

What is a Welcoming Community

Definition:

A Welcoming Community is a physical location in which newcomers feel valued and their needs are served. It is a place where residents undertake actions that facilitate the integration of newcomers by making a collective effort to make individuals feel valued and included. A welcoming community also has the machinery in place to meet the needs and promote the inclusion of newcomers.

A welcoming community attracts and retains newcomers by:

- Identifying and removing barriers
- Promoting a sense of belonging
- Meeting diverse individual needs.

A welcoming community offers services that promote successful integration, defined as the “ability [for newcomers] to contribute, free of barriers, to every dimension of Canadian life – economic, social, cultural and political”.

Newcomers, policymakers and academics converge on the following characteristics as essential attributes of a truly welcoming community:

1. Employment opportunities
2. Fostering of social capital (contributing to bridging networks and trust)
3. Affordable and suitable housing
4. Positive attitudes toward immigrants, cultural diversity, and newcomers in the community
5. Presence of newcomer-serving agencies that can successfully meet newcomer needs
6. Links between main actors working to construct and maintain a welcoming community
7. Municipal features and services sensitive to the presence and needs of newcomers
8. Educational opportunities
9. Accessible and suitable health care
10. Available and accessible public transit
11. Presence of diverse religious organizations
12. Social engagement opportunities
13. Political participation opportunities
14. Positive relationships with the police and the justice system
15. Safety.

The importance of these characteristics to any given community will vary depending on local context and needs. It must also be understood that newcomers are interested not only in their own opportunities and circumstances but also those of their family.

Adapted from: “Characteristics of a Welcoming Community” by Victoria M. Esses, Leah K. Hamilton, Caroline Bennett-AbuAyyash, and Meyer Burstein, *Welcoming Communities Initiative*, March 2010 <http://p2pcanada.ca/library/characteristics-of-a-welcoming-community-report/>