

SHARING SETTLEMENT AND INTEGRATION PRACTICES THAT WORK BUILDING BELONGING: EQUITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

Huron County Immigration Partnership
Huron County, Ontario

Areas of Practice:

- Anti-Racism
- Promoting Welcoming Communities

Video:

<https://youtu.be/AiY-YgXz3Mo>

A Pathways to
Prosperity Project

March 2026



Funded by:

Immigration, Refugees
and Citizenship Canada

Financé par :

Immigration, Réfugiés
et Citoyenneté Canada



PATHWAYS TO
PROSPERITY
Promoting Welcoming Communities in Canada



VOIES VERS LA
PROSPÉRITÉ
Promouvoir des communautés accueillantes au Canada

BACKGROUND ON THE ORGANIZATION AND IMPETUS FOR THE PROGRAM

The Huron County Immigration Partnership is a Local Immigration Partnership based in Huron County, Ontario. Huron County is a rural community of approximately 60,000 people located along the shores of Lake Huron. While the area has historically had less ethnocultural and racial diversity than many urban centres, this has been changing in recent years. In 2021, research conducted in collaboration with the University of Western Ontario found that experiences of discrimination among immigrants and visible minorities in Huron County were significant: approximately 70% reported experiencing some form of discrimination within the previous three years, and many of these incidents appeared to take the form of microaggressions. When the LIP shared these findings with community members and organizations, people asked questions such as, “What are we doing wrong?”, “What are microaggressions?”, and “How do we turn away from microaggressions to doing microaffirmations?” These responses pointed to a gap in knowledge of equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) concepts and a need for guidance to help individuals and organizations better understand and address everyday forms of discrimination.

In response, the Huron County Immigration Partnership sought to foster a more inclusive community where people feel welcome, valued, and celebrated for their differences. To support this goal, it commissioned the Rainbow Diversity Institute to develop the Building Belonging guidebook. The guidebook was designed to create a shared language around EDI, increase understanding of inclusive practices, and provide practical guidance that individuals and organizations can use to build more equitable and inclusive spaces.

OVERVIEW OF THE PROGRAM

Name:

Building Belonging: Equity, Diversity and Inclusion in Rural Communities

Description:

The guidebook is a practical resource on EDI developed for a rural community context. It was launched in fall 2024 to spark, support, and inform local conversations about belonging and EDI, while providing individuals and organizations with practical guidance for more inclusive action. Its content was written in clear, plain language so that it would be accessible to audiences with varying levels of familiarity with EDI concepts, and so that readers could use it as both an introductory resource and an ongoing reference.

The guidebook is available in both digital and print formats. It is organized in a way that builds understanding step by step. It begins by setting out its purpose and grounding the message that everyone belongs in Huron County. It then introduces key terms and concepts related to EDI and belonging. From there, it introduces an equity lens and explains how belonging can be considered not only in interpersonal interactions, but also in policies, practices, projects, designs, and implementation plans. The guide also covers intersectionality, the privilege wheel, and the four I’s of oppression – ideological, interpersonal, institutional, and internalized oppression – to help readers understand how exclusion and inequity operate at multiple levels. It then focuses on microaggressions, including different types of microaggressions, how to recognize them, and how to

respond to them in the moment. Finally, it introduces microaffirmations and outlines practical steps that organizations can take to build more inclusive and welcoming environments.

Goal(s):

The primary goal of the guidebook is to strengthen belonging in Huron County by increasing understanding of equity, diversity, and inclusion and encouraging reflection, conversation, and more inclusive practices. More broadly, it aims to support a community where people feel welcomed, valued, and respected for their differences.

Target Client Group(s):

The primary target groups for the guidebook are organizations and institutions in Huron County, including municipalities, educational institutions, and community organizations. It was also designed to be accessible to individual community members seeking to build their understanding of equity, diversity, inclusion, and belonging.

Delivery Partners:

The Huron County Immigration Partnership developed the guidebook in partnership with the Rainbow Diversity Institute, which served as the project consultant and guidebook developer.

Human Resources:

The guidebook was developed by a consultant and the team at the Huron County Immigration Partnership, in consultation with various interested parties.

Funding:

This guidebook was funded by Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada.

KEY FEATURES THAT CONTRIBUTE TO THIS BEING A PROMISING PRACTICE

Effective:

The guidebook is effective because it builds understanding of equity, diversity, inclusion, and belonging in ways that are clear, practical, and action-oriented. It introduces key concepts in plain language, explains how they apply in everyday life, and provides concrete guidance for responding to issues such as microaggressions and for strengthening inclusive practices within organizations. By combining shared language with practical next steps, the guidebook helps translate awareness into action.

Efficient:

The guidebook is efficient because it presents information in a concise, bite-sized format that allows readers to quickly find what they need. Its clearly organized sections make it easy to locate specific topics, such as key terms, microaggressions, intersectionality, and next steps for organizations, without having to read the resource from beginning to end. As a concrete reference tool available in print and digitally, it reduces the time and effort required to access practical guidance when it is needed.

Relevant:

The guidebook is relevant because it was developed in response to local research showing significant experiences of discrimination among immigrants and visible minorities in Huron County, as well as community questions that revealed a need for greater understanding of equity, diversity, and inclusion. As a result, the guide was designed to respond to identified local needs rather than presenting generic information that may not fit the rural context.

Sustainable:

The guidebook supports sustainability because it was designed to be revisited and reused over time. Its print and digital format, accessible language, and clearly organized sections make it practical for use in training, discussion, and community initiatives. This allows the resource to continue supporting learning and reflection about equity, diversity, inclusion, and belonging beyond its initial release.

Transferable:

The model used to develop the guidebook can be adapted by other communities seeking to strengthen local understanding of equity, diversity, and inclusion. The approach involves grounding the resource in local research and community experiences, presenting EDI concepts in clear and accessible language, and offering practical guidance that organizations and individuals can apply in their own settings. By tailoring the content to reflect local demographics and priorities, this model can be replicated in other communities – particularly rural or smaller communities – looking to build shared understanding and support more inclusive environments.

Innovative and Forward Thinking:

The guidebook is innovative and forward thinking because it brings equity, diversity, and inclusion conversations into a rural context where these discussions have historically been less developed. Rather than simply defining EDI concepts, it presents them in clear, practical language that helps individuals and organizations apply them in everyday life. Its emphasis on belonging, shared responsibility, and concrete action makes the guidebook a proactive tool for helping communities build greater awareness and capacity over time.

Differs in Definable Ways from Other Similar Practices:

What distinguishes this guidebook from similar EDI resources is that it was developed specifically for a rural community and tailored to the realities of that context. The guide was designed as an entry point for audiences with less prior exposure to EDI language, using plain language, bite-sized information, and practical examples that are accessible and relevant in Huron County. Unlike resources developed for larger urban centres, this guide reflects the pace, needs, and lived realities of a rural community and was intended to meet people where they are.

High Client Uptake:

The guidebook demonstrated strong uptake following its launch in fall 2024. Two introductory webinars engaged about 70 participants, including teachers, community organizations, and municipal staff, who became early promoters of the resource within their own networks. In addition, 200 printed copies were distributed to partner organizations, and the guidebook was subsequently taken up across multiple sectors, including community organizations, the school board, classrooms, and local cultural institutions such as libraries and museums.

High Client Retention:

Engagement with the guidebook continued beyond its initial launch. Organizations and institutions that received the guidebook did not use it only once; they incorporated it into staff learning, workplace discussions, classrooms, and other ongoing settings. Participants also shared the guidebook with colleagues and other organizations, which helped extend its use and keep the conversation active over time.

Strong Evidence of Successful Outcomes:

The guidebook's success is reflected in both positive feedback and clear evidence of follow-on action. Feedback gathered after the two launch webinars indicated that participants found the guidebook valuable, accessible, easy to understand, and practical. Participants appreciated its bite-sized format, plain language, and concrete guidance, and reported that it helped break down concepts they had heard about but did not fully understand. Feedback also suggested that readers felt respected as learners, rather than lectured at, and felt empowered to be part of the solution and support belonging in their communities.

Success is also reflected in the guidebook's ripple effects across the community. Partner organizations incorporated it into staff learning and workplace discussions, the school board distributed it to management and teachers and used it in classrooms, and local cultural institutions also built related programming around belonging. These follow-on activities included a belonging conference co-hosted by United Way and the health unit that drew 200 participants, as well as presentations delivered by the local school board to 1,700 students to mark the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. Additional community events also extended the guidebook's reach to people across age groups. Together, these outcomes suggest that the guidebook did more than raise awareness; it also helped prompt concrete action and ongoing community engagement.

PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT AND EVALUATION STRATEGY

The guidebook's reach and early impact were tracked through a combination of formal and informal measures. Formal feedback was collected through surveys following the two introductory webinars, which gathered participants' responses to the guidebook's content, format, and usefulness. Additional indicators of reach and engagement included webinar participation, the number of hard-copy guidebooks distributed, and evidence of uptake by partner organizations and institutions. The Huron County Immigration Partnership also continued to gather informal feedback over time through community and partner interactions, which provided insight into how the guidebook was being used in different settings and how it was supporting ongoing conversations about belonging and equity, diversity, and inclusion.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Huron County Immigration Partnership

<https://www.huroncounty.ca/economic-development/immigration-partnership/>

Building Belonging Guidebook

<https://www.huroncounty.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Building-Belonging-Equity-Diversity-and-Inclusion-in-Rural-Communities-S.pdf>

Rainbow Diversity Institute

<https://rainbowdiversityinstitute.ca/>