

CREATING IMMIGRANT FRIENDLY CITIES

A PROGRAM FOR TORONTO

APRIL 2014



CURRENT CITY STRATEGIES FOR IMMIGRANTS

Toronto has long been recognized as a leader in creating effective multicultural communities. As a City, we have set our sights on being a great place for people from around the world to come and settle and become a full part of the community we share. We know, both instinctively and officially, that diversity is our strength. Toronto should be a model of inclusion.

In service of those values, Toronto has set out useful goals and objectives. We make commitments through a number of bodies – including the City, NGOs, the Board of Trade, and others – to the kind of integration and inclusion processes and outcomes that would serve newcomers well. The City has confirmed those goals in the Toronto Newcomer Strategy, passed in 2013 by City Council, which sets out objectives for settlement and prosperity for immigrant communities.

Implementation, however, is less consistent. Many good models and practices exist. Offering settlement programs that are integrated into schools and libraries is beneficial, but excluding them from recreation centres and child care facilities is hard to explain. Tailoring programs to newcomers in Public Health but not in social services raises questions about the comprehensiveness of the City's commitment to change. Allowing flexibility for immigrant entrepreneurship like the Scadding Court market shows an appropriate level of creativity, but refusing similar accommodation in other programs reinforces the sense of inflexibility on issues that can become systemic barriers. Declaring Toronto a Sanctuary City was a bold and admirable move, but audits show that many people are still being declined. Buses still make far more special stops at churches on Sundays than at mosques on Fridays.

Toronto doesn't have to be that way. Inclusion means this city, in all its aspects, belongs to all of us, jointly. And we're just not there.

We have a great context in this city to work with. Neighbourhoods rich in diversity form reassuring enclaves for newcomers but are embedded in a larger environments that can offer support and engagement. Through pilots like the Toronto Newcomer Initiative, NGOs have successfully partnered with City divisions to deliver joint programs, share skills and connections, and combine their efforts. Pursuing sanctuary city policies raises great hopes, and exploring voting rights for all residents indicates an openness that is encouraging. The current work being done by the City – developing an implementation plan for the Toronto Newcomer Strategy – is an opportunity to capitalize on those opportunities and address the challenges we face.

Over the last year, community groups, local agencies, cultural and faith groups, advocates, and labour leaders have met to talk about these opportunities. Through conversations, research, and collective consideration, key aspects of an immigrant friendly city have emerged. These draw on leadership from cities around the world, where municipal leaders are already forging new policies to emerge as immigrant friendly havens, but also from local practices and great ideas generated right here in Toronto. The content of these discussions and research has been compiled to provide guidance in developing the implementation plan for the Toronto Newcomer Strategy, promoting new ideas, and encouraging the pursuit of good ideas already underway at City Hall.

A FUNDAMENTAL COMMITMENT

Residents, NGOs, and advocates have raised the need for Toronto to commit to developing and maintaining an inclusive society where interactions between newcomers and receiving communities are dynamic and mutually beneficial. In Chicago, Mayor Rham Emmanuel promises to create “the most immigrant friendly city.” In Europe, cities are signing onto the EURO CITIES Integrating Cities Charter that promises to ensure equal access, engagement, and integration for migrant communities in policy development and service delivery and to reflect each city’s diversity in its services, employment opportunities, and economic activities.

Toronto’s diverse communities seek a similar commitment. The City of Toronto has a sustainability charter, food security charter, a housing charter, and a health charter. A fundamental commitment to immigrants should be part of the policy infrastructure in our city. It should recognize that linguistic access is the most significant barrier to immigrant integration across most areas. A commitment by the City should at least meet the standards of the European Charter of Integrating Cities, where rights and responsibilities are shared, and where it is understood that all our communities will adapt together, accommodate each other, and change in the process of integration and inclusion. As the world’s most diverse community, Toronto should also consider setting its own bar.

RECOMMENDATION 1

That the City of Toronto adopt a charter committing it to equity in access to service, inclusion in society, and the enjoyment of economic and social benefits by all residents.

COMPREHENSIVE IMMIGRANT-FRIENDLY SERVICE DELIVERY STRATEGIES ACROSS ALL DIVISIONS

ACCESSING SERVICES

Cities around the world are tackling the issue of services for immigrants. Immigrant friendly cities are not those that simply make bold policy statements or roll out a welcome mat; they are places that create coordinated and comprehensive plans to change the way they do business so that it works for everyone. Inclusion is the watchword for communities that work for everyone and accessing services is one part of that.

Immigrant communities in Toronto know that. In exploring immigrant friendly city strategies, they have called for coordinated, planned approaches to change that ensure that immigrants, new and established, can access the full range of services the city offers its residents. They don’t restrict this expectation to services designed specifically for newcomers. Making sure that there is housing support for someone just off the plane or establishing an office for newcomer issues is only a small part of the puzzle. Systematically assessing all services, from recreation to building inspections, to ensure that they are accessible and appropriate for the whole community they are meant to serve is a bigger job. That’s why, in places like San Francisco, every division with over 30 staff needs a plan to be accessible to local immigrant communities.

Whether it’s creating recreation programs that meet the needs of South Asian communities or ensuring that Municipal Licensing and Standards can be accessed by Spanish-speaking tenants as easily as English-speaking ones, a full range of services should be available to all of Toronto. This will require exploration of issues in many areas. Are the planning regulations for places of worship

designed in ways that appropriately regulate churches but are less relevant for mosques and gurdwaras? Can immigrant entrepreneurs find and use economic development tools as easily as Canadian-born business owners?

An immigrant-friendly city makes a coordinated effort, in all divisions, to look at systemic barriers that impede immigrants' access to city services and address them. An immigrant-friendly city looks at the rules, processes, and practices, and determines where they need to be more flexible, more accommodating, or simply redesigned to make sure everyone in Toronto is included in what this City has to offer.

RECOMMENDATION 2

That the City of Toronto develop and apply meaningful equity evaluation tools to systematically review services and programs to ensure they are accessible to all of Toronto's residents.

RECOMMENDATION 3

That City divisions develop, publish, and widely distribute services plans, describing how they will identify and address barriers to immigrant access to services.

DESIGNING AND IMPLEMENTING SERVICES

Real access relies on creating services that meet people's real needs. Toronto's nutrition programs keep an eye on halal restrictions, and our recreation programs don't assume everyone plays baseball, because we listened to feedback from Muslim communities and cricket players. Engaging communities in planning services helps ensure that the needs of each new wave of immigration are incorporated into the way we design and implement our services and that service offerings have something relevant for all our residents. Diverse programming also benefits a broader range of service users. The swim program aimed at creating safe spaces for Muslim women turned out to be a popular service for women of all backgrounds who seek that environment. When we look at our service strategies through an equity lens, the benefits can indeed be very broad.

Needs assessments, or community consultations, are the first steps in planning and should include an opportunity for communities to identify actionable goals and measurable outcomes for which the city is accountable. The knowledge in our newcomer communities can enable Toronto to address each emerging change and guide our staff to successful strategies for service development and delivery.

RECOMMENDATION 4

That City divisions create systematic, inclusive, and equitable processes for engaging diverse communities in service planning, implementation, and evaluation as well as delivery, and engage them in the basic planning processes and customer service standardization processes for every division and corporations as a whole.

COMMUNICATING

An immigrant-friendly city also provides information that is accessible to everyone. People from many different language groups encounter problems with sewers, enrol their children in swimming lessons, and seek affordable housing. That's why cities like Baltimore and Washington require

divisions to map out a plan to address language barriers and devote staff to ensure that it works. Policies include ensuring that materials are published in all the major languages of the city, that calls to 311 or any other branch of the City can be connected to translation services so all staff can help any resident who needs their services, and that public meetings in areas with multilingual populations get interpretation.

RECOMMENDATION 5

That all city divisions develop and publish language plans that address linguistic access issues and assign accountability for delivering on that plan to the general manager of the division, with regular reports being made available to the public and key stakeholders.

RECOMMENDATION 6

That the City adopt, as corporate policy, the elimination of language barriers, and create corporate strategies to support divisions in achieving that goal.

OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT

While accessing services is part of the process of inclusion, immigrants and newcomers aren't simply consumers of services; they, like all of us, are partners in building a city we all share. One key component of an inclusive city is ensuring that the City literally speaks its citizens' language when members of the public seek services or participate in public processes; but waiting for people to reach out to the City, instead of reaching out to them, overlooks the realities of new communities and the obligations we have to each other. Our public health system found ways to reach out to new parents; other services can reach new Torontonians. Cities across the United States and Europe are developing active inclusion and engagement policies to address the many factors that prevent newcomers from fully engaging in their cities. From the initial process of welcoming newcomers by orienting and informing them about our systems and services, through the ongoing engagement of growing communities and the creation of mutually accommodating strategies for inclusion, cities are actively reaching out to their newest members and facilitating everyone's participation in the community. That's why Chicago not only created welcome stations and civic engagement classes where new immigrants can access multiple services at convenient sites, but also implemented an action plan that identified specific, concrete, and measurable outcomes, which could demonstrate that they are moving the needle on immigrant engagement. It's also why New York is using their cable TV show to provide information to immigrants and why the Office of New Bostonians pursues systematic outreach efforts to connect new communities to city infrastructure. Toronto already has valuable capacity in this area. We have a diverse and voluminous multicultural media. A rich array of NGO's, community organizations, faith groups, and cultural organizations play an important role in helping newcomers acclimatize and settle and link them to resources, information, and opportunities. But the demand for these inclusion strategies exceeds the supply, and many of these supports are limited by reliance on volunteer labour, unstable funding, and inconsistent information. A stable, reliable, and ongoing effort depends on strong and reliable partnerships to make them effective. By working together, cities and their community partners can make that happen.

RECOMMENDATION 7

That the City support partnerships between municipal staff and NGOs, community organizations, and cultural groups as well as to assist municipal staff in their systematic

outreach to connect with immigrant communities, inform and include newcomers, and link new Torontonians to the systems and supports they need.

RECOMMENDATION 8

That the City use a variety of strategies, such as creating visible “welcome stations,” implementing outreach processes, developing partnerships, and establishing measurable goals and targets for engagement in order to reach, involve, and include immigrants in the full range of city processes.

RECOMMENDATION 9

That the City support municipal staff in forging partnerships with NGOs, community organizations, and cultural groups to enhance municipal efforts to facilitate civic engagement and system navigation.

IMPLEMENTATION, MEASUREMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

The best laid plans mean little without the implementation strategies they need to succeed. Urban inclusion strategies sometimes suffer from lofty goals but weak delivery. That’s why cities like Tilburg, Germany, and Dayton, Ohio provide staff and volunteer training programs to ensure that everyone representing their City knows how to engage new communities in ways that are respectful and culturally appropriate. That’s also why Chicago tracks the performance of each division on its’ engagement of immigrants. They track which areas of city service newcomers are able to use, which ones are still inaccessible, and sets targets for improvement.

But improvement comes from sound planning and real accountability. That’s why cities like Washington DC put a senior manager in each division in charge of ensuring that their access plans are well devised, established, and working effectively. It is why cities like Houston created the Mayor’s Office of International Communities and why Munich created an Office of Intercultural Work to provide institutional leadership and support for this work. Toronto can learn from these examples. Toronto can employ its already established Toronto Newcomer Office to provide leadership and guidance in these areas and draw on its Office of Equity and Diversity to enhance effective systems. These Offices can support leaders in each City division to ensure appropriate training, adequate planning, clear measurement, and real accountability for delivering services that will be accessible to all the people of Toronto.

RECOMMENDATION 10

That the City provide training to all staff and volunteers who deal directly with the public, integrating equity training, cultural appropriateness, anti-oppression and anti-racism into training for customer service.

RECOMMENDATION 11

That the City use its’ systems for tracking, measuring, and monitoring customer service to assess the creation of divisional plans that support access and inclusion for all communities, assess the implementation of those plans, and measurable outcomes, such as the rate of access to City services by immigrants, or the inclusion of immigrants in City processes. That evaluation systems include gathering and assessing disaggregated data in order to understand the specific ways in which race, gender, language, ability, culture, and citizenship status

impede access to services and to provide for monitoring and accountability on these aspects of customer service.

RECOMMENDATION 12

That the general manager in each division will be accountable for ensuring the development, implementation, measuring, and monitoring of immigrant-friendly divisional policies.

RECOMMENDATION 13

That the Toronto Newcomer Office and Office of Equity and Diversity be staffed and mandated to provide guidance, direction, and monitoring to support all divisions in meeting these goals.

THE CITY AS POLICY MAKER, PARTNER, AND CONVENOR

Toronto is more than just a jumble of service delivery mechanisms. The leaders of our City do more than just ensure that the garbage gets picked up and recreation centres open on time. The City of Toronto creates policies and develops strategies for ensuring that our city grows and prospers as it should. We draw together leaders from all sectors, we partner with community groups and non-profits, and we work with communities from all parts of our City to convene, promote, and facilitate activities that benefit the people who live and work here.

Those strategies, policies, and plans should reflect all aspects of our City. New communities should be as engaged in planning our economic development and our social cohesion as old ones. New communities should be partners and participants in our Library Board and Health Board, our Police Commission, and our Transit Commission. Policy considerations should take new communities into account and should reflect those communities in the membership of the committees and working groups that undertake them. Public processes should be designed around new models that reach new communities as much as they are around old models that reach more established groups. The classic New England Town Hall is a great way to talk to a lot of people, but not everyone is from New England, and not everyone is comfortable, familiar, and able to participate in that form of public discourse. Community consultations should use processes that are accessible and appropriate to all of our communities, whether they are for zoning and development issues, park planning, or tax policy, and our practices should reflect that. That's why Dayton, Ohio offers civic engagement classes to new communities and why Toronto's own Maytree Foundation gathers charitable funds to help new residents get the information, opportunities, and support they need to join the boards and bodies that lead our City. And it is why cities like Philadelphia and Boston have policies that support more effective consultation with immigrant communities on key issues.

RECOMMENDATION 14

That Toronto establish active strategies for ensuring that all communities are represented in the bodies that govern our city services. That Toronto create policies for our residents by partnering with organizations like the Maytree Foundation, which facilitate the participation of all communities.

RECOMMENDATION 15

That the City review community consultation procedures to ensure that processes designed

to gain resident input are as oriented toward the needs and practices of new communities as they are to more established ones.

Though settlement deeply affects the success of the City, it is not a task that can be managed by City Hall. The Federal Government has jurisdictional responsibility. NGOs, community groups, faith groups, and cultural organizations also play a critical role. While the City's active and continued involvement in settlement is valuable, it should occur in partnership with those who play key roles in this work. Toronto's leadership in the ongoing work of Local Immigration Partnerships, and the Newcomer Leadership Table show how important a role municipal leadership can play. Ongoing work in this area, in partnership with the Government of Canada and community partners, is important and can expand in valuable ways. Local Immigration Partnerships, local faith groups, and cultural groups can provide guidance on new policy at the City level, identify challenges newcomers face in accessing city services, and provide feedback on the implementation of the Newcomer Strategy.

RECOMMENDATION 16

That the City broaden its partnership with the newcomer serving community to include not only settlement organizations and Local Immigration Partnerships, but also faith groups and cultural groups, in order to provide ongoing feedback on newcomer and immigrant issues.

City service sites and city organizations can also play a growing role in facilitating settlement. Already libraries partner with NGOs to provide Library Settlement Partnerships, using Toronto's network of libraries as gateways to settlement supports. The Toronto Newcomer Initiative, Public Health Programs, Recreation Centres, and Child Care Centres engage in similar partnerships, though few of those initiatives have been sustained. There are opportunities for partnership with faith groups and cultural organizations, which, as research indicates, play an enormous role in guiding newcomers through the settlement process. The City could continue to actively build these partnerships to make every door the right door for new Torontonians to find the services and supports that facilitate successful settlement.

RECOMMENDATION 17

That programs that support city staff in partnering with settlement services be facilitated and expanded, and that they be extended to include faith groups and cultural groups interested in sustainable partnership.

EMPLOYMENT AND PURCHASING

City Hall plays an enormous role in the economy of Toronto. The City employs tens of thousands of staff, purchases millions of dollars' worth of goods and services, and regulates thousands of businesses. As a big player in the local economy, Toronto can also be a big player in how the economy affects the many different communities that make up our City. That capacity for economic change should not exclude newcomers and immigrant owned businesses. Purchasing policy and employment process should be designed to avoid any unintentional barriers for newcomer businesses and immigrant applicants. Employment equity should be a central tenet of our human resources policies. Purchasing, jobs, and training can help create new opportunities and facilitate development of capacity in immigrant communities. These tasks never override our duty to the taxpayers to spend their money fairly and well, but initiatives in cities like Chicago and Boston have

shown that thoughtful planning can enable cities to leverage the public purse to provide real opportunities for newcomer communities while getting great value for the public's resources.

Implementing supplier diversity clauses in municipal contracts and procurement policies can create more equitable opportunities for immigrant entrepreneurship, while promoting cultural and gender equality through public appointments to the city's agencies, boards, and commissions contributes to more representative decision-making.

RECOMMENDATION 18

That purchasing, employment and financial processes incorporate social procurement policies that identify and facilitate opportunities to leverage municipal purchasing power to facilitate the development of our diverse work force and our multicultural business community.

REGULATORY ROLES

Immigrant entrepreneurs are a growing segment of our economy, and small business is increasingly the source of income for new communities. Immigrant business owners often identify the maze of regulations as a barrier to participation in the economy and face hurdles which are hard for new micro businesses to clear as they seek to get established. Restrictions on operating businesses from home, constraints on business sizes, and location, even for very small operations, are often identified as hampering the success of new entrants into the economy. That's why places like Chicago created mobile economic development teams to reach out to immigrant businesses and help them learn the ropes, and why Boston adjusted its zoning rules in areas where small immigrant business are incubating. Toronto can learn from those examples but also from our own successes. The City found ways to accommodate micro-businesses in the tiny shipping container market at Scadding Court, and it can find new ways to tweak regulations to make more opportunities.

RECOMMENDATION 19

That Toronto look at its business regulation framework to identify ways to accommodate micro-business, promote economic development opportunities for new communities, and provide new entrepreneurs with the information they need to navigate our systems.

ADVOCACY

Toronto's civic leaders speak for an important part of the national community. The voices of those leaders matter in public discourse and in government debate. Toronto should use its capacity for advocacy to serve the communities that make up our City. Restrictions on family reunification, increased reliance on temporary foreign workers over permanent residents, and increases in detention and deportation of refugee claimants and asylum seekers all adversely affect people who live and work in our City and undermine the quality of life of members of our community. Toronto could and should speak out strongly and persistently to support those communities and give guidance to our federal counterparts. While these matters are unmistakably the jurisdiction of the Government of Canada, their impacts are also local and personal. We are representatives of the nation's largest community of immigrants and we should have a voice in the debate if not a seat at the decision making table.

RECOMMENDATION 20

That Toronto advocate strongly with the federal government on immigration policy and the implementation of immigration laws and practices that protect the wellbeing of Toronto residents.

RECOMMENDATION 21

That Toronto actively communicate its advocacy efforts to the communities they are meant to support.

RECOMMENDATION 22

That Toronto, as the representative of the nation's largest community of immigrants, continue to seek as large a place as possible at policy making tables affecting immigration and settlement issues.

CONCLUSION

These ideas and recommendations represent the result of discussion across advocacy groups, service providers, and community members eager to see a successful, effective, and comprehensive implementation of the Toronto Newcomer strategy.

This work has been made possible by the contributions of CUPE Local 79, Public Interest, and research done by the Maytree Foundation's Cities of Migration Project, and the input of dozens of community groups, immigrant serving organizations and cultural groups across the City, including Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture, Council of Agencies Serving South Asians, Jihad Aliweiwi, Scadding Court Community Centre, Social Planning Toronto, South Asian Women's Centre, St. Stephen's Community House, Toronto South Local Immigration Partnership, and Urban Alliance on Race Relations.