Social Engagement and Integration

Learning from others to inform approaches to integration

Summary of Discussions

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Overview

Citizenship and Immigration Canada is responsible for the development of policies and programs to support the integration and full participation of newcomers in all aspects of Canadian society. We understand the process of integration to be one characterized by long-term mutual accommodation between an individual and society. As an all-encompassing and evolving process, integration goes beyond the sphere of any one institution and is rather the domain of society as a whole. The role of various actors, the elements we consider key to success and the measurement of integration are complicated and multi-faceted. One of the most complicated aspects relates to the social sphere and the extent to which social engagement contributes to the integration process.

In endeavouring to prompt dialogue and debate on this issue, the Integration Branch of Citizenship and Immigration Canada held workshops in regional centres across the country on the role of social engagement in integration. The objectives of these discussions included: (a) to clarify and clearly articulate foundational principles that should guide policy and programming approaches to social engagement; (b) to identify successful models of intervention and avoid potential pitfalls in this area; and (c) to strengthen collaboration with key partners. Workshops were held in Calgary, Halifax, Vancouver and Toronto with over two hundred participants in attendance. Participants included representatives from all levels of government, public institutions, academics, immigrant-serving organizations, community groups, and concerned private citizens. We also held a meeting with academics in Montreal to discuss ongoing research in the province on these topics. In Montreal, Winnipeg and Vancouver, we had the opportunity to meet with provincial representatives to discuss approaches to social engagement and integration and means for collaboration.

Discussions followed the themes of key concepts, collaboration, and measurement, and were guided by the following questions:

I. Key Concepts
  ➢ If our key concepts have contested definitions, how do we work move forward to achieve desired outcomes?
  ➢ Is social engagement a means to an end or an end in itself in the integration process? Is it a process in itself?
  ➢ What are appropriate concepts to ground policies related to social engagement: empowerment? barrier removal? participation?

II. Collaboration
  ➢ What are the roles and responsibilities of the various players in this area?
  ➢ What are best practices to support collaboration and coordination between the various players and stakeholders?

III. Measurement
  ➢ What can we measure and which indicators are best suited to comparison across diverse contexts?
  ➢ What are the challenges in measuring behaviours and attitudes?
  ➢ Is measurement of barriers to social engagement important?

The ideas explored in these sessions have strengthened our understanding of social engagement and its role in integration. We are grateful to all participants for their contributions to the sessions. The results of the discussions will serve as a fundamental basis for future work in this area by the Integration Branch.

Calgary Workshop

March 19, 2008

For CIC, settlement refers to the short-term transitional issues faced by newcomers, while integration is understood to be an ongoing process of mutual accommodation between an individual and society. Successful integration is defined as the ability to contribute, free of barriers, to every dimension of Canadian life – economic, social, cultural and political.

The Integration Branch is exploring how social engagement and community connections contribute to the integration process. We have begun this exploration by consulting key players on this topic, including academics, immigrant service provider organisations, and representatives from all levels of government. In order to frame the discussion, we identified several key questions for examination: What are the appropriate concepts upon which to ground a policy of social engagement as it relates to integration? What is the federal role in social engagement? What are the challenges in measuring social engagement? In what follows, a summary of roundtable discussions with key partners and stakeholders on these questions is outlined.

Defining Key Concepts

It was widely agreed that the development of policy and outcomes associated with the social aspects of integration must be grounded in clearly defined terminology. Participants suggested that we need to first define ideal outcomes and then determine a way to narrow the gap between the current context and that ideal. We were encouraged to learn from existing and historical difficulties with engagement policies and programmes when defining key ideas.

A central concept examined during roundtable discussions was that of **empowerment**. Some participants defined this as a process by which individuals and groups equip themselves with the knowledge, skills and resources they need in order to change and improve the quality of their own lives and communities. In its broadest sense, empowerment was defined as the expansion of freedom of choice and action, a sense of personal agency. It was determined that a sense of empowerment may come from within or it may be facilitated and supported through external agencies, but that it may be a combination of both that is truly required. In the integration process, empowerment was understood to be a process through which stakeholders influence and share control over policies and programs, and the decisions and resources which affect them. All participants agreed that newcomers and the communities to which they attach had an important role in participating in, negotiating with, influencing, and holding accountable institutions that claimed a role in the settlement and integration process.

In discussing key terms relevant to the theme of social engagement, **community** was one concept that was addressed at length. Concern was expressed that definitions of community often create a category of 'other.' Some expressed support for a geographic definition of community. It was posited that identifying with a geographic place was important in that it fills a void created when newcomers leave home and supports participation at a wider level. Others felt that community is more of a fluid concept, with individuals defining their own communities of belonging based on shifting concepts of identity. When one identity comes to the forefront, others fade temporarily to the background. Any definition of community must capture the concept of multiplicity of identities. Out of this discussion, contributors encouraged us to be mindful about the effect our definitions of community and identity would have on a definition of Canadian citizenship and to seek to contribute a broader sense of national belonging.

Clearly, the central concept requiring more clarity in terms of a definition is '**social engagement**' itself. Participants variously described social engagement as a process, a means and an end. As **a process**, social engagement was seen to occur at various degrees across the integration experience. It was a marker of stages of integration that a newcomer might pass through. We were reminded that levels of engagement may change over time and that we needed to clearly attach our policies to a time continuum. We were also encouraged to accept that individuals engaged differently – some as leaders, some as

participants, some as mere followers and still others as principled non-participants. In understanding how engagement might differ for particular individuals and groups we were directed to an examination of notions of inclusion, exclusion, and seclusion, which contributors argued ought to be carefully differentiated when moving forward with a policy approach. Participants also felt it important that we have a clear understanding of the various groups a newcomer might engage with in the integration process, and pressed us to include a wide-range of communities when considering whether or not an individual was socially engaged – including family groups, ethno-cultural communities, linguistic groups, religious groups and national groups, for example.

When conceived of as **an end** in itself, social engagement was defined by some as the freedom individuals possess to engage socially in a self-directed way that met their individual needs and desires. In this way, social engagement was about flexibility, available options and a reduction of barriers. Viewed as an end, to engage in a social way was in and of itself an indicator of integration linked to a psychological dimension of the newcomer experience. In this way, it is more than a mere process marking a passage of time and an acclimatization process: to be socially engaged is a way in which individuals achieve recognition and respect. The sphere in which this recognition and respect is achieved will vary depending on the individual and will take on different levels of importance in their integration goals and experiences.

For others, the end social engagement represented was focused more on the extent to which a community became an inclusive and welcoming place for newcomers to connect. It was then the goal of social engagement policies to reduce barriers and create and support spaces of attachment. An overall approach to integration and social engagement needs to consider participation, a stronger focus on creating welcoming communities, and viewing newcomers for what they bring to a community, as opposed to focussing on their deficits.

Finally, when considered as **a means**, social engagement was viewed as a pre-cursor to other ends, such as employment and language learning. Social engagement was seen as important only in the context of the other benefits that it brought. The majority of participants did not subscribe to this view.

The Federal Role

Participants put forward a range of ideas concerning the roles and responsibilities of various actors within an approach to social engagement and integration. When considering the role of the federal government, suggested responsibilities included: clarifying key concepts; articulating and communicating a national vision for integration; driving institutional change; enabling our partners in their efforts; and providing spaces for collaboration. These roles and responsibilities will be discussed in more detail below.

Participants were strongly supportive of the role of the federal government in taking a stand on particular definitions, regardless of whether the terms in question were contested or difficult to determine. It was argued that it was a federal responsibility to set parameters and provide leadership in defining a clear policy framework rooted within reliable research and evidence on this topic. The provision of such definitions by the federal government ought to support the larger vision of Canadian citizenship we are aiming to achieve. The **communication of a vision** and the role of immigration and integration within that vision would necessitate an education component, a certain degree of 'social marketing,' to inform and persuade communities of the economic, social and human benefits of immigration. Communication from the federal government could include preparing communities to accept and welcome new arrivals, educating employers about benefits of employing newcomers, and debunking myths held about foreign credentials and experience. Municipal participants supported the notion that the federal government acting as a champion for the benefits of immigration would support their efforts at a local level, encouraging excitement and involvement from host communities. Many provinces and municipalities engage in such practices already and may be able to share information on the benefits and challenges of undertaking such a role.

Another component of the federal role offered by participants involved **institutional change** to support the social engagement of newcomers. Participants argued that in order to ensure equity and demonstrate

that diversity is of value, we need to change institutions, not newcomers. Newcomers should participate and be included in this change, informing institutions on how to better target and serve them. Municipalities shared a number of best practices to illustrate how to best engage newcomer communities to bring a more diverse perspective to the table and ensure that the specific needs and barriers newcomers experience at an institutional level were addressed. It was widely acknowledged that institutional change is difficult, requiring resources, incentives, political will and strong leadership. It was noted that the cultural competency of public institutions is often a barrier to social integration and that as a federal institution that we ought to demonstrate a commitment to institutional change that would extend to the type and level of interactions with our partners, particularly our service providers. A number of participants from the immigrant serving sector argued that federal policies can in some instances hinder social integration, such as family class waiting lists separating families for long periods of time and certain limits that are placed on the eligiblility of clients for settlement services.

In working with the settlement sector and with other partners, roundtable participants highlighted that the federal government's role is also that of an **enabler** – providing funding, governance structure, and support to community partners in the design and delivery of programs. There was strong support for the idea that program design must happen at the community level, where the community is best placed to identify the needs and barriers of their members. Such an approach would have to be based on trust and include a shift towards a focus on outcomes.

Funding should also be considered for an expanded suite of community groups. Some argued a need for funding for both traditional service provider organizations (SPOs) and for more mainstream organizations. There was acknowledgement that there needs to be partnership funding that involves multiple funding sources and stakeholders. This may also help to lessen the divisions created through competition for funding dollars and thereby bolster cooperative action. In this way we could bring diverse organizations together around shared activities that would target engagement with newcomers. On a practical level this may mean looking at the capacity of specific communities to provide support to newcomers and providing assistance to them in bridging gaps. Participants felt that the federal government had a role to play in motivating the private sector to be more interested in being involved in settlement related services and that we had not fully tapped into these partnerships.

Similarly, the federal government needs to consider the capacity of the settlement sector. Front-line services are crucial and we need to ensure settlement workers have adequate training and support. Reporting requirements are an area of particular need. In some instances, workers in the immigrant serving sector are torn between delivering and reporting on the directives from the government and addressing the identified needs of the newcomers. If we want consistent and reliable data from these organizations as well as quality settlement services, we must be willing to invest in their capacity to complete both.

When we talk about bridging communities and **making spaces** for collaboration, part of this may involve the need to access and create new physical spaces. In some cases this was an issue of not having funding to access spaces, and in other cases it was an issue of not being able to access spaces at all. It was suggested that providing access to community spaces, such as community centres, schools, libraries, could be another way of bringing non-traditional partners together. There was agreement from municipal representatives that promoting engagement is important, and involves leadership and investment in creating and maintaining spaces where all people feel welcomed. Another option discussed was to fund facilities where different settlement organizations and partners could be co-located. This could lead to new and innovative ways to collaborate. Clearly, such innovation would benefit from close collaboration with municipal partners.

Measuring Success

The identification of concepts with which to ground policy and programming for social engagement and the clarification of the federal role on this issue must be accompanied by a strategy to measure results. Within this area, participants discussed the push towards an outcomes focus, the need for indicators for

engagement and integration, and the importance of the data collection method to be employed in measuring success.

There was an overall acknowledgement of a need to shift from capturing activities and outputs to **accounting for outcomes**. In doing so, we will need to be more flexible to allow for careful consideration of how funded projects address identified outcomes. When deciding how program outcomes will be measured we need to be mindful about what we are actually measuring. For example, in the case of employment we need to be clear about measuring whether or not newcomers find employment versus whether they obtain employment commensurate with their skills and training. Some indicators currently being used allow for newcomers to 'score high' even if they do so entirely within an isolated enclave community (e.g. volunteerism).

The suitability of the indicator depends on how we define integration and the extent to which we expect people to be socially engaged as a component of that integration. Participants cautioned against placing different expectations on newcomers in the realm of social engagement than we would expect from Canadians in host communities. It was agreed that having concrete, well-informed and agreed upon measures would go a long way toward defining an overall vision of integration and engagement to which everyone can contribute and report against across the country. We therefore need to strive for clarity as well as simplicity. Participants felt that newcomers should be given the opportunity to contribute to the selection of outcomes associated with integration. This would be a form of inclusion and engagement. Nevertheless, other participants cautioned that newcomers will have varying notions of 'success' and may not aspire to a larger, normative vision of what integration should look like.

Overall, clarification on indicators and the establishment of a performance measurement framework will serve to demonstrate results and to generate the data needed to support ongoing policy and program design. Measurement can be a community collaborative effort where the community, newcomers and the government all contribute. Within a performance measurement framework, we need to pay careful attention to the different methodological paradigms employed for **data collection**. There was strong agreement among participants that we should employ a balance of quantitative and qualitative methods. Qualitative data can have enormous impact when presented in particular manner, especially with senior decision makers. Participants provided examples of innovative qualitative data collection strategies: some SPOs had clients complete drawings or take photos to depict such issues as inclusion and exclusion. With qualitative studies, there is often concern over their applicability across a national context. Participants suggested completing a series of case studies across the country to overcome this challenge. An additional methodology that participants highlighted was participatory action research. This approach would allow the newcomer to be more than just the subject of the research, but to contribute toward the process of ensuring it is reflective of their lived experience. Participants felt that this would reflect a focus on working with people rather than on their behalf, though some recognized that such an approach ought to be designed carefully to ensure success.

In designing a measurement framework, participants acknowledged that many organizations are capturing data and utilizing methods, such as client surveys, that are not captured within the accountability frameworks of funding partners. These **additional data sources** would be of considerable value and could serve to highlight the personal stories of newcomers. In our attempts to develop standards, we must be careful to not stifle innovative data collection that is ongoing in the field. We also must recognize a potential divide between requirements for reporting on short term versus long term outcomes. Change in the area of social engagement and integration will most likely occur over the long term but projects are often only funded for the short term. In the immediate aftermath of a program, a client may be unable to speak to the impact of their participation but in the following year or two, they may have more perspective to reflect on the contribution of the program to their settlement and integration experience. How can organizations capture long term data from clients after the program and funding have culminated? Examining the long term will definitely require resources. A case management or portfolio approach to service delivery and to measurement would be a significant shift and allow for long term reporting. This would focus more on measuring newcomers integration over the long-term rather than attempting to measure immediate outcomes attributable to participation in a certain activity or program. We need to

ensure that we look back as often as we look forward. If we fail to consider where we have come from, we will not learn from our failures and our previous successes.

Moving Forward

The Calgary Roundtable on Social Engagement provided CIC Integration Branch with important insights into future policy and programming directions in this area. At a minimum, the partners and stakeholders who participated in the discussions brought their support and validation to the perceived importance of a social dimension to integration. In exploring this assertion further, participants reflected upon their own contributions in the area of social engagement and brought their diverse experiences to bear in (1) defining key concepts, such as social engagement, community, and empowerment; (2) providing direction and caution on embarking on particular initiatives, such as the measurement of social engagement; and (3) delineating the potential federal role in this area. The ideas shared during the roundtable will strengthen our understanding of social engagement and its role in integration.

Building upon the success of the federal roundtable and the contributions of participants, CIC Integration Branch will continue to hold workshops in each region of the country to engage policymakers from all orders of government, academics, service providers and key community stakeholders to further explore these concepts. Following the workshop in Calgary in March, 2008, further discussions have been held with researchers and government representatives in the province of Quebec. Discussions are scheduled with the provinces of Manitoba and British Columbia, and the Atlantic and Ontario Regions. Following the completion of these remaining workshops, CIC Integration Branch will incorporate the results of the discussions into a policy paper to be shared with all participants and key stakeholders.

Montreal Meetings

May 1, 2008

On May 1, 2008, the Integration Branch of the Department of Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) hosted a working lunch in Montreal to engage academics and researchers in Quebec in discussion on the role of social engagement in immigrant settlement and integration. Following this discussion, we had the opportunity to meet with our partners from the Ministère de l'Immigration et des communautés culturelles (MICC) to review the programs they manage focused on the integration of newcomers to the province of Quebec. We hoped to examine key concepts that might ground a policy of social engagement, as well as best practices supporting collaboration and coordination between various stakeholders involved in social engagement programming. In what follows, a summary of key points raised during that discussion is outlined.

Key Themes and Issues

Participants agreed that well-defined terminology was important in discussing key concepts in this area. They emphasised the importance of **identifying terms** to use in this realm that were fresh and not value-laden or connected with a political agenda. Importantly, they cautioned that certain terms may be defined differently by English-speaking groups than by French-speaking groups. They felt this was especially true in the case of the term "community," for example, and the way in which boundaries and markers of community might be differently understood and recognised.

The concepts of **identity and belonging** were discussed at length. Participants noted that ascribing a sense of belonging or identity to individuals usually has the effect of tying them to a certain space or community. To assign individuals to a particular identity can restrict them and ultimately prevent them from understanding identity as a fluid concept. Contributors argued that rigid concepts of identity can also unduly circumscribe and isolate communities themselves. Mobility, and the perception that individuals have numerous spaces in which they are recognised and belong, can have a significant impact on the extent to which newcomers feel they can be socially engaged.

Participants cautioned against assuming that we know what problems social engagement would remedy. It was noted that immigrants coming to Canada are highly educated and well-equipped to articulate their needs. We were advised to **consult newcomers** in problem-definition, involve them in needs assessment and, ultimately, include them in the process of determining solutions. Participants discussed the importance of involving immigrants in discussions and decision-making concerning integration at the policy development, operational planning, and measurement and reporting levels. We, as representatives of the federal government, were encouraged to support and motivate immigrant-serving organisations in involving newcomers in the establishment and review of processes and procedures affecting the delivery of services. In order to better meet client needs, consulting newcomers who have experienced both negative and positive integration outcomes in the articulation of programming was viewed as key.

Contributors posited that social engagement ought to be defined within the context of meeting a set of needs and desires identified by newcomers themselves. Participants felt that the term "**agency,**" rather than the term "empowerment," best captures newcomers' ability to be agents of their destiny and to make decisions leading to their particular integration goals.

Participants noted that the interdependency that develops between immigrant-serving organizations and government partners can allow for innovation and creative solutions that serve newcomers, pointing to successful partnering programs that bring together new arrivals with mentors or hosts to support early settlement. They also noted, however, that we should be aware of the potential rigidities in approach such interdependency can create and ensure a commitment to **critical analysis**. They warned that government and immigrant-serving organizations need to be wary of becoming so tightly bound together that they fail to undertake any kind of critical review of their respective roles and activities. Such

interdependence could lead to a lack of critical examination of the work being done by both sides. A willingness by all stakeholders to continually evaluate and assess approaches to integration is essential.

Participants agreed that one of the main challenges facing the immigrant serving sector was little or no **coordination** among key players. They saw a central role of the federal government to facilitate coordination between players and stakeholders. Participants noted that the immigrant-serving sector in Quebec is quite siloed, and that networking across the sector may not be as prevalent as it is in the rest of Canada.

It was suggested that the federal government has had a very fluid policy and vision concerning the social integration of newcomers. Such an approach has allowed the government to take a **pragmatic approach** to newcomer integration rather than an approach linked to a more conformist, homogenous vision. Participants were supportive of a federal role that included a commitment to foster the best local conditions for integration by providing a vision but allowing local decision-makers to articulate specific programming. Respect, it was put forward, needs to be a primary principle of any approach, and more interventionist and prescriptive methods were not always properly grounded in this principle.

Contributors felt that it was important not to view social engagement as an isolated aspect of integration, but rather, to take a **holistic view** of this process. Social integration, it was put forward, is inexorably linked to economic integration and language acquisition. We were encouraged to remain aware of the importance of the various components of the integration process, to recognize how they intersect and to be careful not to dissociate them as we developed a new policy approach. Participants suggested we continue to support efforts to break down the concept of "otherness" – the idea that newcomers are other than us – by targeting programs at host communities. Moreover, we were encouraged to support cultural literacy and competency in the host population and to focus on systemic barriers, such as racism and discrimination, when considering a policy approach.

The Provincial Approach

The Government of Quebec upholds a **vision of integration** in which diversity is welcomed and immigration is understood to be central to economic and cultural growth and development. The province encourages cultural exchanges and closer relations among communities while at the same time remaining committed to the principle that immigrants must adapt to their new environment and be prepared to understand and respect the fundamental values of the host society. Integration programs aim not only to facilitate the settlement of newcomers, but also to encourage their participation in public life and strengthen their **sense of belonging** to Quebec society. At the same time, the province's programs aim to reduce racism and xenophobia among the host population and build an inclusive and pluralist society.

The province provides significant encouragement to regional associations and councils to include immigration and integration considerations in the development of social, economic and cultural strategies in consultation with cultural communities. This has had the effect of ensuring that immigration be viewed as a strategy to support regional development that itself must be linked to integration program planning. It has also ensured that cultural communities are consulted and involved in regional planning exercises. The MICC partners with whom we met indicated that putting in place such **regional action plans**, developed by communities themselves and adapted to their particular issues and characters, has resulted in integration programs specially tailored and focused to meet the needs of the communities they serve.

Conclusions

Meetings with academics, researchers and representatives from the province of Quebec provided important insights into future policy and programming directions concerning the social engagement of newcomers. Some of these insights and recommendations were familiar ones that were echoed at previous roundtables on this topic, such as those cautioning us to clearly define our terminology when considering this area of inquiry. Other comments seemed to emanate more from the particular history of Quebec and its commitment to maintain and support a strong sense of belonging and shared identity among newcomers to the province. Certainly comments and recommendations related to the federal role

in this area of inquiry appeared linked to this history and bolstered our commitment to ensuring effective methods of partnership with the province. There is no question that these discussions will strengthen our understanding of social engagement and its role in integration.

Winnipeg Meeting

May 27, 2008

On May 27, 2008, the Integration Branch of the Department of Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) met with representatives from the province of Manitoba's Ministry of Labour and Immigration to discuss the role of social engagement in immigrant settlement and integration. As one of the provinces that receive funding directly for the provision of settlement services to newcomers, we hoped to examine policies and programs that the province of Manitoba supports in this area and discuss best practices in collaboration and coordination between various stakeholders. Insights gained from our discussions will inform the articulation of a policy basis for programming related to the social engagement of newcomers.

The province of Manitoba has developed a comprehensive settlement strategy in support of the province's objectives for immigration and integration, as identified in the Action Strategy for Economic Growth. During our discussions with our provincial counterparts we were particularly interested in the process by which the Manitoba Settlement Strategy was drafted and the specific elements it addresses. The Manitoba Settlement Strategy was born from consultation with the community. The province conducted an extensive needs assessment through focus groups and consultations with immigrant and refugee newcomers, ethno-cultural community leaders, service providers and others working directly with immigrants and refugees. The resulting Strategy responds to identified needs and builds on the strength of current services, ultimately being guided and shaped by the communities it serves.

The Manitoba Settlement Strategy is broken into key sections. The Strategy is structured to clearly link programming considerations to policy vision and clear and measurable outcomes. It begins with a review of the main issues put forward during initial consultations with key stakeholders. Of particular interest to the theme of social engagement, this review highlighted social isolation and a lack of sensitivity to cultural identity as major issues. The Strategy goes on to identify key service areas and systemic supports that effectively respond to the settlement and integration needs of newcomers to Manitoba. These include: pre-arrival information; centralized initial information and orientation; centralized assessment and referral; settlement and community supports; employment supports; recognition of foreign professional and academic qualifications; specialized programs; field development; service-delivery supports; field development and systemic change and policy development. This is followed by an outline of key programming principles, such as proactive service and program development, and clearly defined strategic outcomes, including improved accessibility and effectiveness of provincially funded programs.

The service area of Settlement and Community Supports links closely to the theme of social engagement. This service area responds to the importance of social integration to the newcomer experience and the need to respect cultural identity in developing settlement programs. Programs focus on the development of social and neighbourhood networks for newcomers and the development of neighbourhood capacities to meet the needs of newcomers in their communities. It recognizes the importance of community involvement in the integration of newcomers and supports increased linkages between community organizations and neighbourhood settlement programming. It relies heavily on an outreach approach to settlement service provision.

The Manitoba Settlement Strategy is complimented by the Welcoming Communities Manitoba Initiative, managed by the Multiculturalism Secretariat of the Ministry of Labour and Immigration. The Welcoming Communities Manitoba Initiative, developed in partnership with CIC as part of Canada's Action Plan Against Racism, promotes the strengthened participation of new immigrants in civil society and fosters more inclusive and welcoming communities for newcomers. The Initiative aims to increase awareness, understanding and knowledge of discriminatory behaviours and practices and to support efforts to counter such behaviour. The Initiative aspires to reduce discriminatory behaviour and practices while empowering new immigrants in facing issues of racism and discrimination. Projects that are supported under this Initiative must aim to build capacity to address discrimination, support community-based social inclusion initiatives and/or increase public education and awareness of diversity and immigration.

Our meeting with our provincial counterparts in Manitoba was very productive and provided important lessons to consider in moving forward with a policy framework on social engagement. Both in terms of structure and content, the Manitoba Settlement Strategy and the Welcoming Communities Manitoba Initiative are useful models in articulating programme policy principles and intended outcomes in this area. We look forward to continued collaboration on this topic.

Halifax Workshop

June 3, 2008

On June 3, 2008, the Integration Branch of the Department of Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) held a workshop in Halifax to engage key stakeholders - including academics, immigrant-service provider organisations, and all levels of government - on the role of social engagement in immigrant settlement and integration. The following questions guided our discussions: What are the appropriate concepts upon which to ground a policy of social engagement as it relates to integration? What are the roles and responsibilities of the various players in this area and the best practices to support continues collaboration and coordination between these stakeholders? What are the challenges in measuring social engagement? In what follows, a summary of key points put forward during our discussions is outlined.

Defining Concepts

Participants felt it was important that any definition of social engagement attempt to capture newcomers' own perceptions of what such engagement would entail. They noted that the creation of a **welcoming community** was key to social connection and that both integration and social engagement need to be considered as a 'two way street,' recognizing mutual benefits for both newcomers and the host community. The hope was put forward that both newcomers and host communities be adaptable and open to change. In fostering engagement, contributors cautioned us to pay special attention to power imbalances between the two sides and to be aware of assumptions and stereotypes that we might hold about newcomers themselves and the newcomer experience. We were also reminded that expectations surrounding the social engagement of newcomers ought not to exceed those that we place upon members of the host community.

In discussing the importance of grounding the development of a social engagement policy in clearly defined terminology, participants highlighted the need to clearly identify our target audience. If our target is the newcomer, how do we define members of this group? How do they define themselves? And how does identification as a newcomer change over time? This question was noted as particularly important given that settlement and integration challenges often continue past the point of citizenship, when newcomers are no longer eligible for CIC-funded settlement services. Participants reminded us that beyond immediate settlement issues, immigrants faced broader, long-term integration challenges that require ongoing involvement on the part of immigrant serving agencies and government departments.

When asked to consider if social engagement should be seen as a means or an end, participants articulated it as **a process** – one that changes as an individual moves along the integration continuum. Engagement is dynamic, not static, with both highs and lows and multiple interconnected dimensions. Individuals engage in many different spaces and places and it was suggested that a policy of social engagement validate the numerous connections that touch an individual's life - be they to formal organisations, cultural and linguistic communities or neighbourhood associations.

To be able to engage in social life and participate there **free of barriers** was seen as a process of building social capital among newcomers. More than merely removing barriers, however, participants suggested that in order to make a meaningful contribution to Canadian society newcomers must be given meaningful opportunities to do so. In this context, the realm of employment was identified as a primary venue for engagement and inclusion. Friendships and social networks were also seen as key to the ability of newcomers to contribute to and fully participate in the Canadian economy and society. In order to further support the creation of such social networks, participants suggested we focus not only on newcomers, but also on imparting the language of inclusion on host communities.

Contributors strongly advocated giving newcomers and newcomers' communities a stronger voice in the design and provision of services as well as in the process of identifying barriers to integration. This kind of bottom-up approach may necessitate a new forum for newcomer consultation, which would also have the effect of recognising newcomers as agents in the integration process. The creation of public spaces

where community members, both new and established, could meet together regularly and engage on issues affecting their communities in a variety of ways, was seen as central to this process. Participants pointed to British Columbia's Neighbourhood Houses as a model of public spaces supporting social engagement.

Collaboration and the Federal Role

Participants noted that CIC is uniquely positioned to take a leadership role in bringing stakeholders in integration to the table. CIC can play a role in supporting dialogue among traditional and non-traditional partners engaged in serving newcomers, such as health institutions and employers. Participants stressed that innovative change often results from multiple sectors becoming aware of issues affecting newcomers and involved in efforts to improve outcomes. It was recommended that CIC continue to provide human and financial resources that support service provider organisations in forging and sustaining partnerships with each other.

In examining avenues of collaboration and best practices, contributors noted the benefits of establishing a **coordinating committee on integration** at the national level. Such a forum would allow various stakeholders to come to the table to discuss how to best maximize their efforts through partnership and could lead to improved effectiveness and efficiency. Participants suggested that this might necessitate moving beyond annual settlement conferences to more regular forums of communication. Currently, information sharing is sometimes haphazard, and while service provider organizations know there is significant information available, they often do not know how to access it. Establishing more regular and formal communication channels would support the collection and dissemination of best practices and tools that immigrant service providers could adapt to meet the needs of their particular client groups. It would also support small centres, who often feel they are doing things on an ad hoc basis and do not know how to access expertise in their efforts to undertake immigration and integration planning. Associated with this effort, it was recommended that CIC play a more active role in funding coordinated research partnerships.

Contributors recommended that collaboration between all levels of government be improved to ensure that multi-jurisdictional governance structures are flexible enough to meet current and emerging needs. There is also a need for guidance to settlement workers in the field in this area, as lines of accountability on issues affecting newcomers are not always clear.

CIC was encouraged to continue to be open to the innovative programming ideas being generated by service provider organizations themselves and to be more flexible in its funding arrangements. Many service provider organizations have evolved past providing standard CIC programs and are engaged in a much wider range of activities. There was a perception that CIC does not adequately recognize this. Capacity building and core funding for service providers was identified as a key requirement for these organisations.

Discussants recommended that CIC itself have a stronger presence in the community and drive **institutional change**, leading by example. There was a sense that the culture of the Department is sometimes quite closed and that CIC cannot expect others to engage in more open and collaborative ways if it is itself not modeling this behaviour. It was strongly advised that CIC dedicate more resources to be accessible to the communities it serves. Service providers themselves indicated that they often feel that CIC representatives are not easily accessible and that they do not know how to effectively direct their comments and enquiries. Similarly, clients are often referred to service providers in instances where their questions would best be answered by CIC staff.

Participants suggested that social engagement would be bolstered by national public awareness campaigns promoting immigration and sharing newcomer stories - both in terms of successes and challenges. It was recommended that CIC bolster its role in informing, engaging and sensitizing Canadian society about the integration process and the benefits of immigration more generally.

Finally, we were reminded to be cognizant of the different challenges faced by urban and rural communities: rural communities in particular often have different expectations and resources to

manage newcomer integration, and this must be taken into account when thinking about an approach to social engagement. In particular, retention of newcomers in their adopted communities was noted as an important issue for settlement stakeholders in Atlantic Canada. Some participants felt a comprehensive job creation strategy was needed so that host communities did not feel they were competing with newcomers for limited jobs and resources. It was noted that it is difficult to persuade newcomers to stay in communities where they can only obtain low-skilled employment. Participants felt that this also affected the host community, which might be more welcoming if it was not itself struggling to find and maintain employment.

Measurement

Discussants noted that before measuring social engagement, we must agree upon a clear definition of this concept. While conceptualizations of social engagement may be contested, participants recommended that CIC determine a working definition in order to allow effective consultation with the settlement sector and to set clear parameters for measurement. We were also reminded early in the discussion to keep privacy and ethical considerations at the forefront of data collection efforts.

Participants recommended that **benchmarks** for social integration be set quite broadly and be flexible enough to capture changing contexts and differing needs. They stressed the need to capture data that will speak to the broader settlement and integration experience of different immigration cohorts. It was noted that it can be challenging to measure successful outcomes when newcomer needs evolve and change over time.

The value of **quantitative versus qualitative** data was discussed at length. Service providers emphasised the importance of narrative reporting, arguing that it provides them with the opportunity to articulate and describe their progress in their own words. They were of the view that data collection and reporting on social engagement is such that it needs to rely on subjective qualifiers. When collecting data that is more quantitative in nature, service provider organizations cautioned us to be clear on understanding the importance of measuring a particular quantitative output. We must ask what it is about the data, and what it is used for, that makes its collection important. Several participants also noted the importance of longitudinal studies as key to tracking change over time. They envisioned a role for CIC in funding case studies on innovative initiatives for measurement. Other participants posited that perhaps national data is not as important as we think, however. Sampling in-depth case studies may ultimately tell a more accurate story.

The importance of using the right tools was also noted. Contributors noted that surveys can be a difficult tool to capture information from newcomers. For those with language barriers, the terminology and rating scales used in surveys can often be confusing. Telephone surveys are a particularly difficult means for connecting with newcomers who may not be accustomed to providing information in this manner. Additionally, it was noted that many people are very reluctant to put things down on paper, but may be more willing to provide information in a conversation with a settlement worker. If settlement workers had time to sit down with clients, they might capture information that is currently not being gathered.

This led to discussions on the importance of establishing trust in the data collection process. In attempting to gather data directly from the newcomer, it is crucial to **communicate the purpose and intended use of the data**. It is also important to provide feedback to organizations and newcomers on the final use and/or publication of the data. One participant suggested notifying immigrants at arrival of the potential of being contacted at a later date to discuss their settlement and integration progress. This would decrease potential fear or misunderstanding at a later date when newcomers are approached to feed into measurement exercises.

Service provider organizations again put forward the need for capacity building to develop reporting competencies and support efforts to measure outputs and outcomes of activities. Organizations receiving funding for particular activities indicated they would welcome a roadmap for reporting expectations. It was noted that while some service provider organizations have well developed performance measurement

practices, such as developing logic models for their programs, others may need more assistance. It was suggested that workshops on performance measurement, such as those provided through the United Way, could benefit many service provider organizations in this area. CIC might consider providing funding for this type of training.

Service provider organizations also indicated the need to strike a balance between reporting requirements and provision of services. Participants emphasised that they have many different funders whose reporting requirements are not always mutually supportive. They noted that the time associated with undertaking administrative duties can sometimes conflict with their ability to focus on delivering services to newcomers. They also noted that lack of multi-year funding poses challenges to reporting: when there is uncertainty surrounding funding from year to year, it can be difficult to implement a performance measurement strategy with continuity.

Conclusions

The Halifax Roundtable on Social Engagement provided CIC Integration Branch with important insights into future policy and programming directions in this area. Partners and stakeholders who participated in the discussions brought their support and validation to the perceived importance of a social dimension to integration. In exploring this assertion further, participants reflected upon their own contributions in the area of social engagement and brought their diverse experiences to bear in defining key concepts and considering the roles and responsibilities of various players in this area and ways to support improved collaboration. They also provided important suggestions on how we might consider measuring social engagement. The ideas shared during the roundtable will strengthen our understanding of social engagement and its role in integration and will assist us as we move forward to developing a policy framework in this area.

Vancouver Workshop

June 10, 2008

The Integration Branch of Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) is exploring how social engagement and community connections contribute to the integration process. We have begun this exploration by consulting key players, including academics, immigrant service provider organisations, and representatives from all levels of government in regional centres across the country.

On June 10th, the Integration Branch and the province of British Columbia held a workshop in Vancouver to engage key stakeholders in the province in discussion on the role of social engagement and integration. This workshop was held in conjunction with the province of British Columbia as it is one of the provinces that receive funding directly from the federal government for the provision of settlement service to newcomers. The Settlement and Multicultural Division is responsible for funding to third party agencies for settlement and adaptation services for new immigrants and for collaborating with communities on anti-racism and multiculturalism initiatives. Three key programs administered by the division are the BC Anti-Racism and Multiculturalism Program (BCAMP), which supports the prevention and elimination of racism by enhancing community understanding of multiculturalism and cultural diversity; the BC Settlement and Adaptation Program (BCSAP), which supports the successful settlement and adaptation of newcomers to British Columbia; and the Welcoming and Inclusive Communities and Workplaces Program (WICWP), which is a three-year initiative to foster inclusive, welcoming and vibrant communities in the province. We were eager to learn from the province and key stakeholders how their work might provide important lessons on collaboration and coordination between partners and how their successes and challenges in this area may ultimately inform our future policy framework on social engagement.

Participants brought their diverse experiences and expertise to the workshop. Discussions throughout the day were guided by the following questions: What are the appropriate concepts upon which to ground a policy of social engagement as it relates to integration? What are the roles and responsibilities of the various players in this area? What are best practices to support collaboration and coordination between these stakeholders? What are the challenges in measuring social engagement? In what follows, a summary of roundtable discussions is outlined.

Defining Key Concepts

In exploring the role of social engagement in integration, participants were encouraged to first reflect upon the varied understandings of these terms and consider how proposed definitions might shape future policies and programming. When discussing **integration**, some participants held a more restrictive view, indicating that individuals move into a system and adjust (or 'assimilate') to that particular system. Many others ascribed to a more fluid understanding of integration as a continuous process, not just a point in time, with necessary involvement from both the newcomer and the host population.

Participants felt that **social engagement** constitutes **a process**. In order to move forward in the process, it is important to have clear intentions and expectations. In elaborating this understanding, the example of a business model of engagement was offered. Within a company or organization, engagement and motivation of the staff is a means to increase profitability, and ultimately bring benefits to the entire group. Such engagement is impossible, however, without trust in the organization, trust in the process as well as the promise of mutual benefit. We need to ask: Why is this important? What are the reasons for engagement? What are the drivers? How can we encourage engagement? How can we build trust in the process? What are the benefits to engaging and for whom?

Social engagement was also described in terms of **relationships**, in that it is concerned with how to encourage collaboration, how to forge connections, how to build trust. Social engagement may also concern itself with relationships on multiple levels, from systemic to individual. At the individual level, participants highlighted the ways in which individuals might utilize or benefit from their relationships, akin to social capital. Relationships, however, take time, with individuals only engaging or participating when

they feel ready. Participants encouraged that if we take the appropriate time to build relationships, it can produce meaningful reflection on the ideas generated through the process and careful determination of where action should be taken.

Participants also offered that social engagement is about **participation** rather than contribution. A participatory approach would give newcomers respect, inviting them to act upon their right to participate and contribute to decision making. This could represent a shift away from a client service mentality, where the needs of newcomers are the main focus. Participation emphasizes the assets and strengths of people and encourages new opinions and ideas; it is a 'strengths-based' approach.

Social engagement was also defined by contributors as **building inclusive communities** – 'co-creating', highlighting commonalities, and building a collective sense of 'us'. Communities can establish their own self understanding and then bridge to other communities and broader society. Participants argued strongly that the various segments of a community, including newcomers, should be actively involved in building the community. Newcomers often experience inferiority in a new setting. Active engagement in community building can allow individuals and groups to explore multiple layers of identity and attachment, and to view themselves as part of the activity, part of the community, part of the city, and so on. This would also encourage newcomers to view public infrastructure and institutions as part of the community and not merely as buildings or 'the government'.

An important component of an inclusive community is a **welcoming environment**. A welcoming environment means creating opportunities for engagement and integration, particularly through the removal of barriers to participation and engagement. One important barrier noted by many was **racism**. We were challenged to move beyond conceptualizing racism as merely overt acts and to consider more subtle dimensions, such as stereotypes and linguistic discrimination, as well as the relevance of where such acts takes place, such as the workplace. Participants saw the complexities of how we view one another as inevitably linked to any strategy to connect people.

Delineating the Federal Role in Social Engagement

A key challenge for work in the area of social engagement and integration is clarifying roles and responsibilities. Participants were encouraged to explore ways of moving forward together in this area and to recommend potential roles for the federal government in contributing to the process.

Participants suggested that the federal government may have a role in **defining a national vision**. The social dimension of integration is very broad and multi-faceted; it is difficult to have a clear grasp of every issue. The challenge is to determine how to limit or frame the issues in order to effect change. Participants felt that parameters are necessary in order to define where we will work and what we will contribute.

A vision for social engagement must also be supported by improved **collaboration** among partners and stakeholders. While one organization or agency may take the lead, collaboration allows for the vision, resources and benefits to be shared among all partners. Complete collaboration, as some argued, means sharing these equally. Others drew attention to different types of collaboration and the challenge of trying to actively nurture more organic forms of partnership or friendship. We were challenged to consider how we might bring different groups together in collaboration.

> **Neighbourhood houses** are prevalent in British Columbia. Most neighbourhood houses subscribe to an overarching "welcoming community" format but develop programming specific for their area. Some are co-located with a community centre, which allows for increased interaction with newcomers in the community. Others join together in coalitions to build capacity at the neighbourhood level, reduce isolation, improve access to services, and map the assets of their particular neighborhood.

Many felt the **means** used to bring people together was key. Some participants suggested that the federal government can nurture collaboration by **supporting dialogue**. **Issues-based collaboration** involves bringing groups together around a particular topic and encouraging them to work together to generate

solutions. Such a role requires ongoing reflection on who can legitimately 'speak' for an individual community. Participants felt that we must also recognize that the dialogue does not belong to any one group but to all who participate. Opportunities for dialogue come in various forms, such as community forums, conferences and social services 'trade shows' where different levels of government and all forms of organizations could showcase their programs and exchange with one another. Others advocated for **physical spaces** for engagement, such as community centres. Overall, participants agreed that the particular location or activities of an initiative are not as important as the end result. Community festivals and events, or even responding to crises, can be means for engagement and collaboration, for sharing values and a common vision.

When bringing various groups together in whatever forum, participants argued that we need to strive for **divergent perspectives and non-traditional partners**. With our main partners, it may just be 'preaching to the choir'. At the same time, we should remain conscious of the risks of stepping over established partners in favour of bringing in non-traditional partners. Partnership and dialogue between long-standing groups and new organizations could be a means for increased involvement, increased uptake of programs and overall improved collaboration. Participants also felt it is vital to include the newcomers themselves – the group most impacted by policies and programs. Encouraging new and divergent partnerships also highlights the importance of supporting **capacity building**.

The BC **Safe Harbour program** brings people together to discuss various dimensions of identity and engagement. The program promotes dialogue around challenging issues and allows individuals to consider what a particular issue, such as diversity, might mean within their community context. Program participants are also equipped with the tools necessary to engage and connect on multiple levels. Overall, the program works towards the positive transformation of society, particularly through a focus on leadership and the development of tool sets necessary to confront negative actions and role model positive behaviour.

Participants suggested that the federal government can play a key role in supporting the efforts of our partners in adapting to increasing diversity and meeting the needs of a growing newcomer population. Support can come in many forms, such as funding for new local projects or the adaptation of innovative projects to new contexts, or education or awareness-raising for settlement workers.

For some, the primary federal role is to **allocate resources** in support of social engagement, integration, collaboration, capacity building, community formation, and so on. Within the current funding climate, participants argued that it can be difficult to promote partnership between community organizations when they are competing for funds. Such funding structures may reflect a disconnect between policy and practice, according to participants. It may in fact discourage the forms of collaboration the policy seeks to promote. Participants suggested that funders should consider means for facilitating collaboration when offering resources and allow for ample time for organizations to develop partnerships. Although the role of allocating resources was discussed, many participants challenged us to take up a far wider role, as highlighted in the points above.

Participants also counseled that if we as a federal government want to consider a policy vision to foster engagement, we must be willing to examine those aspects of our own internal policies and practices that create barriers to engagement. Participants advocated for a willingness on the part of government to examine our own culture, attitudes and values as they relate to our outward objectives for social engagement.

Measuring Social Engagement

A significant aspect of our role in fostering social engagement and integration is to analyze and report on the impact of our efforts. Program **performance measurement** tools are a means of understanding the impact of our approaches. In measuring our performance, participants recommended that we start with the ultimate goal of the program and then break it down into measurable 'bits and pieces', asking how each contributes to the ultimate goal. Key questions for assessing our policies and programs include: What is the impact? How does this create change? What stage are we at? What obstacles are we encountering?

We were challenged to consider both breadth and depth. Our tendency is to count program outputs, but most support the growing shift in focus to **outcomes**. Not all, however, are confident in this change, as it can be difficult to demonstrate success in this area. Measuring progress in social engagement requires gauging **long-term impact**. There are considerable logistical challenges in tracking clients and navigating privacy concerns. To understand our progress and overcome such barriers, participants stressed that we need to use simple and realistic outcomes. Individuals who receive or benefit from services should also play a role in identifying appropriate outcomes. As one participant stated, we need to keep it simple and **trust** what people say. Direct **feedback** from participants was stressed. We were encouraged to embrace a mix of methods to capture feedback and allow a significant space for qualitative data. Many organizations work with satisfaction surveys, and indicated that it is just as important to consider dissatisfaction. While surveys are helpful tools to create a baseline, some raised concerns over 'survey fatigue': participants in the survey need to understand how the information will be used and how they may benefit. In outlining the process and the benefits, you can create trust. Trust can also be fostered by **involvement in the design and implementation** of research or evaluation, such as in a participatory action research project. Such involvement would in effect apply the principles of social engagement to our data collection. Moreover, newcomers can be invaluable by working in the first language of survey participants and creating an atmosphere of common identification. Overall, involvement builds capacity and encourages leadership in the participants.

Clear articulation of the **purpose of the evaluation** was seen as important for all involved. Dialogue between funders and service providers on program objectives and reporting structures would be valuable. Participants also considered the potential of sharing outcomes with other funders, as many aspects of a program or initiative are intimately connected. Some were wary of how reports might influence future funding, as project funding rather than core funding can be seen as a means to exercise control over projects. In sum, clarity around the format and purpose of evaluation efforts is key.

Moving Forward

The Vancouver workshop on Social Engagement and Integration provided the Integration Branch with important insights into future policy and programming directions for this area. The participating partners and stakeholders brought their support and validation to the perceived importance of a social dimension to integration. In exploring this assertion further, participants reflected upon their own contributions in the area of social engagement and brought their diverse experiences to bear in defining key concepts, providing direction and examples for social engagement initiatives, delineating the potential federal role in this area, and framing the role of performance measurement in social engagement policies and programs. The ideas shared and debated will strengthen our understanding of social engagement and its role in integration.

Toronto Workshop

July 14, 2008

The Integration Branch of Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) is exploring how social engagement and community connections contribute to the integration process. We have begun this exploration by consulting key players, including academics, immigrant service provider organisations, and representatives from all levels of government, in regional centres across the country. On July 14th, the Integration Branch hosted a workshop in Toronto to engage over 100 stakeholders from the area in discussion on social engagement and integration. Participants brought their diverse experiences and expertise to the workshop. Workshop sessions were guided by the following questions: What are the appropriate concepts upon which to ground a policy of social engagement as it relates to integration? What are best practices to support collaboration and coordination between these stakeholders? What are the challenges in measuring social engagement? In what follows, a summary of discussions is outlined.

Key Concepts – What are we talking about?

In exploring the role of social engagement in integration, participants encouraged us to first clarify the concepts and then explore their interaction. Many agreed that terms in this domain, such as 'social capital' or 'social cohesion', are often contested despite widespread use. Alternately, the same concepts tend to resurface periodically under different names. Participants also questioned why particular concepts are highlighted or problematized at certain points in time. As a result, a historical and comparative approach should guide our understanding of key concepts. In light of the complexities associated with terms and their evolution, participants argued that reinvention *is* beneficial. If our concepts are continually reflected on, they can stay relevant and dynamic. In this spirit, participants did offer some suggestions to frame our understanding of social engagement and integration.

Participants widely agreed that **integration** is not one-dimensional. As one contributor stated, labour market integration is not the only marker of success. The importance of all dimensions of integration, including a significant social component, was lauded by participants.

Contributors felt that integration and its various components, such as social engagement, are best conceived as processes. Whether these processes occur naturally or require effort and investment was debated. Participants also deliberated the trajectories of such processes, with many noting that integration must begin with basic or immediate needs, the traditional focus of settlement. In moving through social engagement, newcomers begin with orientation and general awareness, then experience greater involvement and eventually influence decision-making. Other participants, however, cautioned that the process is not linear: newcomers experience different needs at different times. For example, the integration experience of newcomers may fluctuate in conjunction with events in their home country or with family abroad. Family relationships, decision-making and resource allocation are also key factors that contribute to integration trajectories. Given the variance in such factors, participants also asserted that integration takes time. Newcomers need time to learn about Canadian society, to adapt as appropriate, to understand their strengths, and feel comfortable in new surroundings. Most agreed that integration extends far beyond the point of citizenship and also into the second and third generations.

Participants widely supported the idea that integration is the responsibility of society as a whole. Support for this approach was evident in cautions against problematizing individual newcomers (as other models may),rather than looking at what integration requires of both newcomers and the host society. In this vein, participants asked whether we define 'newcomers' in relation to time, settlement 'status', or some other factor or combination of factors. Further, they raised the issue of how newcomers understand this label, and whether being identified as someone in need of 'special services' isolates or demeans newcomers. It was suggested that immigrants may self-identify as 'newcomers' when they feel they have not settled or do not belong in a particular context. Therefore, is the 'newcomer'/'host society' dichotomy beneficial?

Participants felt that the **host community** is far more fluid that we assume, as newcomers are able to move in and out of this community as their settlement and integration evolves. Given the dynamic nature of these communities, it is vital to juxtapose our conceptions of individuals and groups with their self-identification and lived experiences in order to better inform our integration efforts.

In identifying integration as the responsibility of society as a whole (involving 'newcomers' and 'host communities' alike), participants advocated for the establishment of a "welcoming environment" or an "environment of acceptance". This encourages the host society to engage the newcomer population, acknowledging their needs and their assets, and identify means for working together towards integration. For many, true integration will allow newcomers to frame and achieve their own success – to realize their own potential and act upon it. Therefore, an 'environment of acceptance' involves **empowered self-identification** and accompanying recognition.

According to contributors, integration may also denote **meaningful participation** in the various dimensions of Canadian society (economic, cultural, social, political, etc). In order to create opportunities for participation, engagement and broader integration, many felt that our focus should be on breaking down barriers. This can be challenging, however, as barriers take a variety of forms, including gender, culture, time, access and other socioeconomic conditions. Participants stressed that we must also consider the 'systemic' barriers that exist in institutions and different levels of government. Overall, this approach may also require an examination of levels of equity in Canadian society. The degree of emphasis on power imbalances and redistribution was considerably more pronounced in Toronto as compared with previous consultations.

Beyond reducing barriers to engagement and participation, some contributors argued that social engagement is about actively bringing people together. This can be done through various means, such as arts and cultural activities or volunteerism. One participant highlighted the workplace as a vital context for social, rather than merely economic, engagement. Individuals spend a considerable amount of their time in their work environment and form connections there. Therefore, social engagement is also about relationships, in that it entails determining how to live and work with one another toward a common aim. One participant termed it '**togetherness'** – more than just one individual trying to effect better outcomes, but rather everyone working collectively to build their community. Through collective efforts, newcomers can also develop a sense of belonging, a connection to their community. One participant described social engagement as a circle with spokes protruding, representing connections and networks. At first, there may be few spokes, but with time and exposure to different contexts, the number of connections expands. Many participants remarked that newcomers need to be engaged in their own community first and then build confidence to engage in the larger society. Participants noted that for newcomers, integration is often defined as feeling at home, feeling safe and secure. This is an important notion for many, especially refugees, who are arriving from starkly different contexts. Having found comfort in their immediate community, newcomers may be exposed to different contexts and form multiple connections, expanding their range of social engagement and working toward their integration.

One promising way to open participation and foster connections is the promotion of **public meeting spaces**, such as a mall or drop-in centre. Public space allows people to connect interculturally and intergenerationally, share our experiences, struggles, hopes and dreams and recognize our common humanity. Public spaces are less threatening for social interaction and can also help to meet other needs. For example, a library setting can foster one's ability to engage while simultaneously learning to navigate institutions. Participants recognized that opening such spaces up for further public use, however, may require additional resources and collaboration.

Although many participants supported the above understandings of social engagement, they also recognized '**multiplicities and pluralities to engagement'**. Just as individuals have multifaceted identities, so too will they experience multiple trajectories or spheres of engagement and integration. Participants also noted that there is a lot of social engagement existing in society that is not formally recognized, such as subversive engagement. This may necessitate a normative discussion on the types of engagement valuable for integration. This, however, presupposes knowledge that social engagement does bring some benefit. Others felt strongly that because of the contextual and individual nature of

identity, belonging, and engagement, we cannot set a level or target. For example, many felt that citizenship is not the ultimate integration outcome, particularly in the context of increasing global mobility. Instead, participants argued that the question should be how to allow people to achieve what they want without strictly defining the means for doing so. The complexities and nuances of defining key concepts, as highlighted above, make policy development in this area very challenging.

Collaboration and the Federal Role – How can we work together?

In considering avenues for collaboration on social engagement and integration, many felt that we currently operate in a 'siloed' or jurisdiction-sensitive system where partnerships and information-sharing are difficult. Participants agreed that this is a considerable obstacle to effective interventions and sustainable change. If we truly want to promote engagement and integration, we must also consider how they can be applied to our own sector. Participants advocated for the conscious adoption of these aims into structures and processes at every level – community, organization, government, etc.

A first step in leading by example is more effective communication. As participants shared, people need to **talk and network**. They need to vent frustrations, organize and generate ideas. In doing so, we can understand our respective roles and responsibilities, establish guiding structures, build capacity for partnerships, and share promising practices. Participants offered that dialogue can also open a space for advocacy. Advocacy, according to contributors, is not a 'bad' word; it should be about providing and facilitating the space to discuss needs and services so people can organize and take action. Participants felt strongly that the ability to collectively organize is a key component of social engagement and integration, particularly as applied internally. Working alone, we all have limitations; working together allows for 'triangulation' or 'cross-fertilization' of services as well as increased legitimacy for all involved.

Participants strongly advocated for improved **information provision** to newcomers. Timely and accurate information informs the expectations of both newcomers and communities, shaping perceived settlement and integration success. For example, newcomers may need information on participatory democracy before being able to engage and participate within our system. Many felt that the current accessibility of information is a major barrier to settlement and integration. One means suggested for increasing accessibility was a mobile information centre. Others suggested a one-stop shop, such as a welcome centre, for all needed information.

In discussing means for collaboration and shared needs, participants also offered comments on **roles and responsibilities**, particularly for the federal government. Proposed areas of involvement for federal departments included: setting a national vision; leading institutional change; providing resources; building capacity; and supporting partnerships.

The federal government can play a significant role in articulating a **national vision** on integration, engagement, and related issues, such as multiculturalism. A national vision should set out our expectations for Canadian society and consider how such a picture resonates with other civic/national 'guides,' such as the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Most importantly, it should identify the key issue or problem. Through research and national discussions, the government could thereby determine the most pressing needs and identify a strategy to address them. Participants felt that it was vital to include newcomers in defining problems and identifying solutions. Such involvement could work towards the empowerment of newcomers in their settlement and integration. Service providers could also play a key role in communicating perceived gaps and pressing needs. Following the articulation of a national vision, the government could also engage in '**social marketing'** to communicate the plan as well as combat myths or stereotypes and highlight the overall benefits of immigration and integration.

In demonstrating a federal role, participants challenged us to lead by example in bringing about **institutional change**. Expectations for policy and program development are often outwards (what will happen or change 'out there'). Participants argued that we should also **look inwards** and consider what needs to change. Specific areas stressed by participants were funding and eligibility. Some participants felt it was challenging to discuss collaboration when the nature of settlement services requires differentiating between those we can serve and those we cannot.

Most, if not all, recognized the **provision of funding** to be a key role for the government. Nevertheless, there was disagreement on the most appropriate structures to support our partners and effect change. According to some, there is little room for trial and error or institutional learning in the current structure. There are increasing demands for service providers to prove success and a growing mistrust of the sector from funders. Many felt that the government should instead be responsible for stable and adequate funding, such as core funding to settlement organizations. Many also expressed concern over the removal of funding directly to neighbourhoods and communities, which they felt prevents the autonomy and full development of community groups.

In conjunction with the role of the federal government to provide resources, participants felt that **building capacity** was another important area for federal involvement. Our partners exist to assist newcomers, and they play a vital role in motivating newcomers to take steps toward their integration. Nevertheless, many do not have the knowledge or capacity to engage with this population and understand their needs and goals. Cultural competency training/education was highlighted as a key tool for service providers, and particularly for frontline workers. Increased diversity in organizational staff would also help to break down barriers. Understanding newcomers and the various communities to which they belong, be they religious, cultural or otherwise, will allow organizations to better connect with their participants/clients and address their needs and goals.

Building on the recognized importance of communication and collaboration, participants noted that the federal government can also **support partnerships**. Key mechanisms for the federal government to foster and support partnerships would be through funding 'partnership-focused' activities or sparking dialogue around a particular issue. Participants felt that considerable power is generated when you convene people for a specific purpose. Dialogue and partnerships can be challenging, however, without the political will to collaborate and share power. Many noted a trend to engage only large agencies and not trust or engage smaller community-specific groups. Participants cautioned that it is important to form a well-balanced group for effective discussion and collaboration. This means allowing full involvement and potential leadership from all groups, particularly non-traditional partners. Those involved must feel comfortable and empowered to participate if not also challenge the system. Dialogue, partnerships, and collaboration will translate into our policies and programs, ultimately affecting our service delivery and the outcomes of newcomers.

Measuring Social Engagement – How can we understand our impact?

When asked to consider the challenge of measuring social engagement, participants remarked that we need to first determine **what integration and social engagement mean** in order to be accountable for them. Some felt that social engagement is too big to measure; it must be broken down into smaller parts. For example, you could measure the ability to act upon one's rights, the ability to find and secure employment, or the formation of friendships. For some, the suggested focus on barrier reduction may be more measurable and allow for clear attribution of outcomes to policy interventions. Focusing on barriers also highlights the importance of measuring negative outcomes.

Many acknowledged that measurement in this area is challenging. Change often occurs over the long term, requiring the tracking of newcomers and struggle to determine attribution. Participants felt that even short-term outcomes could be hard to measure realistically. In response to this challenge, participants stressed the value of **qualitative research** in this area. Many felt that since measuring change in behaviour and attitudes is difficult, narrative reporting is crucial to capturing what is going on. Tools such as needs assessments, focus groups, or client satisfaction surveys can aid in charting progress qualitatively. Some felt it is important to engage smaller service providers in measurement, as they can be seen as 'confidants' of the people. Others also advocated for involving the newcomer and community directly, such as through **participatory research**, as it conveys transparency and builds trust in the process. Participants cautioned, however, that not all groups can complete detailed measurements. Reporting requirements should not be an obstacle to service provision. As such, we were challenged to consider what we can put in place to support effective and efficient measurement.

Contributors remarked that we need to consider **the purpose, audience and structure** of any assessment/evaluation. The questions we ask will ultimately determine the information we receive. For social engagement, the **unit of analysis** is another important factor in measurement. As participants noted, social engagement can occur at the individual, community, and broader society level, which could necessitate both individual and aggregate indicators. Participants also offered that it is important to consider indicators and outcomes for the sector, such as the quality of work or resilience of service providers. One comprehensive formula for measuring our success offered was: the right service at the right time to the right people in the right place at the right cost.

Regardless of the challenges associated with measuring social engagement and integration, participants recognized that indicators and outcomes are important to demonstrate *why* something is done. Therefore, just as investment is needed in defining key concepts and fostering partnerships, so too is it important to carefully craft our measurement efforts to best reflect our intended purpose and ability to effect change.

Conclusion

The Social Engagement and Integration workshop in Toronto brought together partners and stakeholders to explore and validate the perceived importance of a social dimension to integration. The broad range of groups participating in the day, from school boards and health workers to concerned private citizens, demonstrated the significance of these topics to the Toronto area. Participants brought their diverse experiences to bear in debating key concepts, delineating roles and responsibilities, highlighting means for collaboration, and determining how to measure success. The ideas shared during the day have strengthened our understanding of social engagement and its role in integration and will assist us as we move forward in developing a policy framework in this area.