

# Welcoming Communities Program

## Workplace Diversity Initiative

February 2014



Social Planning Council  
North Okanagan



Canada 



WelcomeBC

*This project is made possible through funding from the Government of Canada and the Province of British Columbia*

# Table of Contents

---

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Background</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>NexusBC Workplace Diversity Initiative Overview</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Results of Employer Survey</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Pilot Diversity Workshop</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Recommendations for a Sustainable Workplace Diversity Model</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Appendix I Results of Employer Survey</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Appendix II – Evaluation Summary of Workshop</b>	<b>11</b>

## Introduction

In early 2013, NexusBC was contacted by Annette Sharkey, Executive Director of the North Okanagan Social Planning Council to gauge interest in our participation in the Welcoming Communities program. The program, funded in part by the Government of Canada and WelcomeBC is designed to help communities become more inclusive for new immigrants in the community. Several initiatives were being planned and NexusBC was approached as a potential contractor to take on the workplace diversity initiative. In April of 2013, NexusBC signed an agreement to partner in the part of the program.

## Background

Canada has a long history of supporting immigration as being fundamental to the economic prosperity of this country. The province of BC has been seen a fair share of newcomers to Canada, with 90% of BC immigrants choosing the lower Mainland as their initial destination. About 25% of the remaining 10% who immigrate to the province take up residency in the Thompson-Okanagan area.

Both federal and provincial governments provide a wide variety of services for immigrants including settlement services, forms and application assistance, job search, English as a 2<sup>nd</sup> language and community information resources. Locally, direct services for immigrants are being provided by non-profit organizations including Vernon and District Immigrant Services, Community Futures and NexusBC. Overall, these services have made Vernon and area more welcoming to newcomers, creating programs and partnerships that not only benefit immigrants, but the community overall. In order to attract its fair share of immigrants on an ongoing basis, it is important to ensure that Vernon is “a place that welcomes newcomers, considers their needs and helps to facilitate their successful integration into the community.” (*Social Planning Council, Welcoming Communities Program Action Plan Background, p. 12, Jan. 2013*).

To this end, the Welcoming Communities Program is providing funding for strategies that are intended to strengthen the community’s capacity to become more welcoming and inclusive. These strategies will support newcomers through:

- Improving access to community services
- Supporting the development of intercultural relationships and mutual trust
- Supporting welcoming and inclusive workplaces
- Creating welcoming and inclusive spaces in the community

*(Social Planning Council, Welcoming Communities Program Action Plan Background, p. 14, Jan. 2013)*

A number of initiatives have been identified and are at various stages of completion in Vernon to address these four strategic support areas for newcomers.

## NexusBC Workplace Diversity Initiative Overview

The contract signed with NexusBC defined four distinct deliverables:

- Complete a survey of local business and community organizations to assess interest in ongoing diversity training
- Coordinate and pilot a training session
- Recommend a delivery model and sustainability plan

- Complete a final report including an evaluation component

The NexusBC workplace diversity initiative would also be guided by a steering committee that would include new immigrants and the Welcoming Communities Project Coordinator.

## Results of Employer Survey

In September of 2013, a short survey was created to assess the level of interest among business and community organizations for workplace diversity training. The survey also asked respondents to identify some basic information about their organizations and any efforts that they have undertaken or that are currently underway to make their workplaces more inclusive for new immigrants. An invitation to take the survey through Survey Monkey was distributed through hundreds of email addresses in the NexusBC contact database, the Social Planning Council contact database, the Welcoming Communities contact emails and through e-newsletters distributed by the Vernon, Armstrong and Enderby Chambers of Commerce. A total of 39 survey responses were received. The full survey is attached to this report in Appendix I.

### Respondent Overview

Of those who responded, 77% employed 5 or more people in their organizations. This group is projected to be the primary source of interest for diversity training; smaller companies may be less likely to identify diversity training as an organizational need. A total of 56% of respondents indicated that they do not have newcomers to Canada (defined as those who have immigrated in the last 10 years) among their workforce, while 28% indicated that less than 5% of their workforce is represented by new immigrants.

The steering committee identified in the early stages that in order to maintain accreditation status, applicable non-profit organizations are required to provide ongoing diversity training for employees. We used the survey to identify the size of this second target group of employers who would have a mandatory need to provide diversity training. Of the total respondents, 23% indicated that they are required to provide diversity training for employees to maintain accreditation.

### Current Diversity Initiatives

Survey respondents were asked whether their organizations have implemented or were in the process of implementing a diversity initiative intended to make their workplaces more welcoming for new immigrants. A total of 16% of respondents indicated their organization had either implemented or was in the process of implementing this type of initiative. When asked to briefly describe these initiatives, the following comments were offered by respondents:

- *We take part in diversity training when available in the community*
- *We offer a Leadership Program to our workforce surrounding community inclusion, which highlights cultural sensitivities in the workplace. We are trying to partner with organizations that work with immigrants and international students to ensure that they are included in our programs.*
- *Although we don't have any 'diversity' initiatives in place, I think that one thing that every Canadian could do to help new immigrants feel more welcome would be not to make a big deal of the fact that they are foreign by saying stuff like, "oh, you have an accent". Aside from making*

*that person feel different, I have never quite understood the purpose of people saying this. I'm the immigrant, that's why I'm saying it :)*

- *Due to the nature of the services of our agency, we are constantly scrutinizing and upholding standards of inclusion for immigrants, staff diversity, sexual orientation and those with mobility issues or special ergonomic requirements.*

### **Level of Interest in Diversity Training**

Respondents were then asked if they would be interested in diversity training delivered by a professional in the diversity field. A total of 74% of respondents indicated that they would be interested. When asked if they would be willing to pay for this type of training and what they would be willing to pay, responses were as follows:

Would pay up to \$100/employee for this training	3%
Would pay up to \$50/employee for this training	0
Would only access this type of training if it was free	39%
Prefer custom designed diversity training delivered in-house	10%
Would designate an employee to attend the training and assess suitability for other employees	19%
Not sure of our interest at this time	26%
Other-not defined	13%

Even though 74% of respondents indicated that they were interested in diversity training, a limited number would be interested (<40%) only if the training was free of charge. This result was somewhat disappointing, calling into question the long-term sustainability of diversity training in this area, especially if a fee for service training model were implemented.

Those respondents not interested in diversity training were then asked what the reasons were for this response. A summary of responses follows:

- *Not my decision to make, not in management; we already have a diverse staff, but I think it's a great idea as a refresher*
- *Waste of resources; focus in this community should be on affordable housing; we already train our staff equally whether immigrants or not*
- *Wouldn't give much credence to this "professional" facilitator unless he/she is an immigrant themselves*
- *Not an issue in our organization—no concerns at this time*
- *Never had an immigrant apply for employment here*

Although the survey size is very small, the results indicate that there is interest among business and community groups in acquiring workplace diversity training. However, there seems to be no appetite for ongoing, fee-based diversity training at this time; even when offered at no cost to the employer, less than 40% of respondents indicated that they would be interested.

### **Pilot Diversity Workshop**

At its first meeting, the steering committee discussed the options for offering a diversity workshop, one of the key deliverables of our contract for the Welcoming Communities program. We could develop the workshop ourselves, which might be preferable if we are looking at ongoing diversity training. The

second option would be to search out a professional in the diversity field who could deliver this training for this pilot workshop and possibly on an ongoing basis. The first option would require a fair amount of background research, possible training and complete workshop development by NexusBC staff. It is a rather sensitive topic that would require a careful approach. The committee also recognized early in the process that pursuing the second option could be expensive and it could be a problem finding a qualified professional to deliver the training in the Okanagan area; no local consultants had been identified. NexusBC eventually identified two potential consultants who had some expertise and experience with diversity training who were located in the lower Mainland area.

After some initial inquiries, Dr. Roberta Neault of Life Strategies from Aldergrove, BC was identified as a professional in the field of diversity who had done extensive work internationally. She had also created the SEED (Supporting Employers Embracing Diversity) toolkit for ISSBC, a guide designed “to support employers to recruit, train and retain a culturally diverse workforce.” (<http://www.embracingdiversity.ca/introduction.htm> ) Dr. Neault had also lived in the Okanagan for part of her life, so understood that a diversity effort here will be somewhat different than those being implemented in the lower mainland where the lion’s share of immigrants to BC settle initially.

In June 2013 NexusBC staff attended a diversity workshop hosted by the ISSBC and delivered by Dr. Neault to assess the content and the facilitator to determine if this format could be a good fit for our own diversity workshop. With some modification, it was determined that this workshop would work for our purposes. We approached Dr. Neault and after some discussion agreed to a fee that was manageable within our budget to deliver a workplace diversity workshop on November 14, 2013 in Vernon.

Workshop invitations were sent out through the NexusBC and Social Planning Council email databases and through the Chamber of Commerce newsletters for Vernon, Armstrong and Enderby. An invitation to this event was also included in the local newspaper the Vernon Morning Star on November 3 and 8, 2013. A total of 18 participants attended the 3-hour workshop. Dr. Neault delivered information and recollections of her own experiences promoting workplace diversity with opportunities for attendees to participate in some lively table discussions throughout the session. Dr. Neault also left all attendees with numerous resources to help kick-start their own workplace diversity efforts.

### **Workshop Evaluation**

Overall, participants found the workshop informative and many comments were made about the benefit of the table discussions that took place during the session. Participants gave the workshop very good to excellent marks for delivering information about the benefits of embracing workplace diversity and for the tools and strategies presented to guide a workplace diversity initiative. Generally, participants thought that the facilitator, Dr. Neault, was engaging and very professional. One attendee commented that they liked “Roberta’s energy and practical, real life examples and applications.” Many mentioned that they would like to see a follow-up workshop which might present more practical tools around creating a diversity effort in their own workplaces. A summary of the evaluation results is included in Appendix II of this report.

### **Recommendations for a Sustainable Workplace Diversity Model**

Overall, despite our efforts to generate interest and draw participants to the workplace diversity survey and workshop, there was very little interest shown from employers in the Vernon area. There could be some reasons for this, including:

- lack of funds for a significant promotional plan that may have attracted more employers
- inability to reach those employers for whom workplace diversity training would solve a staffing or skills shortage problem
- some employers may already feel that their “best practices” have made their workplaces inclusive for all employees, not just new Canadians; this was a suggestion put forth by an HR practitioner from a large Vernon company and was echoed by some of the survey respondents
- may feel that there is no need for this type of training; nearly 60% of survey respondents had no newcomers to Canada (defined as <10 years in Canada) among their current staff
- employers have not yet felt the reality of an impending skills shortage in their workplaces and therefore do not see the importance of finding innovative ways to secure workplace skills
- employers may see a diversity initiative as something that will be costly to their organizations

Our workshop facilitator Dr. Roberta Neault recalled that when she was involved in early initiatives in promoting workplace diversity in the lower mainland, it was very difficult initially to generate interest among employers; they thought it would cost them time and money and they didn’t see a need for it. Slowly as she was involved in more workshops and a range of initiatives, interest grew and more employers came to understand the benefits of promoting workplace inclusion for newcomers to attract and retain a skilled workforce. It may have been an easier sell in the lower mainland where there are so many newcomers from a multitude of countries. However, she urged patience and to try again, that the word will spread and more employers will start to see the benefit of these initiatives.

I recently attended a presentation about “Recruiting and Retaining Skilled Immigrants in Your Workplace” sponsored by the local BC Human Resources Association. Several of the employer representatives in attendance expressed frustration in their efforts working with federal and provincial programs designed to bring skilled immigrants to Canada; beyond the expected rules and bureaucracy around these programs, the primary frustration for these employers was retaining these now fully trained, skilled immigrants once their obligation to the government programs had ended. Some immigrants, like many BC residents have been tempted away by higher wages in northern BC and Alberta. Also, when they arrive here, their families find that they have difficulty settling here, having little or no support from friends or family from their countries of origin. Aside from Vernon and District Immigrant Services, people who have immigrated here under these government programs tend to experience little community support and a lack of services, initiatives that could make their overall experience in the community more welcoming. As a result some have left the community and either returned to their country of origin or moved to a larger centre where they will find an established community from their country of origin.

Dr. Neault also suggested that unless employers are having difficulty recruiting suitably skilled employees, they are likely to see diversity initiatives as nice to do, but not essential and therefore do not see this as a priority. She suggested that we try to identify employer needs in the community and cited an employer survey that was done about training needs in Aldergrove. In this survey, lack of time and funding for training was often cited as a problem; she suggested that if you could tie a diversity initiative to a similar identified need in Vernon, we may be more likely to attract the attention of employers. As identified in the preceding paragraph, the problem of newcomer retention in the Vernon area is presenting a problem for some employers, and could be one of the employer needs that could help future workplace diversity initiatives gain momentum.

## Appendix I

### Welcoming Communities Employer Survey Results Summary

1. Please tell us how many people your organization employs. In the box on the left, check one of the following options.

Answer Choices	# of Respondents	% of Respondents
I am self-employed and am the only employee	4	10.3%
1-5 employees	5	12.8%
6-20 employees	10	25.6%
21-50 employees	9	23.1%
Over 50 employees	11	28.2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

2. Approximately what percentage of your current workforce would you say has immigrated to Canada in the last 10 years?

Answer Choices	# of Respondents	% of Respondents
0%	22	56.4%
1-5%	11	28.2%
5-10%	2	5.1%
10-20%	1	2.6%
More than 20%	2	5.1%
Not sure	1	2.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

3. Is your organization required to provide diversity training to maintain your accreditation status?

Answer Choices	# of Respondents	% of Respondents
Yes	7	22.6%
No	24	77.4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

4. Do you currently have or are you in the process of implementing organizational initiatives that are intended to create a more welcoming workplace for new immigrants?

Answer Choices	# of Respondents	% of Respondents
Yes	6	16.1%
No	25	83.9%
<b>Total</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

5. If you answered "Yes" to the question above, briefly describe your organization's diversity initiatives in the text box below.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We have taken part in diversity training when available in the community</li> <li>We offer a Leadership Program to our workforce surrounding community inclusion, which highlights</li> </ul>
--

cultural sensitivities in the workplace. We are trying to partner with organizations that work with immigrants and international students to ensure that they are included in our programs.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Although we don't have any 'diversity' initiatives in place, I think that one thing that every Canadian could do to help new immigrants feel more welcome would be not to make a big deal of the fact that they are foreign by saying stuff like, 'oh, you have an accent'. Aside from making that person feel different, I have never quite understood the purpose of people saying this. I'm the immigrant, that's why I'm saying it :)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Due to the nature of the services of our agency, we are constantly scrutinizing and upholding standards of inclusion for immigrants, staff diversity, sexual orientation and those with mobility issues or special ergonomic requirements.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>My organization is involved with Welcoming Communities</li> </ul>

6. Which employee groups would you say these initiatives are targeted to? Place a check mark in the box to the left of all choices that apply.

Answer Choices	# of Respondents	% of Respondents
All employees	9	75.0%
Senior management	0	0.0%
Other management	0	0.0%
Human Resources	0	8.3%
Operations/Production	0	0.0%
Marketing, Sales/Admin.	0	0.0%
Other	3	25.0%

7. If workplace diversity training was offered in your community by a workplace diversity professional, would you be interested in obtaining this type of training for yourself and/or your employees?

Answer Choices	# of Respondents	% of Respondents
Yes	23	74.2%
No	8	25.8%
Total	31	100.0%

8. If you answered "yes" above, what would your organization be willing to pay for a 3-hour workshop designed to assist you in making your workplace more inclusive for new immigrants? Please check the box on the left beside the choice that most closely represents your opinion.

Answer Choices	# of Respondents	% of Respondents
Willing to spend up to \$100 per employee for this type of training	1	3.2%
Willing to spend up to \$50 per employee for this type of training	0	0.0%
Would only access this type of training for our employees if the training was offered free of charge	12	38.7%
Our organization would prefer to custom-design our own diversity workshops	3	9.7%

Our organization would designate a current employee to attend the training to assess its suitability for other employees	6	19.4%
Not sure of our interest at this time	8	25.8%
Other	4	12.9%
Total	34	100.0%

9. If you are not interested in diversity training for your workplace, could you explain why in the box below?
-- I am a front line worker, so I am not able to make this decision. ~ We have a diverse staff, although they have immigrated over 10 years. ~ We do not have a high turn over rate for our current staff positions. ~ We are not able to expand and higher new staff, although we'd like to. Yet as a non profit organization, at this time it is not possible. ~ I think it is a great idea, and believe a refresher would be wonderful :D
-- Waste of resources, the current focus should be on affordable housing for people to live. We train our staff internally and do not do less for immigrants. Vernon simply needs more affordable places for all workers to live.
-- Since I am the only immigrant at this point, and have lived in several other countries apart from my home country, I probably have more of a handle on diversity than the average Canadian (sorry, I know that probably sounds arrogant). I really don't think that a professional would have better advice to give unless of course they are themselves an immigrant. There would be 2 things the person might add to their workshop that I feel personally would go a long way to helping immigrants feel welcome. 1. Tell people not to make a big deal of their 'accent' as if Canadians themselves somehow don't have an accent. 2. Don't correct immigrants if they don't happen to use the same vocabulary as a Canadian, for example if they say football instead of soccer, don't say, 'no, it's soccer' or something like that.
-- does not seem to be an issue in our organization. large corporation that does not have any concerns with this issue
-- This survey focuses on encouraging immigrants to come to the area and training them to work here. What about the number of young people in the area who could benefit from training but can't afford to stay in the area, purchase a house and raise a family because the income levels of significantly lower than in other parts of the country?
-- Retiring...otherwise I would be interested
-- Have never had a new immigrant apply for employment
-- not in management myself so not able to say

## Appendix II Workplace Diversity Workshop Evaluation Summary

Please take a few minutes to answer a these questions about your experience at today's Workplace Diversity workshop.

The following table asks you to rate **how useful** the workplace diversity strategies presented will be in guiding you and your organization in making your workplace more inclusive for newcomers to Canada. Circle the choice that best represents your opinion.

Diversity Strategies Presented	Average Response out of 5
1. Establishing diversity objectives	4.1
2. Get management support	3.8
3. Make diversity part of the organizational strategy	4.2
4. Create an ongoing, comprehensive program	4.1
5. Introduce useful tools across your organization	4.5
6. Facilitate diversity learning opportunities for employees	4.4
7. Keep and share diversity statistics and success stories	4.6
Knowledge Gained and Future Interest	Average Response out of 5
1. Please rate the extent of knowledge gained in this workshop about the <b>benefits</b> of embracing diversity	3.9
2. Please rate the extent of knowledge gained in this workshop about <b>tools and strategies</b> for workplace diversity.	4.1
3. How useful would you say the overall knowledge gained in this workshop will be to you?	3.8
4. Do you believe that you or other colleagues in your organization would be interested in ongoing workplace diversity workshops in future?	4.2

**Please answer the following questions in the space provided below. If needed, feel free to use the back of the page. (comments received)**

### **I liked**

- Sharing individual experiences
- The dialogue that went on
- Good overview, great start, more specifics would be beneficial
- Overall presentation and welcoming feel of presenter
- Style, structure, delivery
- Practical, real life examples and applications
- Roberta's energy, exchange of experiences and stories
- Roberta's knowledge, discussion of learning quadrants, do's and don'ts
- Multicultural flavour and background that Roberta brought to the workshop

### **I learned**

- Great strategies for approaching employers—ie. ROI
- About the toolkit—will check out the ideas about orientation and use at our workplace
- Importance of appreciating differences and getting benefits from them
- Some great concepts
- How to be more open and understanding of diverse groups
- So much in a short time
- Not be so narrow-minded, and that I may be “the other”
- Our Canadian experience isn't the only valid experience

### **The material was**

- A bit too much information for a short time frame
- Great! X 2
- Very general, but good
- Informative
- Very interesting and helpful
- Thoughtful and realistic
- Comprehensive and informative
- Simple, effective explanations and examples
- Clear, relevant
- Excellent

### **The facilitator was**

- Very engaging and knowledgeable
- Excellent
- Super
- Informative and entertaining
- Excellent, would have like the session to last longer

- Great! Really appreciated her style and presentation format; would attend another one of Roberta's sessions
- Very professional
- Engaging and honest
- Easy to listen to
- Very good at explaining her perspectives
- 100%
- Great at sharing her knowledge

**I'd suggest the following changes**

- Provide blank paper for taking notes
- Create a follow-up workshop with more specifics as to employer implementation and resources
- More ideas as to how to deal with owners/management that are less open and sometimes closed to diversity opportunities
- More interactive activities for participants
- More time X 2
- More opportunities to talk in small groups
- More immigrants/underrepresented populations in attendance to share their stories

***On behalf of the Welcoming Communities program, thank you for taking the time to complete this evaluation. Your feedback is appreciated.***