

SHARING SETTLEMENT AND INTEGRATION PRACTICES THAT WORK WELCOME EXCHANGE

Construction Foundation of British Columbia
Victoria, British Columbia

Area of Practice:

- Immigrant-Indigenous Relations
- Employment and Entrepreneurship Supports

Video:

<https://youtu.be/2kkg1D6RETA>

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

The Construction Foundation of British Columbia was established in 2012 and is a registered Canadian charity dedicated to supporting the construction industry and fostering community development within British Columbia. It prioritizes three key areas: education and training, research, and charitable initiatives. In terms of education and training, the foundation focuses on advancing industry training and career development, including initiatives such as modernizing shop classes, providing driver training to youth, and offering bursaries for trades education. The foundation's research efforts aim to drive innovation within the construction industry, focusing on enhancing safety, improving operational practices, and increasing sustainability of the construction industry. Finally, the foundation engages in various charitable projects that directly impact local communities.

Over the years, the Construction Foundation of British Columbia has cultivated strong relationships with Indigenous communities. In fact, over 50% of its staff is Indigenous. Understanding the historical and cultural dynamics between Indigenous people and newcomers, the foundation believes that effective settlement should actively involve Indigenous people from the outset. This led to the creation of the Welcome Exchange program. The program facilitates cultural activities that allow Indigenous people and newcomers to bond over shared similarities and enhance mutual understanding. Through these activities, newcomers actively participate in reconciliation, while Indigenous people have the opportunity to celebrate and share their culture, reclaiming their role in welcoming newcomers to their lands. Additionally, the Welcome Exchange program provides services and organizes events that help newcomers create strong local connections to employers and community organizations, thereby improving their integration process.

OVERVIEW OF THE PROGRAM

Name:

Welcome Exchange

Description:

Launched in 2020 on Vancouver Island, the Welcome Exchange program is designed to help newcomers integrate into the community by providing them with an understanding of Canada's Indigenous cultures and assisting them in establishing both professional and personal networks. This is accomplished through a series of targeted events and activities:

1. **Cultural Sharing Events:** These events are planned and delivered by Indigenous people, often in collaboration with newcomer artists, to foster genuine interactions and mutual understanding. Participants from various backgrounds come together to learn about Indigenous culture through activities such as beading, carving, and cooking, guided by the spirit of reconciliation. The events emphasize cultural similarities and facilitate relationship building. The group sizes at these events are kept small, around 20 participants, to ensure meaningful interactions.
2. **Employment Opportunity Exchanges:** These sessions facilitate direct connections between newcomers and pre-vetted employers interested in hiring them. Focusing on local job

opportunities and Canadian workplace culture, these events help newcomers enter the labor market and secure employment. Initially concentrated on the construction sector, the scope of these job fairs has broadened to include other industries such as hospitality, healthcare, and security, featuring at least 10 employers and over 50 potential employees. These exchanges not only introduce newcomers to potential job paths but also provide them with the tools to make informed career choices in British Columbia.

3. **Personalized Support:** The program also provides personalized support tailored to newcomers' individual needs through in-person one-on-one meetings and referrals to service providers in the community. It also conducts online group sessions addressing broader topics, including navigating employment services, resume preparation, cover letter writing, interview skills, and understanding immigration procedures. Additionally, the program organizes mini-events focused on language and communication, providing opportunities for newcomers to practice English informally.

Goal(s):

The primary goal of the program is to ensure a respectful and inclusive settlement process for newcomers to Canada, with a focus on the role of Indigenous Peoples. It aims to recognize and respect Indigenous communities, showcase their heritage, and enhance newcomers' understanding of Indigenous cultures and the importance of reconciliation. At the same time, the program aims to welcome and support newcomers by establishing connections to local employers and service providers, facilitating their integration into the community.

Target Client Group(s):

The clients of the program primarily consist of immigrants and refugees. Additionally, the program serves the broader community by facilitating the development of relationships between newcomers, local Indigenous people, employers and service providers.

Delivery Partners:

The program partners with several organizations, including the Cowichan Intercultural Society, Mainstream Canadian Immigration Services, Ukrainian-Canadian Cultural Society, Jobtimize by FitFirst Technologies, Here Magazine, Building Builders, and Help Ukraine Vancouver Island.

Human Resources:

The core project team includes two full-time and two part-time staff members. In addition, several members of the broader Construction Foundation of British Columbia contribute to the Welcome Exchange activities.

Funding:

The program is funded by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC). In addition, the foundation uses its charitable status to raise additional money from industry partners, other charities, and grants to provide additional services beyond the initial funding.

KEY FEATURES THAT CONTRIBUTE TO THIS BEING A PROMISING PRACTICE

Effective:

The cultural sharing events focus on art, which is deeply tied to cultural identity and serves as a powerful tool to teach and preserve Indigenous knowledge and skills. Importantly, artists hosting these events have complete freedom in terms of the planning and implementation of these sessions, ensuring that these events are authentic and engaging.

The employment opportunity exchanges put the needs of newcomers at the forefront by conducting comprehensive needs assessments prior to the exchanges. These assessments take into account employment preferences but also other factors such as needs for childcare, transportation, clothing, and interpretation services. This approach ensures that the events are relevant and accessible. In addition, all employers are thoughtfully selected for their commitment to supporting and integrating newcomers. The program also prepares clients with a guide detailing what to do before, during, and after the event. This thorough approach, coupled with continuous evaluations and participant feedback, allows for ongoing improvements and ensures the effectiveness of the events.

Efficient:

The efficiency of the cultural sharing events is enhanced by giving artists the freedom to design their sessions, which simplifies planning and ensures authentic events. Additionally, keeping group sizes small promotes direct and meaningful interactions, making it easier to manage the events and ensure participant engagement.

The employment opportunity exchanges are carefully planned, lasting only two hours to fit the busy schedules of employers and attendees. In addition, the venue selection and catering facilitate easy access and a supportive networking environment where newcomers and potential employers can form meaningful connections.

Finally, by working with a broad spectrum of community partners, the program is able to follow a small-town approach where everyone has a role in the integration of newcomers. This approach allows for direct and simultaneous interactions among all parties, which streamlines support and improves the integration process.

Relevant:

For newcomers to integrate successfully in their communities, strong community connections are key. The Welcome Exchange program fosters these connections through its diverse activities and events. By engaging directly with Indigenous leaders, newcomers gain an understanding of local traditions and values. They also learn about Canadian workplace culture and connect with potential employers through tailored employment opportunity exchanges. Additionally, the program links newcomers to local service providers, further enhancing their integration into the community. This comprehensive approach ensures newcomers can build meaningful relationships and effectively settle into their new environments.

Sustainable:

The sustainability of the Welcome Exchange program relies on its adaptability, responsiveness to feedback, and active community engagement. Its ability to quickly adapt and respond to feedback ensures that it remains relevant and effective, consistently meeting newcomers' needs. This flexibility allows the program to evolve with changing circumstances, maintaining its relevance over time. Additionally, by involving a broad spectrum of interested parties, the program builds a sense of partnership, enhancing its impact and securing sustained community support.

Transferable:

The Welcome Exchange program's success can be replicated in other communities. To initiate cultural sharing events, other organizations are advised to collaborate with local Indigenous leaders to connect with artists, artisans, and cultural experts. This approach ensures that the program is community-led, incorporating local voices, and maintains authenticity and respect.

For the employment opportunity exchanges, organizations should prioritize flexibility to accommodate diverse participant needs and align employers with the industries relevant to the attendees. Thorough needs assessments prior to the events are particularly helpful to customize the program to meet participants' needs.

Innovative and Forward Thinking:

The Welcome Exchange program places Indigenous people in a leadership role in the development of the cultural sharing events. Also, by engaging artists who share their unique artistic traditions, the program ensures that cultural activities genuinely reflect the community's heritage. This not only preserves Indigenous culture but also makes the events more authentic and effective. Furthermore, the program is based on wide-ranging community partnerships that incorporate a diverse group of members, including some who traditionally have not been involved in the settlement process. These partnerships help to integrate newcomers successfully and enhance community cohesion.

Differs in Definable Ways from Other Similar Practices:

The program differs from classic settlement services by prioritizing the involvement of Indigenous people in its operations. More than half of the Construction Foundation of BC's staff are Indigenous, which helps to ensure that the program is deeply connected to authentic Indigenous knowledge and traditions.

High Client Uptake:

The Welcome Exchange program has seen high client uptake, largely due to its effective engagement strategies and strong collaborative efforts. By partnering with settlement service agencies and community organizations, the program has broadened its reach and enhanced its ability to serve participants effectively. Additional recruitment methods such as using social media, distributing flyers, and sending direct emails have also significantly contributed to its success, especially as the program's network has expanded. Referrals from existing participants have also helped to increase enrollment.

High Client Retention:

The Welcome Exchange program has consistently grown since its launch four years ago. In 2022-2023, the program hosted six cultural sharing events and five employment connection events on Vancouver

Island, surpassing its goals of three cultural sharing events and one employment event per year. Additionally, 90% of employers at these events are repeat attendees, demonstrating a sustained interest and recognition of the program's effectiveness in facilitating employment connections.

Strong Evidence of Successful Outcomes:

The Welcome Exchange program has demonstrated success through positive feedback and outcomes in both cultural sharing and employment events. Participants highly value the cultural sharing events, appreciating the deep connections formed by discovering similarities between different cultural techniques, such as Indigenous beading and North African techniques. These events promote knowledge exchange and enhance mutual understanding, as observed by event organizers.

In terms of employment, the program has been highly effective. About 80% of participants in the employment opportunity exchanges either secure employment or make connections that lead to job offers. This success is supported by employer feedback, with 90% of employers returning to participate in these events, indicating their satisfaction with the quality of candidates they meet and their commitment to support newcomer integration. Employers also highlight the advantages of adding skilled newcomers to their teams, noting the diverse perspectives and experiences that enrich their organizations. Similarly, feedback from Indigenous partners has been overwhelmingly positive. Overall, the strong relationships built through the program not only help newcomers find jobs and integrate into the community, but also lead to lasting friendships among participants.

PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT AND EVALUATION STRATEGY

The Welcome Exchange program relies on a comprehensive performance measurement strategy that uses surveys, focus groups, and one-on-one interviews at all stages of the program to ensure its activities align closely with participant needs. These tools gather both quantitative and qualitative feedback, with a strong focus on qualitative insights to capture detailed experiences and satisfaction levels of participants.

The process starts with an initial outreach to understand community needs and preferences before planning any events. This needs assessment includes direct conversations with clients, which often require persistent and tactful questioning to encourage open sharing of their needs. Following the events, the program conducts follow-ups to assess whether services met participants' expectations, measures participation levels, tracks repeat attendance, and collects requests for future events.

This robust feedback mechanism allows the program to co-create services with participants, ensuring that the activities reflect actual needs and not just assumed ones, and identifies any gaps for future improvement. For example, feedback revealed a high interest in learning about Indigenous traditions and meeting local artists, leading to more hands-on workshops and storytelling at cultural sharing events. Similarly, feedback from employment opportunity exchanges revealed a strong interest in learning more about how to be successful in both the community and the workplace in Canada, prompting the program to expand its activities to address these areas.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Welcome Exchange

<http://cfbc.ca/we/>