

# SHARING SETTLEMENT AND INTEGRATION PRACTICES THAT WORK COMMUNITY BROKER STRATEGY

Action Dignity Society  
Calgary, AB

## Area of Practice:

- Strategies for Engagement with Non-Settlement Service Providers
- Anti-Racism Dialogues and Initiatives

A Pathways to  
Prosperity Project

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PATHWAYS TO  
PROSPERITY  
Promoting Welcoming Communities in Canada



VOIES VERS LA  
PROSPÉRITÉ  
Promouvoir des communautés accueillantes au Canada

## **BACKGROUND ON THE ORGANIZATION AND IMPETUS FOR THE PROGRAM**

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ActionDignity (formerly Ethno-Cultural Council of Calgary) is an umbrella organization of over 80 ethno-cultural groups, organizations, and individuals based in Calgary, AB. Established in 2002, it promotes collaboration between ethno-cultural groups / organizations, service provider organizations, public institutions, academia, and public policy makers for increased accessibility and effectiveness of services, programs, and policies. It builds leadership and organizational capacity in Calgary's ethno-cultural communities and enhances community members' presence and participation in civic activities, public consultations, public policy development, and elections. ActionDignity is involved in many initiatives that address issues of diversity, human rights, racial equity, and public participation. It has developed innovative approaches that strengthen the role of ethno-cultural communities in the design, access, and delivery of services. It is also involved in research on the impact of public policy changes on the day-to-day lives of ethno-cultural communities.

The Community Broker Strategy was first piloted in 2004 to respond to gaps and challenges with regards to roles and expectations between ethno-cultural groups / organizations and service providers. On the one hand, service providers received funding and resources to support newcomers, but faced challenges in connecting with and appropriately serving newcomers and ethno-cultural and racialized community members in Calgary. On the other hand, ethno-cultural groups / organizations faced challenges in accessing resources that would allow them to identify and act on issues faced by their community members. A common perspective was that ethno-cultural groups / organizations were voluntary and had a limited role to play in service systems. The Community Broker Strategy emerged as an approach to build bridges and foster collaboration between ethno-cultural groups / organizations and service providers. It was developed to engage ethno-cultural community members more effectively and efficiently, and connect them to service providers in ways that would meet their needs and result in more equitable access to supports. It was designed to build the capacity of ethno-cultural groups / organizations to act on issues important to them and lead community change.

## **OVERVIEW OF THE PROGRAM**

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**Name:**

Community Broker Strategy

**Description:**

The Community Broker Strategy engages members of different ethno-cultural communities to work as Community Brokers. Community Brokers are hired based on their lived experience and personal connections within ethno-cultural communities, the trust and reputation they have built in their communities, their deep community knowledge, and their ability to engage and mobilize community members. Community Brokers are responsible for connecting with different members of their communities, from leaders to the most isolated, to support their involvement and leadership in actions that address community priorities and/or create a more just and equitable

society. Community Brokers are currently employed part-time and support different programs and initiatives that benefit their communities. Examples of past programs and initiatives that employed Community Brokers include: anti-racism initiatives, domestic violence prevention, ethno-cultural civic engagement, new workers occupational health and safety, access to health care, relationships with Indigenous communities, equitable services and policy change, community research, youth leadership, and arts for social change.

**Goal(s):**

The goal of the Community Broker Strategy is to facilitate the collective voice and action of ethno-cultural communities toward full civic participation and integration.

**Target Client Group(s):**

The Community Broker Strategy targets mainly, but not exclusively, racialized community members of immigrant descent and community organizations. It also engages Indigenous and other community members who share common issues with racialized communities, such as those living in isolation and poverty.

**Delivery Partner(s):**

Community Brokers work with many partners to address community priorities, including: Alberta Health Services Patient Centred Framework and Health Care 101; University of Calgary – including O'Brien Institute of Public Health, Division of Palliative Medicine, Faculty of Social Work, and the Identity-Based Wrap Around Intervention; 50+ Ethno-cultural Organizations who are members of ActionDignity; Domestic Violence Prevention Organizations and Service Providers; Immigrant Serving Agencies; University of Toronto – Migrant Mothers Project; Ryerson University – Multi-Disciplinary Collaboration among different Faculties on Canada-wide Immigrant Seniors Research; Autism Calgary; Alberta Rural Development Network; Calgary Alliance for the Common Good; Basic Income Calgary; Alberta Workers Health Centre; Imagine Citizens; Edmonton Multicultural Health Brokers Cooperative Ltd.; Calgary Workers' Resource Centre and Bow Valley College on Workers' Rights; Poverty Reduction Coalition and Vibrant Communities; Federation of Calgary Communities; Community Development Learning Initiative; Calgary Arts Development; Mt. Royal University – Artists as Changemakers Residency Program; Trico Changemakers Studio; Men's Action Network Calgary; Domestic Violence Prevention Collaborative; Ethno-Culturally Diverse Committee on Domestic Violence Prevention; North East Domestic Violence Prevention Collaborative; Alberta Human Rights Commission; City of Calgary – Cultural Plan for Calgary; Calgary Local Immigration Partnership; and Men's Action Network – Calgary.

**Human Resource(s):**

The Community Broker Strategy is embedded throughout the organization and is guided and supported by all staff, including the Executive Director, Programs and Policy Manager, and Strategy Lead and Program Coordinator.

**Funding:**

The Community Broker Strategy is incorporated into most of ActionDignity's programs. A variety of funders support the practice, including different levels of government, United Way of Calgary and Area, and Calgary Foundation.

## **KEY FEATURES THAT CONTRIBUTE TO THIS BEING A PROMISING PRACTICE**

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### **Effective:**

Community Brokers have deep connections and knowledge of their own ethno-cultural, racialized, and geographic communities, and they use these connections and knowledge, as well as their creativity, to engage community members. Their work is embedded in their community life, and they convene activities based on times and locations most convenient for community members. Ethno-cultural communities are supported to get involved by raising awareness of issues, prioritizing issues, deepening understanding of issues, identifying root causes, and taking preventive action to address issues or influence necessary systems change. Community brokers don't work in isolation. Representing many ethno-cultural communities, they work with each other to support cross-community collaboration on shared issues and opportunities.

### **Efficient:**

Community Brokers know their communities and understand the sensitivities on specific issues. They are efficient at planning culturally appropriate engagement strategies and events and mobilizing local resources. They have access to firsthand information about what is happening in their communities and can provide quick feedback on what is working well, what is not working well, and what issues are important. Community Brokers work as a team across programs, operating holistically rather than in silos with different communities or on specific issues, where appropriate. They support and facilitate the role of ethno-cultural leaders and organizations in leading community-based actions.

### **Relevant:**

The Community Broker Strategy meets the needs of community members by supporting individuals and families, by strengthening communities, and by working with people to influence services and policies to address barriers or inequities. Opportunities are provided for information sharing and skill development in culturally appropriate and meaningful ways. Community members are supported to notice when their personal experiences are part of a larger community issue and to understand the root causes of those community issues. They are also encouraged to be creative and innovative in addressing or preventing issues. Community members are offered mentorship and support to organize and share their perspectives and ideas with decision makers in order to influence systems change. By being in the community, Community Brokers have a better understanding of how various issues impact the daily lives of people and are sensitive to emerging issues and concerns.

### **Sustainable:**

To ensure sustainability, the Community Broker Strategy has undertaken the following actions: sustain and strengthen ActionDignity's organizational ability to engage and mobilize its member organizations and communities and to undertake community development; make the compelling case to funders about the importance of community-based change, and within it the Community Broker Strategy; build the capacity of different communities to lead and be equitable partners in the work; and develop more institutional partners who appreciate ActionDignity's contribution to helping them achieve their own institutional mandates.

**Transferable:**

The Community Broker Strategy could be replicated by other organizations across Canada. Organizations need to be ready to embrace and incorporate community development and grassroots empowerment practices into their work. This means a commitment to nurturing an equitable relationship between organizations / agencies and different communities in the following ways: building the collective and organizational capacity and leadership of different communities; resource sharing with different communities; and co-ownership of results and supporting community-led actions. The Community Broker Strategy can be used in a variety of community and program contexts, such as developing effective community-based services, reviewing and enhancing institutional effectiveness, neighbourhood development, community-university research partnerships, advocating for responsive public policies, and public education and awareness raising campaigns, where community members can take on meaningful leadership and participation.

**Innovative and Forward Thinking:**

The Community Broker Strategy is unique in that it brings a community voice to support and guide programs and inform decisions in service organizations, institutions, and public policy making. Community Brokers connect with a range of people from their own communities, as well as leaders from other communities who may share similar priorities. The focus of their work is broad, and they support deeper exploration of community issues and action ideas for addressing and preventing issues. Community brokers become aware of ideas, initiatives and practices emerging from the communities that can be scaled up or scaled out as innovations.

**Differs in Definable Ways from Other Similar Practices:**

The Community Broker Strategy differs from other approaches to cultural brokering in three ways: the broad range of roles performed by Community Brokers; the three levels of impact that result from Community Broker work (individuals and families, communities, and systems such as service providers, institutions, government, and policy makers); highlighting the contributions of communities in addressing issues rather than being seen as mere beneficiaries or appendages of service provider organizations; and the approach of embedding grassroots community organizing into other structures and formal approaches toward public policy change.

**High Client Uptake:**

The Community Broker Strategy builds relationships with community leaders, and together they share broad networks and deep connections. Community Brokers reach out to members in their communities to identify those who may be isolated. The trust and reputation that Community Brokers have built within their communities are crucial to drawing in people. Once community members feel a personal connection to issues, they are motivated to get involved in large numbers and share their knowledge and skills to create change.

**High Client Retention:**

The Community Broker Strategy creates opportunities for people to take action and be leaders according to their own level of comfort. Community Brokers return to participate in future training and activities, take on new roles with increasing autonomy, and bring other community members with them to future activities and initiatives. They become invested in understanding community issues, engaging others and creating change. They transform community members from being perceived as “clients” to active change makers.

**Strong Evidence of Successful Outcomes:**

Community Brokers are involved across ActionDignity programs and at all levels of program development and implementation. Progress is monitored and tracked within specific programs, as well as across the organization. The data show that the Community Broker Strategy is creating positive outcomes. In 2017, an impact evaluation was conducted on Connecting Elders from Ethno-Cultural Communities, a collaborative program jointly hosted by The Way In Network through Carya and ActionDignity that used the Community Broker Strategy for Newcomer Older Adults. Impact was found across all four domains, including changes for Elder Brokers themselves, changes for newcomer older adults participating in the programs, changes for systems and service providers, and changes in ethno-cultural communities. For example, Elder Brokers were found to have increased knowledge and capacity to inform others, benefit from improved community reputation and trust, and take on new leadership roles in the community. Newcomer older adults who participated in events, activities, and one-on-one conversations with Elder Brokers were found to experience a decrease in social isolation, gain access to otherwise unknown information, utilize new information by accessing new services, and experience an improvement in independence, safety, and comfort. Service providers were found to have improved access to their services by acting on feedback provided by Elder Brokers.

**PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT AND EVALUATION STRATEGY**

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The Cultural Brokerage Strategy uses the following approaches and tools for performance measurement and evaluation:

**In-Program Performance Measurement:**

- Logic models: used to monitor activities, outputs, and outcomes
- Evaluation tools: developed based on desired program outputs and outcomes and communicated to funders through regular reporting procedures
- Examples of evaluation tools: Community Broker pre- and post-training surveys, Community Broker monthly reports and journals, Community Broker timesheets, participant feedback surveys for community conversations and public events, surveys / focus groups / reflective check-ins during and after community-led action plans, feedback interviews with partners and collaborators
- Ongoing feedback and communication: Community Brokers share what is working and not working well in their communities, and strategies and activities are adapted as needed

**Across-Program Performance Measurement and Continuous Improvement:**

- Outcomes Harvesting: used to explore the most significant changes and achievements, and understand how the Community Broker Strategy contributed to those changes and achievements, as well as any emerging promising practices
- Reflective practice: used to identify challenges, promising practices, and opportunities for collaboration across programs

- Other methods: cross-cultural sessions with Community Brokers, staff sessions, joint sessions with Community Brokers, staff, and Board of Directors

#### Tracking Milestones:

- Community and systems-level change is more challenging to measure and communicate than outcomes at the individual level. Milestones of systems change work are tracked and reviewed annually to understand and communicate impact at the community and systems levels.
- Other methods: bi-annual community engagement sessions and community forums
- Examples of milestones: community support networks, community conversations (representing a shift in mindset from personal problem to community issue), capacity building activities, community action plans, participatory action research (to deepen understanding of issues), collaboration across communities, new relationships and collaborations between community members and service providers / decision makers, formal dialogues and consultations between Community Brokers, community members and decision makers

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

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**ActionDignity**

<https://actiondignity.org>