



Dialogues Between First Nations, Urban Aboriginal and Immigrant Communities in Vancouver

'Dialogues between First Nations, Urban Aboriginal and Immigrant Communities in Vancouver' is a project convened by the City of Vancouver, in collaboration with community partners (*the Dialogues Project*). Its goal is to promote increased understanding and stronger relationships between indigenous and immigrant communities within the City. The project began in January 2010 and runs until July 2011. Funding is provided by the Government of Canada and the Province of British Columbia, through the BC Welcoming and Inclusive Communities and Workplaces Program.

Background

Vancouver is one of the most culturally diverse cities in the world. First Nations people have been living here for thousands of years. The City is within the traditional territory of the Coast Salish people, including the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh, who still live here today. They are thriving communities with unique, living cultures rich in heritage. Many Aboriginal people from other communities have also come here and now call Vancouver home, adding their experiences to the cultural tapestry.

Though it has a rich indigenous heritage, Vancouver is also increasingly a city of immigrants. According to 2006 census data, close to half of Vancouver's population was born outside of Canada. The same

census shows that two of the fastest growing demographic groups in Vancouver are immigrants and Aboriginal peoples.

Over the years, First Nations, urban Aboriginal groups and immigrant organizations have acknowledged that there is limited inter-cultural interaction between Aboriginal and immigrant Canadians. Within Aboriginal communities, there is a sense that their history, culture and heritage are not well understood by others living within their traditional territory. For newcomers, it seems there are few opportunities to learn about the Aboriginal community living in their midst. Some studies have shown that newcomers are generally under-informed (if not misinformed) about Aboriginal history, perspectives and issues. One key goal of the Dialogues Project is to help bridge the information and communication gaps between these communities.

The Vancouver Mayor's Working Group on Immigration supports the Dialogues Project, and recognizes the foundational importance of honouring the First Nations so as to create an inclusive and welcoming city for all.

Five key initiatives: starting a process of shared dialogue and change

In order to create greater awareness and collaboration between First Nations, urban Aboriginal and immigrant communities, the Dialogues Project will concentrate around five key initiatives:

1) Story gathering and community research

Story-gatherers will conduct interviews with First Nations, Aboriginal and immigrant community members about their experiences and perceptions on social inclusion and inter-cultural relations. In addition, surveys will be conducted among diverse community groups to gauge their understanding of issues and perspectives regarding Aboriginal and immigrant communities. The interviews and survey findings will inform future initiatives as Aboriginal and immigrant communities work to build stronger relationships with each other.

A literature scan of mainly online sources will also be undertaken to review information targeted at newcomers regarding Aboriginal histories, issues and perspectives. The main sources of information reviewed are from government departments and community organizations.

The interviews, survey findings and literature scan will be included in a Story document, which will be produced for the Dialogues Project (see Documenting and sharing stories).

2) Dialogue circles

In order to foster conversations between Aboriginal and immigrant groups, a series of dialogue circles will be held. These will be facilitated, focused discussions that will centre around the following suggested topics:

- *Remembering history;*
- *Current issues for First Nations, urban Aboriginal and immigrant communities;*
- *Taking stock of current community assets/relations between Aboriginal and immigrant/non-Aboriginal communities;*
- *Envisioning and developing strategies for future collaborative relationships between Aboriginal and immigrant/non-Aboriginal communities.*

The issues and perspectives arising from the dialogues will also inform the content of the 'Story' document.

3) Cultural exchange visits

The participating First Nations, urban Aboriginal and immigrant communities will host cultural exchange visits. These will take place at sites of significance for the hosting communities (e.g. Musqueam First Nation, Chinatown). There will be up to twelve exchange visits, which will serve as significant learning opportunities for the visitors to engage with the histories and cultures of the groups hosting the exchanges.

4) Youth and elders program

Youth and elders from Aboriginal and immigrant communities will be engaged to speak to interested communities and groups about the project's goals and aspirations. They will help motivate further community engagement on the issues. By engaging both youth and elders as presenters, the project also encourages inter-generational relationship building.

5) Legacy projects

Two legacy projects will be undertaken as part of the Dialogues Project. The intent of the legacy projects is to create something tangible and longer-lasting, with wider impact on community members who may not have directly participated in the Dialogues Project. Possible considerations may include a neighbourhood-based public art installation or a community program to generate more public awareness and support for the issues raised under the Dialogues initiatives.

Launch and closing celebrations

There will be a launch event to kick off the project and a closing celebration to highlight the achievements and outcomes of the project.

Documenting and sharing stories

The process, learning and events of the Dialogues Project will be chronicled in a DVD and a 'Story' Document. The DVD will showcase the achievements of the Dialogues Project, including interviews with community members, discussions arising from the dialogue circles, cultural exchange visits, and key milestone events. The 'Story' document will be a visually rich document that will include the stories of First Nations, urban Aboriginal and immigrant communities. Furthermore, the 'Story' Document will highlight the perspectives of the participants and the lessons learned from the project's various initiatives.

The 'Story' document and the DVD will be shared with the broader public who may gain a deeper understanding of Vancouver's First Nations, urban Aboriginal and immigrant communities. It will be translated and disseminated to interested organizations and groups.

Outcomes: New relationships, future collaboration

It is hoped that the Dialogues Project will lead to sustainable, meaningful new relationships between First Nations, urban Aboriginal and immigrant communities. The rich discussions arising from the dialogue circles, as well as the interview and survey data, will inform best practices for working together in the future. The cultural exchange visits and the youth and elders program will also bring the different communities together for mutual learning. Lastly, the legacy projects will offer opportunities for creative inter-cultural endeavours that will help shape future dialogues and exchanges.

Partners

The project is guided by a Project Steering Group. Steering group members include local First Nations, Aboriginal organizations, local immigrant-serving organizations, and other interested stakeholder groups. There are three chairpersons:

- **Wade Grant,**
Musqueam Council
(alternate: Nolan Charles, Musqueam Council)
- **Susan Tatoosh,**
Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Centre
- **Professor Henry Yu,**
UBC Department of History

The Project Steering Group includes members from the following:

- Affiliation of Multicultural Societies and Service Agencies of BC (AMSSA)
- City of Vancouver, Hastings Institute
- City of Vancouver, Mayor's Working Group on Immigration
- Civic Education Society
- Downtown Eastside Women's Centre
- Immigrant Services Society of BC
- Institute for Canadian Citizenship
- Kiwassa Neighbourhood House
- Laurier Institution
- MOSAIC
- Mount Pleasant Neighbourhood House
- Musqueam First Nation
- Native Education College
- Squamish First Nation
- S.U.C.C.E.S.S.
- Tsleil-Waututh First Nation
- UBC Department of History
- UBC First Nations House of Learning
- UBC Irving K. Barber Learning Centre
- UBC Museum of Anthropology
- UBC Office of Community Affairs
- UBC School of Social Work
- Urban Native Youth Association
- Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Centre
- Vancouver Community College
- Vancouver Métis Community Association
- Vancouver Public Library

For more information

To learn more about the Dialogues Project, please contact dialoguesproject@vancouver.ca

You can also visit the website at www.vancouver.ca/dialoguesproject

Dialogues Project Team

Baldwin Wong, Project Lead
604-871-6637
baldwin.wong@vancouver.ca

Karen Fong, Project Coordinator
604-871-6324
karen.fong@vancouver.ca

Lanny Libby, Youth Engagement
604-871-6136
lanny.libby@vancouver.ca

Kamala Todd, Consultant
kamalatodd@gmail.com

Youth Community Developers

A team of Youth Community Developers engages youth and members of diverse communities to promote the project's goals and initiatives. For more information, please contact Lanny Jimenez (*as above*).

Mailing address

City of Vancouver – Dialogues Project
Community Services Group, Social Policy Division
Woodward's Heritage Building
Suite 501 – 111 West Hastings Street
Vancouver, BC V6B 1H4

Fax: 604-871-6048

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