



# **Best Practises Steering and Operations Committees**

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**Note:** The term Steering Committee also refers to Operations Committee. SSPO refers to Settlement Service Provider Agency. Advisory Committee refers to Local Advisory Committee and to Community Support Committee.



## **Steering Committee**

### **The Role of Steering Committees**

The Steering Committees shall:

- Allocate SWs to schools
- provide direction to the project about programs that meet the needs of the clients
- facilitate the work of a community advisory committee
- give direction to the coordinator
- make recommendations to the settlement agency about SW job descriptions
- provide reports to the school board, the settlement agency and advisory committee on the work of the project
- maintain minutes of their decisions
- annually review the work of the project
- ensure participation of project participants in the committee
- establish protocols for communication with individual schools and for school based planning
- documentation of the role of project partners in partnership agreements
- create and update operational guidelines that reflect the objectives and work of the project
- establish protocols for the SWs to access the names and phone numbers of clients
- plan summer programs
- establish client service protocols
- advocate for the needs of newcomer clients
- establish protocols for communication with school staff
- establish protocols for conflict resolution
- reviewing school based facilities that support contact with clients such as appropriate meeting space and access to the internet and telephones

### **Operational Guidelines**

Each project shall develop and maintain operational guidelines that outline;

- the expected outcomes
- eligibility for services
- the nature of the service
- how clients access the service
- referrals to other services
- how SWs are allocated to schools
- training
- roles and responsibilities of partners and project committees



- evaluation
- conflict resolution
- a mechanism for reviewing and changing the guidelines
- how to amend the guidelines

#### **Composition of the Steering Committee**

The steering committee shall be made up of representatives from the SSPO, the School Boards and CIC. The Provincial Coordinator shall be invited to all steering committee meetings (except Toronto). Each organization will identify its own representatives.

#### **Steering Committee Meetings**

The steering committee shall meet on a regular basis, not less than once a school term, to review the progress of the project and plan the ongoing development of the delivery of settlement services to clients.

The committee shall maintain operational guidelines that reflect the objectives and operation of the project and review them annually.

To ensure an effective committee process, the committee shall;

- establish rules of order for meetings and how decisions are made
- endeavour to make all decisions by consensus (see below)
- establish the required attendance for quorum
- create a process for replacing non-participants
- maintain a list of participants, titles, addresses, phone numbers and email addresses
- establish meeting dates at the beginning of each school year
- establish a mechanism for agenda setting and timelines for distributing the agenda to committee members
- agree on a meeting chairperson or co-chairs
- keep minutes that record the decisions of the committee, the Issue/Discussion/Action table format is a useful model for recording minutes, written reports shall be attached to the minutes
- within one week of the meeting, the minutes shall be reviewed by the chair of the committee and sent to committee members within two weeks of the meeting



### Consensus Decision Making

When making decisions the steering committee shall use the consensus technique.

1. Decisions are adopted when all participants consent to the results of the discussion about the original proposal.
2. People who do not agree with a proposal are responsible for expressing their concerns.
3. No decision is adopted until there is resolution of every concern. When concerns remain after discussion, individuals can agree to disagree by acknowledging that they have unresolved concerns, but consent to the proposal anyway and allow it to be adopted.
4. Therefore, reaching consensus does not assume that everyone must be in complete agreement.

### Developing Consensus

The following steps are useful when trying to come to consensus on difficult issues.

Introduction	Step	Facilitator Comments
Introduction	Clarify the process	We are going to consider a proposal, there will be a presentation of the proposal and a chance to ask clarifying questions. We will have general discussion and then opportunities to identify and resolve concerns and finally a discussion on what we should decide.
	Presentation of Proposal and questions to clarify the presentation	Consider what is being proposed, are there any questions about the proposal?
Broad Open Discussion	Checking for agreement on the intent	Is the intent of the proposal a good idea, do not allow one concern to become the focus, to get back to broad discussion you might record a concern on chart paper, if there is consensus on the intent, proceed to identifying concerns

Identify Concerns	Open discussion of concerns	Brainstorming, encourage participants to express their concerns, discourage comments which judge, defend or resolve concerns. Record all concerns. If there are a lot of concerns, it might be useful to group them.
Resolve Concerns	Discuss each concern	Review each concern and consider how to resolve it. As concerns are addressed the group should be feel the developing consensus or lack thereof.
Closure	Declare the result	There are various ways to resolve the discussion; consensus, send to committee, adopt the proposal with outstanding concerns recorded, declare the proposal blocked.

Adapted from On Conflict and Consensus a handbook on Formal Consensus Decision Making – C.T. Butler and Amy Rothstein <http://www.consensus.net>

### **Allocation of SWs**

The steering committee is responsible for the allocation of the settlement workers to schools.

Each Board of Education shall provide a list of the number of newcomers in each school in the last three years (October report or its equivalent) to the steering committee. The list should identify the number of newcomers in each of the last three years and a total of the number of newcomers in those years. It would be helpful if the list included country of birth and home language.

When starting a new program, adding new schools or making significant adjustments to the allocation of SWs, the committee shall consider the following;

- The number of newly arrived students in each school
- A balance between elementary and secondary schools. Because secondary schools are usually larger than elementary schools, the committee may wish to create two lists of schools and allocate an appropriate percentage of workers to each panel.
- Allocating more SW days a week to schools with higher numbers of newly arrived students
- A system for identifying schools with large numbers of families with first year settlement needs. The committee may wish to consider the impact of poverty on settlement and review socio-economic statistics on school communities. Some Boards have developed protocols for allocating additional resources to high needs communities (LOI Grant).
- Alternate ways of delivering service to communities that have existing settlement



supports. Can certain communities receive information about the SWIS project at school registration or at a reception centre and be served on an on call basis.

- How to ensure that SWs spend enough time in schools to build a relationship and understanding of their role in schools.

## **Establishing and Maintaining a Framework for the Project in Schools**

### **Provision of Facilities in Schools**

The steering committee shall establish guidelines for the provision of appropriate work space and access to the telephone and the internet in each school. If a school is unable to provide the appropriate facilities, the steering committee may choose to decline service to that school or offer alternative forms of service.

### **Provision of Client Contact Information**

The purpose of the SWIS program is to reach newcomers as soon as possible after they arrive in a community. To contact clients, SWs must receive the names and phone numbers of newly registered students and their families on a timely and regular basis.

The steering committee shall establish a process for the provision of client contact information on a regular basis to SWs. There are several possible models.

- The School Board can assume responsibility for directing schools to provide the client contact information and communicate that expectation to schools.
- When registering new students, schools routinely request consent from parents for many activities. To minimize the number of signatures required from parents, the School Board could prepare an omnibus release form that is given to parents/guardians for signature. The consent for release of client contact information could be listed among the various consents required by schools (field trips, media release etc). A project brochure might be included in registration package.

Several projects have tried “stand alone” client contact release forms which are sent home to clients or are not part of the registration process. These strategies have not been successful.

### **Ensuring Confidentiality of Client Contact Information**

Steering committees shall ensure that SWs understand that all client contact information is confidential, that it must be kept in a safe and secure place and only be used for contacting clients about settlement issues.



## **Communication With Schools**

Effective communication with school staff is key to the success of SWIS projects. The steering committee shall facilitate good communication by;

- Recommending to the School Boards a process for communicating with Principal/Vice-Principals who are new to a participating school
- Promoting communication with teachers and other school staff
- Establishing guidelines for regular meetings between principals/vice-principals or contact people and SWs to review and plan the work of the SW
- Developing a clear statement of the role of the SW, how they relate to other Board staff and guidelines for SWs when dealing with conflict

### **Communicating with Principal/Vice-Principals Who Are New to A Participating School**

On a regular basis, Boards move or assign new administrators to schools. The steering committee shall consider how to orient new administrators to the needs of the newly arrived, the role of SWs in their schools and how to support them.

For new administrators the steering committee shall propose a process to the school board that outlines how the administrator should support the program. Possible strategies are;

- a letter to principals/vice-principals new to a SWIS school that explains how the administrator can support the program,
- a meeting for principals/vice-principals new to a school about the program,
- a telephone call from a Board representative on the steering committee or from a principal who is familiar with the program.

### **Communicating with School Staff**

School staff should be aware of the services provided by SWs and how to access them. In their ongoing relationship with newcomer families, school staff will find it useful to understand the settlement process and how to best communicate with newcomer families about education issues.

The committee shall develop and promote strategies for communicating with school staff (including support staff) , such as;

- brochures
- regular presentations to school staff about the settlement process and the role of the SW
- presentations about newcomers' expectations of schools
- presentations about the challenges of specific communities, i.e. refugees, war affected communities, separated families, settlement needs of youth
- meetings for office administrators
- distributing the project newsletter





- demographic data about their school from school, Board or OTIS

### **Providing Feedback and Planning the Work of SWs**

To support the partnership at the individual school level, in schools with regularly scheduled service, the committee shall establish guidelines for meetings between principals/vice-principals or contact persons and SWs to review and plan the work of the SW.

The committee shall consider;

- the kind of client service (OTIS) data that should be provided to administrators
- how SWs will obtain demographic information about each school community
- the frequency of meetings between the SW and the principal or contact persons
- how it can support work in individual schools by coordinating supports to schools and SWs

### **Training**

On a regular basis, the committee shall consider the training needs of the SWs and help the coordinator, as needed, to identify Board, settlement sector and community training resources such as meeting space, resource persons and materials.

### **Advisory Committees**

Each program shall establish a community advisory committee that is comprised of stakeholders in the settlement and education sectors, the director of the Settlement Service Provider Organization (SSPO), the SWIS program coordinator (and CIC representatives?). The committee shall meet at least twice annually.

The committee shall:

- Receive reports from the Steering Committee on the operation of the program and future plans
- Provide ongoing support for the program
- Make recommendations regarding the operation of the program
- Provide a forum for feedback

The Advisory Committee shall elect its own chair, who shall establish the meeting dates in consultation with the committee participants. Minutes shall be kept of all meetings and be distributed within three weeks of each meeting.

A process shall be developed for identifying participants in the Advisory Committee and for



facilitating community ownership of the committee.

The deliberations of the Advisory Committee shall be reported to the Steering Committee by the committee chair.

## **Summer Program**

### **Guidelines**

The committee shall consider and approve a summer program that;

- is in partnership with community based services that are used by newcomers such as libraries, health centres, and recreation centres
- provides information and referral services to newcomers
- allows for the organization of group sessions
- gives workers time to update and develop resources
- develops and strengthens relationships with other community services

### **Summer Planning**

In early spring, a planning session shall be held to review the experience of the summer program and to make recommendations for the upcoming summer program. Invitations shall be extended to potential partners to attend the session. All aspects of the program such as outreach, feedback from clients and roles and responsibilities shall be considered. A mechanism for the committee shall receive a report from the coordinator outlining a summer program plan. When considering the summer program, representatives of the service delivery sites should be invited to participate in steering committee meetings.

The committee shall;

- establish timelines for planning and implementation
- ensure that the appropriate facilities are provided to support the work of the SW
- ensure that training is organized to meet the needs of each program site
- confirm arrangements with summer partners in a partnership agreement
- make a plan for promoting the summer program to existing clients

## **Annual Overview**

SWIS programs are dynamic and constantly refining its services to meet the needs of its clients.

To improve the effectiveness of their program, on an annual basis, each steering committee may consider the following key issues:



- how contact information is obtained
- Provision of facilities for SWs
- Adjustments to the allocation of SWs to schools
- Are SWs working within the boundaries of their role
- How the program supports other settlement sector services
- The input of the Advisory Committee
- The operational guidelines
- Partner policies that impact SWs
- Meeting the needs of secondary school parents
- Working with youth
- Emerging needs and trends

The preparation of relevant reports by the coordinator for each of the above issues will make the review process an effective and efficient way to evaluate the program and plan for the coming year(s).

The committee may wish to invite Summer Partners to participate in this meeting.

The committee may wish to allocate the topics over all or part of the school year and to take note of the CIC funding cycle when considering issues with financial implications.

#### **Contacting Parents – How Contact Information is Obtained**

The day to day work of the SW is to systematically contact newly arrived clients in the participating school communities. SWs rely on schools to provide them with the names and phone numbers of newly registered newcomer students.

On an annual basis, steering committees should review the effectiveness of the system for obtaining newcomers' contact information. If necessary, the committee shall consider an alternate means of collecting newcomer contact data.

Possible strategies are:

- Including the permission to release on the same forms that schools use for media, field trip, photo...
- Creating an operational procedure that guides school staff to request a signature on the permission form
- Where appropriate, making the permission forms part of the reception centre procedures.

The committee shall also review the strategies for contacting secondary school students.



### **Facilitating Work with Youth**

The settlement needs of elementary students are best met through their parents, but the most effective way to deliver settlement services to youth is through direct service to them.

The challenges of adolescence are greatly compounded by the stresses of settlement. Immigrant youth feel pulled in opposite directions, between what seems to be irreconcilable values or cultures, and a desire to adapt and fit in their new homeland.

A common phrase in the evaluations of the SWIS projects was that SWs should "...avoid the temptation to get involved in running programs". Unfortunately, in many communities there are few programs that meet the unique needs of newly arrived youth. Therefore, it is important that SWs maximize contact with the existing programs.

On an annual basis the steering committee should review how the settlement needs of newcomer youth are being met and how to promote links between newly arrived youth and existing youth programs.

The committee should consider

- **Linking Schools with Community Based Programs**  
Rather than trying to draw newcomer youth to their program site, community based programs may be interested in using the school as the site for their activities.

SWs should work closely with the principal/vice principal or contact person to consider the advantages and implications of linking schools with community based programs.

Potential service providers who might be interested in linking more closely with schools are;

Public health, parks and recreation, libraries, literacy programs, health centres, employment centres, community service agencies, & other settlement programs.

The steering committee shall consider the best strategies for linking schools with community based programs, a plan for communicating with schools and the best starting points.

- **Participation in School Activities**  
School administrators and staff have the primary responsibility to ensure equitable access to school activities. SWs can assist them in their responsibility by;
  - Providing information about newcomer communities
  - Providing advice about how to communicate with newcomer youth



- Sharing successful school based strategies for involving newcomer youth in school activities, such as clubs, sports, leadership

#### **Provision of Facilities for the SW**

On an annual basis the steering committee should review the provision of facilities for the SW; access to a telephone, an appropriate space to meet with clients, internet access and a secure place to keep records.

When it is not possible for a school to provide all of the facilities, the committee shall consider the appropriateness of alternate arrangements and/or whether there are sufficient facilities for the SW to continue in that school.

The committee should consider if SWs are able to access school space in the evening for group sessions.

#### **Adjustment to the Allocation of Settlement Workers**

On an annual basis the steering committee should review the allocation of settlement workers to schools and if necessary make adjustments to the choice of schools and the amount of time scheduled per school. If the committee is making substantial changes to the allocation plan, it may wish to consider the allocation criteria described in the section Allocation of Settlement Workers to Schools When Starting a New Program or Making Significant Adjustments to the Allocating of SWs.

To facilitate the discussion, each Board shall provide committee members with the number of newly arrived students for each school in the Board. The ESL report to the ministry of education is the best document for this discussion because it reflects a snapshot of student numbers on the same date each year.

If the committee decides to adjust the allocation of workers to meet unmet first year settlement needs, the committee shall consider socio-economic statistics for specific school communities.

#### **Are Workers Meeting a Broad Range of Settlement Needs**

Newly arrived families will have many school related settlement needs but because SWs are based in schools, a large number of their services will be related to education issues. However, the committee shall consider how to ensure that SWs are meeting the other settlement needs of their clients.

The committee shall review the OTIS data and the percentage of non-education related services. If necessary, the committee shall consider strategies to boost that percentage by initiating services related to other settlement issues, such as;



- Income tax in February
- Student employment in the spring
- Registration for summer programs in the spring
- Parenting and youth issues
- Changes to immigration policies
- Accessing accreditation services
- Accessing housing programs
- Vision and hearing
- Finding a family doctor

**How the SWs Support Other Community Based Settlement Services**

The SWIS program is an entry point to the broad range of settlement services that are offered by community agencies.

The committee shall consider the number of referrals to community agencies and how their representatives are involved in supporting school based settlement work such as group sessions.

In some communities, there may not be appropriate settlement services for all ethno-cultural communities. The committee may wish to document the need for particular services and advise the appropriate funders.

**The Input of the Community Advisory Committee**

The committee shall consider the input and recommendations of the Community Advisory Committee and if appropriate, include a response in the annual report.

**The Operational Guidelines**

Each project shall have operational guidelines that reflect the objectives and protocols of the project.

The committee shall review the guidelines and amend them as necessary.

**Partner Policies that Impact SWs**

Because SWs work in schools but are employed by settlement agencies, they need to be aware of the policies of all project partners, e.g. confidentiality, reporting of child abuse.



On an annual basis the committee shall consider any changes to partner policies that may affect SWs.

### **Meeting the Needs of Secondary School Parents and Guardians**

In secondary schools, SWs must meet the unique needs of students and their parents and guardians. Typically, secondary school parents and guardians do not visit the school very often and the SW must devise other outreach strategies. Contact is sometimes complicated by the dynamics of students' relationship with their parents and guardians.

The committee shall consider the number of secondary school parent clients, successful strategies for reaching them and how it can support SWs in that aspect of their role.

## **Annual Report**

The committee shall prepare and distribute an annual report outlining the activities of the project and future directions.

The report should include:

- a summary of OTIS data including the number of families who received service
- percentage of families who received service in their first year, second or third year in Canada
- average number of new clients per month
- estimated percentage of newcomers in each school community who received service
- a breakdown of client service areas
- a description of the clients
- number of referrals on non-education issues
- new directions for the coming year



## **Appendix**

### **Allocation of Settlement Workers to Schools When Starting a New Program or Making Significant Adjustments to the Allocating of SWs**

#### **Allocation Model: Region Wide or Targeted Service Delivery**

The steering committee shall decide if it is going to meet the needs of a limited number of targeted schools, offer the service to all schools in the participating Board(s) or offer a combination of both.

The committee should consider;

- the size of the school board region. If the region is very large, SWs may spend a considerable amount of time traveling between schools.
- the concentration of newcomers in schools. In some communities there are many schools with lower numbers of newcomers. In other communities there are some schools with very high numbers of newcomers.
- how SWs will develop a relationship and communicate with school staff. An effective SW is linked to school staff and understands local school issues. A worker who spends a short periods of time in many schools may have a hard time communicating with and developing a relationship with school staff.
- if services can be delivered on an on-call or by regular SW service. In some communities it might be more appropriate to have regular service; in others, it might be better to call the SW as needed.

#### **Allocation Criteria**

To ensure that the SWIS service is allocated equally to the schools with the greatest number of newly arrived and to clients with first year settlement needs, the committee shall develop a formula or rationale for how worker time is allocated. The committee should consider;

#### **Determining the Number of Newcomer Students by School**

In October of each year, for the ministry of education, school boards produce a report of the number of students who are new to Canada in each school. Each Board shall make the report available to committee members to determine the allocation of SWs. Committee members shall keep the report confidential.

The report should be in excel format and have the following headings;

- Name of School
- Type of school – elementary or secondary
- Total number of students





- Number of students who arrived in each of the last three school years
- Total number of students who arrived in the last three school years
- Percentage of total number of students who arrived in the last three school year (optional)

### **Maintaining a Balance Between Elementary and Secondary Schools**

Because of their size, secondary schools tend to have more newcomer students than elementary schools. If allocation was based on a combined list of elementary and secondary schools, it is possible that the secondary schools would be allocated proportionately more SW time than elementary schools.

To ensure an appropriate balance, the committee should:

- determine what percentage of staff time should be allocated to each panel
- determine how many staff should be allocated to each panel
- sort the excel file so that separate lists are created for elementary and secondary schools
- apply the staff to the schools on each list

### **How Unmet First Year Settlement Needs are Met**

Families in some communities take a longer time to settle. Often this is because of challenges such as poverty, war trauma and other factors. Committees should consider how to take these factors into account in an equitable way when allocating SWs. The committee shall ensure that the needs of schools with the highest number of newly arrived are also met.

Some school boards have developed formulas or other means for equitably distributing their Learning Opportunity Grant.\* Others have identified schools with particular needs and given them additional resources. Committees may wish to use similar criteria.

Once these schools are identified, the committee may wish to rank such schools more highly than schools with similar numbers of newcomers but fewer challenges.



**Allocating More SW Time to Schools with Higher Numbers**

The committee shall consider the number of newly arrived students in each school and allocate SW time accordingly. Schools with considerably more newcomers should get more time.

	<b>Number of Newly Arrived</b>	<b>SW Days per Week</b>
Red School	300	4
Blue School	150	3
Green School	75	2
Brown School	75	2
White School	75	2

**The Access of Some Communities to Existing Settlement Services**

SWIS is an outreach program to provide initial settlement services to communities. If it is determined that due to socio-economic or other reasons that families in a school community are already accessing settlement services, then the committee may decide to not allocate a SW to that school.

**Moving SWs Between Schools with Lower Numbers of Newcomers**

Over a year or less, a SW might reach all the newly arrived families in a school community. The committee shall consider whether it is appropriate to move the SW to another school with lower numbers of newcomers and meet the needs of new and existing families in the first school on an on-call basis.

