

Unsettling Settlement: Creating Relationships between Newcomers and Indigenous Peoples In the Greater Saskatoon Area

*A brief resource guide for community-based organizations serving new
Canadians in the Great Saskatoon Area*

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Introduction

Multiculturalism welcomes and integrates diverse peoples from around the world into Canada's political, social, economic, and cultural spheres (Chung 2010). The distinct challenges that newcomers face in the greater Saskatoon area are exemplified through contexts of Indigenous¹ and settler relationships through colonialization (MacDonald 2014). Newcomer and Indigenous organizations and have the opportunity to play an important role as facilitators of indigenized community programming. Integrating newcomers requires new community members to recognize, respect, and understand the historical and contemporary contexts in which we all benefit. Facilitating meaningful, well-rounded, and culturally-driven programming to engage newcomer and Indigenous communities responsibly is an approach which requires an intentional unsettlement—continually reflecting upon personal, workplace, and community orientations on Indigenous lands. The hope is to strengthen the understandings of the similarities and distinctiveness between each group to move forward in building strong and connected communities.

This strategy gathers resources for community-based organizations wishing to work toward unsettling the psychological and physical spaces they operate within. It provides tools for organizations and individuals in the newcomer services sector to reflect on areas to improve cultural awareness and services for Indigenous and newcomer people. This guide should be dynamic in nature, and resources should be updated periodically as political, economic, and cultural notions of Indigenous and newcomer peoples evolve and services in the area change.

Organizations can only speak on behalf themselves and are only able to hold themselves accountable by engaging with the recommendations of this strategy. Calling upon other organizations or groups should only occur after the organization looking to extend outward is aware of the cultural and political realities they are attempting to engage with. There is no obligation for any external group to facilitate partnership. Moving beyond cultural tokenism requires constant reflection—especially in contexts where Indigenous relationships are of concern.

A Note on Social Context

It is important to recognize that the context of newcomer settlement support services operate within neo-colonial contexts that require active unlearning to navigate. Both Indigenous peoples and newcomers are marginalized in mainstream society and face similar experiences of racism and oppression (Bohaker and Iacovetta 2009). However, little effective inter-group communication at the organizational level exists and attitudes of mistrust, miscommunication, and prejudice are prevalent (Ghorayshi 2010). Furthermore, successful newcomer integration is evaluated between the majority host and newcomer populations— leaving little room for Indigenous perspectives in social or institutional spheres of settlement (MacDonald 2014).

¹ 'Indigenous identity' includes persons who are First Nations (North American Indian), Métis or Inuk (Inuit) and/or those who are Registered or Treaty Indians (that is, registered under the Indian Act of Canada) and/or those who have membership in a First Nation or Indian band. Aboriginal peoples of Canada are defined in the Constitution Act, 1982, section 35 (2) as including the Indian, Inuit and Métis peoples of Canada.

Guiding Framework: Creating Cultural Safety

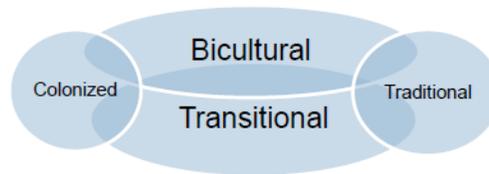
The framework designed by the Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health of Ottawa (WCAHO) seeks to combat the negative experiences of Aboriginal people in the health care system. These lessons are widely applicable and can be implemented to foster cultural safety in the newcomer services sector. The cultural safety model works towards the goal of self-reflection by understanding the consecutive processes of building personal and organizational safety, inclusive of both Indigenous and newcomer people. This process reflects an attempt to create an understanding between two equally participating parties. WCAHO writes, “[cultural safety] analyzes, power imbalances, institutional discrimination, colonization, and colonial relationships (pg. 3).” Moving from personal safety towards organizational safety is key to substantiating Indigenous cultural integrity within newcomer services. These practices should be integrated into programming as implicit points of education in organizations where Indigenous perspectives are offered a role.

Cultural Awareness

a) Identity:

Indigenous identity is complex and diverse between the major representative groups (First Nations, Inuit, Metis). It is also characterized by variation within each group. Aboriginal identity is centred within colonial Canadian institutions and environments.

Figure 1) Variation in connection to traditional culture (WCAHO 2014)



b) History and Context:

Understanding treaties, lands claims, and socio-economic conditions is important given that they relate to the historical relationships between Indigenous peoples and the Canadian state— A relationship built on mistrust of mainstream systems and institutions. There should be opportunities to suppress stereotypes through experiences and connections with Aboriginal peoples, which can be achieved through site visits to both high-functioning and stressed communities (WCAHO 2014).

Cultural Sensitivity:

A deliberate focus on the strengths and abundance of Indigenous and newcomer cultures in physical space grants a place for honour and celebration. Proactive acknowledgement of Indigenous significance in newcomer services is a critical step towards creating a positive tone for external relations. Employment, volunteer positions, and visible representation create an atmosphere that moves beyond the tokenisms of each party—allowing for Indigenous perspectives to influence newcomer programming and for newcomers to incorporate their experiences from a place of mutual inclusivity (WCAHO 2014).

Cultural Competency:

The cultural competency phase focuses on the quality of actions that occur in the workplace. Here, a movement beyond recognition and respect for difference is important. Newcomer organizations should build skills to reciprocate the quality and flow of relationships between their organization and Indigenous partners. These actions require an ability to exchange ideas verbally and non-verbally, a knowledge of when to listen and when to speak, and understanding the value of open-ended questioning in checking one's own beliefs and knowledge systems (WCAHO 2014). Note that newcomer and Indigenous organizations have the opportunity to play a role in the rebuilding of tenuous relationships. Authenticity is the best policy when engaging in relations subject to sensitive topics such as shared experiences of colonization, displacement, and contemporary political divisiveness. WCAHO writes succinctly, "Relationships exist in the realm of communication (pg. 13)." Developing this skill through education, physical presence, and ongoing relations is of key importance to newcomer work. Acknowledging when external assistance is required to facilitate meaningful relations is also a critical skill to be developed.

Cultural Safety:

The most successful human service providers can recognize and create spaces where trust is continually created between those within and across organizations (WCAHO 2014). An example of this suggests that organizations respond to the experiences of others by expressing empathy and a willingness to advocate on behalf of the oppressed in situations where it is typical to respond to the experiences of others by saying, 'I understand.' The latter statement suggests that the distinct lived experiences of others can be deduced into simplified notions of culture—though well-intentioned. The former encourages validity and maintains that the listener can self-reflect on the information provided to integrate into future relations.

Step-By-Step Strategy

Part 1: Reflection

The first step in understanding how to make newcomer spaces inclusive of Indigenous experiences and vice versa is by assessing one's personal beliefs and practices. The following assessment has been adapted from the Indigenous working group of the BC Association of Social Workers (BCASW). The document aims to establish a toolkit for reconciliation and decolonization at the individual, workplace, and community levels. Staff, board, and clientele within an organization will find the following prompts useful in orienting their knowledges and practices with Indigenous peoples and lands. These questions are inclusive of the newcomer experience as well as those who have origins within Canada (BCASW 2016).



A. Self-Location:

What is your personal and family history that brought you to this land?

Are you aware of the history of the land you live and work on? What sources have you drawn on for this information?

Were your family or ancestors impacted by colonization, oppression, structural violence, or war?

What is your understanding of the impacts of colonial violence against Indigenous/newcomer communities?

What is your understanding of the roles of integration services?

What does reconciliation mean to you? What does reconciliation look like to you? (BCASW 2016)

Part B: Practice Framework:

What guides your practice framework? What traditional teachings, systems of knowledge, or worldviews, inform your own philosophy of practice?

Have you had the opportunity to learn Indigenous/newcomer teachings? Are you able to practice these teachings in your profession/personal life? Why or why not?

What is the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous members of your personal and professional community?

What are some things you are doing or can do in the future, to decolonize your personal practice? (BCASW 2016)



Part C: Workplace Assessment

What could reconciliation look like for your organization?

What are some examples of specific measures taken by your organization to address these inequalities?

What role can your organization play in the community to facilitate reconciliation?

Does your organization currently have a relationship with First Nations organizations or communities in your local area?

Are they formal or informal relationships?

How do both parties benefit from this relationship?

Do your employees have a good understanding and knowledge of Indigenous histories, diversity of Indigenous cultures and the historical impact of colonization?

Do your employees demonstrate respect for Indigenous/newcomer cultures and communities?

Does your organization have an over or under-representation of Indigenous/newcomer people in terms of clients and staff? If there is under-representation, what is being done to address it?

Is the physical space welcoming for Indigenous/newcomer clients and community partners?

In what ways is your organization supportive of reconciliation discussions with staff?

How accessible are these conversations to clients and community members?

How is your organization taking the discussion further than staff training?

How can your organizations show leadership and best practice? (BCASW 2016)

Unsettling Environmental Design

These environmental changes can be applied to any organization aiming to build relationships between Indigenous and newcomer communities. The core purpose of unsettling environmental design is to create a culturally safe space as welcoming to all peoples where dialogue can be facilitated.

1. Signage & Infrastructure

Land Acknowledgement:

Felicia Garcia writes, “An Indigenous land or territorial acknowledgement is a statement that recognizes the Indigenous peoples who have been dispossessed from the homelands and territories which an institution was built and currently occupies and operates in” (2018).

It is an ethical obligation that newcomer services make use of land acknowledgements as educational, political, social, and cultural gestures of solidarity. Land acknowledgement should be used in the following spaces:

- i) All outgoing emails on behalf of the organization
- ii) Websites—including the organization's social media accounts
- iii) As an introduction to staff and board meetings
- iv) Office space—as visible and welcoming to guests upon arrival
- v) As an opening statement at community gathering and social events

Example #1: we would like to begin by acknowledging that the land on which we gather is Treaty 6 territory, the traditional territory of Cree Peoples, and on the homeland of the Métis Nation.

Example #2: we gather on Treaty 6 territory and the traditional homeland of the Métis peoples. We pay our respects to the specific peoples of this territory: the Nehiyawak, Nahkawe, Dakota, Lakota, Dene, and the Metis people, and we reaffirm our relations with them.

Provision of Literature and Resources:

Create a resource database that provides information on the intersections and distinctiveness between Indigenous and newcomer cultures. Offer a well-rounded selection of portable literature for clients, employees, and board members to educate on topics of reconciliation, treaty relationships, histories, services, thought-pieces, and art as they pertain to both Indigenous and newcomer cultures. Literature resources should be on physical display at office spaces, outreach events, and available digitally on websites and social media platforms.

2. Policies & Procedures

Strengthen Indicators of Development:

Studies on the indicators of development point to loosely defined measures of reconciliation and multiculturalism (Hartmann and Gerteis 2005; McKone 2015). The qualitative nature of the methodology used by Canadian local and national groups lack concrete analytical grounding. Organizations should seek to develop the indicators of their programming as few initiatives across the province are adequately evaluated for their impact—without formal impact reports, many initiatives contribute to the trend of single-event programming that lacks comprehensive development of relationships over time (MCoS 2015). It may be necessary at this point to consult with Indigenous partners on how to best incorporate culturally relevant indicators of success.

Hiring for Representation:

In concert with the provisions of Employment Act, community-serving organizations should consider hiring self-identified Indigenous (First Nations, Metis, or Inuit) persons and visible minorities (persons not born in Canada) as active team members specifically in spheres where programming and outreach services are concerned. The critical insight and lived experiences of Indigenous and newcomer employees are fundamental to a complex understanding of multiculturalism, intercultural relations and socio-economic nuances in Saskatchewan.

Board Member Representation:

Organizations should seek to establish permanent Indigenous and newcomer positions on their board of representatives. Indigenous and newcomer organizations, community members, and governing bodies are critical shareholders that need to be meaningfully represented to externally promote an organization's mission, strategy, and goals cohesively.

Extended Partnership Framework:

Create a working list of Indigenous-based organizations as a contact resource. Moving forward with the knowledge of services offered in the greater Saskatoon area will be an asset in creating lasting relationships between newcomer and Indigenous partners. Develop an understanding of how newcomer organizations can benefit one another to promote a two-way relationship.

Develop an Evaluation Process, including Benchmark Data and Short-term and Long-term

Impacts:

Most of the work being done centres around short-term projects that lack a collaborative effort between Indigenous and newcomer organizations over time (MCoS 2015). Short-term projects are rarely evaluated for effectiveness using Indigenous understanding of community-building and partnership. Cookie-cutter approaches to building community have been short-sighted and are not flexible enough to enable the complexity of such relationships to be understood by either party (MCoS 2015).

3. Programming

Experiential Learning Opportunities for Staff and Clients:

Allow for the staff and clientele of the organization to participate in experiential learning opportunities. These opportunities can take place within the organization itself, Indigenous organizations, or external to both. It is important to demonstrate the complexity of Indigenous and newcomer identities by engaging both the most fortunate and to-be-developed aspects of their realities. Opportunities to build upon existing events in a cumulative manner will emphasize the aspects of growth, long-term relationship building, and self-reflection found in the cultural safety model.

Two-Way Education:

It is imperative that all members of an organization—staff and board members alike, receive education on the spirit and intent of the treaty relationships. Each team member should be able to critically engage with their individual and collective position as a member of the Treaty territory. There are a variety of resources, workshops, exercises, and engagement activities available from Indigenous organizations in Saskatchewan that will be provided below. An ongoing and deliberate process that seeks to unsettle the organization from within is a necessary and dynamic action within the greater community. Those working in the Indigenous services sector should be invited to participate in educational opportunities on the diverse experiences of newcomers as a gesture of two-way inclusion.

Key Considerations

Universality

Expecting any single individual to respond to or represent all Indigenous/newcomer issues, concerns, or cultures is an unreasonable and uncomfortable practice. This practice discourages participants from self-identifying and presenting their entirety for fear of misrepresentation (WCAHO 2014). Be sure to manage expectations on what types of knowledge individuals can contribute and speak to on behalf of your organization.

Indigenous and newcomer peoples exist across varying geographies in Canada and are not confined to any particular space. Specifically, the experiences of urban, rural, and northern Indigenous people are as diverse as any relationship between two distinct ethnic groups.

Terminology

Terminology can be difficult. The UBC Indigenous Arts Foundation insists this should not inhibit the creation of important dialogue between or within groups. It is best to proceed with honest intentions and refer to the literature for up-to-date definitions.

When in doubt—ask. Crucially, it is important to acknowledge that many contemporary terms are political in nature and are embedded within broader colonial systems of oppression. Terminology is personal to each individual.

Refer to The UBS Indigenous Arts Foundation's guide on terminology for best practices: <https://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/terminology/>

Accessible Communications

Across languages, literacy levels, and abilities, and the encouragement to incorporate Indigenous/newcomer languages when possible.

Resources

Online Workshops and Guidance

- [Kairos Blanket Exercise](#)
- [Kitchen Table Dialogue on Reconciliation](#)
- [Office of the Treaty Commissioner](#)
- [Saskatchewan Polytechnic](#)
- [IDI Cultural Competency](#)
- [ayisiyiniwak: A Communications Guide](#)
- [Bridges Final Report 2015](#)
- [Indigenous Peoples of Canada: A Guide for Newcomers](#)
- [Truth and Reconciliation Commission](#)
- [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#)
- [Whose Land is it Anyway?](#)
- [Terminology](#)

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