



City of Saskatoon

Community Services Report

Adult Focus Group Discussions on Race Relations

January 2009

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Community Services Report
Cultural Diversity and Race Relations

Submitted by



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PROJECT BACKGROUND

The primary objective of the research is to gather feedback from the target audience about what the City of Saskatoon in collaboration with community partners can do through action steps to address perceptions of race relations and racism.

SCOPE OF WORK

The intention of this forum is to use the results of previous surveys as impetus to develop strategies for action steps to move towards achieving the four community outcomes outlined (see attached appendix) in the Cultural Diversity and Race Relations Policy around the recommendations suggested in the report. The forum would be a platform to share and discuss:

- Information on where the City is presently and what are the identified recommendations for action applicable to existing services and effort in the community.
- Where does the City want to be – suggestions for unexplored opportunities and strategies.
- Determine who may take the lead on implementing the recommendations and identifying key stakeholders and how they may be involved.

Cultural diversity and race relations is an in-depth and comprehensive topic to address in one focus group and Fast Consulting found this initial focus group was not able to explore all the issues or questions. More focus groups would be needed to gain more insight and depth. This initial summary is intended to outline a starting point and outline some initial action steps. This report is not intended to be a complete or comprehensive solution to the questions posed to the participants.



SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION

QUALITY OF LIFE IN SASKATOON

Fast Consulting opened the focus group discussion asking participants to rate the quality of life in Saskatoon. The opening question is intended to familiarize participants with the focus group process and speaking openly in a group setting. In addition, it is intended to establish a picture of where we are in terms of current race relations in Saskatoon.

Generally the participants find the quality of life in Saskatoon comfortable and rate it 'good'. They feel the economy is strong and the City of Saskatoon has increased investment in infrastructure making it a better place to live for residents. They foresee continued growth for Saskatoon, although at a slower pace.

■ *“Good city, nice quality of life, it is fairly comfortable.”*

Participants continue by saying that the quality of life they experience may not be the quality of life other Saskatoon residents experience and suggest the quality of life is better for those who can afford it. Participants suggest some Saskatoon residents living at or below the poverty line do not have the same access to education, housing or good paying jobs as those living above the poverty line.

■ *“The fact that I have a good paying job cushions some of the experiences I have seen my family, relatives and friends experiencing in terms of poor housing, access to medi-clinics, no family doctor, limited food and education. I personally may have a good experience but not my relatives who struggle.”*

WHAT IS RACISM

Participants define racism as ‘the quality of relations between members of different races within a country’. It is also ignorance or pre-constructed attitudes or beliefs, a misunderstanding or misconception of a situation and a difference in treatment.

“Misunderstanding and misconceptions around aboriginal people in general. I still find that quite shocking actually in this day and age that we still have that.”

“I am really concerned about how my children will be treated by the broader community as they grow older and it is less acceptable to be a First Nations person and to maintain and celebrate that identity.”

“Racism is about how I’m treated differently which often means I’m treated unfairly or hurtfully or otherwise denied opportunities that others are given simply because I’ve said I’m a First Nations person or somebody knows that.”

EFFECTS OF RACISM

1. Economy

Participants say racism affects the health of the economy because aboriginal people are not being engaged to train for or fill jobs. Aboriginal people experience barriers to further education and advanced job training and the community is not taking enough proactive steps to address these issues.

Participants also point out that addressing the affects of racism are well studied and documented and that programs and support measures have been published for many years but perhaps not implemented.

“...if you close the gap on income, education and employment for aboriginal people it will be a better future for everyone. That has been front and center knowledge in a big way for at least the last decade and truly little has been done to address and close those gaps.”

2. Psychological Gap

Participants tell us that racism and the misconceptions stemming from it are deeply embedded in the Saskatoon community. These misconceptions have established an unequal hierarchy of power in Saskatoon and an unequal access to goods and services which is creating a psychological gap between those that succeed and those that are left behind.

Participants say the larger the gap grows the more challenging it will become to effect future change in education, income and employment and it is detrimental to Saskatoon’s ‘sense of belonging and community’ which effects all residents. Participants say east side/west side differences are visible and are effecting the morale and psyche of all lower income residents, not just aboriginal residents and this drop in morale is creating anger, crime and gang violence.

“...I want to know why the east side Walmart is nicer than the Confederation Walmart? I want to know why the east side children have nicer playgrounds than west side children. We don’t even have a grocery store in Riversdale – everything is developed for the ones who can afford it. It is very ghettoizing.”

Speaking to people about racism and the affects of racism on the community is another psychological aspect of racism that has effected the lives of these participants. They feel burdened by the personal responsibility to represent their culture and to educate, inform and correct people on common misconceptions.

“That’s another important aspect of racism, you bear the cross and it’s upon you all the time to always make the choice to step forward inform, correct and educate.”

3. Immigration

Furthering this psychological gap are stories participants have read in newspapers and heard through the media about the province and the City actively recruiting residents of other provinces and countries to come to Saskatchewan for work. They wonder why they are doing this when they believe the aboriginal work force here is not being engaged to participate. They worry that an effort to go outside the province to recruit sends a negative message to populations that are underserved.

“...for example if we’re in such a growth economy in Saskatoon why are we not working harder on and more focused on having aboriginal people fill those opportunities as oppose to expanding an immigration policy. When we talk about growth here it applies to other groups and people but growth is not one that engages or embraces aboriginal people.”

“...why bring 80,000 workers to Saskatchewan when we have such a high rate of First Nations people without jobs? Why do we have to go outside our boundaries to fill those jobs, I think that has a big effect on our future.”

WHAT DOES 'FORWARD' LOOK LIKE

We asked our participants to tell us if the City of Saskatoon and community partners want to positively effect change what does that look like? What does 'forward' look like? Our participants told us the benefits to effecting positive forward change to race relations would benefit the Saskatoon in numerous ways including

- A stronger economy with more people working,
- A savings to social services,
- A population that is engaged in civic culture and has a better understanding of how to contribute,
- Less crime,
- A lower mill rate and savings for the City,
- A stronger, healthier and safer community,
- Expanded and improved schools, and
- More diversity, a true cultural capital of Canada

And according to these participants the City of Saskatoon plays a significant role in effecting change and moving race relations forward. They say that cultural awareness starts at the top and participants say change starts internally and works its way down and out.

"...if the City is really interested in making a difference they can, but they have to start internally...this has to be a Mayor to sidewalk approach."

1. Internal Audit

Participants suggest the City of Saskatoon conduct a comprehensive internal audit of their own workforce to understand where they rate as a representative employer. Participants believe the concept of representative workforce is a good idea and opens opportunity to qualified and skilled workers. Participants believe Saskatoon as a whole community can benefit a great deal from the contributions aboriginal people can bring and auditing the City Hall workforce is a positive step forward.

“...if they took the initiative to audit their own City hall that would speak volumes - really look at the issue and see how they can take the initiative to take the lead.”

These participants also want the City of Saskatoon to publically acknowledge how their organization is making efforts to reflect its goals of achieving zero tolerance for racism and discrimination in Saskatoon:

- Does the City have an aboriginal hiring policy?
- What is the policy?
- How is it monitored?
- Is it successful?
- In what ways is the City culturally sensitive?
- How do they promote culture diversity in the workplace?

“...what has the City done in education around aboriginal issues, what have they done around hiring and supervising aboriginal people, what have they done around aboriginal retention. What was the exit interview – why did they leave? Is it a workplace culture issue?”

2. Balance Scorecard

Side-by-side to the internal audit, participants believe City Hall should adopt the balance scorecard approach that every department, supervisor and employee is responsible for making a positive change towards race relations, making it part of the job description and creating an evaluation process to determine success or failure.

“...balance scorecards should be part of their leadership built right into their appraisals – ‘these’ are the things you are assessed on an annual basis and part of policy and you commit so much time and energy into these specific areas and one of them should be aboriginal awareness and development?”

...In order to truly make a difference in racism it truly needs to be accountability in every manager down. A performance criteria they are measured against on what have they done to make a difference because you know its easy to throw lots of fluff and stuff and throw a program here and hire a designated person there and they don't last and you assign the issues to a race relations department or a committee or to the manager of aboriginal relations rather than making everyone responsible to get educated and share that knowledge.”

3. Literature Review

Participants also believe the City could benefit by completing a literature review of previous research conducted to answer these issue and review previous initiatives, programs and conclusions to evaluate their implementation and success. Participants feel this topic has been researched and want to understand what actions have being taken. Because our participants have not seen a lot of change in the race relationship they are sceptical that anything of meaning is being done.

“...this topic has been researched to death, do a peer review of what has already been completed. What are the studies, has anything been done with them? Was there any success?”

4. Actively Recruit Aboriginal Leaders

Participants believe it would a positive step if the Mayor of Saskatoon publically acknowledged that the City is aggressively addressing racism and discrimination by actively recruiting high level aboriginal consultants, advisors and/or council representation to address issues around and solutions towards better race relations in Saskatoon.

“...Essentially there has to be leaders and champions in the city at high levels that are willing to make this a true mission. Then things will change.”

Participants tell us that it is difficult to believe change is occurring when they do not see they have a representative voice at higher levels of City operation and governance. To counter this participants suggest the City recruit consultants to advise the mayor and senior management on best practices and race relation policies.

“...we don’t have representation at that level for our voice to be heard...if they could just broaden the scope a bit....even if there is no elected aboriginal officials bring in some consultants or a portfolio at a senior level. This issue speaks to where this falls on the City’s’ radar, if they’re serious about changing how can they do that without a position or voice at a senior level?”

Participants also suggest the Mayor and other councillors actively begin recruiting people from the aboriginal community to engage in civic politics.

“...If the mayor was really sincere he would be out head hunting right now for some advisors or recruiting for council. Why don’t we have any representatives on Council? He could take the lead on that ... reach out to the community.”

5. Leisure Guide/Bill Insert

Participants believe more public education is needed. They recall seeing aboriginal information bill inserts in previous years, and see the Leisure Guide has included more information about aboriginal events and culture but would like the City to increase the frequency and amount of educational material being published.

Participants suggest publishing aboriginal fact sheets that highlight varying contributions aboriginal people have made to the City and they suggest utilizing the Leisure Guide, utility bill inserts and billboards to present the information to the public.

Participants acknowledge that public education can create backlash, but they see backlash as a positive sign that things are moving forward. They tell us that education is a sensitive topic and discussion can sometimes make people feel uncomfortable, but believe it is important to have the conversation.

“...it’s more important to provoke the conversation than not to have them. It creates an opportunity to speak to the issue. And I think any politician whether it’s a councillor or a mayor or their support staff has to realize its not always going to be easy. They are in very challenging positions and they put themselves in the public for a reason.”

6. Invest in Culture Events

Simply put participants want the City to invest more money, support and interest in varying cultural events in Saskatoon. Promote the events in Leisure Guide and acknowledge the presence and contribution of our aboriginal neighbours. Use a utility bill insert to highlight high level employees and talk about results from the balance scorecard.

Develop relationships to create a strong community partnership with the City of Saskatoon, the Public School Board, large employers and First Nations and Aboriginal groups.

BARRIERS TO CHANGE

Participants understand there are barriers associated with change and suggest larger barriers might be found in education that have outdated curriculum, among unions who are not interested in changing their policies and with a general lack of motivation or reason to change with others.

The City can facilitate change by celebrating the variety of culture in this city, integrating cultural sensitivity at core levels, keeping policy development, governance and initiatives at local levels and supporting any organizations that illustrate positive role models.

“...when the broader society and the aboriginal society are happy to see indigenous people do well then we’re on the right road.”

MODERATORS GUIDE

City of Saskatoon - Moderator's Guide - Race Issues

Group Introduction/Opening Discussion

Duration: 5 min.

- Focus groups are a way for organizations to collect opinions in more detail than a typical telephone survey.
- They are exploratory – there are no right or wrong answers. Each person should speak for himself or herself. Not looking for consensus or agreement – don't hold back if your opinion is different from what others are saying.
- Taping and viewing of discussions.
- Ensure confidentiality. Assure participants that the data will be reported without any names attached.
- Introductions.

Overview

Estimated Duration: 40 Min

Today, we're going to ask you some questions about your perceptions of race relations in the City of Saskatoon.

1. Before we get into our discussion, we're going to start the session today by getting your initial reactions on how would you rate the quality of life in Saskatoon? Do you rate it as very good, good, fair, poor or very poor. Can you tell me why you say that? (*Moderator: Look for varying concrete reasons housing, economy, education*)
2. Can you tell us what your definition of racism is? How do you see racism effecting the growth of our community?
3. What are the top two or three issues that drive/propagate racism in Saskatoon?

Alright, now that we've got a general understanding of where people are coming from on this issue I would like to get into the reason for this focus group. Today we want to talk about cultural diversity and race relations, specifically the City of Saskatoon is interested in discussing ideas, which will help us to build a broad-based, positive and welcoming community. Now we understand this is a very large topic to tackle in just a couple of hours so today we want to begin at the beginning and talk about general ideas and general next steps.

4. Now that we've identified some of the negative aspects and effects of racism in Saskatoon, can we go around the table and get some ideas of how you would change things if you had the opportunity? If the City of Saskatoon wants to draw up a blueprint to positively effect change what does that look like? What does 'forward' look like for this (Saskatoon) community? (*Moderator: We need to identify concrete ideas to walk through the next series of questions. Get examples even one or two – the group does not need to agree on the ideas.*)
5. Who would you identify as the community partners for these options?
6. What programs would you identify support building these practices and support the community partners for the options we've been discussing? Are new programs needed? What?
7. What is the City of Saskatoon's role in these situations (other than money)?
8. What are some barriers you see to achieving the goal of building a broad-based, positive and welcoming community? (*Moderator: Clarify that we understand this is an evolving policy and in a constant state of change but is there a possibility for a blueprint*)

Points from survey

In 2005 and 2007 Fast Consulting completed research among a representative cross section of 500 Saskatoon residents and with a cross section of high school students in Saskatchewan. The primary objective of the survey was to assess and gain understanding of perceptions and attitudes of race relations and to explore opinion in areas of: (i) quality of life in Saskatoon, (ii) the current state of race relations in the City of Saskatoon, (iii) race relations issues that require immediate change and (iv) the future of race relations in Saskatoon.

From this survey we found that respondents say the top three ways racial discrimination impacts the community includes crime, negative perceptions about employment and equity and education.

9. So if we want to break those down in broad topics can you give us some ideas of what role the Police Departments should take to improve the impact they have on racial discrimination?
10. What role employers should take to improve the impact they have on racial discrimination?
11. What role should schools take to improve the impact they have on racial discrimination?

12. How can the City of Saskatoon facilitate these roles? What do they offer to the process? What should they offer? What should they avoid offering?
13. Can you tell us if you know of any programs that have proven to be successful either in this community or other communities to reduce racism? What works?
14. That's all the questions I have. Is there anything else you would like to add to our discussion today? How do you feel about doing a follow up session in January 2009?

Thank participants for their time and comments.