

Centring newcomer voices

Resource guide



Canadian Council for Refugees
Conseil canadien pour les réfugiés

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Introduction

Context

Following the public education workshop on the topic of Changing public perception by centring newcomer voices, held at the Fall 2020 Consultation, the CCR is proud to present this collaborative resource.

Empowering refugees is both crucial for their wellbeing and safety and beneficial for the communities who greet them.

As individuals involved in the welcoming of newcomers, we have come to understand the power of amplifying and uplifting the voices of those with lived experience. These stories, ideas and opinions are invaluable and must be recognized as such. That said, sharing is not always an easy feat, and newcomers deserve to feel comfortable and heard in a safe space.

Introduction

Objective

This guide aims to equip readers with tools, best practices and ethical considerations for encouraging newcomers to share in a variety of contexts (from group discussions to campaigns).

Amplifying these voices is imperative—we should always listen to people with lived experience—and equally effective, as storytelling changes hearts more than facts and figures!

Contributors

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As well as all participants of the December 3, Fall 2020 Consultation workshop, "Changing perceptions by centring newcomer voices".

Building a solid base

How to ensure your organization is a safe space

Fostering trust is the most crucial starting point in creating safe, welcoming spaces for newcomers. Despite your best intentions, your kindness and open-mindedness, many organizational structures are rooted in power imbalances. Tangible steps must be undertaken in order to reinforce your trustworthiness.

Representation matters

As simple a statement as it may be, “representation matters” holds true in every context, including yours. Real, diverse representation makes for better ideas, solutions, environments...you name it! Most importantly, proper representation is the first step in an active effort to ensure that every newcomer who comes through can thrive.

Workshop highlights

Participants named different ways in which their organizations walked the walk when it came to representation, from inclusive hiring practices in Human Resource policies, to posting content (on social media, in your workspace, on your website...) that showcases diversity.

Other initiatives were also emphasized:

- Including refugees at all levels of the organization—board, management, staff—to promote a safe, inclusive culture
- Introducing topics of cultural sensitivity and diversity through books, discussion, activities etc.

Building a solid base

How to ensure your organization is a safe space

The Platinum Rule

Committing to a newcomer-centric approach in all aspects of your work will also lead to more accurate and genuine communications (funnel through internal to external). To get there, we recommend upgrading the golden rule to the platinum rule: Treat others the way they want to be treated.

Why is this distinction important?

Folks with different lived experience will react differently to the same approach. What you may consider to be completely reasonable, may be harmful or inadequate for someone else.

Workshop highlights

- Begin the process with newcomers in a space they feel safe in and only involving people they already feel comfortable sharing with.
- During meetings, sessions, discussions with newcomers, invite a friend of theirs, a family member, or the person who connected you with them, if possible. The presence of a familiar face can be reassuring.

Going the extra mile

Establishing a 'client' council or lived experience panel that represents the community you're hoping to serve is the best way to truly make space for them to provide leadership, feedback, ideas that will guide your organization and its services.

Cultural translators can also help you understand a particular culture or community and consequently enable you to undertake actions in that community that better serve its needs.

Building a solid base

How to ensure your organization is a safe space

Case example: Allies in Refugee Integration

The Allies in Refugee Integration (ARI) project is a three-year project led by OCASI in close partnership with Refugee 613 and funded by the Department of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC). The ARI project aims to improve settlement outcomes of privately sponsored refugees by increasing and strengthening collaboration between settlement service providers and refugee sponsorship groups in Ontario.

The second phase of the project consisted of collaborative workshops using human-centred design to foster mutual understanding, build stronger connections and generate ideas that can be turned into pilot projects in the third phase of ARI. The workshops were a crucial early opportunity to foster teamwork and enhance participants' understanding of different perspectives and challenges. This research process therefore included former sponsored refugees, sponsors (from different programs), settlement workers and other academics.

Flow of activities during the workshops

- Co-create meeting guidelines: facilitators and participants brainstormed workshop guidelines that would help everyone contribute their best thinking safely.
- Get to know each other at a personal level: opening exercise to make participants comfortable sharing with each other
- Review the themes that came out of phase 1
- Get into sub-groups to explore one theme
- Develop one idea per group
- Present ideas
- Give feedback
- Rank other groups' ideas
- Reflect on lessons learned
- Closing circle: participants were invited to share a closing word or phrase.

Being transparent

Using openness and honesty for better communication

Complete transparency must be upheld when encouraging newcomers to open up, be vulnerable and share stories, moments of their lives, anecdotes, wisdom...

This is key for the safety and wellbeing of refugees, refugee claimants and migrants, as well as a best practice in your own communications approach/strategy/projects.

The basics include:

Context

Make sure to explain the motivation (organization interest vs. public interest) behind your interaction. Why are you encouraging them to share?

Describe the purpose of your meeting/project/campaign.

Consent

Give participants' the freedom to withdraw their consent. To be able to give consent, the newcomer must understand the context and be well informed of all implications.

Consider providing this information in the participants' mother tongue.

Depending on the individual or group and the context in which you are engaging with them, knowledge sharing can play a significant part in ensuring transparency. For instance, in a situation where the newcomer is featured in a 360° campaign, the scope of their media literacy can easily be overlooked but needs to be assessed to protect the individual.

Media literacy

What we mean: the ability to understand, use and analyze different types of media.

Being transparent

Using openness and honesty for better communication

Questions to ask yourself in a campaign context, for example:

1

Which platforms will be used? Digital, traditional...

2

Is the newcomer familiar with these platforms?

3

Do they understand the potential reach of the campaign on said platforms? How many people might see, react to the campaign?

4

Are they aware of the implications of a photograph: how it can be shared, interpreted, used by different parties...?

For instance: consider photography as a civil contract (Azoulay, 2008). A photo's meaning is derived from the relationship between the photographer, the subject and the viewer. This relationship is not static, it changes over time. At different times, the photographer, subject or viewer will exert greater or less control over its meaning.

A good way to make sure you are being transparent during each project or interaction is to develop an ethics guide or checklist. Journalism ethics can make for an excellent base or inspiration to your own code:

- Seek truth and report it;
- Minimize harm;
- Act independently;
- Be accountable and transparent

Being transparent

Using openness and honesty for better communication

Case example: ISANS Storybook series

The ISANS storybook series is an opportunity to work with newcomers to share their voices, perspectives, and stories with a broad audience. Since the earliest days of ISANS, stories about the unique clients the organization serves were collected and disseminated with the objective to inform the wider general public of immigration and its importance.

The editorial direction for stories is based on the lived experiences of the organization's clients and gaps in narratives that exist around newcomers in the community. When engaging with newcomers for these stories, staff work closely with participants to explain the context, how ISANS will use the photo and story, and how these will be shared (which platforms, what timing, which audiences, and so on). Collaboration and transparency are necessary to ensure a shared understanding and purpose.

Before publication, the team and newcomer involved will review the draft of their story and the photos selected to be a part of the storybook. Participants have the opportunity to remove their story from consideration or request that it is not shared at any time.

Giving control of the narrative

Empowering newcomers to decide for themselves

Different projects will have different communications objectives or goals. No matter the context in which you're encouraging a newcomer to share their story, giving them control over their own narrative is crucial.

Workshop highlights

→ **Content**

Being a refugee, refugee claimant, migrant or immigrant is not just ONE thing:

Provide opportunities for newcomers to talk about both the refugee experience and the resettlement experience - and anything else they want to talk about that shows their humanity. The good, bad, when they were back home, in transition or in Canada. Not just what others expect them to share.

Make space for flexibility:

- Be open about being able to say no to sharing their stories or skipping questions
- Give newcomers a copy of their story and time to review/change/remove it before it goes public

→ **Format**

Ask newcomers who are interested in sharing which medium they feel the most comfortable with: Facebook, publication, video, photography, art, TikTok, Instagram...

Giving control of the narrative

Empowering newcomers to decide for themselves

Going the extra mile

Are you able to further empower your client? Rather than just sharing their story, uplift them: if they want to share through images, teach them how to photograph rather than taking a photo of them. If the medium is public speaking, teach them how to present and speak to audiences, so they can learn a new skill as well.



Giving control of the narrative

Empowering newcomers to decide for themselves

Case example: The Migrant Stories

The Migrant Stories is a platform for newcomers to Canada to share their journeys and experiences while celebrating the success stories. This platform was created by Immaculate Nabisere, as a strategy of promoting migrant stories while responding to the challenges and opportunities newcomers encounter at both individual and systemic levels in Canada.

The project aims to share stories of 'Immigrants in Canada' and the 'Children of Migrant Parents' in order to strengthen our compassion, respect, and understanding of people's journeys and experiences while reducing isolation by creating connections in our communities. This, in the end, will help us recognize and value the diverse experience of immigrants to Canada, the children of migrant parents, and the role they play in the Canadian Society.

During the workshop, Immaculate highlighted how she and her team give control to the newcomers who have accepted to share their stories. The Migrant Stories project does not follow the traditional storytelling style; interviewers use a question guide that includes questions that newcomers are asked in their day to day lives. The interviewee is, of course, totally free to skip questions, edit their responses afterwards and rescind consent at any time.

Offering support

Accompanying newcomers every step of the way

Sharing one's lived experience can be a challenging task on many levels. A newcomer's trust and willingness to share do not guarantee that the act will be effortless. It is our responsibility, as helpers on the receiving end of storytelling, to provide support throughout the process.

Workshop highlights

→ **Before sharing**

Aside from building a safe space for newcomers to share, how can you offer additional help?

- Extend personal invitations from trusted sources.
- Make it clear that you are always ready to support them and to talk if they want to
- Discuss being a refugee in Canada and emphasize what it means beyond being grateful, accepting help and giving testimonies
- Connect newcomers with others who come from a similar background, experiences, and culture. This will help them feel comfortable to open up about their experiences.
- Create specific groups for LGBTQ+ refugee claimants if they feel more comfortable sharing their experiences among themselves

→ **During sharing**

- Provide counsellors or psychologists to accompany newcomers in the process of sharing their stories
- Refugee 613 offers public speaking classes or training sessions with newcomers and coaches

Offering support

Accompanying newcomers every step of the way

→ After sharing

- Connect them to a peer support network - an Immigrant Advisory Group is a safe space for participants to share experiences, opinions, ideas. The group can meet several times a year.
- Follow up with them once your project is done, see how they're doing, ask if you can offer additional resources



Offering support

Accompanying newcomers every step of the way

Case example: All Welcome Here coalition

"The All Welcome Here coalition, a group of non-partisan British Columbia organizations, worked to support refugees and advance refugee-friendly public policy. The coalition did this by facilitating effective inter-organizational communication and timely, active responses to issues in the public discourse based on facts, research, lived experience, and storytelling".

The All Welcome Here project included a media campaign, social media toolkit, public relations training, and an in-person live streamed forum. The project concluded with an in-person forum event titled: Why Should I Care: Refugees and Canada in 2019, which included individuals with lived experience sharing their stories.

The project organizers knew that sharing their stories could be emotionally triggering for refugees, especially at an in person event. Organizers therefore connected with a professional counsellor, included them in the project and at the forum event to support the lived-experience speakers.

The project also included a media campaign--and additional support was offered for the lived-experience speakers through media training (so newcomers were aware of what types of questions they might be asked). This meant scenario work with a journalist, and providing key points and messaging with regard to campaign topics. When media opportunities were planned, the campaign spokesperson and the lived-experience speaker went together and were interviewed together.

Conclusion

We hope this guide provided some insight as to how and why we should be centring the voices of newcomers in our work. Consider this the tip of the iceberg—depending on your context, specific strategies may be more useful to you, and we invite you to dig deeper into the concepts that stood out to you!

As a collaborative guide, this document was meant to reflect the ideas of different people and groups in the field. Your input is always welcome, so don't be shy to write to the CCR team if you'd like to add anything.

Additional resources

Links to other tools and guides to help your work

Case examples from the guide:

- [Allies in Refugee Integration](#)
- [ISANS Storybook series](#)
- [The Migrant Stories](#)
- [All Welcome Here coalition](#)

On media/digital literacy:

- [The AAISA Digital Literacy toolkit](#)
- [Historica Canada's Critical Digital Literacy education guide and worksheets](#)

On communications:

- [The CCR's promoting positive public opinion toolkit](#)
- [Reframing Refugees - Messaging toolkit](#)
- [Non-profit Communications Best Practices](#)

Thanks for reading!

Contact

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