

diversity is working

SPARC BC's *Diversity is Working* project provides seventeen (17) case studies of Lower Mainland organizations that have taken steps to make their workplaces more welcoming and inclusive for employees with diverse backgrounds. The purpose of the case studies is to celebrate successes in workplace diversity by highlighting best practices.

The set of case studies includes examples from organizations with small Human Resources departments to larger organizations with large Human Resources departments and designated diversity managers. The case studies are also drawn from a range of different sectors including businesses, non-profit organizations and government institutions. Some of the organizations being profiled have been implementing diversity and employment equity initiatives for decades while others have started to look at diversity in recent years.

Because of the diverse range of organizations being profiled, there are relevant best practices for any organization that is working to make their workplace more welcoming and inclusive of people from diverse backgrounds. Refer to the adjacent diagram for a list of participating organizations.

The following pieces of information are provided in each organization's case study:

- diversity business case or mandate for diversity;
- diversity initiatives and results; and,
- advice for other organizations considering undertaking similar work.



The City of Abbotsford mission statement is:

"We deliver excellent services that improve the sustainability and quality of life in Abbotsford."



City of Abbotsford

About the City of Abbotsford

According to recently released 2011 census data, the City of Abbotsford had a total population of 133,497 in 2011, which is a 7.4% increase from 2006.¹

The most recent available data on diversity in the City of Abbotsford is drawn from the 2006 census. According to this data:

- 62,770 (51.0%) of the City's residents were female;
- 32,195 (26.4%) of the City's residents were visible minorities;
- 31,950 (26.2%) of the City's residents were immigrants;²
- 25,030 (20.2%) of the City's residents were people with disabilities;³ and,
- 3,565 (2.9%) of the City's residents were Aboriginal.⁴

The City of Abbotsford Diversity Mandate

As a municipal government, the City of Abbotsford is continually working to ensure that its operations and services are responsive of the evolving needs of the community. While the City has been involved in a range of diversity initiatives over the years, it recently made diversity a priority in response to the changing demographics of the community.

A couple of years ago, the City of Abbotsford received a grant from the Government of Canada to run a three-year community diversity project. The Abbotsford Building Connections (ABC) Project was developed in partnership with Abbotsford Community Services, School District No. 34, and the University of the Fraser Valley, to provide information to the community on the importance of embracing diversity and to learn more about the many cultures that make up the City of Abbotsford.

¹ Statistics Canada, *2011 Census Profile*, Accessed at <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2011/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&Geo1=CSD&Code1=5909052&Geo2=CD&Code2=5909&Data=Count&SearchText=abbotsford&SearchType=Begins&SearchPR=01&B1=All&Custom=&TABID=1>

² Statistics Canada, *2006 Census Profile*, Accessed at <http://www12.statcan.ca/census-recensement/2006/dp-pd/prof/92-591/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&Geo1=CSD&Code1=5909052&Geo2=PR&Code2=59&Data=Count&SearchText=abbotsford&SearchType=Begins&SearchPR=01&B1=All&Custom=>

³ Community Social Data Strategy, Statistics Canada, *2006 Participation and Activity Limitation Survey Data*, Table E01213-2006-TGp-2A-CanProv

⁴ Statistics Canada, *2006 Census Profile*, Accessed at <http://www12.statcan.ca/census-recensement/2006/dp-pd/prof/92-591/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&Geo1=CSD&Code1=5909052&Geo2=PR&Code2=59&Data=Count&SearchText=abbotsford&SearchType=Begins&SearchPR=01&B1=All&Custom=>



The goal of the ABC project is to build intercultural and interfaith connections through community-wide twinning activities and intercultural programming offered at neighborhood hubs. Through social interaction, the Abbotsford Building Connections Project increases mutual respect and understanding and reduces racism.

As a result of the ABC Project, the City of Abbotsford formed an internal working group on diversity and inclusion to promote and implement the project within the City. This working group is comprised of representatives across different departments and has resulted in a range of initiatives that help to foster a welcoming and inclusive workplace within the City itself.

From the perspective of those involved, fostering an inclusive and diverse workforce is part and parcel of creating a team that has the necessary knowledge and experience to understand and effectively serve an increasingly diverse community.

In addition, the City's HR department has acknowledged that creating a welcoming and inclusive workplace helps the City to attract and retain the best talent. This will ensure high organizational performance and excellent customer service for the City's residents, developers and business owners.

The City of Abbotsford's Diversity Initiatives

The City's HR department's People and Organizational Development Advisor, in partnership with an employee diversity and inclusion working group, created a Diversity & Inclusion Strategy supported by an annual work plan. This strategy was formally adopted by Mayor and Council in September 2011.

The purpose of the strategy is to provide overall direction to the City and to create a diverse and inclusive workplace where all individuals are treated with dignity and respect. The work plan lists the priority actions that will be undertaken by human resources, the diversity working group, City leaders, managers and employees to ensure that the diversity and inclusion focus is integrated into the fabric of the organization. The intent behind these priorities is to move the organization towards building a talented and diverse workforce that is able to fully contribute its skills and abilities.



City of Abbotsford

The City is in the early stages of implementing this strategy; however, there are a number of positive steps that have already been taken by the City. For instance, the City has a Workplace Human Rights Policy to ensure a workplace free of discrimination and to explain the existing dispute resolution mechanism for managers and employees. In addition, the City's Diversity Policy provides a framework on how the City supports and promotes a society where residents have an equal opportunity to participate and where diversity is accepted and valued. Other efforts include, however are not limited to:

- an employee volunteer verbal and written translator service in various languages other than English; and,
- a quiet room that can be booked by all employees who wish to carry out religious observances or to simply enjoy a quiet space.

In addition, the City has taken steps to incorporate diversity and inclusion into the recruitment process and staff training.

Recruitment

The City encourages diverse applicants to apply to the City by having an explicit commitment to diversity on the City's human resources webpage where it states:

Diversity is Our Strength

Diversity is a commitment to acknowledging, understanding, accepting, valuing and celebrating differences among people with respect to age, class, ethnicity, gender, physical and mental ability, race, sexual orientation, and religious practice. At the City of Abbotsford we strive to create an environment of dignity and respect for all of our employees and build a workforce which reflects the diversity and strength of our community. We are committed to nurture and sustain a culture of inclusion where employees feel motivated, engaged and proud to work for the City and serve our community.⁵

⁵ City of Abbotsford. *Diversity and Inclusion*. Accessed on April 12th 2012 at http://www.abbotsford.ca/humanresources/working_for_the_city/diversity_and_inclusion.htm



In addition, some City departments (e.g., Abbotsford Police department, Fire and Rescue Services) have conducted outreach into the schools to encourage more people to consider a career in these areas. In an effort to remove bias from the interview selection process and to ensure that the City is hiring the best talent, the City has implemented new interview questions focusing on customer service, innovative thinking and diversity which align with the City's strategic goals.

Diversity Training

In recent years, the City of Abbotsford has made a concerted effort to provide information and training to current staff around diversity and inclusion. For instance, in the recently adopted Diversity and Inclusion Strategy, the HR department has made a commitment to issue regular internal communications regarding diversity issues, research and training opportunities.

In addition, all staff members are required to participate in a mandatory three (3) hour respectful workplace training session delivered by the Hastings Institute. The City also supports the Safe Harbour program where staff take the Safe Harbour training to better help an individual who may be seeking temporary refuge. This can be refuge from being discriminated, harassed, bullied, or situations where people simply need a place to sit, have a glass of water or use the phone. All City arenas, City Hall, Police Headquarters and a few Fire Halls are Safe Harbour locations. The City's committed to continue to participate in this program by welcoming and understanding diversity in the community and offering temporary sanctuaries where possible. Furthermore, the HR department supports a staff intranet with a broad range of diversity and inclusion resources; and hosts lunch and learn events on awareness days/weeks that have been set by the United Nations or are local/national/international dates. The HR department has also been expanding their training opportunities to include new diversity workshops, such as delivering a workshop focused on working across generations.



City of Abbotsford

Accountability

In order to ensure a culture of respect and inclusion is embraced at the City, the employee performance management process will include performance measures pertaining to diversity and respect in the workplace to hold managers and employees accountable.

The Results

While the City's diversity and inclusion initiatives are still in the early stages of development, the City has already found that staff and managers have readily embraced the new focus on diversity and inclusion. Staff members from a range of different departments have started to volunteer for the Abbotsford Community Services employment mentorship program, which pairs newcomers with mentors from the same profession. This program helps newcomers understand how to enter their profession within Canada, and helps to integrate Canadian newcomers into Canadian culture and ways of doing business. The mentor becomes their advisor, helps them to network, and shares their personal story.

It is expected that the City will be able to measure its results over time. The newly adopted Diversity and Inclusion Strategy includes a commitment to survey employees regarding diversity and inclusion awareness and practices. This will help the City track progress over time, and the findings will be used to inform upcoming diversity work plans.

Advice for other organizations

When asked if they have any advice for other organizations considering adopting similar diversity initiatives, the City of Abbotsford provided the following advice:

- Make sure that you have buy in and understanding from your senior management team.
- Do some research into what some of the other organizations are doing out there.
- Get connected to your community; there are a lot of organizations who are willing to assist you.



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