Review of Host Group Service Models in Ontario

Citizenship and Immigration Canada
Ontario Settlement Directorate

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The Advisory Committee consisted of Elisete Bettencourt, Lynn Murrell, Jackie Smith and Eva Goodyer from Citizenship and Immigration Canada, and representatives from four service provider organizations: Arsim Aliu from Settlement and Integration Services Organization (SISO) in Hamilton, Mira Malidzanovic from the Kitchener-Waterloo Reception Centre, Sally Spencer from Youth Assisting Youth in Toronto and Lucila Spigelblatt from Catholic Immigration Centre in Ottawa.

In addition, all of the 19 agencies that provide Host services in Ontario participated in phone interviews, some of them up to three hours long. Six of the agencies welcomed Gillian and Anne for full day sessions to observe groups in action and to talk to staff, volunteers and participants. Many agencies invested a great deal of time in this review, and their participation is greatly appreciated. We hope that they find the results helpful.
1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Citizenship and Immigration Canada’s Ontario Settlement Directorate (CIC) commissioned a review of Host group service models to identify which models were most promising, and to recommend changes in the implementation of Host groups to improve services to newcomers. The review was carried out in 2004/05, and made the following recommendations:

1. The core objective for Host groups should be defined as: **To help newcomers link to diverse social networks in the host community.** Other objectives, such as English practice, should be secondary.

2. Host groups should be designed to respond to newcomers’ priorities (e.g., practicing English, shopping, recreation, learning about Canada) while helping them to build social networks.

3. Host should emphasize social networks that link newcomers to the broader community. However, some newcomers may benefit from links with their own ethnocultural communities as a first step.

4. The most promising groups are characterized by the ways they are delivered rather than the service model itself. Of the nine Host group models described in the paper, all of them except the ‘Language Classes’ could be effective, but only if they are delivered using the following elements of promising programs:
   - Groups encourage extensive and in-depth informal conversations among both newcomers and volunteers, and about issues that matter to newcomers
   - Meetings are at community locations and public spaces where Canadians meet
   - Participants are encouraged to get together outside formal meetings (e.g., by exchanging phone numbers or within their school community)
   - Newcomers take on roles in the group where they can contribute and reciprocate (e.g., bringing potluck meals or welcoming newer arrivals)
   - Newcomers contribute to the host community (e.g., volunteering with community events or organizations)
   - Newcomers graduate from Host groups, either to sustainable natural groups or with the ability to use their informal ‘weak’ ties by contacting network members later
   - For conversation circles, most interaction is in small groups of 5 or under, and exercises promote acculturation and network-building
For example, structured activities like field trips could be designed to maximize social interaction and encourage informal linking afterwards, providing prolonged conversations in a real-life setting. Tutoring and homework clubs could promote community engagement if newcomer parents or older youth were trained to act as tutors, linking them to their communities in a way that developed their own skills and extended their networks.

5. Host groups should collect short-term indicators of success to ensure that they are addressing the Host mandate. Suggested indicators are:
   a. Number and type of social ties created through Host activities, both for newcomers and volunteers;
   b. Newcomer participation in community events and organizations (e.g., as volunteers) inside and outside their ethnocultural groups;
   c. Newcomer satisfaction with their social connections

6. CIC should support feedback systems to ensure that successful models are recognized and replicated and that useful practices are shared.

7. Citizenship & Immigration Canada should clarify the following program and policy issues:
   a. Should Host have priorities for specific target groups, such as refugees or children/youth? (If priorities are directed to difficult-to-serve groups, service statistics should reflect the increased cost of responding to them.)
   b. Should the LINC program incorporate informal conversation practice to respond to demand from newcomers and reduce the pressure on Host groups?
   c. Should ISAP services use more community volunteers in settlement tasks, and if so, how should good volunteer management practices be incorporated within ISAP?
   d. What are the requirements for Host group participants? For example, must Canadian youth be trained and screened as official volunteers if they are just visiting a youth drop-in centre? How many refugee claimants may attend a Host group if the group is sponsored by another funder or partner besides CIC?
   e. If Host groups move to community locations where settled Canadians meet and socialize, there will be implications for office costs, information systems, space rental (e.g. for libraries or community centres), and staff travel costs. How will CIC assist in this transition?

Two documents were produced for the review. This report summarizes the findings and describes the recommendations. The addendum includes additional charts and a spreadsheet listing characteristics of all of the group models, and the methodology with interview protocols. Both documents will be posted on settlement.org in May 2005.
2. INTRODUCTION

The Host program, the smallest settlement program funded by Citizenship & Immigration Canada (CIC), matches newcomers with Canadian volunteers to help newcomers adapt to their new communities. Host has been building informal relationships between newcomers and Canadians for 20 years, and is delivered by 38 immigrant-serving agencies across Canada. Nineteen of these agencies are in Ontario.

Host began in 1985 as a community-based service to sponsored refugees. Sponsoring groups, mainly churches, matched newly arrived refugees with individuals or families, who then assisted their ‘friends’ to cope with all of the confusing elements of moving to a new country. The Host program was extended to immigrants in 1991.

An evaluation of the Ontario Host program in 2000\(^1\) found that many agencies were offering group activities as an element of their Host program. The evaluation recommended that CIC support Host groups where they seemed to be effective, and in 2001 CIC Ontario Region published guidelines for ‘English Conversation Circles’\(^2\). With the official recognition of Host group models, even more agencies started providing them.

In the autumn of 2004, CIC Ontario Region commissioned a review of Host group models across the province. The objectives of the review were:

- To identify and describe the various Host group models in Ontario
- To identify the benefits and challenges of group models
- To identify which models and activities are the most promising in terms of effectiveness and efficiency
- To develop recommendations for improving Host program group model service delivery
- To share the results with Ontario Host Service Providers for feedback and consultation

The study only looked at group models, not at individual or family matches, and only within Ontario’s Host-funded agencies. The study was not a program evaluation. This is an important point – we could not evaluate Host group models because service providers are not yet collecting outcome data. CIC requested a collaborative research process that engaged service providers in figuring out how to improve services, and that allowed them to share information among each other.

This report provides highlights of the findings and outlines the key recommendations. The addendum to this report contains a detailed methodology, interview protocols, summary

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\(^1\) Power Analysis, 2000

\(^2\) The CIC guidelines for English Conversation Circles are included in the addendum to this report.
charts of findings, and a spreadsheet that lists characteristics of all of the groups. Both documents will be posted on settlement.org in May 2005.

3. OUR APPROACH

There are three main risks in carrying out a program review without outcome and evaluation data.

The first risk is that the review team does a few interviews and focus groups and concludes that everything is fine, with perhaps a few minor ‘safe’ suggestions to make everyone feel that something has been done. This is not a good use of scarce resources.

The second risk is that the review recommends sweeping changes that are not based on solid information, and that results in disruption to the agencies or poor advice to the funder.

The third risk is that the review comes up with a grab-bag of unrelated suggestions and recommendations that confuse the sector. Reviews should enable service providers and funders to understand the program more deeply and as a result, be more innovative and effective.

To minimize these risks, RealWorld Systems looked at the Host program from many perspectives to ensure that our recommendations made sense from the policy and research viewpoints as well as to stakeholders – CIC, service providers and the newcomers and volunteers themselves. Conclusions that are supported by multiple perspectives are more likely to be helpful, and at the very least unlikely to be harmful.

The research methodology is described in detail in the addendum. In brief, we reviewed every agency file at the CIC offices, reviewed the research literature on factors leading to successful settlement, carried out extensive phone interviews with every Host service provider in Ontario (most were over an hour, and some took up to three hours), and visited six agencies to see some promising Host groups in action.

We also involved service providers via representation on the advisory committee and three formal consultations3. We maintained a high degree of transparency throughout the process. Agencies were sent our interview notes for correction before we analysed the data. They were then asked to review and correct the spreadsheet summary of their own group models. Every agency agreed to speak to us on the understanding that our conversation was not confidential (see the introduction to the interview protocol for the exact agreement). This meant that we could share information between agencies and discuss common issues and problems that they were experiencing, as well as good ideas and successful models.

3 The first consultation, at the Geneva Park Host Conference at the beginning of the review, focused on the objectives and design of the study. The second consultation was part of a workshop at the National Host Conference on February 17, and the third was at the CIC offices in Toronto on March 2. Representatives from thirteen agencies attended the March 2 consultation, and a summary of the session is included in the addendum.
4. **HOST’S MANDATE**

Before we can identify promising Host group models, we must identify the desired outcomes of Host. What is Host’s mandate? What is Host trying to achieve?

We drew from two main sources to understand the main goals of Host. The first was the *Host Handbook for Service Provider Organizations*\(^4\) posted on CIC’s web site. The Handbook, which outlines Host’s purpose, activities and agency responsibilities, states:

> “[The Host program helps] immigrants overcome the stress of moving to a new country. Volunteers familiar with Canadian ways help newcomers learn about available services and how to use them, practice English and French, get contacts in their field of work and participate in the community. At the same time, host Canadians learn about new cultures, other lands and different languages; they make new friends and they strengthen community life.”

The second source was CIC’s *Settlement Evaluation Framework*\(^5\), which was developed last year in cooperation with service provider organizations throughout Canada as part of CIC’s Contribution Accountability Framework. The Evaluation Framework is the official statement of CIC’s desired settlement outcomes.

CIC has three settlement programs open to immigrants and refugees: Host, Immigrant Settlement and Adaptation Program (ISAP) and Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC). All of CIC’s settlement programs have the same three long term outcomes:

- Canadian society benefits from the contribution of newcomers
- Newcomers are accepted and engaged in Canadian life
- Newcomers fully participate in all sectors of Canadian society – economic, political, social and cultural

Host is by far the smallest settlement program – about 3% of LINC’s budget and 8% of ISAP’s budget\(^6\). LINC is focused on language learning, and ISAP is focused on enabling newcomers to connect to the information and services they need in order to become settled and employed.

\(^4\) From Citizenship and Immigration Canada web site at [http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/newcomer/host-1e.html#host2](http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/newcomer/host-1e.html#host2)


\(^6\) Email communication from Lynn Murrell, Citizenship and Immigration Canada. It is consistent with financial estimates for 2003/2004 posted at [http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/est-pre/20032004/CI-CI/CI-CIr34_e.asp#s6x1](http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/est-pre/20032004/CI-CI/CI-CIr34_e.asp#s6x1)
According to the Evaluation Framework, Host has five desired outcomes for the medium term (3 to 5 years). Three of them are the same as outcomes for ISAP or LINC:

- Newcomers can communicate in English and/or French
- Newcomer can access community resources and services, including libraries, health care, education
- Newcomers can meet personal goals, such as education, employment or income improvement.

Host has two desired outcomes that distinguish it from ISAP and LINC:

- Host communities, including francophone minority communities, welcome and engage newcomers
- Newcomers of all ages and members of host communities are engaged in diverse social networks.

In other words, the outcomes that distinguish Host from the other settlement programs are in the area of community engagement and social networks. Meeting those outcomes are key to defining Host’s purpose.

When we are looking for effective service models in Host, we mean that we are looking for models that will help newcomers contribute to and be fully engaged in Canadian society through their social involvement with Canadians.

5. DESCRIPTION OF HOST GROUP MODELS IN ONTARIO

Groups have become an important part of the Host program in Ontario. Of the 19 Host agencies in the province, fifteen (or 79%) are providing group activities as part of their Host programs. The remaining four agencies have provided groups in the past and/or are planning to offer them in the future.

We found 51 examples of groups that were offered in 2004. If an agency provided two or three groups using the same model, we counted it as one example. We did not include family matches, in which a family of newcomers are matched with a family of Canadians.

The addendum contains a set of charts describing characteristics of the Host group models, as well as a spreadsheet that gives summary information on all of the Host groups provided by the 19 agencies in Ontario.

None of the Host programs (group or individual) have been formally evaluated, and none of the agencies are collecting outcome data. Most use basic evaluation forms with satisfaction ratings and some qualitative questions to gauge group success.
In our interviews with agencies, we asked for the main objectives for each type of group they provided, as well as any secondary objectives. We then combined their descriptions into four top-level objectives:

- **Social network development** was the primary objective for 39% of the groups.
- **Language of settlement practice** (mostly English) was the primary objective for 35% of the groups.
- **Welcome/ Orientation/ Acculturation to Canada** was the primary objective for 14% of the groups.
- **Specific skills development**, such as math tutoring, was the primary objective for 12% of the groups. We included ‘French Conversation Circles’ in this objective if they were in locations where French was not the language of settlement.

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**HOST Group Model Breakdown by Primary Objective**

*Total Number of Active HOST Group Models = 51*

- **Social Network Development**, 39%
- **Language of Settlement Practice**, 35%
- **Welcome / Orientation / Cultural Exchange**, 14%
- **Specific Skills Development**, 8%
- **French Practice**, 4%

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*Figure 1: HOST Group Model Breakdown by Primary Objective. Note: French Practice was combined with Specific Skills Development in cities where French is not the language of settlement.*
We clustered the 51 groups into 9 service models based on their primary objective. The nine service models described below are ideal types, based on the phone interviews with Host agencies. In site visits to several Host groups, we found that staff and volunteers did not always run the groups exactly as described by the Host coordinator. Reasons may include insufficient training, a lack of clarity regarding outcomes and roles, and the difficulty of managing a program that is delivered by volunteers. Without some kind of regular monitoring and evaluation, the ‘service models’ described below are unlikely to be consistently delivered in reality. However, the nine models capture the types of activities that Host groups are currently offering, or intending to offer.

Social network development

Helping newcomers develop their social networks was identified as the primary objective for 39% of the groups (20 out of the 51). This objective includes helping newcomers to meet new people, learn how to befriend Canadians, develop friendships, make connections to informal networks, and so on. Not only was this the most common primary objective, but two thirds of the groups (67%) stated it as either a primary or secondary objective.

Five group models addressed the objective of social network development.

1. Socializing Around Language Practice: This type of group is usually called an ‘English Conversation Circle’ or ECC, but its focus is on the socializing aspect, not the language training aspect. The Host agencies offer newcomers the opportunity to practice English as a way to attract them to the service. Many newcomers want to improve their English, and to practice English in ‘real’ situations, and these ECCs can provide a way to offer both English practice and a place to socialize with Canadians.

   Typically there are several volunteers in each group, with a ratio of about one volunteer to three newcomers, and small subgroups engage in lively conversation about their lives and other topics that interest them. They often exchange phone numbers or email addresses and meet informally outside the groups. Friendships are encouraged between newcomers as well as between volunteers and newcomers.

2. Recreational/Hobby Groups: These groups meet informally to go on walks or play sports or talk about books. In some cases, the groups have arisen naturally without formal leadership from the agency. They may consist of matched newcomers and volunteers who find it more convenient to get together in a regular group rather than setting up individual weekly appointments. For example, in Kitchener-Waterloo, hosts and their matches began meeting during the Y’s family swim time. The Host agency found out about it and began advertising it in their newsletter, and it has become an important element of their Host program. This model may also be a way for unmatched newcomers and volunteers to participate in Host.
3. **School Buddies**: These school-based programs match groups of Canadian students with groups of newcomer students in the same school. Each newcomer is usually matched to a Canadian student as his/her buddy, often someone of the same age or in the same grade. But the focus is on group activities, not one-to-one conversation. The groups are led by a paid Host staff person, often with the support of school staff (e.g., guidance counsellor or ESL teacher) who recruit or select the students. There is an element of working with the school itself to make the whole school community more welcoming to newcomers.

4. **Youth Drop-Ins**: These groups meet at a central location (not their school) and provide a place for newcomer and Canadian youth to meet each other in a semi-structured setting. There may be a combination of discussion, workshops and games. The aim is to help young newcomers integrate into the local youth scene in a way that is safe and healthy. Parents of newcomers may be invited to attend until they feel comfortable that their children are in safe hands. This is similar to the Community Engagement model below in that the group tries to replicate a ‘natural’ youth community. Newcomer youth may be encouraged to welcome newer arrivals, so that newcomers take on some volunteer responsibilities.

5. **Community Engagement**: These groups engage newcomers with their local community directly rather than through assigned Canadian volunteers. Newcomers are engaged with the broader community as contributors, not just recipients (cooking potluck dinners as a fundraising event; helping local residents to build a float for the Christmas parade; volunteering at community events).

One interesting variation in Hamilton, ‘Refugee Community Engagement’, links newly arrived refugees with members of their own ethnocultural group within two days of arrival. The older arrivals who act as welcomers are recognized by the agency as valued colleagues in the settlement process. In community engagement, the focus is on getting newcomers to mix into existing natural social networks as directly as possible.

The community engagement model is very interesting, and we believe it should be expanded and experimented with. One possible variant is to place newcomers as volunteers in agencies that serve the broader community, while ensuring that the newcomers are involved in appropriate network-building tasks in those agencies. For example, they should be interacting with settled Canadians in the language of settlement. Volunteer centres should be engaged in this approach, though they may need some help from settlement agencies in assessing newcomers and placing them in appropriate settings.

**Language of settlement practice**

Practice of the language of settlement was the second most common objective. In most cases, the language of settlement was English, with the sole exception of Ottawa where they offered French practice. Thirty-five percent of the groups had
‘English practice’ as their primary objective, and over half (55%) had it as either a primary or secondary objective. Note that we did not include groups here that offered French practice in areas where French was not a language of settlement.

Only 16% of the groups did not include either social network or language of settlement as one of their objectives. Those groups named welcome, acculturation and/or specific skills development as their only objectives.

One service model addressed the ‘language practice’ objective.

6. **Language Classes:** This type of group is also called ‘English Conversation Circles’, but unlike the first group, ‘Socializing Around Language Practice’, it focuses on language learning. One or more volunteers, perhaps retired ESL teachers, teach a group of newcomers. During the ECC, the volunteer leads structured language exercises, directs participants to talk about specific topics, or leads a group of children or youth in an ESL class to supplement their school classes. Large groups may split into smaller subgroups, but the ratio of volunteers to newcomers may be one to five or more. The group discussion is led by volunteers, not newcomers, and topics are generally chosen by the agency or volunteers.

**Welcoming, orientation and acculturation**

This objective included activities that welcome newcomers at the point of arrival in Canada, as well as activities that help them with the masses of information they need to know in their new country. This information may include rules around visiting Canadians at home (i.e., they like to be phoned first), or childrearing customs. Fourteen percent of the groups had this as a primary objective.

Two service models emphasized the welcoming objective:

7. **Learning about Canada:** Another variant of the English Conversation Circle, this service model focuses on helping newcomers learn about Canadian life and at the same time engage them in English practice. The main activity is group conversation, as in the other ECCs, but the topics revolve around information that is helpful to newcomers. Role-playing may be used when talking about, for example, how to deal with your children’s teacher. It is an extension of the information and referral function of ISAP, but allowing newcomers to explore these topics in more depth, informally, and with ‘real Canadians’.

8. **Structured activities:** Summer camps, field trips and day or family camps are all examples of structured activities that involve more than conversation. These groups offer a mixture of acculturation activities and recreation or socializing. Examples include field trips of high school youth to libraries, parks and grocery stores; and summer camps that bring children or whole families together. The groups include both newcomers and Canadians.
Specific skills development

This objective included skills development and training that are not related to language of settlement practice. Activities include homework clubs, computer skills training, math tutoring and also French conversation circles that were not in an area with a significant francophone community. Twelve percent of the groups had this as a primary objective.

One service model focused on skills development:

9. Skills Training/ Tutoring/ Homework Clubs: Often targeted at school children or university students, these groups provide volunteers to help newcomers with specific skills (e.g., computers or math), or general homework help. Sometimes Frontier College is involved in providing trained tutors, as in two of the Host groups run by SISO in Hamilton.

Other Group Characteristics

Forty-one percent of the Host groups targeted children or youth and 18% targeted families. 20% targeted refugees, and 37% had no specific target group other than newcomers who were eligible for Host services. (Some groups had multiple target groups, so numbers do not add to 100%.)
A third of the groups were held at a settlement or immigrant/serving agency. Other locations included schools, churches, libraries, recreational centres and public spaces.

Because of the concern raised by several agencies that Host groups may place newcomers in a ‘one-down’ situation, we analysed who was responsible for deciding what topics or activities were carried out in the group (agenda development) and who led the group. In about half of the groups, the agenda is set by the agency staff or volunteers. In 70% of the groups, the staff and/or the volunteer led the group. We were unable to separate volunteer-led from staff-led; often the staff would introduce the session and then the volunteer would take over.
HOST Group Models - Agenda Development

Total Number of Active Group Models = 51

- Agenda set by agency or volunteers: 49%
- Agenda set by participants each session: 27%
- Agenda set by participants at beginning of program: 16%
- Agenda is unstated or unset: 8%

Figure 3: Host Group Models: Agenda Development.
HOST Group Model Breakdown by Group Meeting Leadership Role

Total Number of Active Host Group Models = 51

- Staff and/or Volunteer Leads: 70%
- Staff & Participants Lead: 4%
- Volunteer & Participants Lead: 2%
- Volunteer, Staff & Participants Lead: 2%
- NA: 6%
- Participants Lead: 16%

Figure 4: Host group model breakdown by leadership role

Finally, it is interesting that about half of the groups were started in the last three years. This probably shows the influence of the group guidelines published by CIC in 2001.

6. BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES OF GROUP MODELS

Over the weeks of data collection, we heard many comments about the challenges and benefits of group models from agencies, volunteers and newcomers. The following points, all of which were raised by service providers in telephone interviews and confirmed during the consultations, summarize the problems and opportunities of Host groups as they are currently provided, as well as some of the service providers’ hopes and fears.
6.1. **Key Benefits**

- Several agencies noted that Host groups are better than one-to-one matches for youth. Youth, they said, don't like being matched with strangers, but prefer to select their own friends in a group of other youth.

- Some agencies used groups as a way to keep newcomers and volunteers engaged while they were waiting for individual matches.

- In some cases, groups were used to allow matches to emerge naturally, similar to the youth groups. Several Host coordinators thought this made for stronger matches.

- Some volunteers are reluctant to commit to regular one-to-one contact for an extended period of time (e.g., six to 12 months). Groups are a way for volunteers to participate with newcomers informally, and for a shorter commitment. For some volunteers, group interactions are more appealing, and thus, a different type of volunteer can be recruited.

- Groups can lead directly to more accessible institutions in the community. The school buddy programs work with the entire school community to become more welcoming to newcomers. Groups meeting at local community centres or libraries involve negotiation with community resources, and may lead to more culturally appropriate processes. The Host staff may need to mediate between groups of newcomers and the venue. This is actually one of the great advantages of having groups meet outside the settlement agency – it can involve a form of service bridging to make the broader community more accessible.

- As Host programs have experimented with groups, new forms of Host have emerged that sidestep the whole idea of designated Canadians taking newcomers under their wing. Some of the community engagement strategies attempt to connect newcomers directly with natural social networks in a very interesting way that is worth exploring further.

- Groups encourage the development of social networks among newcomers from diverse backgrounds, broadening their connections to Canada’s multicultural communities.

6.2. **Key Challenges**

- Many agencies pointed out that groups are not a replacement for individual one-to-one matches. Groups definitely show promise, but they do not replace the close, strong ties that form between many of the newcomer/volunteer matches.

- Some agencies believe that groups lend themselves to power differences between volunteers and newcomers, in which newcomers are positioned as disempowered takers and volunteers as givers. They believe that a classroom scene in which one or more volunteers teach newcomers is inconsistent with Host values.
• Host’s flexibility, as shown by the rise of groups, makes it vulnerable to filling gaps in LINC and ISAP. Conversation Circles in particular were questioned by many agencies as a stop-gap for LINC. LINC is perceived as having a serious weakness around informal conversation practice, and Conversation Circles are often filled by LINC students who are trying to get extra practice.

• Host groups may not make sense in small towns with few newcomers. Some smaller cities had groups that comprised only three or four people – two or three newcomers and one volunteer. Depending on the staff required for scheduling and support, groups may not be worth the cost.

6.3. Questions and Concerns

• Agencies value Host’s flexibility and the fact that Host allows them to be innovative in designing activities for newcomers. They were concerned that the program review might lead to inappropriate rigidity.

• Many agencies requested more guidance on what group activities are acceptable for Host, more consistency between program officers regarding guidelines, and more clarity regarding who may attend the groups. For example, may the group serve refugee claimants if most of the other participants are Host-eligible?

• Most agencies had very little knowledge about what their peers were doing in the area of Host groups. With a few exceptions they did not share their materials with other agencies. However, many said they would be happy to share their materials, and hoped for more information sharing in the sector.

7. THE EVIDENCE FOR HOST

While planning our phone interviews and developing the questions we would ask all the agencies, we also carried out a literature scan of the factors that lead to successful settlement, focusing on Host’s five medium-term outcomes described above. Host was created 20 years ago, and it was possible that new research might show that matching newcomers with volunteers was not an effective model for settlement and integration. In fact, we found the opposite. Based on the research literature, Host appears to be more relevant than ever.

Here is a summary of what we found, categorized by the outcomes they address.
7.1. **Outcome: Newcomers can communicate in English and/or French**

This is indeed a very important factor in integration. Newcomers must be able to speak the language of settlement in order to get full access to services, jobs, training and other resources of community life.7

There are two kinds of language learning that are of relevance here. The first is the technical mastery of vocabulary and grammar as they are used in communication. That is the mandate of LINC, CIC’s largest settlement program, with a budget 32 times more than Host. Formal language teaching requires special expertise and curriculum design8, although informal and unstructured conversation is increasingly seen as crucial elements of instruction9.

The second kind of learning is the effective use of language in social interactions such as friendship, work and daily living. This is best done in the context of informal conversations that are in-depth, low-stake and involve a variety of speech activities in different situations.10 Host relationships, both in groups and individual matches, are good places for this type of language learning.

Second language education research shows that peer-to-peer dialogue focusing on problem-solving is just as useful as expert-novice dialogue11. In other words, newcomers practicing English together – as long as the conversations are collaborative and problem-solving – can learn as much as practicing with native English speakers. In fact, newcomers should talk to other newcomers because, especially in Canada’s large cities, they must be able to understand non-standard accents.

Research also shows that the quality of the relationships formed in interactions affects language learning significantly12. It is easy to have misunderstandings and hurt feelings when using an unfamiliar language, because cultural differences in asking for help or saying no can sound rude to the other person. Volunteers and newcomers need to learn how to recognize miscommunications and how to repair

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7 Canadian Council for Refugees, 1998
8 Celce-Murcia 2001
9 Jacobs and Farrell 2001
10 Swain 2000; Vygotsky, 1986
11 Swain and Lapkin 1995; Swain and Lapkin 1998; Swain 2000; Swain and Lapkin 2001; Swain, Brooks et al. 2002
12 Storch 1999; Storch 2003
them. And this type of intercultural sensitivity is important even when the newcomer can already speak fluent English.13

7.2. Outcomes: Newcomers can access community resources and services, including libraries, health care, education (and) Newcomers can meet personal goals, such as education, employment or income improvement.

The two Host outcomes above overlap with the desired outcomes of the Immigrant Settlement Adaptation Program (ISAP). Like the issue of language learning, there are two ways of addressing these outcomes. The first is to provide effective information and referral services to newcomers, which requires training and accurate information about community resources. That is ISAP's mandate, and CIC Ontario commissioned a review of ISAP two years ago14 that described effective service models related to information and referral. ISAP has 12 times more funding than Host.

The second way to address these outcomes is through the information and contacts that emerge in social interaction. There is plenty of evidence, summarized in the next section, that social networks are an effective way to gather and disseminate useful information.

So far, based on the three outcomes we have listed so far, there is no reason to fund Host as a separate settlement program. It could just be divided between LINC and ISAP, which would simplify administration.

However, Host has two additional desired outcomes that distinguish it from ISAP and LINC, and that also allow it to address the outcomes above:

7.3. Outcomes: Host communities welcome and engage newcomers (and) Newcomers of all ages and members of host communities are engaged in diverse social networks.

Both of these outcomes relate to the development of social networks between newcomers and the broader community. The outcomes are aimed at both newcomers and Canadians, not merely newcomers.

There is a large and growing literature on the relevance of social networks and social capital to immigrant settlement15 as well as to health, adaptation and economic

13 FitzGerald, 2003
14 Kerr and Simard 2003
15 Kunz 2005
success\textsuperscript{16}. All seem to rely on social networks consisting of both strong ties (like family and close friends) and weak ties (like acquaintances or friends of friends)\textsuperscript{17}.

As a recent policy review on settlement stated, "Does social capital, defined as social networks, play a role in immigrant integration? The answer is a resounding 'yes'."\textsuperscript{18}

There are two types of helpful social networks\textsuperscript{19}.

- One type provides \textbf{social support}, which helps people to ‘get by’, or to cope with problems. Social support networks involve links to people in the same small networks or with same disadvantages, and uses strong ties.

- The second type of social network provides \textbf{social leverage}, which helps people ‘get ahead’ or improve their opportunities, e.g., through access to job information. Social leverage involves links (or ‘bridges’) to other social networks, and mostly uses weak ties.

Recent research on the employment of refugees found that their “former education and employment have little, if any, impact in securing meaningful and stable employment in Canada... Of all the forms of capital considered, a refugee's network structure shows the greatest impact on quality of employment."\textsuperscript{20}

In the working world, many corporations that are successful in quickly getting new staff (not necessarily immigrants) to become productive use a \textit{relational approach} to bring new staff up to speed. Instead of giving information, they “help newcomers establish a broad network of relationships, and then let the newcomers tap their growing information network \textit{as needed} to quickly become productive contributors.”\textsuperscript{21}

Close kinship and friendship networks, while useful in some ways, can prevent disadvantaged groups from taking advantage of community resources. Group loyalties may isolate members from valuable information, or restrict their options by (for example) requiring them to provide childcare to family members rather than

\textsuperscript{16} Woolcock and Narayan 2000

\textsuperscript{17} Flap and Volker, 2004

\textsuperscript{18} Kunz 2005 p.15

\textsuperscript{19} Briggs 1998; Briggs 2004

\textsuperscript{20} Lamba 2003

\textsuperscript{21} Rollag et al. 2005 p35
obtaining education.\textsuperscript{22} Host has an important role in building linkages to the broader community.

Despite the significant link between social networks and many kinds of success, researchers have not been able to define why social networks are so useful. “There are an annoying number of plausible connections\textsuperscript{23}” complains an expert in the area. It seems that social networks have at least four characteristics that relate to their usefulness in overcoming disadvantage\textsuperscript{24}:

- The number of people who are willing to help
- The amount of help they are willing to give
- The resources that the helpers have access to, including their own social networks
- The ease of which the network resources can be accessed (for example, whether it requires just a quick phone call to a neighbour or an expensive journey to another city).

Host agencies, in maximizing the usefulness of their groups, should make them large enough to provide a diverse network for newcomers, and recruit volunteers who are knowledgeable and well-connected.

In general, CIC and service providers can feel confident that an effective social network strategy is an excellent investment in helping newcomers to integrate into Canadian society, and fits well into its overall settlement programs. It will be a continuing challenge to provide Host services that are as effective as possible in helping newcomers connect to diverse and useful social networks.

8. MOST PROMISING MODELS AND ACTIVITIES

As we pointed out at the beginning of this paper, none of the Host group models have been evaluated for effectiveness. Comments about the characteristics that are most likely to be effective can only be guesses based on research literature, agency experience, and our observations. As evaluation data emerges, agencies and CIC should share and replicate successful practices. There may be other practices that are more effective than the ones listed below.

\textsuperscript{22} Woolcock 2000 p7f
\textsuperscript{23} Flap 2004 p15
\textsuperscript{24} Flap and Volker 2004 pxvi
Given those caveats, we did identify several characteristics that we believe are promising practices for Host group models. They are consistent with the core Host outcomes of building social networks in the context of settlement and integration.

**Promising groups tend to have these characteristics:**

- Groups encourage extensive and in-depth informal conversations among both newcomers and volunteers, and about issues that matter to newcomers
- Meetings are at community locations and public spaces where Canadians meet
- Participants are encouraged to get together outside formal meetings (e.g., by exchanging phone numbers or within school community)
- Newcomers take on roles where they can contribute and reciprocate (e.g., bringing potluck meals or welcoming newer arrivals)
- Newcomers contribute to the host community (e.g., volunteering with community events or organizations)
- Newcomers graduate from Host groups, either to sustainable natural groups or with the ability to use their informal ‘weak’ ties by contacting network members later
- For conversation circles, most interaction is in small groups of 5 or under, and exercises promote acculturation and network-building

**These characteristics may not be consistent with building social networks:**

- Groups meet at locations that isolate newcomers from neighbourhoods and host communities, such as settlement agencies where settled Canadians do not socialize
- Group leaders (whether staff or volunteers) act as ‘teachers’ and newcomers are passive students
- Newcomers do not meet volunteers or each other outside the formal group activity
- In the case of youth groups, volunteers and/or newcomers drop out as soon as they satisfy their 40 hours of community service (i.e., participants are not engaged and must be ‘bribed’ to attend)
- Host resources support groups in which newcomers do not graduate (e.g., newcomers use it as primary source of social support, and stay for years)
- Groups are adjuncts of LINC class (e.g., LINC students go to English Conversation Circles as an extension of their studies)
- Groups are narrowly focused on language learning and practice or skills development
9. RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommend a number of changes to Host group models below. Some of these recommendations may have implications for the Host program as a whole.

1. The core objective for Host groups should be defined as: To help newcomers link to diverse social networks in the host community. Other objectives, such as English practice, should be secondary.

   Comments:

   The desired outcomes for Host should be clarified to prevent Host resources being diverted to other programs, and to focus Host on more effective practices.

   Other objectives, such as helping newcomers practice English or French, mobilizing volunteers to help with settlement tasks, and promoting the capacity of the host community to welcome newcomers, are also important but should support the primary objective above. Activities that do not promote the development of social networks do not fit within Host’s mandate.

2. Host groups should be designed to respond to newcomers’ priorities (e.g., practicing English, shopping, recreation, learning about Canada) while helping them to build social networks.

   Comments:

   For example, if newcomers want to practice English, groups can be designed in a way to promote informal relationships with Canadian hosts and among newcomers. Host’s role in building language skills is to enable informal conversation within a social relationship, not to provide formal skills training. For newcomers with limited English or French, groups must provide a safe place for newcomers and volunteers to struggle with different languages. That’s not the same thing as English exercises. In another example, helping newcomers get familiar with Canadian recreation may be better achieved through hiking clubs or hanging out at the community recreation centre than by having directed discussions about sports.

   There is plenty of room for flexibility and innovation. Groups can do a wide variety of activities as long as they have the elements that build positive social networks and at the same time deliver what they promise to the participants. Expectations should be clearly communicated and managed; a Host-run homework club will be very different from a school-run homework club, and parents should understand that their children will not be hunched over their books studying in the former.

3. Host should emphasize social networks that link newcomers to the broader community. However, some newcomers may benefit from links with their own ethnocultural communities as a first step.
**Comments:**

Host has a role in supporting two major types of social networks: those that build social support among people with similar disadvantages, and those that build links to the broader society.

Host should be mainly focused on promoting links to the broader society, rather than linking newcomers to members of their own ethnocultural community.

However, some groups (especially youth and some newly arrived refugees) may benefit from initial help in connecting to their own ethnocultural communities. This can be risky. Agencies must ensure that newly arrived refugees feel safe and are not exposed to people who may be perceived as enemies from the country of origin. Members of the already-settled communities might have a history of conflict with newer refugees.

Even if newcomers are linked with their own ethnocultural communities first, Host programs should build in bridges to the broader community to minimize the development of disadvantaged enclaves, and to help newcomers build social leverage. Agencies should also be aware that many refugees and youth are fully capable of being linked immediately with the broader community rather than going through a two-step process.

4. The most promising groups are characterized by the ways they are delivered rather than the service model itself. Of the nine Host group models described in the paper, all of them except the ‘Language Classes’ could be effective, but only if they are delivered using the following elements of promising programs:

   • Groups encourage extensive and in-depth informal conversations among both newcomers and volunteers, and about issues that matter to newcomers
   
   • Meetings are at community locations and public spaces where Canadians meet
   
   • Participants are encouraged to get together outside formal meetings (e.g., by exchanging phone numbers or within school community)
   
   • Newcomers take on roles where they can contribute and reciprocate (e.g., bringing potluck meals or welcoming newer arrivals)
   
   • Newcomers contribute to the host community (e.g., volunteering with community events or organizations)
   
   • Newcomers graduate from Host groups, either to sustainable natural groups or with the ability to use their informal ‘weak’ ties by contacting network members later
• For conversation circles, most interaction is in small groups of 5 or under, and exercises promote acculturation and network-building

For example, structured activities like field trips could be designed to maximize social interaction and encourage informal linking afterwards, providing prolonged conversations in a real-life setting. Tutoring and homework clubs could promote community engagement if newcomer parents or older youth were trained to act as tutors, linking them to their communities in a way that developed their own skills and extended their networks.

Comments:

Newcomers are often placed in a passive, one-down position in relation to Canadian society. This is unavoidable when they attend training, get counselling, take advice, accept social assistance, and so on. Host is the only CIC settlement program that is based on equality and reciprocality. One-way teacher/student relationships are fine in many situations, but they don’t belong in Host.

5. Host groups should collect short-term indicators of success to ensure that they are addressing the Host mandate.

Suggested indicators are:

• Number and type of social ties created through Host activities, both for newcomers and volunteers;

• Newcomer participation in community events and organizations (e.g., as volunteers) inside and outside their ethnocultural groups;

• Newcomer satisfaction with their social connections

Comments:

It is easy for complex programs with hard-to-define objectives to drift. Furthermore, we do not know enough about what activities are most effective in building positive social links to the broader community. It is essential for Host programs to collect indicators to ensure they are having the right kind of impact, and so that the Host models can get more effective.

The suggested indicators should be based on social capital research and validated with a few volunteer agencies before asking all agencies to collect them. It is probably not necessary to survey every group participant; smaller samples could be followed up by phone with volunteers and newcomers. Successful results should be

25 Grootaert et al. 2004
shared between agencies so that good practices can be spread.

6. CIC should support feedback systems to ensure that successful models are recognized and replicated and that useful practices are shared.

**Comments:**

This point is related to the previous recommendation about indicators, but is broader. It is not enough to just collect indicators; agencies and CIC must analyse them, find the most effective models, and encourage their replication.

Besides the results of outcome evaluation, agencies can share other resources. Some agencies have detailed volunteer management processes that they would be willing to share with their peers. Others have successful volunteer recruitment strategies, and others have innovative and apparently successful Host models. There should be ways for agencies to share these practices, possibly by posting them on settlement.org or a national equivalent, rather than leaving agencies to develop them from scratch in every community. This is particularly relevant to the expansion of Host into new communities or agencies.

7. Citizenship & Immigration Canada should clarify the following program and policy issues:

   a. Should Host have priorities for specific target groups, such as refugees or children/youth? (If priorities are directed to difficult-to-serve groups, service statistics should reflect the increased cost of responding to them.)

   b. Should the LINC program incorporate informal conversation practice to respond to demand from newcomers and reduce the pressure on Host groups?

   c. Should ISAP services use more community volunteers in settlement tasks, and if so, how should good volunteer management practices be incorporated within ISAP?

   d. What are the requirements for Host group participants? For example, must Canadian youth be trained and screened as official volunteers if they are just visiting a youth drop-in centre? How many refugee claimants may attend a Host group if the group is sponsored by another funder or partner besides CIC?

   e. If Host groups move to community locations where settled Canadians meet and socialize, there will be implications for office costs, information systems, space rental (e.g. for libraries or community centres), and staff travel costs. How will CIC assist in this transition?
10. REFERENCES


