

INTERCULTURAL AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

CONVERSATION STARTER



The purpose of this “conversation starter” is to provide VIP stakeholders with key highlights on the topic of intercultural and civic engagement. The information, which includes current statistics and excerpts from relevant literature, provides a starting point for further conversation.

Key Highlights

Social Cohesion and Sense of Belonging

- According to the 2005 Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada, immigrants who arrived in Canada in the last five years and made new friends reported higher levels of health than those that did not 2010 (Health Status and Social Capital of Recent Immigrants in Canada, Zhao, Xue and Gilkinson).
- Immigrants living in large cities in BC have the lowest sense of belonging in western Canada. However, English language proficiency was found to increase sense of belonging (Wilkinson, Bucklashuk, Yi, Chowdhury and Edkins 2014).
- In a 2010 provincial survey that measured attitudes about the cultural diversity and the welcoming nature of BC communities, Business Class immigrants reported the lowest levels of intercultural relationships. Forty-eight percent reported they could effectively communicate with people from other ethnic backgrounds and feel comfortable working for someone with an ethnic background different from their own. In contrast, 75 percent of Family Class immigrants and 80 percent of Skilled Worker Class immigrants (BC Ministry of Jobs, Tourism and Innovation: 2011 Welcoming and Inclusive Communities and Workplaces Program Presentation).
- In 2010, 82.8 percent of Metro Vancouver residents reported that they learn from other cultures (Canadian Council on Learning, 2010).
- The Vancouver Foundation’s 2012 Connections and Engagement survey conducted with 3,841 people across Metro Vancouver found that newcomers, who have lived in Canada five years or less, have smaller networks of close friends. The same study found that 70 percent of recent immigrants who have lived in Canada for five years or less reported that they felt welcomed in their neighbourhoods. It was also revealed that newcomers, aged 25 to 44, and those living in high-rise apartment buildings report-

ed the weakest level of social connectivity (Connections and Engagement Report 2012, Vancouver Foundation).

- In Vancouver’s Engaged City Task Force consultations, some immigrants and newcomers indicated they were not aware how the City works. They were unclear about where to get information and which services were the City’s responsibility (Vancouver Mayor’s Engaged City Task Force Report 2014).
- In a study about the role Vancouver neighborhood houses play in the settlement and integration of immigrants, 82 percent of respondents reported that neighborhood houses helped them make ties with people from other ethnic backgrounds (Bridging Newcomers in the Neighborhood Scale: A Study on Settlement/ Integration Roles and Functions of Neighborhoods Houses in Vancouver, Yan & Lauer 2006).
- Another study found neighbourhood houses played an important role in the settlement process because they provide non-commercial, non-judgmental spaces for people to get involved in their communities (How Strangers Become Neighbours: Constructing Citizenship Through Neighbourhood Community Development, Cavers, Carr and Sandercock, 2007).

Diversity

- Nearly two-thirds of respondents from the Vancouver Foundation’s Connections and Engagement survey felt that while most people are tolerant of different ethnic groups, they nevertheless preferred to be with people in the same ethnic group as themselves. Seventeen percent of survey participants reported that they experienced some form of discrimination in their daily lives (Connections and Engagement Report 2012).
- The 2010 City of Vancouver’s Dialogues Project brought together First Nations, urban Aboriginal, and immigrant communities to strengthen relationships and understanding among the communities. Immigrant participants voiced their desire to seek understanding about Aborig-

inal communities but lacked the necessary information and opportunities for interaction (Vancouver Dialogues, 2011).

Connections: Social and Civic Engagement Among Canadian Immigrants, Scott, Selbee and Reed, 2006).

Volunteering

- A 2012 study revealed that 50 percent of donations made by immigrants were to religious organizations. Immigrants also spent more time volunteering for religious organizations than participating in other types of volunteering activities. As well, the study showed that recent immigrants (39 percent) were as likely to volunteer as long-term immigrants (42 percent). However, compared to the Canadian-born population, immigrants, both recent and long-term, were less likely to volunteer for charitable or non-profit organizations (Giving and Volunteering Among Canada's Immigrants, Thomas, 2012).

Political Participation

- According 2000's National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating, nearly 65 percent of immigrants to Canada indicated that they have voted in the most recent federal, provincial or municipal election. Immigrants who have lived in Canada longer than 26 years were more likely to vote (82 percent) compared to 55 percent of recent immigrants who have lived in Canada for 6 to 15 years. Voting rates among immigrant youth (22 percent) and young adults (43 percent) were very low in comparison to their Canadian-born peers (36 percent and 77 percent, respectively). However, immigrants who came to Canada as young adults, aged 20 to 39, voted in greater numbers than those who had immigrated as older adults (Making

Gaps and Challenges

- The "astronaut family" phenomenon in Vancouver has contributed to immigrant families being separated and isolated in the community, resulting in lack of social and emotional support. The term "astronaut family" refers to situations where immigrant women live in Canada with their children while their husbands work in their home country. People in this group were found to be more vulnerable to feelings of loneliness, helplessness, and boredom (The Flexible Family? Recent Immigrant and "Astronaut" Households in Vancouver, British Columbia, Waters, 2001).
- A 2012 study showed that immigrants who lack a support network of friends and family suffer more from emotional problems (Perceived Discrimination and Health: The Mediating Effect of Social Capital, Hochbaum and Lauer, 2013).
- Immigrants experience challenges in accessing information about volunteering opportunities. Lack of time, lack of fluency in English, cultural issues and economic barriers were identified as barriers to volunteering for immigrants (Building Caring Communities: The Contributions of Immigrant Volunteers, Ashton, Baker and Parandeh, 2006; Making Connections: Social and Civic Engagement among Canadian Immigrants, Scott, Selbee and Reed, 2006).

