement process can be viewed as a continuum, as newcomers move from acclimatization, to adaptation, to integration (see diagram below)

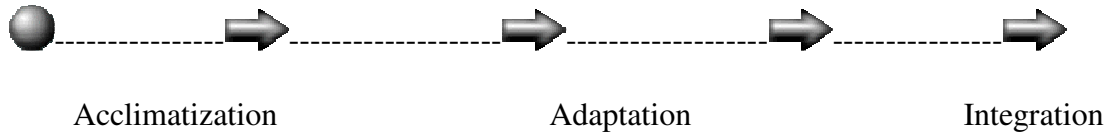
² Social Planning Council of Ottawa (June 2009). *Immigrants' Economic Integration: Successes and Challenges A Profile of Immigrants in Ottawa Based on the 2006 Census*.

³ Even when important re-distribution effects are taking into consideration, in particular the impact of immigration on Canadian low wage workers.

⁴ Putnam, D. Robert. (2007). *E Pluribus Unum: Diversity and Community in the Twenty-first Century*. Scandinavian Political Studies, Vol. 30 – No. 2, 2007.

The Settlement / Integration Continuum

Resettlement/settlement



The Canadian Council for Refugees identifies four spheres of settlement and integration:

- Economic integration: acquiring skills, entering the job market, and achieving financial independence.
 - Social integration: establishing social networks and accessing institutions.
 - Cultural integration: adapting various aspects of lifestyle and engaging in efforts to redefine cultural identity, and
 - Political integration: citizenship, voting, and civic participation.
- (as re-produced in SPCO, 2010, p. 11)

Leaders from the ethno-cultural groups identified what was working well and not working well with respect to integration in Ottawa.

What is working well, with respect to integration:

Several participants highlighted that much of the settlement and integration process is working well, and in particular, that services are significantly improved from earlier time periods.

Generally things are working well and Canadian society is generous. Today you probably see a lot of people criticizing that Canada is not doing enough to help immigrants etc. In fact, Canada has done quite a lot. It's important to say thank you.

Representative from small ethno-cultural group

There are many more supports than when I came to Canada. 50 years ago there was not any help. You were on your own.

Representative from small ethno-cultural group

Participants in the research listed the following areas where integration was working quite well :

- Help with housing ;
- Getting the permanent residence card and the health card ;
- Language classes ;
- Social housing (even if the list is long) ;
- Social assistance ;
- The fact that essential needs are taken care of ;
- University education is accessible through provincial loans and bursary programs. ;

- There is a good range of services for the Francophone community (although they are not necessarily well known)

In addition, specific services were mentioned as being particularly helpful including the Multi-cultural Liaison Officer Program and the virtual small business hiring program from the Vanier Community Services Centre

What is not working well, with respect to integration:

Leaders of the small ethno-cultural groups shared that, despite progress, there were many areas where systemic barriers continued to work against the integration process. Further, in many cases these barriers affected the second generation (Canadian born children of immigrants) as well.

The integration is two-ways. You want to integrate, but if the host society does not open, you are excluded. Large organizations should address this problem.

Representative from small ethno-cultural group

Exclusion can limit the development of the potential that youth have. We want inclusion for them.

Representative from small ethno-cultural group

Participants in the research listed the following as some of the key areas where integration was not working well :

- Access to employment, including higher rates of unemployment;
- Poor recognition of foreign diplomas, certification and work experience;
- Education system not adapting to the diversity of the population (need to happen at the level of the educators) ;
- Inadequate support for parents and students to know how the school system works here, which is necessary because they come from a different education system ;
- A need for more affordable housing;
- The services offered by large organizations do not reflect the diversity of the population nor the individualized needs of the community member;
- Difficulty finding out what services are available;
- Significant language barriers for non-official language speakers;
- Services for seniors not appropriate to their needs and culture;
- Services for youth not culturally based;
- The lack of solidarity between small groups, and the small and large groups.

Although there has been an increase in supports from half a century ago, many participants noted that since the 1980's, they have seen significant cutbacks to the supports available for integration. In addition, the economy is not as strong now, which is an important factor in the challenges of integration. When the economy is strong, it is much easier for immigrants to integrate, but when the economy is weak, immigrants are disproportionately affected. One community leader shared that it was

much harder now for recent immigrants from his home country than it had been for immigrants from the same country who arrived thirty years ago.

Our initial objective was to have a common meeting place for families from [our country of origin]. Our current work has expanded to help new families to settle. The needs of the community have evolved. In the 1970-1980 there was more support for families to integrate. The economy was good and our community members found it easier to get established. The support has decreased over the years. Those who arrived during the 1970-1980 are well integrated and their economic situation is OK. New immigrant families from our same country of origin have problems to integrate, to find a job, a house.

Representative from small ethno-cultural group

The many barriers to effective service delivery was a key theme from the research. The range of issues identified reflect those listed in an extensive literature, such as a 2010 study on the needs of immigrant youth. These barriers include : inadequate funding, the variability of needs by different cultural and/or racial backgrounds, variability of needs by gender and lack of interagency coordination, eligibility criteria, lack of awareness of available services and inadequate staffing. (CERIS, 2010, p. 34 – 35)

It is not possible to have one program that addresses the diversity of the population. Larger organizations' services for newcomers are for basic settlement, such as finding a house, registering children at the school, accessing language training. They are not responsible for the quality of the house newcomers find, if the children get enough support at the school or not, or if the parents cannot attend the language training, because they have to work to support their families. The additional programs offered by large organizations, such as employment programs, target newcomers with 5 years in the country. The assumption is that after 5 years immigrants have already integrated. The reality is that many of them are trapped in low quality jobs and poor housing. To fill the gaps it is necessary to strengthen the work of both larger organizations and small community organizations. They work is complimentary.

Representative from small ethno-cultural group

Integration Challenges Facing Immigrant Families

We don't have a tradition of individualism in the countries we come from. This is a cultural shock because it is very individualistic here. We have to accompany people in the changes they have to make in the new society and to help them understand how the society works here and how this impacts us and our families.

Representative from small ethno-cultural group

We emphasize in our work the concept of extended family in [our culture] that includes grandparents. The Canadian concept of family looks only at parents and children.

Representative from small ethno-cultural group

Immigrant families are an important and growing percentage of Ottawa’s families. The first report in this project⁵ explores the unique challenges which immigrant families experience. Some of the most important issues identified by community members participating in that report, and validated by the interviewees in this research, included :

- Preserving values and practices from the home country and fitting in with practices and values here
- Youth figuring out “who they are” – balancing their heritage and their roles in the new country
- Making sure the children do well in school
- A new role for elders and isolation of seniors
- Changing roles for men and women
- Inter-generational issues (between children and parents, parents and grand-parents or children and grandparents)
- Violence within the families
- Assimilation into English culture and loss of French (for Francophone groups)

The Importance of the Small Ethno-cultural Organizations

Small organizations have a unique contribution. We understand the language and culture of the community. We have the experience, the trust of the community and the knowledge of the pressing issues. Community members feel more comfortable in the environment provided by small community organizations. We listen to them. We do not judge them. We understand. Different groups of people need to have different set of programs. The large and small organizations need to work together. Each one has a distinct and complementary role to play – the large organizations at the macro level and the small groups at the micro level.

Representative from small ethno-cultural group

To respond to these challenges, many immigrant communities develop their own organization. There are estimated to be more than 100 such groups in Ottawa alone. They serve a broad cross section of distinct communities making up Ottawa’s immigrant population. For example language spoken is just one dimension of diversity. In 2006, nearly 69 languages, in addition to English and French, were reported as mother tongues among the immigrant population (SPCO, 2008) and many groups are organized around a common language, identifying their ability to do their work in a non-official language as a particular strength. Others have a mandate specific to a particular population of immigrant or visible minority community members. Some address the particular needs of women, youth or seniors.

These groups provide important services to families in terms of orientation, information, accompaniment, and appropriate cultural supports. They often serve as a link – or bridge - between community members and the traditional (mainstream or larger) services. Many organize recreational and cultural activities. These groups are often small, with little or no financing, relying on a small number of volunteers. Some are isolated from other groups in the voluntary sector, while others

⁵ Social Planning Council of Ottawa. (2010). Immigrant Children, Youth and Families: A Qualitative Analysis of the Challenges of Integration. Ottawa: Author.

develop partnerships. They are a very important part of the community support structure as they often are the only or primary support for community members who are otherwise isolated.

An important role of small ethno-cultural groups is to support families, children, youth and seniors to address the challenges identified above. These issues go beyond the settlement issues which are funded by senior levels of government – in scope and in time. Further, the mainstream services mandated to address family related issues often do not have a culturally based approach. To complicate matters, seeking help outside the family is discouraged by culture, which creates a further challenge. The various community organizations have developed their own approaches to support which flow from the needs of the community members and respect cultural traditions. In the next section of this report we provide a quick overview of some of the strategies used by the groups to address these issues.

Because of our culture, many families do not want to acknowledge a problem. It is a shame for the family. For the same reason they will not go to counselling. In this respect the main issue is to build trust in the community so they share these concerns. Our organization is trusted by the community. We are the first point of contact for members of our community facing family problems.

Representative from small ethno-cultural group

The value of the ethno-cultural organizations is further clarified by the concept of social capital. “Social capital” refers to the connections between individuals. In particular, social capital refers to the social networks and patterns of reciprocity and trust which flow from such connections⁶. Societies which have high level of interpersonal trust, network and social norms have a higher potential for social, political and economic development than those which do not have those characteristics⁷. Ethno-cultural organizations, through their activities, play a key role in the development and support of social capital. They offer informal links for cohesion and mutual help which increase the sense of belonging and of being supported. They also enable their members to have access to external networks with can help them change their situation (for example, to find employment or housing)⁸. In other words, ethno-cultural organizations do important work for integration, inclusion and the participation of new immigrants in the Canadian society.

We are the only ones that can provide services to our community in their own language and culture. We have a profile in the community and our work is recognized. We have developed a network with [people from our community] based in different organizations who can help. Large organizations and settlement services are not equipped to provide these services. They do not have the network we have in the community.

Representative from small ethno-cultural

⁶ Putnam, D. Robert. (2000). *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community*. New York: Simon Schuster.

⁷ Wakefield, S.E.L & Poland, B. (2005). Family, friend or Foe? Critical reflections on the relevance and role of social capital in health promotion and community development. *Social Science & Medecine*, 60 (12), 2819-2832.

⁸ Tastsoglou, E.; Miedema, B. (2000). *Immigrant women organizing for change: integration and community development by immigrant women in the maritimes*. Final Report to the prairieCentre of Excellence for Research on Immigration and Integration at www.percii.metropolis.net

Bonding social capital encompasses the connections within the group. Bonding social capital is considered important to the building of local networks, the provision of social support, and the mobilization of solidarity. Social capital is helpful for groups that are limited in size, bound in terms of membership, and have shared cultural norms (Chaudhury, et al., 2008). In Ottawa, which does not have a strong pattern of geographically based ethnic enclaves, small ethno-cultural organizations are particularly important as a primary means to enable people with a shared experience or identity to connect with and support each other.

Our organization is commended for providing the space for interconnectedness of the community.
Representative from small ethno-cultural group

It is important to be aware that this kind of social capital can lead to the exclusion of others with different identities (Chaudhury, et al., 2008). The potential for exclusion must always be monitored and considered in any situation. However, Lewis-Watts (2006) stresses, that the type and quality of immigrants' social networks can be just as important as 'human capital'⁹ in the success of the integration process. As a result, the negative perception that immigrant communities can prevent social integration ('turning inwards to form exclusive so-called enclaves') cannot be substantiated. What is generally accepted is that immigrants with large networks tend to have greater access to different types of support and specialized information. This is important for the settlement process. Settlement agencies and community organizations can play a significant role in expanding these networks. (SPCO, 2010, p. 7)

Bridging social capital represents the networks that are developed between groups. Bridging social capital can help groups to establish linkages, share resources, and unite towards common goals (Chaudhury, et al., 2008). While several of the small groups worked together to serve their communities and address common issues, the more common linkages were between the small organizations and larger community agencies. The small organizations were very aware of the mutual benefits of the small and large organizations working together. The small organizations are the key link with the communities that large organizations need and the large organizations have a service delivery mandate and capacity which can benefit the smaller organizations and the communities they serve.

We go where the large organizations can't. We find the people, connect with them personally. The large groups don't have the time or mandate to do that. We prepare the individual to be able to use the services. In this way, the large organizations benefit from our work. They can show success in their results because of the ground work we did.
Representative from small ethno-cultural group

Small community organizations do not have the resources to fill the gaps, but have the cultural and language expertise and the community credibility. They usually do not provide direct services, but refer clients. Referrals require a good response from larger organizations. If they cannot respond to the cultural diversity, there is a problem. Working together needs a mutual understanding and sharing knowledge and resources.
Representative from small ethno-cultural group

⁹ education, language, marketable skills.

Best Practices in Supporting the Integration of Immigrant Families

The Concepts of Best Practices, Good Practices and Promising Practices

Over the past decade, in many disciplines from healthcare to social services, there has been a growing interest by funders, decision makers and researchers in the concept of « best practices ». In the literature, there are many definitions.

Bendixsen and de Guchteneire, 2003, provide a definition which captures many of the key ideas of « best practices ». They define a best practice as: A results-oriented approach which relates to successful initiatives or model projects that make a sustainable contribution to an issue at hand. In addition, « best practices » is about accumulating and applying knowledge of what is working and not working in different situations. It includes the process of learning, feedback, reflection, and analysis. In other words, by understanding what has 'worked well' for other groups and organizations in their approaches to maximizing effective and positive outcomes, these ideas can be adapted by other organizations.

The literature also reflects differing levels of rigour in identifying a « best practice ». In some circles, « best practices » are those which have been documented to have a significant impact on an issue, and for which the research has been replicated and verified by some form of academic review. Good practices are those which meet this same test but have not yet been replicated. Promising practices are those which have been implemented and evaluated to have demonstrated a significant impact, but which have not been replicated nor subjected to academic scrutiny.

The research with ethno-cultural organizations confirmed our expectation that the formal concept of « best practices » was not familiar to most of the leaders interviewed. For some, the concepts were quite new. Others based their organizational structures and activities on learning, feedback, reflection and analysis (based on learning from within the organization and outside, from other organizations or research), and could demonstrate significant impact of their work, but they did not use the language of « best practices ».

Why Do “Best Practices” Matter for Small Ethno-cultural Organizations?

Although the small groups tend not to use the language of « best practices », the research shows that best practices are important for the groups for three primary reasons :

1. Small ethno-cultural groups are very motivated to operate in a manner which is most effective for their members and « best practices » research can help them to learn from each other what works well.
2. Many funders in the sector now use the language and concepts of « best practices » and require those seeking financial support to demonstrate how their activities fit with identified best practices.
3. « Best practices » research with respect to integration of immigrants and refugees confirms the important role of small ethno-cultural groups.

Miriam Potocky-Tripodi (2002) writes that, in relation to immigrants and refugees, best practices « demand a specialized knowledge of the questions unique to these populations¹⁰ ». The author adds that the best practices « demand equally an adaptation and a specialized application of interventions and traditional services¹¹ ». She finds this is a role already played by the ethno-cultural organizations, which would be more effective if the small and large organizations were working together. To have better results, it is enough to provide specialized training and funding to the small organizations in order to better serve immigrants.

« Best Practices » : Use With Caution !!

Despite the potential benefits in applying a « best practices » approach to the work of small ethno-cultural organizations, there are some very important cautions. In some cases, such an approach can reinforce forces of exclusion which already marginalize small ethno-cultural groups and their membership :

- 1. « Best practices » are normally defined by mainstream organizations or institutions and may reflect inaccurate or inappropriate assumptions.**

Most of what is defined as « best practices » is defined by mainstream groups or academic institutions, and often reflects assumptions which do not reflect the complexity and reality of the community.

For example, a common requirement is for a group to demonstrate it has a certain level of organization based on a western non-profit model including an elected Board of Directors, and annual meeting of members, etc. While this may be appropriate for many types of activities and reflect a certain type of accountability and transparency, it can be too onerous or bureaucratic in other cases.

- 2. « Best practices » are the language of funders, policy makers and academics and may disregard activities that are important or essential for the community.**

A example would be an early learning program which limits participation to one parent and his or her children under six, without any provision for the reality that the family may have children of many ages and only be interested in activities which involve all family members, including seniors.

- 3. This approach may ignore cultural, religious or gender sensitivities, the complexity of the community or the reality of community members' lives.**

For example, in the literature on the subject of ethno-cultural groups and best practices, “client empowerment” is commonly cited as an integral part of best practices. While client empowerment can be an important part of community work, it is not approached the same way in diverse cultures. Promoting individualized client autonomy exclusively may create confusions and tensions if pursued in isolation of cultural values of collectivism within some traditions.

¹⁰ Potocky-Tripodi, Miriam. (2002). *Best practices for social work with refugees and immigrants*. New York: Columbia University Press.

¹¹ Ibid.

Further, “empowerment strategies” may not recognize the skills, resources, and strengths of immigrant communities.

4. A « best practices » approach may limit creativity and encourage a one-size-fits-all approach to meeting diverse needs and contexts.

A simple example is the model of an active parent school committee which meets once a month in the evening as the primary model for parent engagement in the school system. Such a structure may not be accessible to immigrant parents facing a number of barriers to participation.

5. Such an approach can reinforce the exclusion of the smaller groups with fewer resources and less capacity.

It is often beyond the capacity of small groups, particularly those with no funding at all, to do research to find out about best practices related to their work or to document their work in order to demonstrate its’ impact. This can lead to an increasing gap between the « have » and « have-not » organizations, in which the under-resourced groups are further disadvantaged in accessing resources.

In fact, what may appear to be a « best practice » may have very little to do with the practices of the group itself, and more to do with the economic, social policy environment in which they operated at a particular point in time. It is important that groups be cautious to properly understand the context of the so-called best practice and its’ relevance to their particular circumstances.

The good results we have achieved in the Centre have to do with the good economic integration of immigrants who arrived in the period 1970 – 1980.

Representative from small ethno-cultural group

Finally, a « best practices » approach can divert focus from important systemic challenges, and reinforce the erroneous concept that if voluntary sector organizations simply « did things right » their problems would be solved. As with any analysis which places responsibility for systemic problems on those experiencing the problems, such thinking can be very debilitating to groups and take away from important work leading to systemic change.

A current example of this is the focus on « building capacity » for small groups to learn strategies for completing funding applications within competitive funding frameworks which are already stretched to the limit. While such an approach meets the objective of providing some degree of opportunity to small groups, in the absence of strategies to change the systemic issues which reduce their likelihood of being successful on their applications, it is a poor substitute for a « best practice ». Such groups often blame themselves, thinking they didn’t fill the form out properly.

...there may be occasions ,... where doing more of the same, only better, can run counter to the overall goal of social justice and equality within a multicultural society because institutional and systemic structures of inequality are reinforced rather than dismantled. Further research and discussion with all stakeholders is needed around this topic.

(Lee, p. 42)

A Framework for « Best Practices » Appropriate for Small Ethno-cultural Organizations

Why does our program work so well? Because we make sure we get results. With successful results the community has confidence in us. As well, we are very supportive and welcoming. People feel very at ease to talk to us. Our secret – solid work on the ground, excellent understanding of the needs of our community, and a commitment to respond.

Representative from small ethno-cultural group

A framework for “best practices” appropriate for small ethno-cultural organizations is one which meets the definition of best practices, above, but is based on the perspectives of those most affected. Sharing of strategies is a powerful tool for building the capacity of communities to take action. Moreover, effective change is most likely when communities are given adequate support to enable them to act on their particular concern and share among groups their collective understanding. (SPCO, 2010, p. 23 – 24)

The community leaders of the small ethno-cultural groups shared their perspectives of what worked well in their organizational and program practices. Some common principles emerged, which provide a framework for « best practices » which is firmly based in the experience of the groups. The principles are remarkably similar to principles reflected in the literature, particularly in

- Lee, Dr. Jo-Anne and Harrison, Cheryl, June 1999. Immigrant Settlement and Multiculturalism Programs for Immigrant, Refugee and Visible Minority Women: A Study of Outcomes, Best Practices and Issues. University of Victoria, Victoria B.C.
- Canadian Council for Refugees (CCR), (February 1998). Best Settlement Practices. Settlement Services for Refugees and Immigrants in Canada. Available at http://ccrweb.ca/bpfina1.htm#N_8_

In fact, the principles are so similar to the core values and guidelines set out in the latter document by the Canadian Council for Refugees (with the exception that some of the details are only relevant for large settlement services), that we have reproduced their framework in Appendix B of this report for comparison and reference.

The most important elements identified by leaders of the ethno-cultural organization, which together represent a framework for best practices are :

1. The importance of working in partnership and linking members with the mainstream services
2. Excellent use of volunteers, specifically motivated and committed members of the community
3. Activities decided by and defined by the members
4. Accessible, personalized, welcoming and non-judgmental services and activities
5. Strong outreach to connect with members of the community
6. An holistic approach to challenges, supporting the individual within the context of the family and the broader community
7. Empowerment of the participants and fostering of pride in the home culture
8. Being goal oriented and professional in implementing the activities identified by members
9. Independence, including a strong capacity for fundraising and the acquisition of space (especially purchase of a location)
10. Using research and evaluation to ensure continuous improvement and that the services continue to meet community needs

What Could Be Improved to Support Small Ethno-cultural Organizations More Effectively to Meet Community Needs?

The smaller groups have access to the community, but difficulty accessing the funding. The larger groups have access to the funding, but difficulty accessing the people in the community who have the needs. *Representative from small ethno-cultural group*

Leaders from the ethno-cultural groups participating in the research identified some key areas for improvement in Ottawa which would assist them to more effectively fulfill their important role in supporting the integration of immigrant families. In order of priority, these were:

1. Improve opportunities for the smaller groups to develop equitable partnerships with larger community organizations

We have developed partnerships with various organizations and are currently networking to expand our partnerships. We see our role in the broader network of services as part of a collaboration that benefits large and small organizations. Right now we do not know about all the services that other organizations offer to immigrants. This information is very important for our referrals. We could implement funding projects together with large organizations, but we do not have this opportunity. We work separately. We would like to see a sharing of resources and space in a collaborative approach between large and small organizations. *Representative from small ethno-cultural group*

- Larger organizations reach out to the smaller groups to initiative partnerships where there could be mutual benefit in serving the community
- Small organizations also outreach to the mainstream organizations
- Large groups serve as an umbrella for smaller groups
- Improve communication between the large and small organizations
- Develop a database that links the small groups and the larger organizations
- Larger groups survey the small groups to find out there interests and need and services
- Provide workshop on how to best deal with large groups and how to ensure reciprocal agreements
- Funders scrutinize funding applications which are partnerships between large and small organizations to ensure the arrangement is equitable to the small group, builds its' capacity and includes a budget allocation for the small group
- Use media to gain publicity about the small groups so the large groups hear about them
- Use outreach settle counsellors to establish effective referral practice between small and large groups
- When establish partnership, the duties and responsibilities of both groups should be clearly set out in writing

2. Increase access to funding for small ethno-cultural groups

It is harder for the small groups since they have no funding to provide programming. The smaller groups do not have funding or staff. When something is run on a voluntary basis, it is harder to keep it going. The start and stop phenomenon often plagues the small groups. People gbet tired. This is the problem with the small groups. *Representative from small ethno-cultural group*

Most groups were very stretched and stressed by their lack of funding. Not having staffing, programming or rental resources was a key problem, particularly in light of cutbacks in other services which has led to higher demand on their organizations. Significant challenges for the groups included difficulty competing for funding, restrictive funding criteria, the amount of administration in applying for and reporting on funding, and the difficulty of establishing equitable funding partnerships with larger organizations. As well, the instability of funding was a serious problem which led to unpredictability in the service levels to their communities. Specific recommendations included:

- Funding proposals that include more than one organization could be helpful
- Funders create opportunities for funding for projects that meet the needs of our community not just the funding criteria defined by other organizations
- Make the application processes less onerous for small groups
- Funding agencies should encourage joint proposals submitted by large and small groups

It is very important to note that several participants in the research did not agree at all with the strategy of increasing access to funding for small ethno-cultural groups. They believed an important strength of some groups was their ability to fundraise for their services and occupancy costs from within their membership. This ensured their autonomy to meet community needs, and was consistent (for some) with a model of communities looking after their own needs rather than relying on government for all services. They felt if funding was given to one group it should be given to all, and this would place a burden on the tax system.

3. Provide opportunities for small ethno-cultural groups to get access to free or affordable space for administration and for programs / activities

Our main challenge is access to funding and the lack of space. We need to pay for a room every time we hold an activity. To improve our work, we need access to free space for our activities. Because of rental costs we cannot offer a permanent place to meet for Vietnamese seniors. We are limited to invite them to activities we have on rented facilities.

Representative from small ethno-cultural group

- Larger organizations share their space with smaller groups

4. Help small ethno-cultural groups to address volunteer challenges

We have a high turn-over of volunteers. They cannot commit for long periods of time, unless they are seniors.

Representative from small ethno-cultural group

- Larger groups work with the smaller groups to help them attract and retain new volunteers to lighten the burden and ensure succession of the groups
- Share best practices in coping with volunteer turn-over and the trend toward interest by volunteers in only short term commitments
- Encourage a better attitude towards volunteering

5. Mainstream organizations better integrate diversity into their service delivery

Large organizations should review their programs and services based on input from small organizations. Their services have many problems of eligibility, adequate information, translation, cultural interpretation. Small organizations are trying to help their communities, but the response from large organizations that have the mandate and resources is inadequate. *Representative from small ethno-cultural group*

- ensure hiring for front line positions reflects Ottawa’s population
- hire for bilingualism with one official language and a non-official language
- to fill a need for language capability and cultural sensitivity, large organizations can partner on the funding and program delivery with a small organization with that expertise
- mainstream organizations improve their evaluation processes to identify where they need to improve the accessibility of their services with respect to diversity. This could be done in collaboration with the small organizations

6. Provide better access to information for the leaders and volunteers in the small ethno-cultural organizations, to help them in their role of making referrals and providing orientation regarding settlement, other services and how Canadian society works (e.g. the school system)

Larger organizations should provide more and appropriate information to small organizations in timely manner, so it can be disseminated to the community. This could be easily done if small organizations are on the contact lists of large organizations. This approach would avoid the miscommunication that exists and ensure access to the right information. *Representative from small ethno-cultural group*

- Large organizations provide a coherent list of services with a description of the requirements, to assist small organization’s referrals. The information should be available in the language of the immigrant family and cultural interpretation should be provided
- Ensure good information about services and supports available for Francophone immigrants, as they face additional access barriers.

7. Provide opportunities for basic capacity building for some organizations (e.g. bookkeeping, etc.)

We need help with making budgets, creating and maintaining a website, facilitating workshops on how to make power point presentations effective, and so on. We would also like to involve volunteers who are retired to help with some of these items.

Representative from small ethno-cultural group

8. Provide support to use appropriate “best practices”

Participants generously shared their understanding of best practices related to specific program areas, such as addressing intergenerational issues. This information will be made available in a series of information sheets, to be published separately from this report. Additional suggestions included:

- Provide adequate resources so groups have real capacity to implement best practices and to advocate their views
- Provide workshops to train organizations in best practices
- Support small groups to acquire research skills in order to produce own studies either through training or linking them with university academics and students to do research
- Small organizations need to strengthen their profile. It is important that they share information on their activities and make their profile known to the funding community.
- Proposal writing workshops with emphasis on best practices
- A booklet of tools to document best practices
- A system to gather and include good comments about programs or services

Conclusions

1. Strong community-based and neighbourhood-based social networks are a key dimension of integration

Central to the process of creating sustainable diversity is the capacity of institutions at the national, provincial and local levels to counter patterns of exclusion and facilitate the integration of new immigrants into the labour market and guarantee access to social services, language training and education. Also essential is the creation of an urban space where newcomers can build social networks and participate in the cultural and political life of the city without giving up their own cultural and communal ties.

Currently, federal and provincial programs are generally focused on short-term transitional settlement services through core and project funding for non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Municipalities are often faced with the longer-term effects and costs of lack of support for crucial services, most notably access to housing and the labour market. There is a need to invest in medium- to long-term settlement services for certain immigrants more at risk. More generally, strengthening the sustainable diversity of Canadian cities requires a high degree of collaboration among governments and the numerous non-governmental agencies and community groups involved in the integration process of new immigrants. (Papillon, p. iii – iv)

2. Small ethno-cultural groups are increasingly being relied upon to fill gaps in services

While the interviews highlighted the critical importance of the small groups, they also raised an important concern. As needs have grown, the economy has deteriorated and services have been cut-back, the small ethno-cultural organizations are increasingly being asked to pick up the impact left by cuts to settlement services, a stretched healthcare system and a fragmented social safety net.

To cope with chronic underfunding, the sector has developed mechanisms to provide basic services. Heavy reliance on dedicated, but not necessarily trained volunteers to deliver core programs ... is one such strategy. ...Government goals for the social cohesion and social integration of immigrants into a multicultural society cannot be fully met under the existing funding arrangement. (Lee, p. 7)

Large organizations are relying on the volunteer work of small organizations for settlement of new families. The volunteer work of our members, particularly seniors, contributes to support the integration of families. Our members are taking care of families in need and filling the gap in services.

Representative from small ethno-cultural group

We have learned that our organization does not have the resources to support new families and we cannot overcome the reduction of government support.

Representative from small ethno-cultural group

3. The forces of exclusion which impact immigrants at the individual and family level are replicated in the experience of the small ethno-cultural organizations.

Small ethno-cultural organizations have an important role to play in the integration process. However, they lack sustained and adequate funding. (SPCO, 2010, pg. 25) The literature acknowledges that ethno-cultural organizations have less access to resources than organizations serving the general population. This diminished access contributes to the de-stabilization and increase in the isolation of such communities (Potocky-Tripodi, 2002). There is a need for a multi-faceted approach to increase the inclusion of small ethno-cultural organizations in the spectrum of service provision, decision making tables and access to resources including space and funding opportunities.

4. There is a need to develop and implement a model for collaborative service delivery and equitable access to resources between large and small organizations.

In recognition of the important role of the small ethno-cultural group with respect to integration, and of the critical importance of improving integration, Ottawa needs a model for collaborative service delivery and equitable access to resources between large and small organizations supporting integration. The City of Ottawa's Community Funding Framework is a good first step, but the initiative must go further. We can no longer rely exclusively on competitive funding frameworks and planning tables that do include meaningful involvement of small ethno-cultural groups.

An equitable model for support would be founded on the following principles:

- based on collaboration and partnerships on equal and negotiate basis
- equitable access to resources by large and small organizations
- recognition on the legitimacy of some services continuing to be provided through a volunteer structure

There is a certain urgency to this situation. Before it is too late, we have to address the growing alienation of some elements of the immigrant population. If things are allowed to go on for too long then the situation lapses into negativity, as we see in Europe. Better support to small ethno-cultural organizations will enable us to better support our volunteers, who in turn support our community members who are facing the greatest challenges.

Representative of small ethno-cultural organization

Appendix A: Guided Interview Grid

- 1) I'd like to find out more about your organization and the work it does:
 - a) Why was your organization started?
 - b) What needs are you hoping to meet?
 - c) Can you tell me more about what the organization does?
 - What are your activities?
 - (Get more details on what is distinct for their particular community of concern with respect to what is working, what is not, and the needs?)
 - d) What do you hope to accomplish with your work?
 - What are their goals with their members?
 - (Get more details on what they see as the process or steps of integration where they have a role)
 - e) What do people or other organizations praise your organization for?

- 2) What do you think is most important about your work, or the way you work?
(Get their idea of best practices / promising practices with respect to an aspect of integration or of social). If they give you an opening, explore what they identify as a best practice, i.e. probe for:
 - a) What is it – description of the elements (who, what etc)
 - b) Purpose
 - c) How did you decide on this approach. (Did you use any research and if so, of what research)
 - d) Do the participants have any role in decision making in the practice
 - e) Why do you think it is the most important
 - f) How do you know it makes an important difference for people (Also - Does it include evaluation)
 - g) What have you learned from the practice and what is the process for continuous learning
 - h) What could others learn from this?

- 3) Now, I'd like to talk about the families (or youth or seniors...) with whom you work. One of our main goals with this research is to show what is important to do when supporting the integration of (families or youth... as appropriate to their target population).
 - a) What do you think are the biggest challenges for (families, or youth or seniors) in settling into a life in Canada and feeling comfortable here?
 - b) What do you think are the most important things the large organizations can do to help the (families, or youth...) .
 - c) What are the most important things the smaller organizations like yours could be doing to help the (families or youth...) (Want to get at the unique role for small ethno-cultural organizations.)
 - d) Are you aware of other places where there are good models or services that we do not have in Ottawa, which you would like to see?
If so, get the details.

- 4) What do you think is the most important contribution which (their target population, e.g. Serbians, or immigrant seniors...) can make to the broader community?

- 5) There are some complicated issues which some cultural communities are trying to address. I have some cards here with some of those challenges.
- Inter-generational problems (between children and parents, parents and grand-parents or children and grandparents)
 - Preserving values and practices from the home country and fitting in with practices and values here
 - Youth figuring out “who they are” – balancing their heritage and their roles in the new country
 - Making sure the children do well in school
 - Changing roles for men and women
 - Violence within the families
 - A new role for elders
 - Assimilation into English culture and loss of French (for Francophone groups)
- a) Are there any one of these where your organization or community has something to offer to help address this?
- e.g. An idea of how to address the issue or an idea of a service which could help?
- b) If so, which issue?
- c) What do you think are the most important things to help families with these issues?
- d) What could the smaller organizations like yours do to help
- e) What could the large organizations do to help
- 6) (For Francophone only) Now, I’d like to talk about the fact that your community is part of the Francophone community of Ottawa.
- a) Is there anything different about supporting Francophone immigrants in Ottawa compared to supporting other immigrants?
Alternative questioning: Are there additional challenges which your (community, members, seniors...) face being part of the Francophone community?
- b) What do you think are the most important things the large organizations can do to help the (families, or youth...) with those issues.
- c) What are the most important things the smaller organizations like yours could be doing to help the (families or youth...) with those issues.
(Want to get at the unique role for small ethno-cultural organizations.)
- 7) I’d like to talk about the role of your organization in relation to other organizations and services.
- a) Have you worked with other organizations on anything? If so, can you tell me about what you did together?
(Probe for details. Want to get at:
(a) what their relationship is with other small ethno-cultural groups
(b) what their relationship is with larger organizations, and
(c) how they see their role in the broader network of services)
- b) Why do you think it is important to have groups such as yours, when we have larger organizations such as settlement agencies, health centres etc?
(Probe to find out what they think is the unique role for small ethno-cultural organizations)

- c) How could the larger organizations and the smaller ethno-cultural groups work together to better support the integration of immigrant families?

Alternate way to ask same question: If the larger organizations and the groups like yours were working really well together, what would that look like or how would that work?

Probe for:

- What is working well in the support services for the integration of immigrant families?
- What is not working well in the support services for the integration of immigrant families?
- Who could fill the gaps – small groups or larger groups

- 8) We've talked about the good work you do. What would help you to be able to do your work better or to do more of it?

- a) What are the TWO most important things which have helped your organization in its activities so far? (For example, volunteers, having a free space to meet, etc.)
- b) What are the TWO most important things which could help your organization in the future to continue with its programs and activities?

- 9) Is there anything you would like to add?

Appendix B: Best Practice Guidelines From the Canadian Council for Refugees

Excerpted from:

Canadian Council for Refugees (CCR), (February 1998). Best Settlement Practices. Settlement Services for Refugees and Immigrants in Canada, pg. 24. Available at http://ccrweb.ca/bpfina1.htm#N_8_

We have articulated the best practices in the form of guidelines, emanating from twelve core values. These guidelines form a framework which can serve as the basis for analysis, evaluation, planning and information-sharing in the field of settlement services.

Core values:

- Access
- Inclusion
- Client empowerment
- User-defined services
- Holistic approach
- Respect for the individual
- Cultural sensitivity
- Community development
- Collaboration
- Accountability
- Orientation towards positive change
- Reliability

1. **Services are accessible to all who need them. Access is assured by:**
 - providing a welcoming environment
 - offering services in the client's own language, where possible and appropriate
 - offering culturally appropriate services
 - undertaking outreach, so that services are known to those who might benefit
 - communicating effectively about the organization and its services
 - where possible, offering services irrespective of immigration status or other criteria of eligibility
 - providing an environment where women feel comfortable
 - offering childcare, where appropriate
 - having a geographically accessible site and/or addressing clients' need for transportation
 - having a physically accessible site
 - listening to and responding to concerns about accessibility
2. **Services are offered in an inclusive manner, respectful of, and sensitive to, diversity. Inclusion is assured by:**
 - recognizing the diversity of needs and experiences (e.g. young, old, highly educated, those without education, singles, families)
 - offering anti-racist services

- providing a non-sexist environment
- enforcing a policy of non-discrimination
- offering non-judgmental services
- respecting different perspectives within newcomer communities

3. **Clients are empowered by services. Client empowerment is assured by:**

- fostering independence in clients
- meaningful membership and participation of clients in the Board
- encouraging client involvement in all areas of the organization
- involving clients as volunteers
- recognizing, affirming and building on the resources, experiences, skills and wisdom of newcomers
- providing information and education to allow clients to make their own informed decisions
- offering programs and services leading to employment and career advancement
- offering a supportive environment (especially to those who are traumatized)
- supporting the clients' right to choose from among service providers the approach that best meets their needs

4. **Services respond to needs as defined by users. User-defined services are assured by:**

- undertaking an individual assessment for each client of needs, expectations, goals and priorities
- assessment of the needs and priorities of newcomer communities and the host society
- involving newcomers in needs assessments
- ongoing assessment of whether services continue to meet needs
- listening to clients and communities served
- responding to the particular needs of refugees (recognition of differences, changing needs)
- offering flexibility in services
- incorporating flexibility into programs, in order to allow them to adapt to changing needs
- involving users in the planning, implementation and evaluation of services
- offering users maximum control over programs

5. **Services take account of the complex, multifaceted, interrelated dimensions of settlement and integration. A holistic approach is assured by:**

- recognizing the diversity of an individual's needs (physical, social, psychological, political, spiritual)
- responding wherever possible to a variety of needs at once
- providing a range of services in one location ("one-stop")
- recognizing that integration is a long-term process
- avoiding compartmentalization
- taking into account the effects of policy decisions on individuals and communities and responding through advocacy
- recognizing the importance of the family in the lives of individuals
- providing opportunities for relaxation and fun

6. **Services are delivered in a manner that fully respects the rights and dignity of the individual. Respect for the individual is assured by:**
 - confidentiality
 - services free of racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination
 - respecting the fundamental rights of each participant
 - compliance with a Code of Ethics
 - offering a professional quality of services
 - recognizing the uniqueness of each person
 - giving full and accurate information
 - making human contact
 - good monitoring, selection and training of volunteers

7. **Services are delivered in a manner that is culturally sensitive. Culturally sensitive services are assured by:**
 - having staff and volunteers from the same background as the clients served
 - ensuring that service providers are knowledgeable about the culture of those being served
 - offering services in a culturally appropriate manner
 - developing and implementing policies on cultural competency and anti-racism
 - showing respect for different cultures

8. **Services promote the development of newcomer communities and newcomer participation in the wider community, and develop communities that are welcoming of newcomers. Community development is assured by:**
 - giving priority to community building
 - investing in the development of newcomer communities
 - developing community leadership
 - building bridges between communities
 - eliminating barriers to newcomer participation in the community
 - familiarity with the resources in the local community
 - working towards changes in public attitude towards newcomers
 - working through the organizations of newcomer communities
 - involving volunteers in services delivered

9. **Services are delivered in a spirit of collaboration. Collaboration is assured by:**
 - promoting partnerships between organizations that build on strengths of each
 - good working relationships
 - team-building
 - communicating regularly with others and sharing information
 - referral services
 - coalition-building
 - providing opportunities for community problem-solving
 - taking account of available resources and experiences

10. **Service delivery is made accountable to the communities served. Accountability is assured by:**
- the organization's Board
 - evaluation, involving the participants
 - ongoing monitoring
 - performance appraisals
 - policy and procedure manuals (for financial management, administration and personnel)
 - close connection with immigrant and refugee communities
 - fiscal responsibility
 - development of goals and specific measurable, realistic outcomes
11. **Services are oriented towards promoting positive change in the lives of newcomer and in the capacity of society to offer equality of opportunity for all. An orientation towards positive change is assured by:**
- advocating for improvements in policy
 - recognizing and building on the possibility of change in the lives of newcomers and in society
 - developing new programs and new service models
 - improving services through training and research
 - celebrating successes
12. **Services are based on reliable, up-to-date information. Reliability is assured by:**
- keeping information up-to-date
 - using social research
 - exchanging information

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