

GOVERNMENT AND PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS ADDRESSING NEEDS

CONVERSATION STARTER



The purpose of this “conversation starter” is to provide VIP stakeholders with some highlights and information on the topic of how governments and public institutions can better address newcomers’ needs.

Key Highlights

The Roles of Governments

Federal Government

- The federal government supports the settlement, resettlement, adaptation and integration of newcomers into Canadian society. All permanent residents are eligible for settlement and integration programs. Programming delivered by third parties includes provincial and municipal governments, school boards and post-secondary institutions, settlement service organization, other nongovernmental actors, and the private sector across the country (Strategic Outcomes 2014, Citizenship and Immigration Canada).
- Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) formally recognizes the importance of engagement at the local level. CIC sees that municipalities play a central role in delivering services that improve the settlement and integration experience for newcomers. Cities have the capacity and expertise already in place, the economic benefits of immigration are most evident at the local level and the attraction of newcomers is only useful if the retention challenge is resolved (Local Immigration Partnership Presentation, 2014, CIC).
- The Local Immigration Partnership initiative funded by CIC is the mechanism through which the Federal Government supports the development of community-based partnerships and planning around the needs of newcomers (Local Immigration Partnership Handbook, 2014, CIC).

Provincial Government

- From 2004 to 2014, under the Canada-British Columbia Immigration Agreement, the B.C. Government was responsible for administering settlement funding to support initiatives aimed at immigrant attraction, selection, admission, retention, and integration (Backgrounder Canada - British Columbia Immigration Agreement 2010, CIC).

- Funding for settlement services and ESL training was repatriated from the provincial government to the federal government in 2014 (BC government press release, September 2014).
- Currently the provincial government continues to support integration services for vulnerable immigrant and refugee groups, as well as non-CIC eligible immigrants and refugee clients.

Municipal Government / City of Vancouver

- The City of Vancouver has undertaken various initiatives and processes to ensure that civic services are responsive to and inclusive of all Vancouver residents including newcomers. To create greater awareness of diversity-related issues, the City has established the Equal Employment Opportunity program to provide training opportunities to staff. Civic grants are available to non-profits that support social and cultural initiatives and a newcomer’s guide to the city has been produced in several languages (Multiculturalism and Local Government in Greater Vancouver, Edgington and Hutton, 2002; Report of the Mayor’s Task Force on Immigration, 2007).
- The Vancouver Mayor’s Working Group on Immigration (MWGI) has been established since 2005 to recommend key policy and program directions to mayor and council regarding immigration issues at the local level. This working group is currently the governance group for the Vancouver Immigration Partnership (VIP) initiative (Memo to Council from the Mayor’s Working Group on Immigration, 2014).
- In 2014, through the Community Services Direct Services Grant program, the City provided a total of \$360,000 to organizations that directly support the integration of immigrant and refugees population in the local communities (Social Policy Report, Community Services Direct Services Grants 2014).

Municipal Services

- In the 2014 budget planning process, Vancouver residents stated that the top services the city delivers are providing parks and green space, access to libraries and recreation facilities, and garbage services (City of Vancouver Service Priorities Research for the 2014 Budget).
- A 2014 survey involving 426 people found that the top five issues for Vancouver residents: transportation, housing, garbage, social services (including community centres, mental health, and schools), and crime (City of Vancouver Service Priorities Research for the 2014 Budget).
- The City's 311 Telephone Information and Referral Services can provide services in 175 languages (City of Vancouver 2014).
- In 2013, city residents identified the three most important Vancouver Police Department programs as being School Liaison Officers, Downtown Eastside foot patrols, and Block Watch (Vancouver Police Community Policing Assessment Report, NRG Research Group 2013).
- The Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation provides a variety of recreation services through civic facilities. Those facilities include community centres, sports fields, courts, golf courses, ice rinks, fitness centres, pools, water parks, marinas, and fitness centres. All venues are open to all residents including newcomers (City of Vancouver website, 2014).
- The Vancouver Public Library provides services dedicated to meeting the lifelong learning, reading and information needs of Vancouver residents. Through initiatives such as the Info Skills Centre and the New to BC partnership, the library helps newcomers connect with programs and services in the community (NewtoBC, Vancouver Public Library, 2014).

Gaps and Challenges

- There is a lack of coordination and cooperation between different levels of government (federal, provincial, and municipal) on immigration and settlement policies (Starting on Solid Ground: The Municipal Role in Immigrant Settlement, Federation of Canadian Municipalities, 2011).
- Municipalities face challenges in providing effective settlement and integration services to newcomers due to

lack of funding from the federal government. Additionally, there is increasing pressure on municipalities to address newcomers' settlement issues such as housing and transportation despite the fact that local governments are not mandated to provide these services (Starting on Solid Ground: The Municipal Role in Immigrant Settlement, Federation of Canadian Municipalities, 2011).

- There is a lack of collaborative efforts between the local government and community partners, such as the immigrant service agencies, to enhance support for social inclusion (Promising Physical Activity Inclusion Practices for Chinese Immigrant Women in Vancouver, Canada, Frisby, 2011).
- Post-secondary institutions limit support for newcomer integration despite the fact that they host international students and offer English as a second language (ESL) programs to newcomers (The Integration and Inclusion of Newcomers in British Columbia, Hiebert and Sherrell, 2009).
- In 2014, the Ministry of Advanced Education reduced funding and base operating grants to BC public post-secondary institutions by approximately \$22 million. This money had previously come from the federal government (BC government press release, September 2014).
- Under the eligibility criteria for settlement services determined by CIC, Canadian citizens and non-permanent residents are not eligible to receive CIC funded settlement services (Funding Guidelines: British Columbia, CIC, 2013).
- During Vancouver's 2014 Engaged City Task Force consultation, it was discovered that many newcomers do not know how the City works. They are unsure as to where to get information and what services and responsibilities fall under the local government (Vancouver Mayor's Engaged City Task Force Report, 2014).
- Almost half of all immigrants (49.5 percent) reported experiencing difficulty accessing housing options. Many immigrants (56 percent) and refugee claimants (76 percent) mentioned language as a major barrier to finding housing. Thirty-nine percent of immigrants and 34 percent of refugees cited family size as another barrier to securing a home (The Profile of Absolute and Relative Homelessness Among Immigrants, Refugees, and Refugee Claimants, Hiebert, Addario and Sherrell, 2005).