Acknowledgements

The Ethno-Cultural Council of Calgary would like to thank all of the staff, volunteers, Strong Neighbourhoods Cultural Engagement Project (CEP) participants, ethno-cultural communities, individuals and organizations who helped contribute to the creation of this publication. A special thank you goes to community organizers and the Project Advisory Committee who have played a key role in the planning, direction and development of the CEP project. We would also like to thank our funders, Family and Community Support Services (FCSS) and United Way of Calgary and Area, for their support and partnership in the CEP project.

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Engaging Ethno-cultural Communities Toolkit
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Printed by: Minuteman Press
Supported by: Family and Community Support Services (FCSS) and United Way of Calgary and Area

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ISBN: 976-0-9869114-3-9

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Overview

Engaging Ethno-cultural Communities Toolkit was developed by the Ethno-Cultural Council of Calgary based on experience and learnings from the Strong Neighbourhoods Ethno-Cultural Engagement Project.

Engaging Ethno-cultural Communities Toolkit has been designed for use by Community Development Professionals, Community Associations, Community Service Organizations and Agencies, and by local Community Organizers or Residents interested in engaging with ethno-cultural groups in their community.

The toolkit is designed to help users move through the engagement process from early planning stages to community action. However, it is important to keep in mind that community engagement is not a linear process. Early stages of the process (e.g. knowing your community, planning, recruiting) should be completed first in order to provide a solid basis from which to design your engagement strategy. Asset mapping can be carried out both as a planning exercise, and also repeated later as an engagement exercise to help ethno-cultural residents identify their own assets. The middle stages of the process, such as communicating, connecting, engaging, and taking action may be done more than once as an ongoing process so that you are working with residents engaged early on while continuing to engage with new groups of people from the community. It’s best to keep these ongoing engagement processes open and welcoming so that new people may join in at any time.

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Engaging Ethno-cultural Communities Toolkit

Introduction – Why Engage Ethno-Cultural Communities?

Community engagement encourages the emergence of more active citizens. Active citizens are a great untapped resource. Active and engaged citizens . . .

- **Improve the liveability of communities.** Community members understand their own neighbourhoods better than anyone else, and their involvement can help identify local preferences and priorities and address local issues.
- **Solve local problems.** "When people become involved in their neighbourhoods they can become a potent force for dealing with local problems. Through co-ordinated planning, research and action they can accomplish what individuals working alone could not." (Citizen’s Handbook)
- **Rekindle sense of community.** Active community members can help to create a “sense of community connected to place.” “Neighbourhood groups can act as vehicles for making connections between people, forums for resolving local difference and a means of looking after one another. They can create a positive social environment that can become one of the best features of a place.” (Citizen’s Handbook)
- **Contribute to better health.** New definitions of health recognize the effects of adequate education and income, a clean environment, secure housing and employment, the ability to control stress, and social support networks. Healthy communities are also determined by the active participation of community members.

Within our communities there are often groups of people who are marginalized and underrepresented. Research shows that many new immigrants and individuals from ethno-cultural groups feel isolated and/or alienated. This social isolation can affect both the individuals and the community as a whole. In community building we need to ensure that people from marginalized groups are fully engaged, included, and given a voice so that we can benefit from the full diversity of ideas, opinions, and skills present in our community. Engaging marginalized groups often requires assertive, pro-active, and specialized strategies in order to overcome barriers and reach out to those who are isolated. This toolkit provides information and ideas that will help you develop strategies to better engage with ethno-cultural communities.

Engagement Objectives

- To increase involvement and interest in building strong neighbourhoods that are welcoming, safe, and vibrant places to live
- To bring about change to improve your neighbourhood
- To enable all community members to fully participate in and enjoy their neighbourhood
- To build cohesion and capacity by enabling community members, especially those who feel excluded, to be more involved and have more influence
- To improve the quality of community engagement with ethno-cultural groups
- To help individuals with different backgrounds, interests, cultures, and languages come together, get to know one another, and feel like they are part of the neighbourhood or community (sense of belonging)
- To empower local citizens to have control over their lives

The following principles provide some basic guidelines for your engagement work.

**Principles for Engagement**

1. **Make a difference.** The purpose of participation is to achieve change – to make a difference in the community. It may also make a difference to all those involved in terms of learning, confidence, and sense of active citizenship. This requires active commitment to change by all parties.

2. **Voluntary.** People may be encouraged to be involved, but effective participation means they also choose to be involved.

3. **Transparency, honesty, and clarity about the purpose or the engagement project, the limits (what can and cannot be changed), who can be involved and how, and what might happen as a result (next steps).**

4. **Adequate resources to manage the process well, and to deliver on the results.**

5. **Inclusive participation,** with traditionally excluded or marginalized groups offered special support and encouragement.

Accessible, so no participant is excluded because of lack of physical access to meeting places, timing, or appropriate support (e.g. child care, transportation, etc.).

Accountable. Participatory processes need to be accountable to all those involved. This requires good record-keeping and reporting of both processes and outcomes.

Power. Participatory processes should have sufficient power to achieve the agreed objectives. Participants share power over decision making, planning, and action taken by the group.

Capacity Building. Participatory processes should seek to support a climate of mutual learning and development throughout the process among all those involved.
Know Yourself

Before we start thinking about how to engage ethno-cultural residents, let’s first think about who we are, and why we want to do this work.

In Canada, we are a nation of immigrants. What is your ethnic or cultural background? Where did your ancestors come from? What special cultural traditions have been passed down in your family? Where do you live now? How long have you lived there?

Our cultural norms, values, and traditions are present in many of our ways of being. For example, think about how your cultural norms might influence the way you communicate with others, organize your family, parent your children, or relate to service providers such as police, teachers, doctors, etc.

In order to do the work set out before us (i.e. ethno-cultural engagement) we need to be aware of our own ‘cultural competence’ which includes our perceptions, understanding, and possible biases toward other ethno-cultural groups. Being aware of our own thoughts and behaviors will help increase our sensitivity to how we interact with others as we are attempting to engage residents.

Cultural Competency has three main components:

1. Cultural Awareness – a sensitivity and understanding of one’s own cultural identity as it shows itself through our beliefs, values, and practices, as well as through our biases.
2. Cultural Knowledge – having knowledge of other cultures’ beliefs, values, and practices allows one to understand different worldviews.
3. Cultural Skills – having the professional skills to interact effectively with diverse cultures, and the ability to operate between multiple cultures.

Throughout this toolkit there are reminders for being sensitive to the ethno-cultural groups you may engage. You will see tips such as being aware/informed of different cultural norms, values, beliefs and attitudes; family and gender roles; awareness of faith/cultural heroes, celebrations and holidays; and use of plain language, interpreters, and story-telling.

Reassess your own cultural competency often in order to make sure you are on-track to do the best engagement work possible in the diverse and global community that is Calgary. Be curious. Ask co-workers who may have more insight or experience with particular cultures.

Before moving on to the next section, take a minute to think about some of the similarities and differences that you might encounter between your own culture and that of others.

Areas for Exploration

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<th>Your Culture</th>
<th>Other Cultures</th>
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<td>taking turns</td>
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<td>interpersonal space</td>
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<td>Family Structure</td>
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<td>education</td>
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<td>Celebrations</td>
<td>important holidays/traditions</td>
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<td>Faith</td>
<td>restrictions (dress, actions, food)</td>
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<td>gathering place and times</td>
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<td>role of males/females</td>
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Know Your Community

The key to developing effective engagement strategies is to know your community. Do some preliminary research to find out which ethno-cultural groups you might find in your community and in what proportions or numbers. City census data and neighbourhood profiles are a good place to start. You can find these types of information by searching the City of Calgary website or through Statistics Canada. You can then plan your engagement strategies as inclusively as possible and monitor which ethno-cultural groups in your community are being reached and engaged, and which appear to be absent or under-represented in community gatherings and community work. You can then develop engagement strategies specifically targeted to the ethno-cultural groups who are absent or under-represented.

Note that census data may not be completely up to date with recent population growth or immigration to the particular community, so you may wish to use other sources of information as well. For example, check with local agencies serving immigrants, schools, or health partners to determine any recent population trends or noticeable social issues or service gaps in the community.

Keep in mind that there may be a great deal of diversity within an ethno-cultural group itself. Within an ethno-cultural group there may be distinct subgroups based on:

- different faiths,
- country or area of origin (e.g. national, tribal, or caste affiliations),
- language,
- interests or professional groups (e.g. business owners, nannies, engineers),
- age or gender groupings (e.g. mothers, seniors, youth), etc.

So even if some individuals from a particular ethno-cultural group are involved, other individuals may be noticeably absent. For example, you may have a thriving and involved Chinese business community, but find that the Chinese seniors or youth are very isolated.

So now, let’s get to know your community . . .

Know Your Community - Questions

Which information sources have you checked to find ethno-cultural groups?

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<tr>
<th>Information Source</th>
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<th>Comments/Ideas</th>
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<td>Census data</td>
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<td>Community profiles</td>
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<td>Immigrant agencies (make a list)</td>
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<td>Other service agencies (e.g. schools, youth programs, library)</td>
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<td>Local businesses</td>
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<td>Community Association</td>
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<td>Observation or Contacts</td>
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<td>Other Sources</td>
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Which ethno-cultural groups are represented in your community? How large is each group?

List three or four key ethno-cultural groups
Number or %
1. _____________________________________________
2. _____________________________________________
3. _____________________________________________
4. _____________________________________________

How involved are each of these ethno-cultural groups in the community? How are they involved? Which of these ethno-cultural groups are underrepresented or absent in community activities?

What faith groups are represented in your community?

What key language groups are represented in your community?

Which ethno-cultural groups are represented on the community association?

Which ethno-cultural groups are represented on the local school council?

Which ethno-cultural groups are on the radar as having issues? What are those issues?

Ethno-cultural Group

Have a Plan

Now that you know something about the ethno-cultural composition of your community, let’s make a plan to get people engaged. Your plan should have clear strategies, activities, and timelines for moving the engagement forward. Be sure to build in specific goals or checkpoints where you can pause and reflect on your progress. Engagement is long term work and it’s important to be able to monitor your progress and identify your achievements in order to sustain motivation and momentum.

Choose your focus or target ethno-cultural group(s) or sub group(s)

There are a variety of ways to determine your target/focus for this engagement work. You may decide to choose the ethno-cultural group with the largest numbers in the community, or you could choose a group with the highest profile issues or most noticeable service gaps. You might choose a mixed ethno-cultural target group based on a common language, faith, age, gender, or interest (personal or professional). Or you may simply choose to start with an ethno-cultural group where you have some firm contacts. Sometimes you can make the best early progress with a group that has already approached you, expressed interest, or started to organize informally.

However, you should keep in mind that the goal is to engage with groups who are marginalized, under-represented or absent in your community work. In particular you want to engage people who don’t currently have a voice in their community.
Learn more about the culture

Once you choose your target group(s), take some time to learn about the culture you are attempting to engage. You will need to be sensitive and respectful of cultural norms and values in order to build trust and make progress. Sometimes different cultures may have different age or gender norms than we are used to in Canada, different way of greasing, welcoming or engaging with others and different approaches to leadership. Know what is important to this group and treat them respectfully. Get to know their cultural heroes, religious and cultural holidays and traditions. Take advice from experts about the best way to approach the engagement process. You can build your cultural capacity/awareness through contact with your local immigrant serving organizations or by connecting with someone from the culture. Be sure to include cultural awareness training for non-ethnic staff and volunteers who will be involved in the engagement project.

Identify Leaders

Research shows that many ethno-cultural communities have a strong sense of community and connections within their own ethno-cultural group. Within a distinct ethno-cultural group there are likely to be a number of formally recognized leaders as well as informal leaders. You can tap into these existing informal structures within the ethno-cultural community to find people who know the community and can help with a broader community engagement strategy.

Single vs. Mixed Ethno-cultural Engagement Focus

Some experienced community engagement projects (e.g. ANC Toronto) feel that since there is a tendency for immigrant communities to find connections within their own ethno-cultural group, that it may be best to start the engagement process with a single ethno-cultural focus and then gradually expand the engagement to include a broader range of ethno-cultural groups/individuals from the community. This approach may be simpler to implement initially as you can focus communication in one first language, and accommodate one set of cultural norms. It may work best for newer immigrant communities who are still strongly attached to their own ethno-cultural group and cultural practices, or have weaker English language skills.

Other community engagement projects (e.g. Vancouver Neighbourhood House) believe that the engagement should be broadly applied across all ethno-cultural groups in the community with a focus on finding common ground and common interests. Since you know your community best, it is up to you to decide which of these strategies will work better as a starting point and when you might broaden your engagement from focusing on one or a few ethno-cultural groups to focusing on a mix of ethno-cultural and more mainstream community members. The important thing is to be flexible in your planning and engagement strategies in order to take advantage of opportunities for integration as the project moves forward.

Geographic Specific or Ethno-Cultural Specific

Another consideration in your engagement planning is whether you are intending to engage with a specific ethno-cultural group or groups within a specified geographic area or neighbourhood, or whether you are intending to engage with an ethno-cultural group that may include members across several areas or neighbourhoods. Because ethno-cultural communities tend to connect more strongly within their ethno-cultural community than they do within a specific geographic area, it is likely that regardless of which approach you choose you will be dealing with ethno-cultural memberships that extend across geographic areas. However, if you are intent on local neighbourhood revitalization and local community building, you can at least set this geographic area as your priority while leaving the engagement activity open to include others outside the target neighbourhood.

Another way of dealing with this dilemma is to let the ethno-cultural group themselves determine their sense of connection to the local neighbourhood and their membership. For example, in the ANC project in Toronto a group of Filipino nannies who had worked in a specific neighbourhood but were now mostly residing elsewhere came together in a community-building project because they had a common interest and all lation with the neighbourhood and with each other. The neighbourhood became their common meeting place where the group socialized and participated in activities.
Engagement Objectives

Now that you have thought about who and why you want to engage in community building, you need a specific plan with goals, activities, timelines, and resources. Start with the big picture (i.e. your long term goal) and then develop the shorter term objectives and activities. Your engagement plan will help to keep you focused and on track. Be sure to revisit the plan regularly to monitor progress and update your plan as needed.

Engagement Planning Questions

Which ethno-cultural group(s) am I choosing to engage with?

What do I know about this culture? (list language(s), country/areas of origin, faith(s), holidays, etc.)

Who are the formal and informal leaders in this ethno-cultural community?

Who is already organizing informal activities or groups?

Who might be interested in working on this engagement project? (make a list of potential contacts or interested people)

What resources will you need and where can you find them? (e.g. people, funds, space to meet/gather)

Who/where to get this

What languages will you need? Will you need translated materials? Where can you find interpreters?

What is your short-term and longer-term objective in doing this engagement work?

Short-Term Objective

Long-Term Objective
Recruit and Train Local Community Organizers

A key strategy to facilitate engagement with your target ethno-cultural communities is to find local Community Organizers who speak the first language, are from the culture or know the culture well, and have some connections in the particular ethno-cultural community. Ideally these individuals would live in the community or in close proximity to the community, and have some previous community development or facilitation experience or might even be currently involved in their community (cultural, faith, or geographic) in some informal leadership capacity. But the most important features are commitment, enthusiasm, willingness to work with the community, and ability to gain the trust of the community. These Community Organizers can act as an effective bridge between the mainstream community and the ethno-cultural community.

In other project examples these local ethno-cultural community organizers have been named “trusted advocates” or “community animators” (see Appendix examples).

Criteria for Recruitment

- From the ethno-cultural group they intend to engage
- Live in the neighbourhood or in close proximity
- Speak the language of their ethno-cultural target group
- Have established connections, trust, and networks within a particular cultural, age, or linguistic group
- Know the formal and informal leaders of the ethno-cultural group
- Know the formal and informal organizations, groups, activities, cultural celebrations, traditional heroes, etc. of the ethno-cultural group
- Commitment to community building

Recruitment Strategies

Treat the Community Organizer position as you would if you were hiring a new staff member. Be sure to set out a job description for the Community Organizer role so that everyone knows what is expected of the position. Clearly outline the benefits of working as a Community Organizer in order to attract interest. Benefits could include training, new knowledge and skills, work experience, mentoring, a reference for future employment, and the opportunity to improve the local community and the experience/lives of local ethno-cultural residents.

Advertise the position, especially within the geographic and ethno-cultural community of interest. Have people apply for the position and interview them to determine their level of expertise and commitment. This will help you to determine how much training and support they may need in future, and how you might best integrate the helper into your engagement strategies and activities.

If you already know people in the community that you think could do a good job, encourage them to apply. Or you could ask for recommendations from people who know the community, or from service organizations who have some connection with the local community or with the ethno-cultural group you are trying to recruit.
Paid or Unpaid Community Organizers

You can use paid or unpaid/volunteer Community Organizers, part time or full time. Most of the successful projects of this type use part time paid Community Organizers with an understanding that the Community Organizer may choose to exceed the paid hours with additional volunteer hours.

Before determining whether to use paid or unpaid Community Organizers you might consider some of the pros and cons to each approach. Some things to consider before deciding how to engage your Community Organizers include:

- Paid positions encourage people to get involved and sustain the activities over time
- Time spent working/volunteering in the community must be weighed against the opportunity to use that time to earn money, or take care of family responsibilities. In communities with a high level of poverty, paying Community Organizers may mean that they don't have to choose between improving their communities and supporting their own families.
- Paid positions help offset the costs incurred through volunteering.
- Use of local residents as Community Organizers can create added value for the project by tapping into residents' local information and connections.
- Paying your Community Organizers helps to address issues of equality and fairness between professionals guiding the work, and local residents carrying out the work.
- On the other hand, if some residents are being paid as Community Organizers and others are volunteering, it could create tension and a sense of inequity.
- Small project budgets may limit the funds you have available to pay Community Organizers. Be aware that you may not be able to pay for all of the hours contributed – some hours may become volunteer work.
- Creating paid Community Organizer positions may attract those who are more interested in the money than the community vision.

Be clear about expectations for the Community Organizers. You may wish to set up a contract, specifying the number of hours to be worked, the length of time the Community Organizer will work on the project, and any hourly pay rate, honorariums, incentives, or expenses to be reimbursed.

Train, Organize, and Support Local Community Organizers

Your ethno-cultural workers are an integral part of your community development team. But keep in mind that they are probably not trained community development workers or have little experience or training in Canada. They will need training, as well as ongoing guidance, supervision and support. Before sending them out into the community, set up a training schedule that covers the basic community development skills and awareness they will need to do their job.

Training Themes

Here is a suggested list of themes or topics that could be covered in your training:
- Know your community -- how/where to find information on the community
- Know yourself -- what are your experiences, values, beliefs about community
- Vision of a strong healthy community
- Social Capital -- what is it, bridging and bonding among groups, linking into vertical and horizontal networks, building trust
- Mapping -- how to do this
- Leadership -- how do we understand community leadership, formal vs. informal leaders
- Engagement methods that can be used
- Facilitation skills -- how to engage and facilitate a group
- Planning your strategies and monitoring your progress
- Community events/activities -- what works best for early engagement, cultural integration, etc.

Work as a Team

Assign an experienced supervisor or project coordinator who will be available to the Community Organizers on a regular basis. The supervisor may need to work side by side with the Community Organizers to assist with planning, guiding, and facilitating the engagement work.

Setting your Community Organizers up in teams, paired with a supervisor, another helper or community development worker, or with another volunteer from the community, will strengthen their ability to carry out the engagement work. Working in teams increases confidence, increases sense of safety and validity when door-knocking, allows for sharing of ideas, spreads out the workload, is helpful when engaging large groups in activities, and may contribute additional languages.
The Value of Local Community Organizers

Your Community Organizers create an important link to the ethno-cultural community you are trying to engage.

- Networking/Mobilizing: They can be a link to additional and wider networks, such as nonprofit organizations, informal community networks, businesses, government agencies, and funders. They can also help provide access to grassroots leaders, policy makers, and other potential participants.
- Facilitation: They can facilitate collaboration between the ethno-cultural community and mainstream community members, or between leaders across community sectors (e.g., business and youth), or among groups with similar missions (e.g., seniors services). They can also act as facilitators during group meetings or activities, help to provide translation, and gain access to meeting space in the neighbourhood.
- Modelling Behavior: They can be an example or model for cross-cultural collaboration, encouraging people from diverse backgrounds to work together to use the diversity among themselves and in their community as an advantage.
- Advocacy: They can advocate for funding and other supports to develop ideas and opportunities, or address issues identified by community members.

Map Community and Cultural Assets

Your community has many assets that community members can use as a foundation from which to build a positive future. Asset mapping is a simple process of identifying those assets in the community and thinking about how people interact with them. For example, certain groups of people may be found in particular places in your community (youth/parents at soccer field, seniors at local coffee shop, new immigrants at library ESL class). Mapping provides ideas for where you might engage with community members, what public spaces might be available to you for meetings or community gatherings, what people, skills, and resources exist in the community that could be helpful to your community building effort.

Ethno-cultural community members can help tap into specific cultural assets in the community that may not be otherwise available to community members. Cultural assets may include special skills or knowledge of ethno-cultural residents (e.g., language skills), information about where ethno-cultural residents gather, or access to ethno-cultural groups, activities, or facilities.

Community assets may include:

- Local public services/physical structures, e.g., school, faith centres, library, recreation centre, bus or LRT, police, fire station
- Local businesses, e.g., grocery store, gas station, convenience stores, coffee shop
- Natural resources, e.g., parks, river, green space
- Social services and community organizations, e.g., Boys & Girls Club, Seniors Centre, daycare
- Formal and informal groups, e.g., Community Association, parent council, youth group, soccer team, ethno-cultural specific groups
- Skills, knowledge, talents and experience of local residents
Mapping Exercise
To map the assets in your community, you can simply get out a pad and start writing a list, or use a flip chart to brainstorm with others. Asset mapping exercises are a good way to get to know the local community, so it is important to have the Community Organizers and community volunteers create their own asset maps that can later be combined into a larger map. You may also want to engage larger groups of citizens in an asset mapping exercise as a community building process. Keep in mind that when working with ethno-cultural residents you should leave extra time for questions and answers. Encourage ethno-cultural residents to think about some of the unique cultural assets they may be aware of, as well as the more obvious general community assets.

Sometimes using a more informal, story telling approach to asset mapping makes it easier to engage ethno-cultural residents. For example, have group members draw their typical day or week on flip chart paper and then share their personal experience with the group. The Community Organizer can help identify the specific personal and community assets represented in the stories (e.g. places people go, where they gather, their interests and talents).

Community Walk About
Gathering a group of community residents or volunteers for a walking tour of the community is another great way to map physical assets, businesses, and services. Try to walk the whole community block by block – you may want to break up the work by assigning different areas to different volunteers. Notice various features of the community including green spaces, buildings, businesses, or social gathering places such as a community centre or community garden. You can also look for who’s out and about in the community, how well maintained are the streets and green spaces, how much traffic is there, etc.

Mapping Personal Connections
Encourage residents to identify their own key contacts and social networks. In this way, ethno-cultural residents can reach out to help engage others from their own ethno-cultural group or from the neighbourhood, help identify formal and informal leaders, or other residents with important skills, talents, or assets to contribute.

Mapping Individual Capacity
You can map individual capacity (i.e. skills, talents, contacts) as part of the overall mapping exercise and create an inventory of people’s skills, talents, professions, and groups they are associated with. You might also consider using a snowball approach to connecting with and engaging additional community or family members in the asset mapping by asking participants you have engaged with to invite others to fill out a brief survey identifying their skills and interests. Whatever the approach, it should be designed and presented in a way that will encourage residents to view themselves as having valuable assets that they could contribute to their community, and to connect people who can help each other. Help ethno-culturally diverse residents to identify and appreciate some of the unique gifts and talents that they bring to the community (e.g. language skills, in-depth knowledge of culture or history, contacts, ability to connect with and engage others from their ethno-cultural group).

Observe Community Interactions
- Another great method used by one ethno-cultural researcher is to simply watch for interactions in public places. Some suggestions for this method are to:
  - Systematically observe social interactions in different public spaces
  - Interview key informants on their knowledge of neighbourhood dynamics
  - Look for how residents “associate” with each other – where do particular ethno-cultural groups connect (with each other and with others of different backgrounds)
  - Identify the roles played by cultural communities. Some ethno-cultural groups will have established their own informal helping organizations or activities (e.g. East Indian seniors’ group, Thai women’s group). These organizations or activities help to engage ethno-cultural members in their neighbourhood and create new opportunities to meet the needs of ethno-cultural residents.
Build Your Asset Map

You can place the identified assets on a large "map" which may be a geographic representation of the community or could be divided into types of assets and the links between them. Maps are good visual aids. When you can see the data right in front of you, your understanding and insight is often increased.

One mapping method is to find a large street map of your community. Then mark with a dot or push-pin the geographic location of services and organizations you have identified. Patterns will emerge that show how certain locations may have more or less assets.

Continue to build your map over time as you discover new features, groups, or services in the community. Refine and revisit your individual and community asset inventory lists. Keep them on a computer where you can break down the information in different ways (e.g. meeting space, youth programs, people interested in gardening, etc.).

How To Use Asset Mapping

Now that you have identified some of your community assets there are a number of ways you can use this information.

- As a simple inventory of what's in your community;
- To chart who lives in the areas to ensure that no group is inadvertently excluded. Do this by reviewing census data to identify ethno-cultural populations represented in your community;
- To map the informal and formal networks such as faith groups, cultural groups, parent groups, sports groups, resident groups, etc.;
- To map the informal and formal activities in the area;
- To map interactions between people, places, services;
- To better understand the community's strengths and issues (e.g. traffic, upkeep of buildings and homes, population concentrations such as housing complexes, or higher densities of one ethno-cultural group);
- To identify neighbourhood gathering places such as cafés, schools, faith centres, etc.;
- As a resource – knowing where you can access meeting space, skills/talents available in the community, etc.;
- As a resource for your action plan (e.g. to identify meeting space, popular public spaces, or activities that can facilitate your action plan).

Attention to Communication

For ethno-cultural communities, language can be a significant barrier to community engagement and integration, and can keep people socially isolated from the mainstream. Individuals who have little or no English or weak English language skills will have difficulty interacting with their neighbours, accessing mainstream services, or even being aware of community events and activities. They cannot fully participate in community consultations or discussions if they don’t understand what others are saying, or can’t easily express their opinions. Therefore, it is critically important to provide communication in first languages, especially for those ethno-cultural groups you are targeting for engagement.

Strategies for enhanced communication with ethno-cultural groups include:

- Translate notices, brochures, and information handouts into the first language of identified ethno-cultural groups;
- Post translated materials in places where the local ethno-cultural population may gather or access services (e.g. local school, church/mosque, cultural centre, local convenience store, community association, etc.);
- Find community partners who can help you distribute information about your engagement project (e.g. school, library, community association, other community group, etc.);
- Use ethnic media (newsletters, newspapers, radio, etc.) to advertise or talk about your engagement project;
- Use translators at community gatherings where there may be mixed English and non-English speaking residents;
- Find someone who speaks the group’s first language and conduct some meetings with the identified ethno-cultural group in their own first language;
- Make use of your trained Community Organizers and other community volunteers who speak different languages.
Communication Materials

- Posters and brochures are a good way of getting a large number of people interested in what you’re doing. A well-designed poster is eye catching, provides just the right information in an easy to understand way, and can be put in a range of locations.
- Try to write in plain language and keep the message clear.
- As a rule, always ask yourself who you are trying to reach. What message are you sending to what audience? What are your objectives? Remember this with all communications.

Questions Re: Communication

1. Which first language groups do you need to interact with as part of your ethno-cultural engagement strategy?

2. What languages are available within your group of trained helpers and community volunteers?

3. Where do people from the ethno-cultural group gather? Where can you post notices? Who might help you distribute information?

4. What ethnic media outlets (newsletters, radio, advertisers) exist in your community?

5. What strategies or approaches will you use to address the language barriers in your community work?

Connecting with the Ethno-Cultural Community

Since you have already determined that there are particular ethno-cultural groups that are absent or under-represented in our community, you now need to figure out how to connect with them in order to engage them in community building. There are a number of strategies suggested in the literature.

Have a Clear Message

Be prepared with a clear message about why you want to engage with the community. How would coming together benefit the participants and their community?

Go to the Community

When trying to connect with a marginalized ethno-cultural community you need to plan an assertive, pro-active approach to reach out to the community, rather than assuming that the community will come to you.

Door knocking

Door knocking is an old but effective method of making face-to-face contact with community members. The easiest way to do door-knocking is to have people do their own block or area. Being a neighbor creates an immediate bond with the person answering the door. Another approach is to use a short survey about local concerns, interests, current projects, or your group’s goals.

It’s important to have community workers/volunteers work in teams in which different languages are represented. Keep in mind that some isolated multicultural or immigrant citizens, women and/or seniors may be intimidated by seeing someone at their door that they don’t know. If you are using a door knocking approach ensure that the community workers/volunteers have name badges and brochures or materials that clearly identify who they are and why they are at the door. Be prepared to share a clear message about your engagement project’s goals or activities. State what action the person at the door can take as well as the benefits of taking that action.
Look for Micro-Publics

One way to find members of a specific ethno-cultural community is to look for groups or ‘micro-publics’ (places, events) where they might be expected to gather and interact. These could include schools, libraries, community centres, parent groups, youth groups, seniors groups, faith groups, etc. Connect with the group leader and bring your message/invitation directly to members of the group. You might even hold mini-consultations within the group to gather information on interests, issues and opinions, or to support the formation of an action group.

Try a Snowball Effect

A good way to expand your contact within an ethno-cultural community is to engage a few people and then ask those people to reach out to friends, family, neighbours, or acquaintances. Use your connections. These personal connections and invitations can be a powerful engagement strategy as we are more likely to participate in an event with the support of a friend or someone we know, than on our own – especially where there may be language or cultural barriers or simple lack of confidence.

Create Membership Lists

Create membership lists with places for entering name, address, day and evening phone numbers, and email addresses. Membership lists can later be used to reach large numbers of people through a "telephone tree" approach.

Organize an Informal Community Event

Have a first engagement meeting, gathering, or event already planned so that you can invite people from the community to come together. Community building often starts with informal activities.

Be Mindful

As you approach ethno-cultural communities, keep in mind a few simple rules

- Be sensitive to the cultural norms.
- Be respectful
- Be patient
- Be creative

An important part of community engagement is relationship building and empowering. The keys to successful relationship building and empowering include communicating, listening, being flexible, open minded, and having a long-term commitment to the process.4

Use your first informal community activities or meetings as an opportunity to develop trust, increase the level of comfort among participants, and create a sense of belonging and sense of community. In order to do this, people need to feel comfortable, and have opportunities to chat and get to know one another. People are more motivated to get involved if the activity looks interesting or fun.

Engaging people to come together as a group requires attention to creating interest, reducing potential barriers, and making them feel welcome. You will need to consider the following details in your planning and organization of the event.
Generating Interest

Think about how you can generate interest in your initial gathering or event. Can you explain to people why you want them to come together? Some strategies you might consider to help generate interest include:

- Colourful and fun posters or notices
- Personal invitations from yourself or one of the Community Organizers or volunteers, or use contacts within the community to invite others (i.e. friends, neighbours, family members)
- Provide food and offer door prizes as an incentive
- Include some fun activities along with whatever community work is on the agenda

Reducing Barriers

- Meeting space – create safe spaces for people to come together. Use a familiar, neutral meeting place located within the community and with easy access for participants (e.g. school, community centre, recreation centre, local library, etc.)
- Flexibility re: timing – choose a time when families are available, such as early in the evening or weekends, or perhaps link with the timing of another community event. Be aware of cultural traditions and holidays to avoid scheduling a meeting at times that conflict with other obligations
- Child care with activities/fun for the kids – offer child-minding for those with children and create fun activities for the children so they will want to come back to the next event or meeting
- Transportation – some participants may require assistance with transportation. For individuals with transportation barriers, try to arrange for rides or car pooling where possible.

Welcoming Environment

- Welcome team – be sure to assign someone to greet and welcome participants as they arrive. Use name tags to ensure participants can greet each other as well.
- Room arrangement – set up the room to encourage mingling, interaction and conversation among participants
- Food provides a great attraction to a gathering and acts as an icebreaker among participants. Eating together makes the meeting less formal and helps to create a sense of community. Be aware of any cultural preferences or restrictions regarding food in order to avoid offending participants (e.g. vegetarian preferences, no pork, etc.)
- Engage participants as helpers. For example, is there someone willing to help with the food preparation or serving, or with the room arrangement or welcoming activities?
- Ice breaker/connecting activities – include planned fun activities that will help people get to know each other (e.g. names, where they live, country of origin, how long they have lived in Canada or in this neighbourhood, do they have children, what is their profession, country of origin, what are their interests, favourite places in the community, etc.)
- Prizes or takeaways (something they can take home with them, e.g. a brochure, memento, craft, ideas page, etc.) You may wish to include prizes as an incentive to participate, or some kind of takeaway item to remind participants of the gathering and encourage them to come back again.
- Small discussion groups can work well. Large meetings, especially where there are a variety of languages, can lead to frustration. Smaller events that are more relaxed and sociable have proven popular and effective.

Notice Who Comes

Part of your work will be to notice who comes, in order to be aware of which sub-groups are present and which are still absent. This will help you plan next steps in your engagement strategy as you think about how to maintain the interest of current members while reaching out to and increasing those who are under-represented. Think about the size and make-up of the group you have been able to attract.

- how many people did you engage in the event?
- how many men, women, children, seniors, were different cultural groups present?
Notice individual and group assets that may provide a useful way to further engage participants.

- what different talents, skills, professional training, personal interests were represented in the group?
- are there any formal or informal leaders in the group?
- what languages do participants speak?
- who might volunteer to help with the next event (planning, food, welcoming, inviting others, facilitating, child care, transporting others, etc.)?

A key purpose of your engagement with marginalized groups is to give people a voice. Creating opportunities for dialogue will help you to find out what’s important to people in your community. Don’t assume that you know what their issues, interests, or opinions might be. Hearing directly from the people themselves is best. What they have to say might surprise you.

A key purpose of dialogue is to use a community’s diversity to deepen shared understanding and produce outcomes of long-term benefit to the whole community. The dialogue should also help to deepen individual interest, engagement and commitment to the project, and empower participants to become more active in their community. It also provides an opportunity for people to get to know each other, build relationships, and develop a better understanding of their community and each other.

5 Adapted from Nurture Wise Democratic Process and Collective Intelligence In Public Participation. www.iap2.org
Some Tips for Good Dialogue

- **Facilitate the discussion**: Have an experienced facilitator to ensure the dialogue process is well managed and as productive as possible.
- **People attend as equals**: Make the dialogue an inclusive experience. Create a level playing field for participation.
- **Include multiple ways of knowing**: Community wisdom arises from the interplay of stories, facts, principles, reason, intuition, and compassion. Use a variety of methods to help people express their ideas (e.g., talking, drawing, etc.). Methods that involve writing are less likely to be successful if there are language barriers.
- **Help people feel fully heard**: When people feel fully heard, they will be able to hear others, join in collaborative discussion and co-creative problem solving.
- **Dialogue is a two-way process**: Don't do all the talking – make sure most of the talking, ideas, and opinions are coming from the participants.
- **Encourage new understanding and build relationships**: This will create a foundation for participants to move forward together and implement the resulting ideas or plans.
- **Identify and build on common ground**: What are people's interests, ideas, concerns, needs, opinions? Where is there similarity and where is there diversity?
- **Empower people's engagement**: When people feel involved in the sharing of ideas or creation of a plan and they can clearly see their diverse contributions represented in the final outcome, they are more likely to be engaged and feel empowered to take action.
- **Record dialogue results visibly and transparently**: Facilitators should record the meeting on large sheets of paper, and produce a record of the dialogue in the form of photographs and a summary.
- **Establish ongoing participatory processes**: Since intelligence is the capacity to learn, and learning is an ongoing process, collective intelligence can manifest most powerfully in a process that is ongoing and iterative. One time events are limited in their capacity to generate collective intelligence.
- **Be flexible and listen to the group**: Leave room for dialogue/conversations. Depending on people's interest for information, make sure there is additional time built in to the meeting agenda to give time for questions and answers for some burning interest. That will help participants feel heard and motivate them to participate.

Other Methods for Gathering Input

You may wish to gather some information on people's general ideas or issues before holding a larger gathering of participants for dialogue or conversation. In that case, you can always use a survey or knocking approach. However, note that these approaches are limited in that they lack the opportunity for sharing, relationship building, and social network development that a group session offers.

Engagement Methods

There are many options for structuring your engagement activity. To help you to choose the most effective engagement method for your community, here is a list of different methods you could consider. (See Appendix for more details)

- Appreciative Inquiry
- Arts Based Engagement
- Conversation Café
- Door Knocking
- Events
- Focus Groups
- Future Search
- Participatory Appraisal
- Learning Circles
- Listening and Story Projects
- Open Space Technology
- Participatory Appraisal
- Planning for Real
- Story Dialogue Method
- Surveys
- World Café
- One on One/Community Conversation

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Engage Around Action

Community engagement works best when action accompanies dialogue. One rule of thumb is to “act more, meet less.” Most people prefer action to meetings. (Citizen’s Handbook)

**Determine Priorities for Action**

One good way to identify a group’s priorities is to ask people to write down their most important ideas or issues. Each person writes his or her priorities on large post-it notes, one priority per note, and then sticks them to a board or large sheet of paper where everyone can see them. A facilitator helps the group arrange the notes into clusters with similar characteristics. The top priority soon becomes apparent and the group can now generate ideas for action. To be effective, the group should pursue no more than one or two objectives at any given time. (Citizen’s Handbook)

Keep in mind that when your action project creates opportunities for “share experiences,” people can get to know one another on a deeper level than simple public courtesy. For example, a community garden where people work together in a shared space with frequent regular interaction is more impactful than a one-time community event (e.g. barbecue). Try to engage all groups of people in the project (e.g. seniors, children, mixed ethnic groups).

Another approach to action projects is to build on commonalities of shared experience that already exist in the community (e.g. school, recreation activities, parenting).

**Plan the Action**

Start with projects that are short-term and highly visible. This type of project will help get the momentum going by making small but noticeable improvements. A common mistake is to first take on a large project to create a big impact. Too often these projects fail because people lose their energy for the project. Non-visible (behind the scenes) projects should also be put off until the momentum gets going. Non-visible projects are rarely recognized by the public and thus are much less rewarding to the contributors. People will rally around successful projects and efforts, so recruiting for future projects will become easier.

Develop an action plan. It should include a time-frame; an ordered list of tasks to complete; persons responsible for each task; a list of resources required including materials, facilities, and funds. Keep action plans flexible so you can respond to the unexpected.

**Capacity Building**

Use action projects as an opportunity for additional engagement and capacity building. Those participating in community-generated projects can develop and practice new skills, build confidence and increase social networks.

**Facilitate Action with Funding**

Providing resource support and small grants to participating community groups can help facilitate action on planned projects.

**Link to Higher Levels**

Participants from ethno-cultural groups may lack connections within the larger community. As part of the action project, help to link them to additional and wider networks, such as nonprofit organizations, businesses, government agencies, decision makers, and funders.
Ideas for Community Building Projects

A well facilitated engagement process can support participants to develop ideas for action projects that are important to them. Here are some ideas for community building projects.

- Car Co-op
- Child Minding Co-ops
- Community Festivals and Parades
- Community Gardening
- Community Kitchen
- Block Watch
- Block Parties
- Block Clean Up
- Environmental Activities
- Garden Club or Plant Exchange
- Good Neighbour Awards
- Intergenerational Activities
- Local Theatre, Art or Music Group
- Local Team or Sports Activities
- Organizing Around Hot Issues
- Parks Committee
- Story Projects
- Study Circles
- Supper Club
- Tree Planting

For more community building ideas or information see Citizen’s Handbook
http://www.citizenshandbook.org

Make It Happen

Engaging marginalized populations takes more dedicated time and energy than you might expect, and needs to continue over an extended time period (probably several years) in order to be effective and self-sustaining in the community. Follow through is critical to build trust and maintain momentum. Project staff and Community Organizers need to maintain a consistent, regular, and dedicated effort in order to see long term sustained results.

Follow up consistently and quickly – don’t let interest/excitement/connections cool or people will disengage. They need to see continued progress and results and to be actively involved in the project in order to build capacity (skills, leadership), trust, sense of empowerment, and sense of community. Poor or inconsistent efforts could have the opposite effect of that intended, as it could break trust, undermine confidence, or reinforce a sense of alienation (e.g. feeling their ideas/interests are not important enough to pursue). True engagement means that people have a vital and active role in their community. It shows people that they are important members of their community.

Resources

Be prepared to adequately resource your engagement strategy with staff support, meeting space, supplies, project grants, etc. over the long term (i.e. several years). In addition, consider setting aside funding for your community action projects. Small action grants can help your participants realize their plan and sustain action.

Capacity Building

Seek opportunities for capacity building among staff, Community Organizers, volunteers, and community members throughout the project development process. Capacity building, community building, and empowerment should be built into every project activity.
In order to ensure that the project is making progress, and to maintain momentum and enthusiasm, it is important to track project activities as they unfold and monitor your progress. Project monitoring and evaluation should be linked to your project plan. Your plan should be reviewed regularly.

Check in with staff, Community Organizers, volunteers, and participants on a regular basis to see how the project is progressing, where you are seeing success and where there may be challenges or opportunities arising. Regular team meetings provide an ideal opportunity for dialogue, brainstorming, capacity building, and teambuilding activities. You might also bring the team together periodically in an informal social setting to appreciate their hard work and celebrate success.

Be sure to communicate progress and successes with community members as well. Even if the project is stalled, community members should be informed of the challenges and plans for next steps. They may have ideas for getting the project moving again or for other directions the engagement project could take. Keeping community members informed of how the project is progressing will help to maintain their connection to the project and their motivation to stay involved.

Participant celebrations of project success provide an additional opportunity for capacity building and community building. Involve community members in planning and implementing the celebration so they can take an active role.
Questions for Monitoring and Evaluation

1. Has the team been able to complete planned activities?

2. To what extent have results matched expectations (e.g. for number of individuals participating, or level of involvement)?

3. Has the project increased diversity of representation in the community (e.g. Community Association or other community projects/decision making bodies)

4. What challenges or barriers have arisen? What can you do about the challenges?

5. What unanticipated opportunities have been presented?

6. What have you learned about engaging ethno-cultural communities?

7. Does the project plan need to be revised or updated to include new or different strategies?

Additional Resources


www.peopleandparticipation.net provides practical information for those working to involve people.


The Community Tool Box – contains useful tools for compiling an inventory of local organizations/institutions/private sector businesses/populations and for conducting interviews among these populations [http://ctb.ku.edu/tools/en/section_1042.htm]


Partners in Salford - Community Engagement. This site provides a community engagement toolkit with a list of community engagement strategies, explanations of each and a few tips for working with ethnic communities. Available at: [http://www.partnersinsalford.org/community-engagement.htm]

Resources for organizing community engagement. Available at: [http://www.involve.org.uk/category/publications/]


Community Engagement How To Guide. This document provides good, basic information on how to engage with minority ethnic communities. Available at: [http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/BuiltEnvironment/regeneration/engage/HowToGuide/MinorityEthnicCommunities]


Engaging Ethno-cultural Communities Toolkit

Appreciative Inquiry is a technique that aims to uncover the best things about the organization or team being explored. This enables good practice to be replicated elsewhere. The technique is based on dialogue – collecting people's stories about things that went well by asking encouraging questions.

Arts-based engagement refers to a cluster of techniques using drama, dance, and performance, creative writing, poetry and storytelling, music, and the visual arts (drawing, painting, collage, photography, video and 3 dimensional arts), as a vehicle for engaging people about an issue.

Conversation Café is an informal dialogue method which invites people to take part in discussions about topical issues in an informal setting. See www.conversation.org

Door Knocking is a traditional way of making face-to-face community contact by going door to door in a community and talking with people at their front door. You can also use the door to door method of introducing people to your project by leaving an information brochure with the person, in the mail box or on the door (i.e. door hander). You could also supplement your door knocking with a short survey about local concerns or information about your project. See Citizen's Handbook for more detailed instructions on this method. www.citizenshandbook.org

Events are usually one-off occasions which can either be directly related to the issue being explored in consultation (for example a men’s health awareness day) or used to build community capacity (for example a family fun day).

Focus groups are an in-depth discussion of between 6-12 people, that focus around a set of particular issues or topics. A trained specialist facilitates the discussion and the session’s details are recorded or noted by another person.

Future Search is a highly structured planning meeting that ideally lasts for 16 hours over 3 days. The aim is to attempt to get the "whole system" in the room. The event focuses on the future and common ground rather than conflicts and problems, and stresses the importance and validity of different kinds of knowledge that are brought by stakeholders.

Participatory Appraisal (PA) is an approach to learning about communities that places equal value on the knowledge and experience of local people and their capacity to come up with solutions to problems affecting them.

Planning for Real is a process in which participants make or use a three dimensional model of their local area as a visual prompt. This helps participants to develop suggestions about how they would like to see their area improved and their community developed. They then prioritize these ideas in groups and create an action plan for decision-makers to take away.

Learning Circle/Study Circle A learning circle is a highly interactive, participatory structure for organizing group work. The goal is to build, share, and express knowledge though a process of open dialogue and deep reflection around issues or problems with a focus on a shared outcome.

Listening/Story Projects A listening survey is an informal technique used to discover what ideas or issues are creating the most emotional energy in a group or neighbourhood. A group of residents are trained in "the common blocks to listening", how to eavesdrop in public places, how to get permission to insert yourself into a conversation, how to keep people talking without intruding, and how to deal with people who say something you dislike. First the "listeners" make a list of places in the community where people gather (e.g. hairdressers, soccer games, etc.) Then they go out to these places to find people. To conduct the survey, one person encourages people to talk, while the other acts as recorder. At the end of each week, everyone gets together to evaluate the material collected and determine where the strongest feelings lay. Both residents and service providers are surveyed in this way. The results of both surveys are then made available to the whole community.

A close relative of the listening project is the story project. It can focus on gathering the history of an area or capturing the character of an area. Listening and story projects provide good excuses for bringing people together.
Open Space Technology is an approach for hosting meetings, conferences, or community events and is characterized by:

- a broad, open invitation that articulates the purpose of the meeting;
- participant chairs arranged in a circle;
- a "bulletin board" of issues and opportunities posted by participants;
- a "marketplace" with many breakout spaces that participants move freely between, learning and contributing as they "shop" for information and ideas;
- a "breathing" or "pulsation" pattern of flow, between plenary and small-group breakout sessions.

Story Dialogue Method
Storytelling (or the story dialogue technique) builds on traditional, oral communication and learning techniques. It can be used as a means of recognizing and respecting the expertise that people have in their own lives in relation to community development and health issues. The storytelling takes place in a supportive group setting, although it could be adapted for use in a one-to-one situation for those with less confidence. The process is structured so that valuable personal experiences are used to draw out important themes and issues affecting the community and then action can be planned around these insights.

Storytelling uses a mixture of story and structured dialogue based on four types of question: “what?” (description), "why?" (explanation), "so what?" (synthesis), and "now what?" (action). Open questions are asked of the storyteller by the other members of the group (about six people) and this generates dialogue, but with a particular set of objectives in mind: to move from personal experience to more generalized knowledge (insights) and action. The whole process, once the story has been written, should not take longer than about 60-90 minutes. A skilled facilitator is central to this method.

Surveys
You could use a survey approach but this might not be ideal if language is a barrier or if trust is low. If you choose this method, surveys can be distributed through the community newsletter, schools, or library, or could be dropped off or completed door to door by volunteers.

World Café is a different kind of meeting format designed to bring people together in an informal setting and have conversations about questions that matter. The underpinning assumption is that people feel more comfortable and creative in a less formal environment and, as its name suggests, this engagement technique recreates a café environment and behaviours to stimulate conversations. These conversations link and build on each other as people move between groups, cross-pollinate ideas, and discover new insights into the questions or issues that are most important in their life, work, or community. As a process, the World Café can evoke and make visible the collective intelligence of any group, thus increasing people’s capacity for effective action in pursuit of common aims (http://www.theworldcafe.com/involved.htm).

Community Asset Mapping Samples
Ethno-Cultural Council of Calgary
Phone number: 403-293-9900 Fax: 403-262-8973
Email: info@ecccalgary.com
Please visit www.ecccalgary.com
Address: 915-33rd Street NE Calgary, Alberta Canada T2A 6T2

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