

TOGETHER FOR A MORE INCLUSIVE  
SOUTHERN WEST-ISLAND

A photograph of four people standing in a modern, bright community center. From left to right: a man with a beard and a black hat wearing a blue patterned shirt and jeans; a woman with a headband wearing a blue patterned dress; a woman with red hair and glasses wearing a light-colored blouse; and a man with a beard wearing a light green t-shirt with a colorful graphic. They are all smiling. The background shows a large open space with white pillars, a bookshelf, and a computer monitor.

# TOOLKIT OF BEST PRACTICES

to promote the participation of  
*people of immigrant origin and of ethnocultural minorities*  
in the decision making processes of local organizations  
as well as to the community life



# WHY?

The present toolkit was developed in the framework of the project '**Together for a more inclusive Southern West Island**' based on a literature review of several documents on public participation.

*When we feel a strong sense of belonging and live authentically, we thrive.*

# WHO?

This toolkit of best practices is intended for use by all **organizations** (community, private, municipal, public) that want **to promote the participation of people of immigrant origin and of ethnocultural minorities** in the decision making process of their respective organizations.

Public participation is a process that engages the public in decision making. It involves the process or activity of informing the public and giving full consideration in the decisions that affect them.



# BACKGROUND INFORMATION

People of immigrant origin belong to two places: firstly, they belong to **where they come from** and secondly, they belong to **where they now live**. While integration takes place in the latter, they maintain a variety of links with the former.

The present **Canadian multicultural society** is the result of Canada's history of settlement and colonization as well as of immigration and refugee policies, as such we see new immigrants coming from around the globe.

**People of immigrant origin and ethnocultural minorities** are likely to constitute increasingly larger segments of the electorate in the 21st century, and thus, their importance to maintaining Canadian democracy cannot be underestimated.



## HISTORY

People bring with them the **history** and **civic engagement** practices from their countries of origin.



## DIFFERENCES

People have different **views** towards civic life.



## CULTURE AND TRADITIONS

Cultural **understandings** and **traditions** are important in integrating different models of civic engagement.



## POWER OF EXAMPLE

The power of example is a **strong tool** that can help in encouraging people to participate in civic life.

Civic engagement means working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values and motivation to make that difference.

# SPECTRUM OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

## INFORM

People cannot participate unless they receive complete and objective information on which to base their judgements. A **communication plan is essential** and it needs to answer six key questions: to whom, what, how, when, by who and why.

Examples: publications, regular press releases, occasional news stories, Websites, newsletters, fact sheets.

## CONSULT

Public participation requires **two-way communication and interaction with the public**.

At this stage, the public is invited to provide input or comment on the information provided.

Examples: focus groups, public meetings, community facilitators, tours or interviews, surveys.

## ENGAGE

At this level, the public is provided with **an** opportunity for dialogue and interaction. Reach deeply into immigrant and ethnocultural communities to find people interested in engaging.

Examples: workshops, roundtable discussions, facilitated meetings and interactive small group discussions.

## COLLABORATE

At this level, the public is provided with **an** opportunity to partner or work jointly with decision makers.

Examples: advisory committees, task forces, consensus-building activities.

## EMPOWER

At this level, the final decision-making is placed in the hands of the public.

Examples: citizen juries, ballots, delegated decisions.

# KEY ELEMENTS OF MEANINGFUL, EQUITABLE, INCLUSIVE AND DIVERSE PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Meaningful public participation reflects the principles of **accessibility, impartiality, transparency, consistency, efficiency, accountability, fairness** and **timeliness**, and recognizes that all parties have responsibilities in meeting these principles.

**Eight key elements** of meaningful public participation were identified and public participation should exhibit all of the elements to be meaningful.

1. Early notification
2. Accessible information
3. Shared knowledge
4. Sensitivity to community values
5. Reasonable timing
6. Appropriate levels of participation
7. Adaptive processes
8. Transparent results

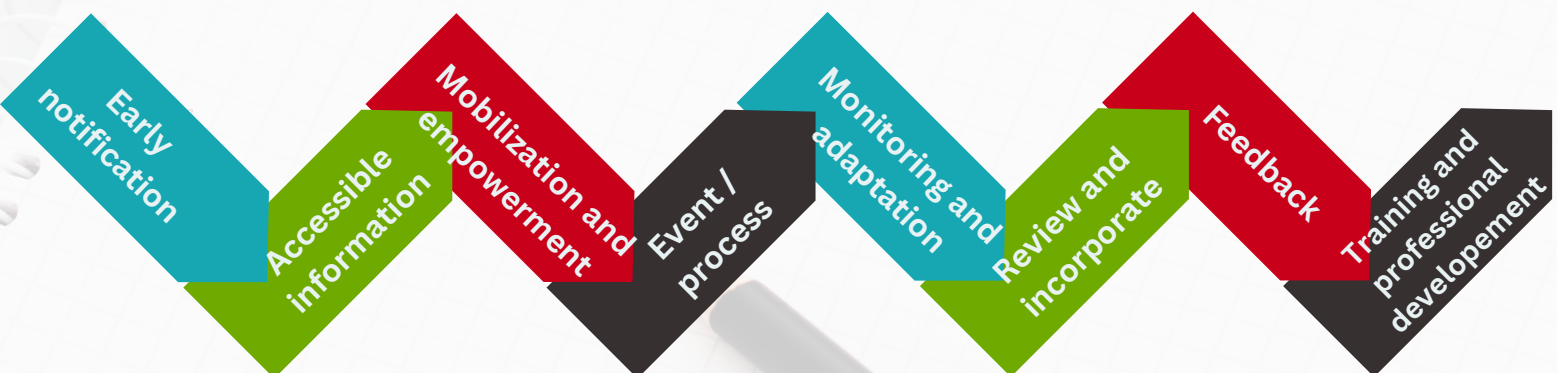
The public should have an opportunity to have a say in decisions that affect their lives through a meaningful public participation process.



# *Checklist for an equitable, inclusive and diverse event or process organization*

To develop this checklist we have performed an extensive review of and an adaptation to the purpose of our project:

- the checklist developed in the framework of the MTElles project (originally designed to enable cities and community development structures to be better equipped to serve the community and provide more equitable and inclusive ways of appropriately addressing the needs of all women in the community) as well as
- the Public Participation Guide (This document provides guidance on federal environmental assessments commenced under the former Canadian Environmental Assessment Act of 1992.)



# 1. PROVIDE EARLY NOTIFICATION

## *Key elements*

The information notices should be shared in advance of each event or process.

Posting and distributing **of** such notices should allow **for** a reasonable time **frame to allow** interested parties to determine whether they wish to participate, review relevant information, make informed opinions and decisions, and prepare to participate in a meaningful way.

Use all information channels to ensure you reach all interested parties.

Public participation can result in more effective outcomes when people are **notified, well informed and can have input early** in the process.

## *Notification methods*

Internet, print advertising in local newspapers, community postings, radio announcements on local radio stations, news releases, fact sheets, information packages (brochures or pamphlets)

## *Checklist*

Provide early and adequate notice of each opportunity for the public to participate in the decision-making process.

# 2. ENSURE ACCESSIBLE INFORMATION

## *Key elements*

Information is key. It is important to share with ethnocultural communities and immigrant population the information needed prior to organizing the events and processes, information that needs to be presented in a plain and clear, accessible and inclusive language. Ensure that adequate quantities are available at easily accessible venues, such as schools, local libraries and town halls.

Providing information in the languages of interested parties will help facilitate their understanding of the process/event and it will encourage members of the target groups to become involved in the process/event.

**Accessible information** should be provided to ensure that the target groups have the information they need to participate effectively.

## *Cultural sensitivity*

When implementing methods of communication, be sensitive to the customs and lifestyles of ethnocultural communities and immigrant population you wish to reach. Using culturally sensitive means of communication can influence whether they participate in activities, how well information is disseminated and understood, whether it is well received, and whether your public participation activities successfully meet their objectives.

## *Checklist*

Provide information in a timely manner and well in advance.

Give ethnocultural communities and immigrant population adequate and relevant information using plain and clear, consistent terminology to form an educated opinion.

Provide information in appropriate languages for ethnocultural communities and immigrant population.

Find out if there are common means of distributing information in the community (e.g., local television or radio station, local newspaper, library, schools).

Seek existing community groups and cultural leaders to help disseminate information.

Provide information in a suitable format and ensure that it is delivered or written in a clear and inclusive manner.



# 3. MOBILIZE AND EMPOWER ETHNOCULTURAL COMMUNITIES AND IMMIGRANT POPULATION

## *Key elements*

People responsible for organizing events and processes should travel to meet ethnocultural communities and immigrant population where they are, rather than expecting them to come to the organizations to express their views.

Organizations should respond to the needs and priorities of a full diversity of people by organizing consultations on topics that are important to them, not only on issues that the organizations consider to be a priority.

It is crucial to reach out to ethnocultural communities and immigrant population in the community. Finding ways to increase their **trust** and level of **self-confidence** is also key to fostering their participation.

## *Revamping*

It is vital to always introduce new practices in order to encourage participation of ethnocultural communities and immigrant population. Questioning the methods we use to ensure their participation helps us determine whether these methods are effective in mobilizing everyone and truly enabling ethnocultural communities and immigrant population to express their views.

## *Checklist*

Tailor mobilization strategies for diverse populations.

Advertise the ease and accessibility of participation in meetings and events.

Support and accompany people in their participation. Ensure and promote adequate availability of accompaniment/mentors.

Involve people in decision-making processes, including in organizing events, consultations, etc.

Offer special approach and activities to people that are most often excluded.

Be completely transparent about events and processes and communicate shared goals openly.

Organize participatory activities close to people's surroundings (work place, living place, schools, libraries, parks) and at appropriate times of day.

Offer a wide range of ways for people to participate (virtual, in-person, etc).

# 4. ORGANIZE THE EVENT OR THE PROCESS

## *Key elements*

Process or event participants will have different history, cultures, perspectives, values, approaches and interests. When organizing the event, consider the variety of values and accommodate the cultures, customs and needs, in order to support and acknowledge diversity. The best way to identify values and needs is through contact with, and input from, the representatives of local groups, as they have the best understanding of the unique customs and interests of the people they represent.

The way participants are welcomed and the format of meetings are both key to promoting greater participation of ethnocultural communities and immigrant population.

Public participation processes need to be carried out in a manner that respects different **values** and **needs**.

Knowledge, concerns, values and viewpoints should be shared in an open, respectful and timely manner.

## *Communication methods*

If ethnocultural communities and immigrant population are to contribute positively to the process, they must feel that their views are heard and respected and that you are committed to working cooperatively and impartially with them.

## *Checklist*

Respect community values and needs.

Offer a warm and welcoming environment.

Set up the rooms so that people are encouraged to come and voice their opinions.

Offer tools and conditions that make it easier for people to actively participate.

Encourage and welcome the presence of children.

Make meetings accessible.

Ensure shared power as much as possible and alternate speakers to balance the voices heard.

# 5. MONITOR AND ADAPT

## *Key elements*

Ongoing monitoring during implementation will help make sure the activities meet the overall objectives.

Monitoring participation and feedback will help verify whether the activities and techniques are effective in involving the target groups, obtaining their input and meeting their expectations.

The results will be fed in the organization of future events and processes.

It is essential that the implementation of events/processes be flexible and that each activity is **monitored** and **adapted** as new information or issues arise.

## *Examples*

- Informal feedback
- interviews
- questionnaires
- peer evaluations
- debriefs
- formal surveys

## *Checklist*

Encourage ethnocultural communities and immigrant population to submit comments throughout the process/event.

Conduct follow-up interviews.

Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the process/event regularly during the process.

Gather data regarding participation.

# 6. REVIEW AND INCORPORATE THE INPUT

## *Key elements*

Traditional knowledge is often told through stories where the point or the moral of the story is not immediately evident. To capture this input, it is important to spend time to interpret and understand the message clearly before recording or assessing it.

As you receive and verify input from the participants, document or otherwise record the information in an accessible format.

The information collected can be organized in many ways, but should always be dated. The source of information and the method of obtaining the input should always be identified.

Meaningful public participation requires that you clearly understand the **views** of the participants and the **input** you received.

## *Initial commitment*

How you intended to use the input was established in the planning stage and made known up front to ethnocultural communities and immigrant population. You now have an obligation to meet those commitments and this is essential to making the public participation meaningful.

## *Checklist*

Properly reference all sources of information and document each knowledge system (e.g., technical and traditional knowledge).

Give ethnocultural communities and immigrant population an opportunity to validate how their input or traditional knowledge has been interpreted and recorded.

Make sure you keep your initial commitments.

Evaluate the impact of actions taken and decisions made on all people.





# 7. PROVIDE FEEDBACK

## *Key elements*

Reporting back to participants can be done at different stages of the process, as well as at the end of the entire public participation process.

As reporting back can take many forms, it should be determined early in the process how, when and to whom feedback will be presented, and in which forms.

**Reporting back** to the participants of events/processes is an essential part of meaningful public participation.

## *Methods*

It is useful to summarize the comments, opinions and information received so participants and decision makers can understand themes raised, gauge trends and strengths of opinions, and know who participated. This documentation can then form the basis for reporting back to participants.

## *Checklist*

Clearly explain and document how the comments you received will be taken into account.

Summarize comments, opinions and information shared by participants.

Send a draft of report for review before a final version is adopted to all interested parties.

Distribute the finalized report to all participants and also make it publicly accessible for other interested parties.

# 8. TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

## *Key elements*

Keys to making ethnocultural communities and immigrant population in all their diversity feel more welcome and to reducing the obstacles to their participation in democratic life are:

- Identifying and continuous training the people in charge of mobilizing;
- Organizing and facilitating consultations on a range of topics such as power dynamics and systemic barriers;
- Developing participation practices that promote equality and inclusion.

Continuous **professional development and training** for key people involved in organizing events and processes is essential for a meaningful public participation.

## *Key topics*

- power dynamics
- systemic barriers
- participation practices that promote equality and inclusion
- intercultural communication

## *Checklist*

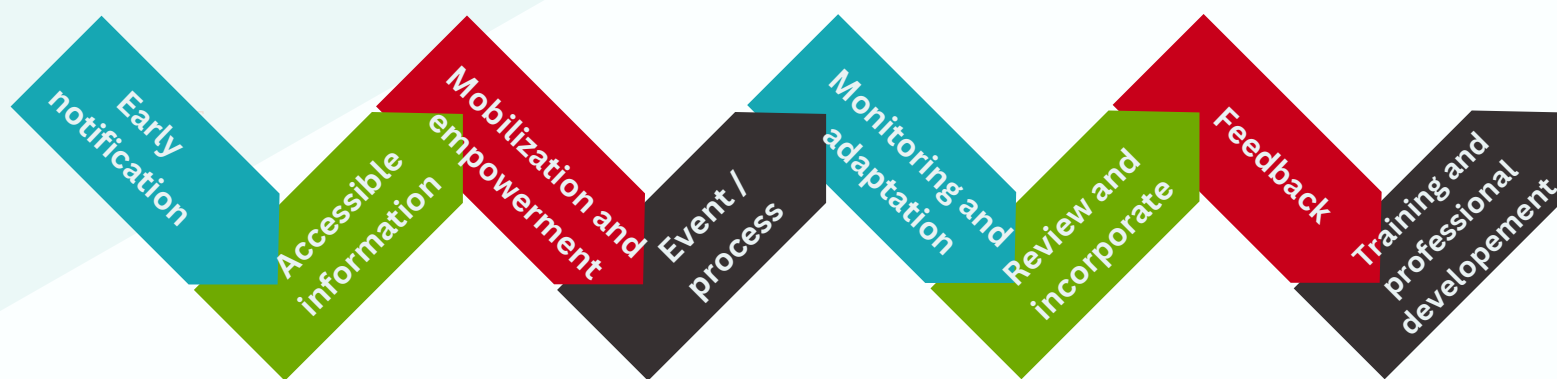
Ensure appropriate training of key people involved in mobilizing, organizing and facilitation of events/processes.

Use a critical approach regarding the introductions of new practices (evaluation, test, budget).

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