

***Central Okanagan
Local Immigration Partnership Council
Strategic Planning
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Contents

Introduction	3
Strategic Planning Context	3
Review of LIP Vision Statement	5
Review of Logic Model Outcomes.....	5
Environmental Scan	6
Assets & Strengths	6
Barriers & Challenges.....	8
Aspirations & Opportunities	11
Strategic Directions (Themes).....	13

Introduction

The members of the Central Okanagan Local Immigration Partnership (LIP) Council convened a strategic planning session on November 24, 2014 in Kelowna. The purpose of this session was to review research conducted on immigrant needs in the region and conduct an environmental scan that would add to and compliment the research. Strategic directions were identified through this conversation.

The planning session covered the following areas:

- Review of the LIP's Vision Statement
- Review of Community Assets & Strengths
- Review of Community Barriers & Challenges
- Review of Aspirations & Opportunities
- Identifying New Strategic Directions

Strategic Planning Context

Community Research

The Central Okanagan LIP conducted research between July 2014 and October 2014 to better understand the needs of immigrants in the community. A research consultant was hired to conduct a preliminary literature search/review and conduct original research in the form of community leader and frontline worker surveys and a community focus group.

As a part of the research conducted by the Central Okanagan LIP, a newcomer's services map was created. This map is intended as a resource for immigrants in the community to provide ease of access of services. The link to the online map resource can be viewed here:

<http://kcr.ca/cioc/AssetMapping/index.html>

Community Context

Taken from the Community Research (Taban Leggett)

The Central Okanagan Regional District is made up of four municipalities: Kelowna, West Kelowna, Peachland, and Lake Country (Regional District of Central Okanagan 2014). As a geographically desirable area of Canada, the Central Okanagan Region has experienced an increase of immigrants and newcomers. Data drawn from the 2011 National Housing Survey (NHS) for Kelowna highlights that 13.9 percent of the population of the Kelowna Consensus Metropolitan Area (CMA) are foreign-born and 0.6 per cent are non-permanent residents (Statistics Canada 2011). The 2011 NHS also indicates that 3,145 immigrants moved to Kelowna between 2006 and 2011, which is 12.9 per cent of the total population of immigrants currently residing in Kelowna (Statistics Canada).

In 2011, the three most common countries of origin for newcomers living in Kelowna were the United Kingdom (24%), German (12%), and the United States (8%) (Statistics Canada).

By comparison, the top three countries of birth of immigrants living in British Columbia in 2011 were China (14%), India (12%), and the United Kingdom (11%). The 2011 NHS also estimates that 10,550 individuals in Kelowna belong to a visible minority group. It has been determined, furthermore, that the three largest visible minority groups living in Kelowna are South Asian, Chinese, and Japanese (Statistics Canada 2011).

The 2011 NHS further indicates that 82.2 per cent of Kelowna's immigrant population identifies English and/or French as the language they use most frequently at home. The three most frequently reported non-official languages spoken at home by immigrants in Kelowna are German, Panjabi (Punjabi), and Spanish. The median age of immigrants in Kelowna in 2011 was 32.8 years, compared to 35.7 years for the immigrant population in British Columbia (Statistics Canada 2011).

Review of LIP Vision Statement

As part of the strategic planning process, a vision statement was developed. The starting point for the conversation to develop the vision statement was the goal statement in the LIP Council's Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) which reads as follows:

“We are committed to the further development of a Central Okanagan as an inclusive, welcoming, and vibrant community where immigrants can realize their full potential, racism is eliminated, and cultural diversity is valued and celebrated.”

Review of Short- and Long-Term Outcomes

As part of the strategic planning process, the short- and long-term outcomes of the LIP were reviewed. The strategic direction identified by the LIP Council should contribute to the short- and/or long-term outcomes for the LIP initiatives, but is not limited by them.

Short-Term Outcomes:

- Enhanced engagement of a diversity of members in settlement and integration of newcomers;
- Broad-based partnerships developed for planning and setting community priorities;
- Community and newcomer needs assessed in a coordinated manner, and enhanced awareness of needs among a wider array of local actors;
- Increased capacity to support the integration of newcomers and to foster welcoming communities, including welcoming and receptive labour markets at the community level.

Long-Term Outcomes:

- Enhanced responsiveness of non-settlement services to the needs of newcomers and communities;
- Improved coordination of services at the community level and thereby enhanced accessibility and uptake;
- Improved outcomes for newcomers.

Environmental Scan

The following reflects the results of an environmental scan of the Central Okanagan as it relates to welcoming newcomers. The scan formed the basis for identifying strategic directions or themes for the LIP.

Assets & Strengths

Understanding and reflecting on areas of strength or community assets in terms of welcoming newcomers is critical to harnessing them for achieving strategic objectives. The strengths and assets that were identified in the community research acted as the starting point of conversation within the LIP to develop strategic directions and are as follows:

- Industry Training Authority (ITA)
- Intercultural Society of the Central Okanagan (ISCO)
- Kelowna Community Food Bank (KCFB)
- Kelowna Community Resources (KCR)
- Kelowna Newcomers Society (KNC)
- Okanagan Regional Library (ORL) Kelowna Branch
- Okanagan College (OC)
- Okanagan Education Centre (OEC)
- Project Literacy Kelowna Society (PLKS)
- Settlement Workers in Schools (SWIS)
- University of British Columbia Okanagan (UBCO)
- Grassroots Organizations
- Informal Networks

The strengths identified during the planning session were roughly grouped in the following areas:

Diverse Community

- Ethnocultural groups (OCCA, ISCO, French Cultural Centre, etc.)
- Diversity of newcomers (different countries, cultures, etc.)
- Arts, culture, and heritage supporters
- Fitness culture of the city
- Participation in cultural events
- Family oriented community
- Population is becoming more diverse (UBCO, OC, etc.)
- The people of the Central Okanagan are nice and welcoming
- Curiosity/Willingness to participate in cultural events
- The City is supportive of culture, arts and heritage

- Economic diversity, including a very large agricultural sector

Collaboration

- Good collaboration amongst the community's service providers
- Grassroots culturally focused organizations being established and collaborating
- Increasing opportunities to collaborate
- Local Immigration Partnership (LIP) Council

Programs and Services

- Free ESL, LINC classes
- Variety of community service organizations
- A large variety of community services available

Geographical Characteristics

- Weather and climate
- Size of the city (not too big, not too small) - big enough to have good services, but still a close knit community
- Growing community

Local Economy

- Economic diversity
- Large agricultural sector
- Broad technology and entrepreneurial sector

Community Infrastructure

- UBCO and Okanagan College are driving positive change
- H2O Centre, soccer dome
- Okanagan Centre for Innovation
- WorkBC
- Improvements to BC transit
- Kelowna International Airport (YLW)

Barriers & Challenges

The Community Research and the LIP Council identified some areas where the community faces barriers or challenges to increase awareness of what has not been effective in the past or where growth or change is needed. The LIP will consider strategic directions that will address these barriers.

The barriers identified in the community research included the following:

Access to Information, Support, and Mainstream Services

- Time Limitations (not enough variation in scheduling)
- Distance and Transportation Issues (also limited online access)
- Lack of healthcare translation and effective healthcare services to students
- Residency requirements
- Affordability of housing, education, transportation, childcare, healthcare, etc.
- Communication about program available
- Lack of affordable childcare
- Lack of services for families, children and youth
- Ineligibility of international students, naturalized Canadian citizens, Temporary Foreign workers, and their families for services
- Lack of program funding
- Lack of diversity of services

Employment and Skills Development

- Credential recognition
- Help with Direction upon Arrival
- Companies assisting with transition
- Diversity training for employers

Language

- Lack of affordability of proficiency testing, alternative English instruction if ineligible for free services, etc.
- Lack of availability and affordability of translation services
- Lack of varied offerings of English as a Second Language (ESL) training

The areas of weakness that were identified through the conversation during the planning session included:

Service Access

- CIC office closure (service must now be accessed in Vancouver or itinerant services)
- Lack of immigrant focused community services (most services are generic and may not be as accessible to newcomers)
- High cost of citizenship and language testing

- Urban sprawling and planning issues creates issues for transportation, access to services, contributes to isolation
- Lack of economy of scale to offer more services, resources, etc. (Kelowna vs. Vancouver)
- Transportation to remote and rural areas
- Issue of services not available on the weekend

Networking and Information

- Difficult access to credit/credit cards
- Lack of empowerment and network systems for immigrants
- Lack of mentors/advocates
- Lack of accurate, local statistics to help drive decision making

Rights-Based and Advocacy

- Lack of enforcement of legal obligations for employers of Temporary Foreign Workers, particularly in the agricultural sector
- Racism/Sexism
- Lack of knowledge of rights (tenancy rights, employment standards, etc.)

Diverse Community

- Language barriers
- Limited family friendly communities
- Lack of employer capacity or awareness to address diversity
- Racial profiling by police/law enforcement
- Microaggression against women and minorities

Programs and Services

- Access to information, support, mainstream services
- Access to language training
- Lack of immigrant specialized/focused services
- Lack of refugee services
- No CIC office in Kelowna (requirement to go elsewhere)
- No weekend services to people

Local Economy

- Employment and skills development
- Lack of human resources departments in organizations/businesses
- Lack of alignment or a recruitment strategy to meet future labour demands
- Lack of strong ties between service providers, community economic development, immigrant settlement, employers, etc.

Community Infrastructure

- Urban sprawling and planning issues creates issues for transportation, access to services, contributes to isolation, etc.
- Lack of walkable communities
- Lack of transportation to rural and remote areas in the valley
- Lack of collaboration between non-profit organizations and urban planners

Aspirations/Opportunities

The planning session focused on identifying opportunities that capitalize on assets and strengths and demonstrates awareness of the broader external operating environment, including barriers and challenges. There was also acknowledgement that the LIP would not be able to address all needs immediately, but that there might be some obvious opportunities for meaningful action.

The following recommendations were made in the Community Research:

Language

- Confidential and professional translation services
- More flexible program scheduling
- Coordinate ESL training among service providers
- Increase offerings of advanced ESL courses
- Advocate for increased affordability
- Offer services in different languages (doctor visits, intake forms, etc.)

Access to Information, Support, and Services

- Coordinate schedules of supports and services
- Alleviate distance of services, transportation, and isolation
- Increase in affordability: housing, education, transportation, childcare, healthcare
- Increase communication of information, supports, and services online
- Further research for addressing childcare needs, alternative childcare, baby-sitter programs, etc.
- Increase in services for family, children, and youth
- Extend access to programs and services to international students, families, naturalized citizens, and Temporary Foreign Workers; further research to identify specific gaps for these groups
- Create a centralized hub where information, support, and services can all be housed under one roof
- Advocate for the opening of a CIC office in Kelowna
- Advocate for further program funding
- Decrease residency requirements in order to access services

Employment and Skills Development

- Streamline credential recognition and communication regarding credentials before arrival
- Provide employers of immigrants with settlement information to provide staff with upon arrival
- Provide employers and their staff with diversity training

The following themes for aspirations and opportunities were identified by the group during the strategic planning session:

Increase Service Coordination

- Increase coordination of existing services
- Increase ESL course offerings
- Create opportunities for networking among immigrants

- Maximize immigration lawyers as the first point of contact
- Change residency requirements to access programs and services
- Centrality, consistency, and continuity of services

Service Enhancements

- Increase affordability, accessibility, and privacy of translation services
- Increase children, youth, and family programming
- Provide training and information for employers of Temporary Foreign Workers (TFWs)

Increase Collaboration between Stakeholders

- Okanagan Regional Library (ORL) surplus space, opportunity to create a local hub in unused space, information opportunity to link local resources online, multilingual book exchange, kids time, etc.
- Centralized space online or physically; house all relevant immigrant services under one centralized service hub
- Foster grassroots organizations by locating and creating a space for increased collaboration
- Increase collaboration between economic organizations and service provider organization
- Increase awareness of services by increased partnerships, collaboration, etc.
- Enhance immigration retention by increasing coordination between academic institutions, economic institutions, and immigration services
 - Kelowna Community Resources (KCR), University of British Columbia Okanagan (UBCO), Okanagan College (OC), School District No. 23 (SD23), Economic Development Commission (EDC), cultural groups, etc.

Enhanced Use of Digital and Social Media

- Offer courses online
- Communicate programs and services online
- Harness effective marketing/communication channels
- Perform additional research on best methods of reaching newcomers who have not accessed services

Advocacy

- Advocate for the re-opening of a Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) office in Kelowna
- Advocate for increased access to/funding for education services, housing, transportation, healthcare, and childcare
- Advocate for the acceptance of certified translations conducted outside of Canada
- Advocate for extending supports and services to international students, naturalized citizens, and Temporary Foreign Workers
- Advocate for healthcare access for international students, Temporary Foreign Workers, etc.
- Address issues including microaggression, RCMP racial profiling, etc.
- Increase support for grassroots organizations
- Increase support for newcomer business owners

Economic Development

- Support for newcomer business owners and entrepreneurs

- Increased collaboration and partnerships with employers and the economic development of the community

Cultural Change

- Community gathering
- Create spaces to bring people together
- Friendship building and communication opportunities

Strategic Directions

Through the discussion, a number of strategic directions or themes emerged. These directions reflect the perspective of the LIP members present for the planning session and email feedback as well as consideration of the results of the research. The strategic directions are consistent with the short- and long-term outcomes and with the vision statement of the LIP.

In order to achieve our vision, the Central Okanagan LIP will:

1. Work in a more cohesive and integrated way to address the identified needs of newcomers.

Rationale:

The need for greater collaboration and partnering was a consistent theme in both the research and in the conversations during the planning session. While the existing collaborative relationships were viewed as a strength, the group felt that more could be done in this area.

Suggested Task Areas:

- Work to create a community Hub for immigrant serving and/or culturally focused organizations
- Create a working group to examine ways to enhance service coordination (i.e., scheduling, types of services, etc.)

2. Strengthen economic opportunities for newcomers

Rationale:

While the Central Okanagan has adopted a coordinated approach to supporting the economic success of newcomers, more could be done in this area as well. Maximizing the economic potential of newcomers supports economic growth as well as integration in the community.

Suggested Task Areas:

- Develop partnerships with local businesses to explore ways to enhance their capacity to support newcomers
- Develop partnerships between academic institutions and economic development to better coordinate efforts to recruit and retain newcomers
- Provide diversity training to all employers

3. Support and engage in community development and advocacy

Rationale:

While the Central Okanagan has many assets and strengths as a community, there are still a number of challenges. Many of these challenges reflect the need to engage in community development and advocacy work, including effective networks of newcomers for sharing of information and ensuring that newcomers have access to institutions that support them knowing and exercising their rights.

Suggested Task Areas:

- Form an advocacy working group
- Create a working group to address the need for greater networking and mentorship opportunities for immigrants