# PRINCIPLES OF ENGAGEMENT: CREATING STRONG PARTNERSHIPS FOR NEWCOMER AND ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES IN SASKATOON

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**With a population of 246,300 the city of Saskatoon is one of the fastest growing cities in Canada. With the Aboriginal and newcomer communities being the fastest growing demographics, Saskatoon is also rich with intercultural learning events and celebrations throughout the year.**

**It has a youthful vitality and cultural richness thanks in part to the University of Saskatchewan, and a vibrant, sophisticated arts community that is tangible at the events and festivals taking place throughout the year.**

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For centuries, migration has led to changing relationships among cultural groups, contributing to the richness of the Canadian cultural landscape. Like other Canadian cities, Saskatoon shares a colonial history that has produced an array of dynamics between Indigenous inhabitants and newcomers to Canada. These dynamics present some of the greatest challenges faced in Saskatoon. In 1989, with an eye to understanding that "the participation and contribution of all citizens in the development of a community is vital to meeting the challenges of the future," the City of Saskatoon moved to establish a Race Relations Committee to advise on the different facets of creating bridges among Aboriginal, newcomer and mainstream populations through avenues such as recreation, culture, and business.

Discrimination perpetuates many disadvantages experienced by Aboriginal peoples and other groups, many of whom are members of Saskatoon's most economically and socially marginalized communities. Over the years, the Cultural Diversity and Race Relations (CDRR) Policy has brought together community groups to gain a mutual respect and understanding of one another, address common experiences, celebrate multiculturalism, and tackle racism.

The face of Saskatoon continues to change rapidly due to a recent increase in immigration to our province. The City of Saskatoon strives to maintain a welcoming and inclusive community through strong partnerships with Aboriginal and newcomer organisations in order to mitigate racial discrimination and alleviate social, political, and economic disparities.Effective strategies for resolving these continuing challenges of inequality include the development of an Aboriginal Employment Strategy, and a deliberate shift in focus from the promotion of multiculturalism and cultural awareness towards comprehensive anti-racism education initiatives in a corporate training program. This shift is aimed at developing "an action-oriented strategy for institutional, systemic change to address racism and the interlocking systems of social oppression" (Sefa Dei 1996).

With a vision to promote human rights and address racism through shared responsibility, the Canadian Commission for the United Nations Education, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) created a network of municipalities across Canada. In May of 2008 Saskatoon became the first signatory of CCMARD. Six years later, in February of 2014, Statistics Canada showed Saskatoon to be the second fastest growing city in the country (Statistics Canada 2014) with Aboriginal and new immigrant populations posting the largest increases. Thus, efforts to address racial dynamics continue to be a priority for the City of Saskatoon. In response to this rapidly growing and changing face of the city, the Immigration, Diversity and Inclusion office has been invited to take part in several community collaborations. The goal of the work has been to bridge the newcomer, Aboriginal, and settler populations through inclusion, intercultural interaction, education, and awareness. The following are examples of how Saskatoon applied three of the four principles of Aboriginal engagement as quoted in the CCMARD toolkit (2012).

### MUTUAL RECOGNITION

The City, via the Immigration, Diversity and Inclusion Consultant, was invited to coordinate a panel at the University of Saskatchewan (UofS) for The Community-University Institute for Social Research two-day conference on quality of life (with a special focus on indigenous people's quality of life). The City of Saskatoon chose to highlight work that the community is doing in Aboriginal/newcomer collaborations. The panel, entitled "Aboriginal and Newcomer Relations: Making Community Connections" included representatives from the UofS, the Office of the Treaty Commissioner, the Saskatchewan Intercultural Association, and the City of Saskatoon.

### MUTUAL RESPECT

In order to learn more about Aboriginal culture, the Hindu Association initiated a learning event "Building Bridges to Understanding", where two presenters were invited, one First Nations and the other Métis Nation. The City's role was to coordinate and engage the community. The event attracted over 60 people of different ages, who agreed that this was a sign of the changing times: Aboriginal, settler and newcomer guests sitting on the floor in a Hindu temple listening to Aboriginal and Métis speakers and afterwards sharing a vegetarian meal of curry and rice and bannock and jam.

### SHARING

The Saskatoon Symphony Orchestra (SSO) and SaskEnergy offered newcomers 100 family passes to their family series presented at the Western Development Museum. For the next event in the series, the SSO offered 200 family passes to both Aboriginal and newcomer communities. Both the Western Development Museum and the SSO were overwhelmed to see such a diverse audience.

At the City of Saskatoon, we are truly fortunate to be part of a community that will lead the way in collaborations. The City's role is to be the catalyst, connector, and facilitator for "navigating challenges" when addressing issues of discrimination, racism, and inequity. Municipal Governments in other levels of government, and community-based organizations share in the responsibility and have an important role to play to combat racism and discrimination, and fostering equality and respect for all citizens.

### REFERENCES


Canadian Coalition of Municipalities Against Racism and Discrimination 2012: Toolkit for Municipalities, Organizations and Citizens,

City of Saskatoon Cultural Diversity and Race Relations Policy, Clause 3, Report No. 2-2004 of the Planning and Operations Committee, C10-023, February 9, 2004.

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