



Surrey IAR Dialogue

Newcomers & Civic Engagement

Summary Report February 2019





dialogue at-a-glance

Held at Surrey City Hall

By invitation-only event

Attended by 18 participants

Facilitated by Jorge Salazar

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about Surrey IAR

Surrey Immigrant Advisory Roundtable (IAR) is a group of Surrey-based immigrant and refugee residents who serve as an *authentic 'newcomer' voice* to the Surrey Local Immigration Partnership (LIP). Surrey LIP was formed in 2014 and brings multiple stakeholders together to develop local community responses to immigrant integration and help make Surrey a more welcoming and inclusive city.

dialogue objectives

Share the *findings of the IAR Report* on Newcomers & Civic Engagement*

Learn about *the existing work* in Metro Vancouver in the area of diversity and civic engagement

Initiate discussions about possible actions that participating organizations *may take to advance some of the recommendations* from the IAR Report

* IAR survey & consultations report can be found here:
http://www.surreylip.ca/sites/default/files/IAR_Report%20Survey_October2018_FINAL.pdf



Surrey IAR Dialogue

Newcomers & Civic Engagement

January 14, 2019

5:30 pm - 8:00 pm

Surrey City Hall
Community Rooms, 2nd floor

Dialogue Agenda

- 5:30 Welcome & Introductions
- 5:45 Surrey IAR Presentation
- 5:55 Dialogue Panel & Q&A
- 6:50 Small Group Discussions
- 7:20 Reporting Back
- 7:40 Reflections & Closing

Dialogue Panelists:

- Wafa Al-jabiri, IAR member
- Muzna Zafar, Board member, Surrey Libraries
- Alison Brewin, ED, The Vantage Point
- Bill McMichael, Board member, BoardVoice
- Rableen Nagra, Patient Engagement Specialist, BC SUPPORT Unit—Fraser Centre

Dialogue Facilitator:

Jorge Salazar

Dialogue Objectives

Share the findings of the IAR Report on Newcomers & Civic Engagement

Learn about the existing work in Metro Vancouver in the area of diversity and civic engagement

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What did stand out for you in the IAR Report?

Awareness: I was impressed by how many immigrants **want to be involved but do not know how.** We have so many volunteer opportunities at FHA & BC SUPPORT Unit—Fraser Centre, i.e. to participating on Patient Experience Advisories or in patient-oriented research projects. All these opportunities can be shared with our community partners.

Remembering Our Purpose:

I think often NGOs and other groups are so busy with their day-to-day work and survival that **they forget their main purpose: to do good in the world.** We can't forget that!

Active immigrant residents: I kept on coming back to a number of immigrants [who participated in the survey and] who are already quite involved in Surrey. Many immigrants try to get volunteer experience because they need to gain "Canadian experience". We [immigrants] get quite discouraged and our confidence goes down as we are applying for jobs and not being considered, regardless of all the experiences and qualifications we have. **Volunteering is often the only way to get local experience.**

Outreach: I echo the recommendation to utilize more **creative outreach practices to ethnic communities.** At Fraser Centre, if we want to engage with a specific ethnic group, we take advantage of our connections with ethnic media for example, radio shows, local health expos; otherwise we are reaching the same group of empowered community members.

Diversity of organizations in Surrey: I wish the list of volunteer organizations included in the survey was more reflective of the diversity of organizations in Surrey. **There are many smaller agencies that are always looking for more volunteers** and board members, such as sports, arts organizations. As an immigrant, it is a great opportunity to practice the skills that you might not be able to do in your first years in Canada (lawyer, accountant, etc.) and local organizations will greatly benefit from such expertise.

Missing Voices: I believe it is important to pay attention to who was interviewed/participated in the survey and who was not. Were survey participants newcomers? Refugees? We need to always reflect on not only what was said by those who were involved but even more importantly **we need to ask ourselves about who we are not talking to?** Who is not involved?

Volunteering & Commute: Reflecting on barrier to volunteering, particularly in Surrey, I believe transit cost is substantial and **very few organizations, if any, offer to offset this cost for their volunteers/boards members.**



DISCUSSION

Participants' Reflections:

The Case for Diversity: Majority of BC's leaders in NGOs are white women; hence, boards need to start seeking a more diverse representation on their boards/ for their senior management roles.

Capacity Challenges: NGOs' capacities are stretched as most of them are only funded to do 'core activities' and organizational capacity building (including board development) is not adequately addressed.

Settling In: First a couple of years can be quite challenging for many immigrants and they might get involved to get connected or get experience but once they get a job, they quit volunteering. However, the return on volunteering for all other reasons is tremendous and it needs to be better communicated and promoted.

Longing for Belonging: Some studies have shown that immigrants might live a more conservative way of life as in Canada they join faith-based groups/churches to feel like they belong somewhere and it can be true even for those immigrants who were not religious back in their countries.

What Do We Mean by Diversity? There are two groups of newcomers: (1) immigrants, who are usually more skilled and have less language barriers (2) refugees, who usually have more barrier to settlement and integration

Gap in the Volunteering Sector in Surrey: Surrey does not have a Volunteer Centre or an organization that supports volunteering for all in Surrey. Different NGOs run their volunteering programs as the City does but there is no one place that provides this service across the city.

Existing Online Resource: There govolunteer.ca is an online resource that provides a list of board and other volunteer opportunities in BC.

Attending Board Meetings: Most likely, immigrants do not know that some public board meetings (like Surrey Libraries, for example) are open to public and it is a great opportunity to attend and learn.

What Is Meaningful Volunteer Experience?: Most organizations cannot provide meaningful volunteer opportunities to immigrants who are seeking meaningful leadership opportunities (e.g. making copies or doing registration does not count as a meaningful experience)

Meaning of Engagement: Often, immigrants volunteer for their faith/cultural groups and while becoming more connected to their cultural/faith communities might also become more isolated from the large community/ neighbourhood they live in (ethnic silos)

Not Connecting the Dots: Sometimes, a cultural diaspora is fundraising to support their community member who is battling a disease while there are supports offered for free by local organizations. Yet, dots are not connected as there is a disconnect between the audience and message.

The Power of Language: when we talk about volunteer opportunities, immigrants might not be as excited about being involved as when we talk about "civic engagement" and "leadership".

The Power of Culture: the word 'volunteering' might have a negative connotation in many cultures, i.e. 'free labour'; hence, immigrants might only be interested to gain 'Canadian experience'. **What can we do to address this conceptual difference?**

Promising Practice: Several years ago, there used to be a BoardMatch program offered through Volunteer Vancouver (aka the Vantage Point) and the program provided training and matching services to people who wanted to be involved and who otherwise would not have been involved. Unfortunately, the program was discontinued.

Limited Leadership Opportunities with the City: The City has only limited number of Boards and Council Advisory Committees [currently under revision] and there are different application and selection processes but eventually City Council approves all applicants.

Limited Scope of the Survey: The survey did not ask questions about voting and political engagement because we [IAR] tried to limit the number of questions and scope of the survey.



What can I do to improve access for immigrants to leadership volunteer opportunities in Surrey?

Suggested Actions:

I will do more **outreach** about what Library has to offer to newcomers at religious & ethnic festivals

I will be open-minded when receiving feedback from people

As an IAR member, will do more outreach and **spread the word about what neighbourhood houses do** and how to get involved

The Fraser Centre has many e-subscribers and we can help share volunteer opportunities in bi-weekly electronic newsletter.

Contact: rableen.nagra@fraserhealth.ca

I will organize a soccer tournament to encourage **the participation of young people**

MOSIAC is interested in improving access to immigrants/refugees to civic engagement opportunities in Metro Vancouver and the organization is currently working on **the pilot project in this area** as well as will be seeking funding to advance meaningful civic engagement opportunities for immigrants

The Vantage Point will be interested in supporting Surrey's organizations and providing training in this area. The VP is currently in the process of **applying for funding to support board development** of the organizations providing anti-racism work in BC

I will be listening or speaking about/on people passions

I will keep sharing opportunities **on social media** (I commit to doing it at least once a week)

As an IAR member, will do **more outreach in Surrey ethnic communities** to spread the word about volunteering, in general and leadership opportunities on Boards and Civic Advisory Committees, in particular

I will encourage other immigrants I (you) meet to come **to Surrey IAR and City's Advisory Committees (as they are open to the public)**

I will be promoting [leadership volunteer] opportunities in the **different ethnic newspapers/media**



What can other Forum participants do to improve access for immigrants to leadership volunteer opportunities in Surrey?

CONTINUED COLLABORATION: Institutions [who attended a Dialogue] should share networks and financial resources

VOLUNTEER DAY/WEEK: The City of Surrey and Surrey Library to work with other community partners in Surrey to host a Volunteer Day to provide an opportunity for community organizations to share their volunteer and board opportunities with Surrey's residents, including immigrant population

SURREY IAR LEADERSHIP: Surrey IAR should host a Volunteer Day; IAR members could use their networks to bring people to events

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT Organizations working with youth (i.e. PCRS) can support young people to show up to events

CITY'S ROLE: The City might facilitate, so there is more collaboration and less competition among

SURREY VOLUNTEER CENTRE: City of Surrey can set up a Volunteer centre that will provide information about volunteer opportunities not only in the City

COMMUNITY SPACE: Surrey Libraries has rooms and resources and can play a role of a community connector

MEDIA ENGAGEMENT: Organizations should collaborate more by sharing and inviting media connections