



Tool Box of Ideas for Smaller Centres: *Attracting, Welcoming & Retaining Immigrants to Your Community*



Resource Handout #5

Guidelines for Multicultural Collaboration

Cultural questions -- about who we are and how we identify ourselves -- are at the heart of living in a multicultural society like Canada. As you set to work on multicultural collaboration in your community, keep in mind these guidelines:

- ☼ **Learn** from generalizations about other cultures, but don't use those generalizations to stereotype, "write off," or oversimplify your ideas about another person. The best use of a generalization is to add it to your storehouse of knowledge so that you better understand and appreciate other interesting, multi-faceted human beings.
- ☼ **Practice**, practice, practice. That's the first rule, because it's in the doing that we actually get better at cross-cultural communication.
- ☼ **Don't assume** that there is one right way (yours!) to communicate. Keep questioning your assumptions about the "right way" to communicate. For example, think about your body language; postures that indicate receptivity in one culture might indicate aggressiveness in another.
- ☼ **Search** for ways to make the communication work, rather than searching for who should receive the blame for the breakdown. Don't assume that breakdowns in communication occur because other people are on the wrong track.
- ☼ **Listen** actively and empathetically. Try to put yourself in the other person's shoes. Especially when another person's perceptions or ideas are very different from your own, you might need to operate at the edge of your own comfort zone.
- ☼ **Respect** others' choices about whether to engage in communication with you. Honor their opinions about what is going on.
- ☼ **Stop**, suspend judgment, and try to look at the situation as an outsider.
- ☼ **Be prepared** for a discussion of the past. Use this as an opportunity to develop an understanding from "the other's" point of view, rather than getting defensive or impatient.
- ☼ **Acknowledge** historical events that have taken place. Be open to learning more about them. Honest acknowledgment of the mistreatment and oppression that have taken place on the basis of cultural difference is vital for effective communication.
- ☼ **Awareness** of current power imbalances -- and openness to hearing each other's perceptions of those imbalances -- is also necessary for understanding each other and working together.

Remember that cultural norms may not apply to the behavior of any particular individual. We are all shaped by many, many factors -- our ethnic background, our family, our education, our personalities, etc. - - and are more complicated than any cultural norm could suggest.