



SURREY  
LOCAL IMMIGRATION  
PARTNERSHIP

# Surrey LIP 2026 Community Forum

## Beyond Scarcity: Collaboration as New Currency

### Key Learnings & Insights Report

April, 2026 | Surrey, BC



Funded by:



Immigration, Refugees  
and Citizenship Canada

Financé par :

Immigration, Réfugiés  
et Citoyenneté Canada

# Table of Contents

Territory Acknowledgement .....	03
A Message from the Surrey LIP Co-Chair .....	04
Acknowledgements and Gratitude .....	05
Executive Summary .....	06
Introduction .....	11
Setting the Stage .....	11
Panel Discussion Highlights .....	12
Collaboration Workshop: Key Learnings .....	14
Community Consultation: Key Learnings .....	17
Conclusion .....	19
Appendices .....	20





## Territory Acknowledgement

The work of the Surrey Local Immigration Partnership (LIP) takes place on the ancestral, traditional and stolen territories of the SEMYOME (Semiahmoo), ḡícə́y (Katzie), kwíkʷə́łəm (Kwkwetlem), ḡʷɑ:ń́ł'ə́ń (Kwantlen), qiqéyt (Qayqayt), xʷməθkʷə́yəm (Musqueam) and s̓cəwaθən məsteyəxʷ (Tsawwassen) First Nations. The knowledge and traditions of these communities are significant in providing context to the work we do, and the Surrey LIP recognizes the importance that reconciliation has in building truly inclusive and strong communities.

## A Message from the Surrey LIP Co-Chair

As Co-Chair of the Surrey Local Immigration Partnership (LIP), I am pleased to share this reflection from our 2026 Community Forum.

This year's gathering underscored the strength and promise of community-led collaboration. Across settlement, Indigenous, business, civic, and community sectors, partners came together with a shared desire to work more intentionally, strengthen relationships, and better support newcomers with compassion and creativity.

In a time marked by change and uncertainty, there was a clear and collective choice: connection over isolation, possibility over limitation, and collaboration over competition. The conversations throughout the day reflected not only the complexity of the challenges we face, but also the deep commitment across sectors to respond in ways that are grounded, practical, and forward-looking.

I am grateful to all who contributed their time, insights, and leadership. The perspectives and priorities that emerged continue to shape our shared direction and strengthen the spirit of partnership that will guide Surrey's inclusive future.

With gratitude,

Neelam Sahota  
CEO, DIVERSEcity Community Resources Society  
Co-Chair, Surrey LIP





## Acknowledgements and Gratitude

The Surrey LIP is grateful to Elder Kevin Kelly (Kwantlen First Nation) for opening our 2026 Community Forum in such a thoughtful and grounding way. His sincerity and wisdom reminded us of our shared responsibility to care for our community. Hay čx<sup>w</sup> qə (thank you).

Our heartfelt thanks to panelists Dr. Daljit Gill-Badesha (AMSSA), Valerie Cross (Tsawwassen First Nation), and Indra Bhan (Surrey White Rock Board of Trade), and to moderator Neelam Sahota (DIVERSEcity) for generously sharing their time and insight.

To JP Baker and the Vantage Point team, we deeply appreciate your willingness to adapt your Collaboration Lab for our partners and for your continued commitment to strengthening BC's non-profit sector.

We also thank our engaged community partners; Douglas College, MCFD, City of Surrey, Emplo CB, SherPride, YWCA BC, MOSAIC, Options, and MovementYVR; for showcasing your services and connecting with our Forum participants.

To the Surrey LIP Council and Working Groups, your dedication to building an inclusive and welcoming Surrey continues to drive our shared efforts.

Finally, thank you to the staff, volunteers, and vendors whose hard work made this event possible. Your collaboration made all the difference.

Sincerely,  
Nicolas Tellez-España, Manager Surrey LIP

# Executive Summary

## Overview

The 2026 Surrey LIP Community Forum brought together more than 50 partners from across the settlement, Indigenous, business, civic, and community sectors to explore how collaboration can strengthen newcomer-serving systems in a time of shifting federal immigration policies, fiscal constraints, and growing community needs. The theme, **Beyond Scarcity: Collaboration as New Currency**, captured a shared understanding that cross-sector partnership is essential for building a more inclusive, resilient Surrey.

The Forum combined three key components:

1. A multi-sector panel discussion on the evolving nature of collaboration.
2. A hands-on workshop facilitated by Vantage Point on building organizational collaboration skills.
3. A community consultation to shape the [2026–2027 Surrey LIP Action Plan](#).

Together, participants identified practical strategies, strengthened relationships, and reaffirmed their shared commitment to supporting newcomers across Surrey.



## Panel Highlights: What Collaboration Requires Today

Panelists Dr. Daljit Gill-Badesha (AMSSA), Valerie Cross (Tsawwassen First Nation), and Indra Bhan (Surrey White Rock Board of Trade), moderated by Neelam Sahota (DIVERSEcity), shared rich insights on collaboration in their sectors.

### Key Themes

- **Collaboration starts with trust.** Strong partnerships rely on relational practice, transparency, and shared values.
- **Indigenous partnership requires humility and co-creation.** Indigenous communities must be involved from the outset, not as last-minute contributors.
- **Employers need clarity and alignment.** “Win-win” collaboration requires clear communication and shared value propositions.
- **Alignment is essential.** Without shared purpose, collaboration becomes duplicative or ineffective.

Panelists emphasized that, in a time of scarcity, collaboration becomes the most reliable path to greater impact.

“The panel highlighted the importance of changing the system. Not to gatekeep although systematically and naturally that’s what want to do.”

— Surrey LIP 2026 Community Forum participant



## Workshop Highlights: Building the Skills for Collaboration

Led by **JP Baker** from **Vantage Point**, the workshop offered practical frameworks and tools adapted from Vantage Point's three-day Collaboration Lab. It focused on building a shared understanding of what collaboration is, and what it requires in practice.

### Key Insights

- **Collaboration exists on a continuum** ranging from communication to full integration.
- A **collaborative organizational mindset** includes collective thinking, clarity of purpose, trust-based communication, flexibility, and effective use of tools.
- **Barriers are predictable:** time pressures, mistrust, misalignment, power imbalances, and lack of structure.
- **Mechanics matter:** MOUs, shared planning documents, clear roles, and joint decision-making structures reduce friction.
- **“Good enough for now, safe enough to try”** encourages experimentation and progress over perfection.
- Collaboration is most successful when partners share information early, maintain transparency, and add the right amount of structure.

Participants expressed that these frameworks validated their experiences and offered concrete strategies to strengthen cross-sector partnerships.

“The workshop helped me understand how systems can divide us and collaboration has the potential to unite us.”

— Surrey LIP 2026 Community Forum participant



## Community Consultation: Priorities for the 2026–2027 Surrey LIP Action Plan

Participants engaged in table discussions across **seven key priority areas**:

1. How to fund and resource Welcoming Week
2. What a policy watch network can look like for the LIP
3. Immigrant Advisory Table (IAT) engagement
4. Coordination of employment fairs and newcomer networking events
5. Employer engagement during uncertainty
6. Embedding the Surrey LIP Reconciliation Strategy
7. Recognition for employers supporting newcomer hiring and retention

Attendees were given the opportunity to contribute to any of the priority areas that resonated with them. As no constraints were placed on participation, not all priority areas received contributions, specifically priority 7: Recognition for employers supporting newcomer hiring and retention.

### Key Learnings Across Tables

- **Collaboration infrastructure needs to be strengthened.** Partners want shared calendars, templates, policy-monitoring networks, and more structured coordination.
- **Newcomer and Indigenous voices must be central.** The IAT and Indigenous partners are essential contributors to planning and decision-making.
- **Employers need coordinated outreach.** Employer engagement works best when consistent, clear, and jointly led.
- **Resource constraints require creativity.** Many partners are willing to contribute in-kind supports, from space to staff time.
- **Reconciliation requires readiness.** Education, cultural learning, and long-term relationship-building are foundational.

**These insights directly inform the 2026–2027 Action Plan now available [online](#) and as an appendix to this report.**

## Conclusion

The 2026 Surrey LIP Community Forum demonstrated the power of community-led collaboration. Across sectors, participants expressed a shared desire to work more intentionally, to build stronger ties, and to support newcomers with compassion and creativity.

In a moment of change and uncertainty, Surrey's partners chose connection over isolation, possibility over limitation, and collaboration over competition. These insights shape not only the 2026–2027 Surrey LIP Action Plan, but also the spirit of partnership that continues to guide Surrey's inclusive future.



# Introduction

## Overview

On March 5, 2026, over 50 community partners gathered at the Surrey Sport & Leisure Complex for the Surrey LIP's annual Community Forum. This year's theme, *Beyond Scarcity: Collaboration as New Currency*, captured a shared understanding that Surrey's newcomer-serving ecosystem is entering a new landscape. One defined by shifting federal immigration levels, constrained funding, and evolving community needs.

In this changing context, collaboration is not simply beneficial; it is essential. Partners from education, health, settlement services, local First Nation communities, business, and civic institutions came together to explore how we can collectively build stronger, more resilient systems of support for newcomers.

The afternoon featured:

- A multi-sector panel discussion.
- A collaboration capacity-building workshop led by Vantage Point.
- A community consultation to shape the [2026–2027 Surrey LIP Action Plan](#).

Together, these sessions generated rich insights, strengthened relationships, and affirmed that Surrey's greatest asset is its people, and their willingness to work together.



## Setting the Stage

The Forum opened in a good way, with a welcome from Kevin Kelly of Kwantlen First Nation, grounding the space in gratitude and acknowledging the lands on which we gathered.

Surrey LIP Co-Chair Neelam Sahota then welcomed participants and spoke to the Forum's theme: that collaboration becomes our "new currency" when resources are scarce, needs are growing, and organizations face increasing pressures to do more with less.

A brief, [Surrey LIP in Review, video](#) showcased achievements from 2025–2026 and highlighted the growing importance of collective problem-solving, shared leadership, and community-driven action.

# Panel Discussion Highlights

## Collaboration as New Currency

Moderator: **Neelam Sahota**, CEO of DIVERSEcity

Panelists: **Dr. Daljit Gill-Badesha**, CEO of AMSSA; **Valerie Cross**, Executive Councillor, Tsawwassen First Nation & Director, Community Engagement, SFU School of Medicine; **Indra Bhan**, COO, Surrey White Rock Board of Trade

The panel explored how collaboration is shifting across the settlement, business, and Indigenous sectors and what this means for Surrey's future.



## Key Insights from Panelists

### 1. Collaboration Starts with Relationships (Dr. Daljit Gill-Badesha)

Collaboration is not a project; it is a relational practice rooted in trust, mutual respect, and shared values. Daljit emphasized the need for information-sharing, collective sense-making, and relational governance, especially in times of fiscal constraint.

### 2. Indigenous Partnership Requires Humility and Co-Creation (Valerie Cross)

Valerie highlighted that meaningful partnerships with Indigenous communities must be grounded in knowledge, learning, and protocol-awareness. For collaboration to be authentic, Indigenous communities must be engaged from the beginning, not as an afterthought.

### 3. Employers Want Clarity, Value, and Partnership (Indra Bhan)

From the business perspective, “win-win” collaboration means:

- Clear communication
- Reduced duplication
- Alignment between community goals and employer needs

Indra emphasized the importance of shared narratives, inviting employers into community impact work as full partners.

### 4. Cross-Sector Alignment

All panelists agreed that Surrey’s future success depends on:

- Shared purpose
- Consistent communication
- Collaborative mindset
- Structured approaches to partnership
- The courage to work differently

These themes were echoed and deepened in the Vantage Point workshop.



# Collaboration Workshop: Key Learnings

## Working Together for Collective Success

Facilitated by JP Baker, Vantage Point

This 90-minute hands-on session distilled essential tools from Vantage Point's multi-day Collaboration Lab, giving participants practical skills they can apply immediately.

The workshop focused on:

- Understanding what collaboration truly is.
- Mapping types and depths of collaboration.
- Identifying barriers and enablers.
- Learning collaboration "mechanics."
- Building a collaborative organizational mindset.



## 1. What is Collaboration?

Participants learned that real collaboration involves:

- A shared goal rooted in community benefit.
- Mutual accountability.
- Equity and respect.
- Ongoing commitment.
- A willingness to "work with," not simply "work beside."

**It is more than cooperation or communication; collaboration is joint action in service of shared impact.**

## 2. Collaboration Exists on a Continuum

JP introduced the Collaboration Continuum, which depicts five levels:

1. Communication – sharing information.
2. Cooperation – informal assistance.
3. Coordination – aligning processes.
4. Collaboration – shared resources & decision-making.
5. Integration – organizational merging or restructuring.

Participants reflected that many Surrey initiatives exist between "coordination" and "collaboration," with movement possible depending on capacity and need.

### 3. Depth of Collaboration: Who Collaborates Matters

Collaboration can happen at many levels within organizations:

- Admin staff
- Frontline staff
- Leadership
- Boards of Directors

**Strong collaboration requires alignment across and between organizations, not just among leaders.**

### 4. The Collaborative Organizational Mindset

A truly collaborative organization:

- Thinks collectively rather than individually.
- Prioritizes communication, transparency, and trust.
- Maintains clarity of purpose and goals.
- Adopts a learning mindset.
- Uses tools effectively (technology, shared files, templates).
- Embraces flexibility and adaptability.

“Create partnership before starting to work, not to start working and then seek partnership.”

— Surrey LIP 2026 Community Forum participant

**Participants discussed the importance of examining whether their organizations model this mindset.**

### 5. Barriers to Collaboration Are Predictable and Solvable

Barriers identified included:

- Time constraints
- Competing priorities
- Organizational silos
- Power imbalances
- Mistrust or misunderstanding
- Lack of shared tools
- Lack of clarity in roles

**JP encouraged participants to distinguish between real barriers and perceived barriers; especially regarding time. If collaboration is optional, time becomes a barrier; if collaboration is essential, time gets allocated differently.**

## 6. Collaboration Mechanics: Tools That Make Partnership Work

JP introduced practical tools that support collaboration:

### Write It Down

- MOUs
- Partnership agreements
- Terms of reference
- Action trackers
- Joint planning documents

### Share Information

- Shared data
- Collective impact frameworks
- Pooled insights
- Joint messaging

### Deal with Difference and Disagreement

- Normalize conflict
- Discuss risks early
- Maintain respectful dialogue

### Get Structure and Clarity

- Defined roles
- Rotating chairs
- Joint committees
- Clear decision-making structures

### Use the Right Technologies

- Shared drives
- Project management software
- Communication platforms

### Define Terms and Values

- Be specific
- Align terminology
- Co-create criteria

## 7. Tips & Approaches to Strengthen Collaboration

Participants explored several “quick wins,” including:

- Collaborate **early**, not after plans are made.
- Be transparent about **capacity**.
- Add the **right** amount of structure.
- Empower **collaborative leaders**.
- Tell compelling stories that make others want to join.
- Separate **ideation** from **decision-making**.
- Adopt “**good enough for now, safe enough to try.**”

This resonated strongly with Forum participants, many of whom identified perfectionism and fear of conflict as barriers.

“I will seek to implement the notion of “good enough for now, safe enough to try” in my approach to working with partners”

— Surrey LIP 2026 Community Forum participant

# Community Consultation: Key Learnings

The consultation involved seven tables addressing seven priority areas for the 2026–2027 Surrey LIP Action Plan. Partners used many of the workshop learnings, such as identifying barriers, clarifying roles, and thinking on the collaboration continuum, to guide their discussions.

Attendees were given the opportunity to contribute to any of the priority areas that resonated with them. As no constraints were placed on participation, not all priority areas received contributions, specifically priority 7: Recognition for employers supporting newcomer hiring **and** retention. Below is a synthesis of both the consultation findings and how workshop insights strengthen them for the 6 priority areas where contributions by attending were made.

## 1. Welcoming Week

**Challenge:** No dedicated budget for 2026-2027.

**Workshop lens:** Collaboration as resource pooling.

### Key Learnings

- Partners can offer in-kind support (space, staff, programming).
- A multi-site model may reduce cost pressures.
- Community-based grants can support funding shortages.

### Recommendations

- Build an in-kind contributions registry.
- Add clear MOUs outlining partner roles (structure + clarity).

## 2. Policy Watch

**Challenge:** Limited staff capacity to monitor policy changes.

**Workshop lens:** Information sharing as collaboration.

### Key Learnings

- Partners want a shared policy-monitoring system comprised of Surrey LIP Council members.
- Quarterly updates are realistic.
- Lived experiences should complement data and analysis.

### Recommendations

- Use collaboration mechanics: shared files, consistent structure, defined roles for policy watchers.
- Identify willingness and capacity among Surrey LIP partners to form the policy watch under the support of LIP staff.



### 3. Immigrant Advisory Table (IAT) Engagement

**Challenge:** The Immigrant Advisory Table is underutilized.

**Workshop lens:** “Who collaborates?” is just as important as “how.”

#### Key Learnings

- IAT members can contribute to planning, program design, and community decisions.
- Need orientation and capacity-building.

#### Recommendations

- Revamp recruitment for IAT members by create onboarding materials.
- Connect IAT to boards and advisory committees suggested by Council partners.

### 4. Coordination of Employment Events

**Challenge:** Duplication and lack of alignment.

**Workshop lens:** Collaboration continuum, move from “coordination” to “collaboration.”

#### Key Learnings

- Need centralized event calendar hosted on the LIP’s website
- Need buy-in from Surrey LIP partners to share information in a timely fashion
- Need structural mechanism for information sharing (i.e. shared drive)

#### Recommendations

- Develop a shared platform for employment related information sharing
- Leverage existing working group meetings to agree on annual priorities and coordinate events



## 5. Employer Engagement During Uncertainty

**Challenge:** Employers need clarity and support.

**Workshop lens:** Clear value proposition and shared structures.

### Key Learnings

- Employers respond best when outreach is coordinated
- Research and mapping should happen before outreach

### Recommendations

- Build a collaborative employer engagement strategy in partnership with key partners (i.e. Surrey White Rock Board of Trade, WorkBC Centres, etc).

## 6. Embedding the Reconciliation Strategy

**Challenge:** Embedding reconciliation strategy across LIP structures.

**Workshop lens:** Collaboration requires humility, shared values, and dealing with difference.

### Key Learnings

- Training, cultural exposure, and relational practice are essential
- Indigenous organizations must guide the process

### Recommendations

- Create a Reconciliation Readiness Plan
- Embed cultural protocols into governance and planning

**The insights from this community consultation process have been integrated into the 2026-2027 Surrey LIP Action Plan which is available [online](#) and as an appendix to this report.**



## Conclusion

The 2026 Surrey LIP Community Forum demonstrated the heart of Surrey's newcomer-serving ecosystem: a collective willingness to show up, listen deeply, learn together, and co-create solutions.

In a time of scarcity, Surrey's partners chose abundance; of ideas, relationships, and generosity.

Together, we continue building a Surrey where newcomers not only arrive but truly belong.

# Appendix A: 2026 Surrey LIP Community Forum Agenda

## Beyond Scarcity: Collaboration as New Currency

### Surrey LIP Community Forum

Thursday, March 5, 2026

Surrey Sport & Leisure Complex – Arenas

12:00 PM – 4:00 PM

#### Event Agenda

**12:00 – 12:30 PM** | Buffet Lunch & Networking

**12:30 – 12:40 PM** | Welcome & Territory Acknowledgement

- Kevin Kelly, Kwantlen First Nation
- Neelam Sahota, Surrey LIP Co-Chair

**12:40 – 12:45 PM** | Surrey in Review 2025-2026

**12:45 – 12:50 PM** | Introduction to the Panel

**12:50 – 1:35 PM** | Panel Discussion: Collaboration as New Currency

- **Moderator:** Neelam Sahota
- **Panelists:** Dr. Daljit Gill-Badesha · Indra Bhan · Valerie Cross
- Includes audience Q&A.

**1:35 – 1:45 PM** | Break

**1:45 – 3:15 PM** | Working Together for Collective Success: A Collaboration Workshop

- **Facilitator:** JP Baker, Vantage Point

**3:15 – 3:50 PM** | Community Consultation: Shaping the 2026–2027 Surrey LIP Action Plan

- Facilitator: Nicolas Tellez-Espana

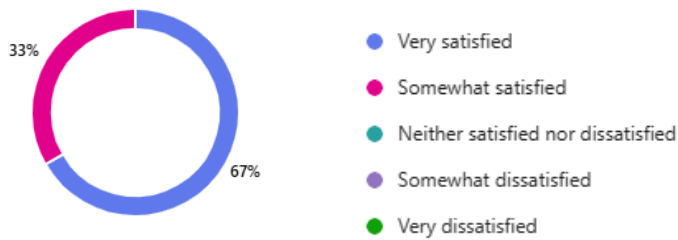
**3:50 – 4:00 PM** | Concluding Remarks & Next Steps

## Appendix B: Resources from the 2026 Surrey LIP Community Forum

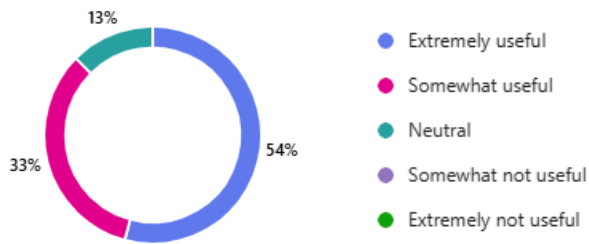
1. **Surrey LIP in Review: 2025-2026 Accomplishments:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6tDI6XRkzj8>
2. **Insights from the 2026 Surrey LIP Community Forum Panel:**  
<https://www.surreylip.ca/why-collaboration-is-needed-now-more-than-ever-for-surrey-to-thrive/>
3. **Forum Presentation Slides including Working Together for Collective Success: A Collaboration Workshop:**  
[https://drive.google.com/file/d/15Z\\_Lb\\_uT4zWNR4KOcWcWbkXZRPINigju/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/15Z_Lb_uT4zWNR4KOcWcWbkXZRPINigju/view)
4. **2026-2027 Surrey LIP Action Plan:** <https://www.surreylip.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Surrey-LIP-2026-2027-Action-Plan.pdf>

# Appendix C: Participant Survey Results

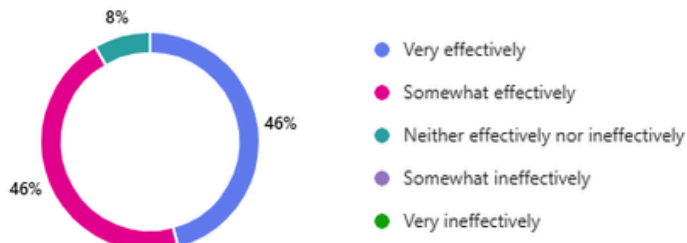
## 1. Overall, how satisfied were you with the forum?



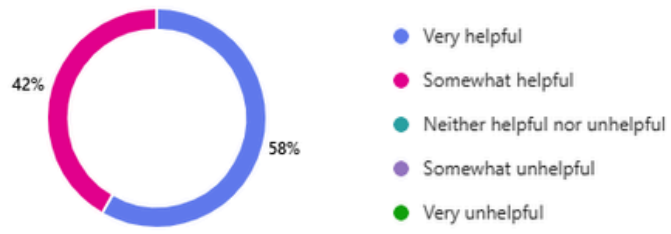
## 2. How useful was the panel discussion in helping you understand the importance of collaboration in Surrey's changing funding and policy environment?



## 3. How effectively did the panellists' perspectives deepen your understanding of what meaningful collaboration can look like across sectors?

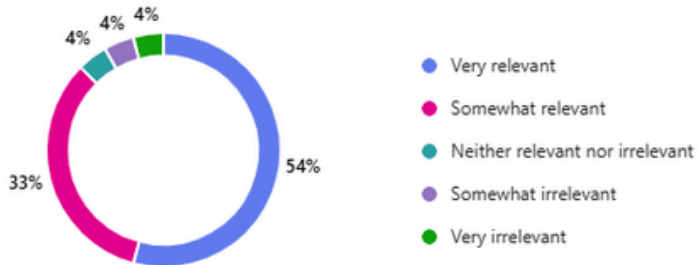


## 4. How helpful was the workshop in increasing your confidence to initiate or strengthen collaborations with other organizations?

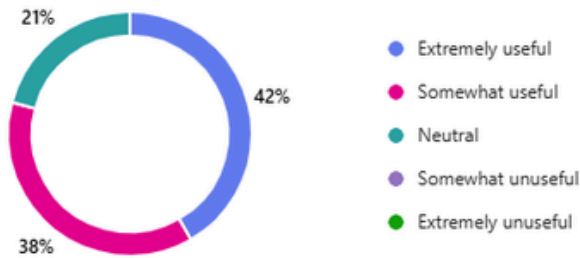


# Appendix C: Participant Survey Results

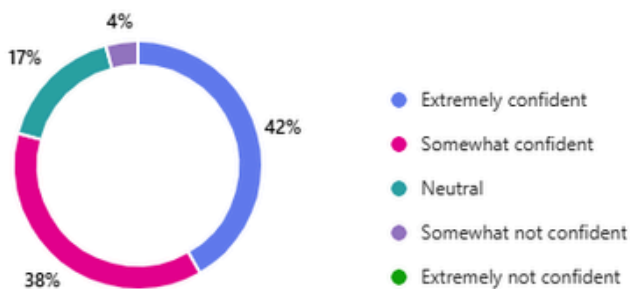
5. How relevant were the tools and strategies presented in the workshop to your organization’s current collaboration needs?



6. How useful was today’s Action Plan consultation in helping you contribute your insights to Surrey LIP’s 2026–2027 priorities?



7. How confident do you feel that the ideas generated today will meaningfully inform the final Action Plan?





## SURREY LOCAL IMMIGRATION PARTNERSHIP

Surrey Local Immigration Partnership (LIP) is a community partnership bringing diverse voices together to build an equitable and inclusive city where all immigrants, refugees and citizens thrive.

Contact us at:

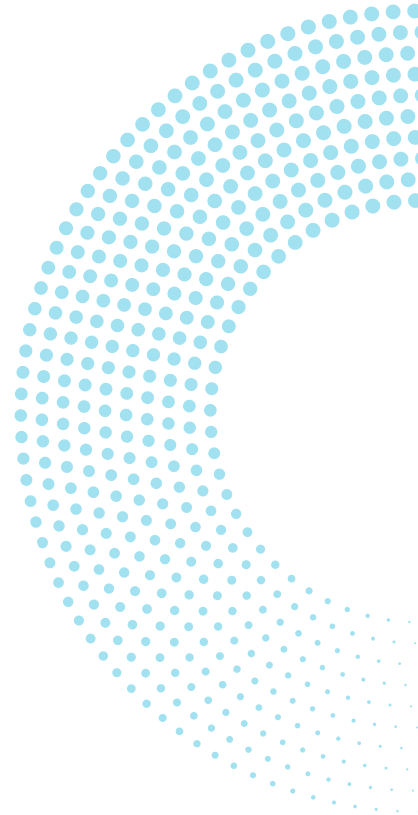


[surreylip@dcrs.ca](mailto:surreylip@dcrs.ca)



[surreylip.ca](http://surreylip.ca)

Follow us at [@SurreyLIP](https://twitter.com/SurreyLIP)



Surrey LIP is managed by:



Funded by:



Immigration, Refugees  
and Citizenship Canada

Financé par :

Immigration, Réfugiés  
et Citoyenneté Canada