



Policy on Multiculturalism

REPORT ON THE FOCUS GROUP SESSIONS



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Smita Joshi
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“If we are to achieve a richer culture, rich in contrasting values, we must recognize the whole gamut of human potentialities, and so weave a less arbitrary social fabric, one in which each diverse gift will find a fitting place.”

***Margaret Mead
(1901-1978, American Anthropologist)***

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In June, 2008, the Office of Immigration and Multiculturalism (OIM) launched the Policy on Multiculturalism for the province of Newfoundland and Labrador. The Policy promotes multiculturalism and cross-cultural understanding where the cultural diversity of all people is valued, supported and enhanced to collectively build a self-reliant, prosperous province.

The approval of the provincial Policy on Multiculturalism also directed the Department of Human Resources, Labour and Employment (HRLE) to lead its implementation. A series of provincial focus groups and internal committee meetings were held with various stakeholders and government departments to obtain input into the implementation process. This report highlights key thematic observations brought forward in the discussions, including suggestions for government action to support implementation.

The participants supported the Policy and agreed that as a pluralistic society, the province needs to be more inclusive and celebrate all cultures. They noted that acknowledging the importance of culture in a person's beliefs, values, thoughts, communications and actions is an important step in further developing a culturally rich and vibrant province. Discussions revealed that, at the local community level, social customs including religious celebrations, ethnic foods, arts and music were seen as providing meaningful context for cultural exchange and understanding. For the service delivery level, participants pointed out that the provincial government and other agencies need to be more mindful of clients from diverse cultural backgrounds, thereby setting the stage to provide quality inclusive services and supports that will benefit and enrich all.

Participants viewed sensitivity to cultural differences as a two-way street where all parties involved should actively promote cross cultural understanding. It was felt that inclusive exchanges will increase the vibrancy of communities, foster a sense of belonging, and assist with retention of immigrants. Participants also highlighted particular sectors of the province's immigrant population - such as internationally trained healthcare professionals and international students - as both contributors to, and recipients of, multicultural approaches to services and community life.

Within government, the Assistant Deputy Ministers' Committee and the Working Group on Multiculturalism recognized that multiculturalism binds together the networks of family, friends, and neighbors that constitute an economically vibrant and prosperous province, and that:

- quality services are more likely to be delivered by Provincial Government departments that are acquainted with, and sensitive to, cultural nuances, language skills, history, current events, and common practices of the minority communities;

- community partnerships hold the key to building an inclusive society, and;
- inclusive service organizations that facilitate cultural connections and nuances will aid in building a diverse and culturally competent workforce and creating a more “mindful” system of supports for all, including first-generation Newfoundlanders and Labradorians from diverse cultures.

INTRODUCTION

In June, 2008, the Office of Immigration and Multiculturalism (OIM) launched the Policy on Multiculturalism for the province of Newfoundland and Labrador. The Policy is designed to guide government programs and services.

The approval of this provincial Policy on Multiculturalism also tasked the Office of Immigration and Multiculturalism to lead its implementation. As a result, a series of focus group sessions were conducted across the province to seek input into the implementation of this Policy.

Since the launch of the Policy, a series of focus groups and committee meetings throughout the province have been held with various stakeholders and government departments to obtain input into the implementation process. The ultimate goal is to establish effective partnerships to promote multicultural activities at the regional and community level. The present report describes the overall process to obtain input and highlights key thematic observations.

IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS

The implementation strategy for the provincial Policy includes two approaches: internal, working with government officials; and external, seeking input and involvement from community members across the province.

Internally, the Assistant Deputy Ministers’ Committee on the Provincial Immigration Strategy assists the Office of Immigration and Multiculturalism (OIM) with its provincial mandate by ensuring government policies and programs support the provincial immigration strategy.

An inter-departmental Multiculturalism Working Group has also been established to assist executive members across departments in identifying and managing activities and initiatives related to implementation of the Policy on Multiculturalism both within government and at the regional and community level.

Externally, focus group sessions to seek input to policy implementation were facilitated by Dr. Smita Joshi, Director of Multiculturalism. The sessions were held during September and October, 2008, and included representatives from members of diverse cultures, community groups, youth groups, women's groups, business/industry representatives, educators, and recent newcomers to the province. OIM's Settlement and Integration Consultants, Ms. Tanya Hawco and Mr. Sheldon O'Neill, co-presented and recorded the discussions.

A total of 13 meetings were held in the following ten locations.

- Happy Valley-Goose Bay
- St. Anthony
- Corner Brook
- Stephenville
- Clarenville
- Marystown/Burin
- Carbonear
- Gander
- Grand Falls-Windsor
- St. John's

A further three sessions were held in St. John's to which specific participants were invited as follows:

- Francophone Stakeholders
- Women's Groups
- Education Stakeholders

Each session began with an interactive presentation/overview of the Policy. Participants were then invited to provide feedback on a series of questions designed to promote discussion and obtain input into the implementation of the Policy (See Appendix 1). The goal of the sessions was to ensure the Policy would become "a living document" effectively supporting services, improving retention, and promoting cultural vibrancy and harmony across the province.

In addition, the questions were available on the HRLE website and the general public was invited to provide feedback by email or regular mail. The following section presents a thematic arrangement of the observations and suggestions made by participants.

KEY OBSERVATIONS

In all sessions, participants were supportive of promoting multiculturalism and increased immigration to the province. All acknowledged the need to promote cross-cultural understanding in their communities.

The key observations include:

1. There is widespread support for the Policy on Multiculturalism.

- Participants were pleased to see that the Policy goes far beyond a minimum level of “understanding” cultural diversity to “inclusive citizenship” which is an essential piece in creating and sustaining a pluralistic society.
- The Policy was viewed as enriching the lives of all citizens by helping to promote celebrations of cultural diversity and exposing community members to new customs, foods, and ideas. Some participants expressed “excitement” about the Policy.
- Participants have noticed an increased focus on both immigration and multiculturalism, particularly in the recruitment and HR fields. Many noted that government is moving in the right direction and becoming generally more inclusive.
- While some participants felt NL is still very much a homogeneous society, many noted the “peppering” in many communities and that multiculturalism is starting to be noticed outside Memorial’s campus and outside St. John’s.
- A number of participants noted that our changing labour market needs will require more international newcomers to meet demands, bringing much more multiculturalism.

Suggestions for Action:

- Promote awareness of the Policy at all levels of government and encourage commitment to the principles in everyday operations.
- Ensure there is a link between the Policy on Multiculturalism and the provincial Strategic Cultural Plan.
- Ensure members of diverse cultures have access to opportunities in the public service.
- Address the need for funding to support efforts.

2. There is a need for public education and awareness regarding the Policy's central tenet of strength through diversity.

- Many stakeholders noted the importance of public awareness of the contributions immigrants and people from diverse cultures have made and continue to make to the province.
- Participants noted that immigrants from diverse cultures are often professionals and provide valuable services to NL communities, often taking “difficult-to-fill” positions, e.g., rural physicians.
- Many immigrants were seen to be innovative and creative professionals or successful entrepreneurs who are likely to see opportunity for economic development that may have been overlooked.
- It was noted that immigrants are appreciated for providing connections to the global market place.
- Some participants were familiar with the OIM's newsletter, believed that this was a positive endeavor, and supported widespread circulation.
- Some participants indicated that positive exposure to immigrants' contributions is vital, that “People must experience to understand.”
- Many of the newcomers from the immigrant community who shared their personal experiences identified, “friendly nature/willingness to help” as the province's strength.

Suggestions for action:

- Enhance awareness within programs and curriculum in the formal education system.
- Develop a web page related to immigration and multiculturalism in the province.
- Promote appreciation and respect for diverse cultures through a provincial celebration of the province's unique composition.

3. Cultural awareness was viewed as a two-way process.

- Participants noted that newcomers will benefit from an awareness of the existing cultures in Newfoundland and Labrador, just as Newfoundlanders and Labradorians will be enriched through awareness of newcomer's cultures.
- Many mentioned the importance of multiculturalism going beyond the immigration issue, since other cultures already exist in this province. Implementation should therefore seek to validate all cultures, not just that of immigrants.
- The importance of working with media was noted. Many newcomers felt that the media did not portray foreign countries accurately, i.e., often showed the poorest and least advanced aspects. (Yet, in reality, the professionals who arrive here are top

notch and can go anywhere.) Such media coverage leads to misconceptions in the community, and an under-appreciation of newcomers' skills. More awareness and accurate information is needed.

- Participants noted there are many myths and stereotypes about Newfoundland and Labrador and what the province has to offer to immigrants. They indicated it is important to change this, and that cultural exchange is one way to debunk myths and counter anxieties.
- Participants indicated that any discussion on multiculturalism must include the province's First Nation's people.
- It was noted that the province's Francophone community experiences both immigration and intra-provincial migration. Participants felt that just as immigrants have special needs, Francophones coming from other provinces may have particular needs as well.
- There was some discussion that, in the past, multiculturalism/immigration was viewed more with curiosity; now there is more interest, but also some anxiety. Some of the noted concerns included: perception that immigrants would be "taking jobs" especially in case of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians who were away for work; notion of "take care of our own first"; loss of identity and discrimination. Participants spoke about the importance of good communication plans, noting more awareness and education is needed in the community to ensure racist attitudes are not fuelled by anxieties and misperceptions.

Suggestions for action:

- Provide correct information about the province before the arrival of the newcomers.
- Promote Newfoundland and Labrador's attractive features and natural beauty, information on existing cultural diversity, and the benefits of living in safe communities with friendly people.
- Promote, through partnerships, community cultural events, such as public readings and art shows by authors and artists from a wide variety of cultures, information sessions on "Who's Who" in the community, etc.
- Encourage, through partnerships, the sharing of food, music and the arts as a key approach to creatively promote cross-cultural appreciation, highlight diverse cultures, make friends, and promote community connections.

4. Community involvement is central to the settlement and integration of newcomers.

- There was general consensus that municipalities and their leaders are key partners in ensuring a successful and sustainable implementation plan for the province.

- Community frontline workers and volunteers were seen as key facilitators of welcoming programs and fostering immigrants' integration.
- Some participants noted it is important for immigrants to both remain connected with their cultural group and establish ties with the larger community.
- Some participants felt there is a need to promote a greater understanding of culture shock among both immigrants and the community.
- The importance of practical life skills for newcomers was acknowledged and, in this regard, many stakeholders showed keen interest in obtaining further training as community-based facilitators.
- It was noted that settlement services play a vital role and need to be available outside St. John's.
- Language training was viewed as critical and there is a need to explore modes of delivery for rural areas.
- Some stakeholders expressed the view that there is little done to promote cultural awareness within their community.
- It was suggested that those who stay are more likely to be from similar cultures, climates, rural areas. Those who leave may be from cultures whose needs cannot be met in a smaller center.
- Unless there is concerted action, some participants expressed that rural communities may always have transient immigration.

Suggestions for action:

- Through partnership assistance to stakeholders, develop information brochures to help individuals understand community services and activities.
- Promote awareness of the interest in, and commercial value of, having a variety of foods available in local stores.
- Encourage community members to provide a range of supports to assist newcomers with life skills that may not come naturally, e.g., snow clearing.
- Examine ways to support communities in providing more formalized conversation tutoring.
- Encourage employers of newcomers to play an active role in introducing their employees to the larger community.
- Acknowledge and support the important role of existing cultural communities in welcoming newcomers and promoting cultural sharing and awareness.
- Seek out champions in communities to work with welcoming community groups.
- Ensure there is funding to support community-based initiatives.

5. Implementation of the Policy on Multiculturalism requires a holistic approach.

- Participants acknowledged that the Policy is truly inclusive and holistic.
- It was expressed that implementation of appropriate policy and programs is only possible when all levels of government – federal, provincial and municipal – support the principles articulated by the Policy on Multiculturalism.
- Participants noted the importance of Provincial Government departments, especially Health and Community Services, Education, Justice, Tourism Culture and Recreation, Labrador and Aboriginal Affairs, and the Rural Secretariat, who are working with the community partners to ensure government programs and services are culturally inclusive.

Suggestions for action:

- Set up a process to ensure all levels of governments are aware of the Policy and consider the needs of all cultures in their programs and services.
- Set up an interdepartmental multiculturalism committee to facilitate the development and implementation of provincial programs and services that are practical, culturally sensitive and inclusive.

6. Effective settlement services should consider the needs of all the family members of newcomers – parents, children, youth, grandparents, and especially recognize the needs of immigrant women.

- Many participants noted that welcoming newcomers and improving retention requires attending to issues affecting all family members, including possible isolation of spouses at home, social/recreational needs of children, language barriers, professional needs of couples, credential recognition, employment opportunities, etc.
- Family ties were viewed by many participants as the key reason why people leave or stay.
- It was noted that newcomer women who do not work outside their homes are often the most isolated and in need of support.
- Participants felt that integration is most successful through children, that immigrants with children have an easier time integrating within the community than those who are single or married without children.

Suggestions for action:

- Through community partnerships, support the development of mentoring programs for newcomers and their families.
- Promote understanding of the role of women in other cultures.
- Promote awareness of the needs of newcomer women and their families among service groups and women's groups.
- Encourage community groups to involve people from other cultures, thereby ensuring the voices of diverse women are represented.

7. Services should be culturally sensitive.

- The creation and maintenance of culturally sensitive infrastructure in areas such as health and education is essential to the integration and retention of immigrants.
- Stakeholders expressed that the inclusive services needed to promote multiculturalism must be realistic and linked to the province's capacity to provide appropriate services, especially in rural areas.
- Some participants noted that multicultural education is important for both tenants and landlords.
- Some mentioned that orientation to the justice system is important.

Suggestions for action:

- Consider the needs of immigrants in all areas of service, e.g., when looking at a housing strategy, keep in mind that immigrants may have special needs, as do other groups such as seniors and young families.
- Ensure the full range of newcomers' information needs is met.
- Government funding programs should cover a range of activities conducive to multi-cultural sharing, e.g., food costs.

8. Health care professionals, particularly in rural Newfoundland and Labrador, and international students can help to promote multiculturalism.

- Some participants in rural areas indicated the presence of foreign-trained doctors in their hospitals has led to multicultural experiences and openness in their communities to new cultures and immigrants.
- Physicians themselves have created orientation activities that allow newcomers to feel comfortable with their new surroundings.
- Many participants indicated their first experiences with people from other cultures were in university.

- For international post-secondary students, integration into the larger community is difficult, as many students live, study and work on the campus. Both students and the community are missing out on valuable exchanges.
- Participants supported an increase in the number of international students and attention to required supports, such as lower tuition levels. There was support for recent initiatives such as open work permits, the new federal category of Canadian Experience Class (CEC) and the new Provincial Nominee category of International Graduate.

Suggestions for action:

- Encourage professional associations to provide cultural opportunities at a regional level, i.e., hold events to increase awareness in communities and regions about the cultures of their members.
- Through partnerships with community groups, build community-wide engagement in multicultural events associated with hospitals and health care professionals.
- Continue to build closer relationships between post-secondary representatives and the Office of Immigration and Multiculturalism.

CONCLUSION

Participants viewed the Policy on Multiculturalism and the Immigration Strategy as positive actions undertaken by the Provincial Government to enhance the province's social, cultural and economic growth.

It was noted that as a pluralistic society, we need to celebrate and respect all cultures, languages, religions, and ethnicity. Internal and external participants agreed the Policy on Multiculturalism was “long overdue” and its Policy Statement reflected the best interest of all people residing in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Despite the evident enthusiasm, there were several cautions expressed regarding raising expectations, given the relatively small size of diverse cultures and amount of resources available to community groups. Participants felt that inclusive services must be realistic and linked to the province's capacity to provide appropriate services, especially in rural areas. Other cautions were noted by some participants who, while supportive of increased immigration and promotion of multiculturalism, expressed concern about the out-migration of ‘our own’ youth and referred to the importance of working to repatriate our own citizens.

Stakeholders emphasized the importance of education, with many stating there is a general lack of public awareness throughout the province with respect to multiculturalism and public education is essential. They expressed support for programs designed to promote multiculturalism, anti-racism and cultural sensitivity for the public, K-12 students, post-secondary students, and businesses. It was agreed that change of attitude was key to the successful implementation of the Policy.

Internally, both the Assistant Deputy Ministers' Committee and the Multicultural Working Group recognized that sensitivity to the cultural differences of service recipients requires a closer look at the culture of existing provider organizations. It was noted that often newcomers may not be familiar with the mainstream agencies (e.g., schools, police services), and service providers must be "mindful" of other cultures and how an agency may be perceived and experienced by individuals and families from all cultures. Lastly, it was noted that the delivery of more culturally-sensitive services and supports will be a shift that will benefit all people receiving services.

The overriding observation made throughout the province is that there is complete confidence in and support for the newly launched provincial Policy on Multiculturalism, and participants anticipate the Policy will enhance the vitality of communities throughout the province.

NEXT STEPS

A number of initiatives suggested for action by participants are already underway. The province launched a Newfoundland and Labrador Immigration Portal in March, 2009 and has engaged 20 municipalities in developing their own community portals, with plans for more. Settlement and Integration Consultants with the Office of Immigration and Multiculturalism have received training in "Attraction and Retaining Immigrants: A Tool Box of Ideas for Smaller Centres" (www.integration-net.ca) and will, in turn, be available to train community members. Funds for immigration-related initiatives are now available through the Newfoundland and Labrador Settlement and Integration Program (NLSIP). In 2009, during the week of March 21-27, the province initiated a weeklong province-wide celebration of multiculturalism aimed at fostering respect, equality and promotion of cultural diversity as a strength.

While the purpose of this document is to summarize the focus group discussions held to guide government's implementation of the Policy on Multiculturalism, the observations and suggestions also hold the potential to assist interested parties in the development of work plans designed to further enhance living in the province's welcoming and increasingly diverse communities. Ultimately, the goal of implementation is to bring widespread active support for the province's Policy on Multiculturalism.



APPENDIX 1

Implementing a Policy on Multiculturalism For the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Focus Group Questionnaire Fall 2008

Your feedback is sought to assist us with implementation of a provincial policy on Multiculturalism, recently approved by the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador. Thank you for your time and suggestions!

1. What are the strengths of the recently launched provincial policy on Multiculturalism?

2. What should be done to implement this provincial policy on Multiculturalism?

3. Newfoundland and Labrador's Policy on Multiculturalism is designed to promote Respect, Equality, Collaboration and Inclusive Citizenship for all.

a) How can we promote respect for members of diverse cultures?

b) How can we promote equality of opportunity for all?

c) How can we promote cross-cultural understanding, sharing and learning from each other to honour all cultural heritages?

d) How can we promote inclusive citizenship (way to encourage and include everyone to become active in their community activities)?

4. What types of cultural programs, if any, could be offered provincially to support and celebrate cultural diversity in Newfoundland and Labrador?

5. What other things can government do to improve the retention rate of people of diverse cultures?

6. What can you as an individual do to implement this Provincial Policy? What can Community organizations do to implement this policy?

7. Who else should we partner (work) with when implementing this policy?

8. How would we measure whether the desired outcomes are achieved?

Thank you for completing this questionnaire. If you have any questions, comments or additional suggestions please provide by writing to:

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