



FEDERATION OF  
CALGARY COMMUNITIES

STRONG NEIGHBOURHOODS INITIATIVE



# I LOVE MY NEIGHBOURHOOD

TIPS FOR ENGAGING IMMIGRANT  
RESIDENTS IN NEIGHBOURHOOD  
INITIATIVES



THE CITY OF  
**CALGARY**  
COMMUNITY &  
NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

## 1. ASK YOURSELF SOME HARD QUESTIONS BEFORE TAKING ACTION

- Why do you want to become more inclusive?
- If it's out of a genuine desire to work together with people from diverse cultures and you honestly see the benefits to you and your group, that's the right attitude! However, if you feel pressured to do this from external sources, then it's better to re-evaluate your direction or it may not be the right time to take action
- Are you prepared to become culturally inclusive?
- It's a commitment once people come in the door. Is your group ready to make some changes to the way you normally do business in order to pursue this value? Don't engage and then continue business as usual. This would be more detrimental to a relationship than not making any efforts in the first place.

## 2. FIND OUT WHO YOU ARE TRYING TO ENGAGE

- Demographics/community profiles
- Find out from schools, other residents

## 3. DEFINE WHAT YOU WANT TO ENGAGE FOR

- The word "engage" is foreign even to many Calgarians, and if you add the participation in neighbourhood concept, plus the possible language barrier, no wonder it's complicated! The word engage or outreach may not even exist in some languages.
- It's easier to give people examples of what they could participate in
- You could offer an opportunity to do something concrete, short term or at just an event
- Find out what they are passionate about! If they are already involved in a community project or volunteer for a cause, they could add an aspect of that into their neighbourhood.

## 4. MAKE THE INVITATION PERSONAL AND SPEAK DIRECTLY TO PEOPLE

- When you are promoting an existing initiative (you already have something concrete), add a word or a sentence in a different language. Even the word “welcome” in another language would make new Canadians feel that you are speaking to them and the initiative is also meant for them.
- If you persist in always making an effort to include this, eventually when there’s the opportunity to meet and talk face to face, people would know that you are trying to be culturally inclusive and that’s the first step towards building a relationship.



## 5. CULTURAL ENGAGEMENT HAPPENS ONE AT A TIME

- Don’t attempt to engage every single cultural group at the same time; it’s not only impossible but it’s not desirable either. Begin with whoever is closest and interested: if somebody brings their newly arrived Filipino neighbour, begin by engaging that person and that group.
- Having something translated into a couple of languages is better than not having anything translated at all.
- Making a small effort to outreach to just one or a couple of groups based on who’s closer and available, is an excellent way of being inclusive. The fact that you are not outreaching the rest of the culturally diverse people from the community at this point in time does not mean you are discriminating against them. It just means we all need to begin somewhere! Using this argument for not taking any action is in itself not being inclusive.

## 6. RECRUIT A NEIGHBOUR TO ACT AS A BUDDY

- Like everybody else, it's easier to come out the first time when there's a friend coming with you.
- Always give the option of having a friend come with them even if they don't live in the same neighbourhood.

## 7. DON'T LET FEAR PARALYZE YOU FROM A FIRSTCONTACT

- Every culture and even within a culture there are differences in communication styles. There's no way you can know them all and we all know this. You are not expected to know cultural etiquette before approaching somebody who is from a different culture than yours.
- What matters is that you are friendly, respectful and sensitive (pick up on cues and check them out). This is all that's needed when approaching somebody for the first time.
- Begin with saying, "Hi" and go from there. Greetings will vary and to begin just do what you normally do and what feels comfortable to you. Later, you will learn what people prefer, for instance you can ask them if they prefer a handshake or if they would like to be addressed by first name or by Mr. Mrs., etc.



## 8. EFFORTS TO BRIDGE THE LANGUAGE BARRIER

Summarize, ask, speak directly, don't use slang, but do use visual aids

- Successful communication is not always about having an interpreter. There are a lot of things we can all do to communicate better
- In meetings or even one-on-one conversations, summarize main points, go over decisions and make it a point to ask directly if there are any questions.
- When things are explained in a group and people are expected to make a decision or act on something; don't assume that people understood the message. This is because when learning a second language as an adult, it takes extraordinary amount of concentration to pay attention to follow a conversation to understand what's being said and it's normal as well as needed, for people to take "small mental breaks" in the middle of a conversation. It's always a good idea to check individually with them.
- For example, the group decides to go out on a team building outing and each person is to register with so and so by such and such date. The complete message may not have been understood; for instance if they may know that a trip is planned but don't know where, the time, what food to bring if any, etc. In this case, it may be needed to check after the meeting to see if they are coming and take the opportunity to check if they have all the details.
- It's possible that they may not know the cultural norms which are sometimes implied in a message, such as it's known that the onus of a response is on people who take the initiative to RSVP with so and so instead of waiting to be asked if they are going.
- In meetings, it would be helpful to write on a blackboard the action items, the key decisions made.
- Sometimes it's best to avoid the use of slang but other times it's best to use slang and right after use another word or sentence to explain it.

## 9. MAKE IT A POINT TO APPROACH NEW PEOPLE

- When you suspect that somebody might be from another cultural background and they are new in a group, you can approach them and engage in friendly conversation. The worst possible thing is for an immigrant person to take the risk of coming out and end up being ignored. Be friendly, introduce them to somebody else
- Explain about the event, initiative; just because they are there doesn't mean they understand what it's all about.

## 10. IT'S DESIRABLE TO MAKE UNPLANNED MISTAKES

- Every mistake is a sign that you are on the way to a new insight, new knowledge and an opportunity to build a better relationship with that person or group.
- Mistakes are the only way to know what not to do next time and acquire cultural competency. How else are we going to know what works if we don't know what doesn't?

## 11. MAKE PARTICIPATION EASY AND ACCESSIBLE

Think of ways in which you can support that person by offering help with any of the following:

- childcare
- food
- transportation
- language (When appropriate and as possible, offer interpretation and/or translation of written materials.)



## 12. MAKE YOUR SPACE WELCOMING AND INCLUSIVE

- Images that convey appreciation for diversity
- Consider a welcome poster in different languages
- For Holidays use greetings displays and images that convey multicultural and multi faith inclusion calendar, greeting cards.

## 13. CONSIDER MAKING ADAPTATIONS TO YOUR WAY OF WORKING IN ORDER TO ACCOMMODATE SPECIAL NEEDS

- This is the most important sign that you are really open to work with people of diverse cultures
- Immigrants and New Canadians make infinite numbers of both small and significant adaptations in their daily routine to fit into the Canadian culture. When they see that we are making a small effort to meet them along the way, it's a sure sign that we are on the way to cultural appreciation and inclusiveness
- For example, you may want to consider becoming more inclusive by having a progressive fee to an event (different rates depending on need). You may choose to use your discretionary powers to make a small decision that would facilitate an inclusive idea needing immediate response without having to go through the "proper procedure" of waiting until next month's meeting to get a group decision. In this case, the latter would act as an exclusionary barrier.



## WHAT IS THE FEDERATION?

We are a not-for-profit support organization for over 200 not for profits in Calgary including 150 community associations. Our mission has been to improve neighbourhood life in Calgary by providing services and programs that create, support and enhance vital and representative community based associations. We provide our members with services such as urban planning, safety resources member services, communications, volunteer recognition, and much more!

### ABOUT THE STRONG NEIGHBOURHOODS INITIATIVE

The Strong Neighbourhoods Initiative (SNI) is a 10-year program by The City of Calgary's Community & Neighbourhood Services (CNS). This initiative uses a community development approach, with selected Calgary neighbourhoods, to increase social inclusion and reduce poverty. Residents are encouraged to actively seek ways to work with The City to create the kind of neighbourhood everyone wants to move to. The City's community social workers and community recreation coordinators work with residents to help them network, organize, advocate and mobilize for sustainable, social change at the neighbourhood-level.

For more information in the SNI communities visit:  
[www.calgary.ca/strongneighbourhoods](http://www.calgary.ca/strongneighbourhoods).

### FOR MORE INFORMATION:

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