

roots & connections planning guide

A culturally integrated ESL curriculum
for community orientation in Alberta



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EDUCATION**

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“The art of cross-cultural communication is not simply providing information, but rather exchanging information.”¹

Welcome to the Roots and Connections Program Planning Guide

This is a guide to help program planners establish a course using *Roots and Connections* in the community. *Roots and Connections* is targeted at (but not limited to) newcomers who are at higher risk of isolation. It addresses the challenges service providers face in meeting newcomers’ diverse and complex needs, while at the same time being mindful of broader community development goals in rural Alberta.

Introduction

With decreasing population growth and increasing immigration, Canadian communities are going through a cultural shift. For rural communities, this change has been dramatic. Shrinking workforces have led employers to look for new ways to ensure essential services and maintain production.

Simply, immigration has become essential to support a sustainable future for Canada. In Alberta, many rural communities are making greater efforts to attract and retain newcomers. The Alberta Government’s “Welcoming Communities” initiative (under the “Supporting Immigrants and Immigration to Alberta” strategy¹) supports these efforts to be welcoming and inclusive of immigrants and their families.

NorQuest College launched the Rural ESL Enhancement Project in response to rural immigration challenges, especially isolation. Isolation is an unfortunate reality for many newcomers, resulting from both physical separation and social/cultural distance². It can happen because of language barriers, a lack of understanding or disconnect from the “system,” segregation, racism, overwhelming responsibility, loss, disorientation, feelings of not belonging and lack of access.

The project also identified challenges for host communities attempting to create a welcoming atmosphere for newcomers. These challenges include cultural awareness, responses to change and a lack of services

¹ *Supporting Immigrants and Immigration to Alberta* www.employment.alberta.ca

² *Cultural distance is a measure of the difference between two cultures with regard to politics, technical and economic experiences, language, the size and cohesiveness of the group, cultural attitudes (relations between dominant and minority groups) and cultural patterns (gender, hierarchy, self, time, etc.).*

and resources to respond to increasing numbers of newcomers and help bridge cultural distance.

Community organizations want to meet the needs of new immigrants. They want to be able to offer an effective community orientation to newcomers. To do this effectively, they need a ready-to-use tool that teachers and volunteers can use, regardless of teaching experience.

This is the concept behind *Roots and Connections*, a culturally integrated English as a Second Language (ESL) resource consisting of four parts:

1. Program Planning Guide
2. Instructor Guide
3. Toolkit
4. Curriculum

Roots and Connections provides the foundation for language, orientation and cultural integration programming to address newcomers needs and build a welcoming, inclusive community.

For more information about immigration and immigration trends, go to: www12.statcan.ca.

Guiding Principles

Roots and Connections is a culturally responsive ESL curriculum resource focusing on orienting newcomers to the community, establishing connections to reduce isolation and, with support, laying the groundwork for integrated participation in all aspects of community life. It is built on the following principles:

1. Based on the Canadian Language Benchmarks

Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB) provide a common standard for describing

and measuring language proficiency. Many provincially funded workplace, settlement and academic language programs have adapted goals and standards aligned with the CLB. *Roots and Connections* aligns with the CLB and supports the development of novice instructors.

The *Roots and Connections* curriculum is not designed to raise benchmark levels. Rather, it is designed primarily to give specific language that enables greater access to community services and activities. *Roots and Connections* modules are built on a series of components that fit easily into lesson plans that support a communicative language approach. Success is measured by learners' ability to access their community. Information about the Canadian Language Benchmarks is available in documents at www.language.ca.

- Canadian Language Benchmarks 2000: English as a Second Language for Adults
- Canadian Language Benchmarks 2000: ESL for Literacy Learners
- Canadian Language Benchmarks 2000: Implementation Guide

These online resources help language instructors learn more about CLB guided language instruction and include sample lesson plans, background theory and more.

Roots and Connections incorporates core CLB principles:

1. Task-based teaching and learning

The program addresses the four skill areas –reading, writing, speaking and listening – through basic tasks:
- routine tasks using illustrations

- personal connections tasks
- survival English tasks
- dialogue tasks
- numeracy tasks

2. Learner-centered study

Learners are involved in the decision-making process to determine course content and tasks. Their full participation is encouraged through:

- awareness of the purpose of *Roots and Connections* as a language-based community orientation curriculum
- involvement in deciding the priority of the units
- involvement beyond the classroom through meaningful cultural encounters in the community

3. Needs-based programming

Using *Roots and Connections* tools and resources, instructors assess learners' needs to help identify priorities and key gaps through:

- An informal cultural needs assessment to determine cultural distance, students' context and relevance of materials
- A Community Knowledge and Skills Assessment to assess cultural distance, students' prior experience and priorities (interests)
- A language assessment to determine English skill levels

2. Culturally integrated

A culturally integrated resource...

- builds on a principle that sees newcomers and participating community members as partners
- is grounded in knowledge of the needs and backgrounds of all stakeholders

through a cultural needs assessment and self-assessment tools

- serves the interests of the target populations by being relevant and sensitive to their needs and challenges including expressed goals of newcomers to feel safe, settled and welcome
- enables communities to support and welcome immigrants
- answers fundamental questions about orientation, cultural adaptation and support
- empowers newcomers to feel increased control over their adaptation challenges
- prepares communities to welcome newcomers in culturally competent ways
- encourages ongoing cultural competence³ development of instructors using the resource

3. Capacity Building

Often people who do this work in smaller communities come to it without formal training in language teaching. This resource is designed to develop some of the basic knowledge, skills and awareness that can make the experience more satisfying and fruitful for both instructor and student.

1. Self-guided instructor training manual provides basic information about ESL instruction and how to work cross-culturally through a variety of tasks.
2. Culture bytes included with every unit help instructors become aware of how culture may impact what we notice, how we interpret it and what we might miss as an important cultural difference.
3. Tools included help integrate cultural knowledge into recruiting, registering and assessing learners needs.
4. A collection of additional resources and reference are provided.

³ Cultural competency refers to culturally adaptive behaviour that facilitates the accomplishment of intercultural goals. It includes the capacity to shift perspective and adapt behaviour. Furthermore it involves the movement from a monocultural to an intercultural mindset that reflects increasingly more complex perceptions and experience of cultural difference. (Hammer and Sebera Advanced IDI Facilitator workshop notes, 2008)

Goals of Roots and Connections

The goals of the *Roots and Connections* curriculum are based on needs identified by stakeholders in small communities in Rural Alberta.

The four main goals of *Roots and Connections* are to :

Provide survival English by...

- teaching survival language for many key services
- following Canadian Language Benchmark (CLB) guidelines
- addressing beginning language proficiency at CLB 1–3
- allowing opportunities for language practice and mastery in a variety of contexts and functions
- developing relevant vocabulary

Build community knowledge by...

- including eight instructional themes that provide necessary information in the community context
- identifying key information about community systems, services and history
- helping newcomers learn how to get things done
- helping newcomers build a “Community Map” that indicates important services and how to access them
- answering questions related to settlement themes such as accessing health care, using an ATM, buying clothes and other household goods, staying safe, communicating with schools and participating in community learning and recreational activities

Increase cross-cultural awareness by...

- providing tools to deliver a program that reflects the cultural context and needs of participants
- including “Culture Bytes” at the beginning of each unit and module to reveal the assumptions present in the concepts and expectations of each unit
- including a “Personal Connections” activity that grounds each module in the experience of the learners, and offers an opportunity to discover cultural differences and similarities

Establish community connections by...

- promoting field trips to connect newcomers with professionals and service providers in the community
- holding “coffee encounters” for people to get involved and connected
- providing tools to get conversations going between community members and newcomers
- inviting guest speakers into class to share essential information and establish relationships
- encouraging simulation activities in class to prepare learners for real-life experiences
- exploring community information through promotional and informational media such as brochures, newsletters, newspapers, bulletin boards and radio.



Planning Through a Cultural Lens

Roots and Connections is a flexible resource that can be used in informal one-on-one settings such as tutoring or home visitation programs or for group lessons organized by a community service provider. The following step-by-step guide will help community service providers prepare to offer *Roots and Connections*.

This guide uses a cultural lens to plan a language based community orientation program using *the Roots and Connections* resource by integrating cultural awareness and an understanding of the context of newcomers. It is written to help take into account aspects of culture that may influence your decisions. This guide has been adapted with permission from a program planning tool developed by the Multicultural Health Brokers Co-op in Edmonton.

Step 1. Identify the Need

a. Determine the Need for a Roots and Connections Community Orientation Program

The first step in getting a *Roots and Connections* program running is to get

a picture of the settlement and language needs in your community. Understanding who makes up your community may help identify target demographics. For example, individuals not entering the work force or staying home to care for children are more likely to be isolated. To determine the need and available resources consider these strategies:

- use the ESL Needs Assessment Tool available at www.norquest.ca/corporate/edresources/index.htm
- use your community network to discover who is newly arrived in your area. For example, check with the local employment office, talk with employers who are hiring immigrants or schools that may have immigrant children registering.
- Community profile:
 - For the profile of your community from the last census go to: www.statscan.gc.ca)
 - To find out what language groups are coming into the community look at employment trends and talk to local businesses.
- Community asset mapping—a process by which you actually place your community's existing resources on

a map of your community. For more information about how to do this, go to the website of Human Resources Canada, Office of Technology, Community Learning Asset Mapping: A Guidebook for Community Learning Networks at: www.hrsdc.gc.ca.

Examples of information you can gather through mapping:

- Who is in your community? (Identify the businesses and organizations associated with each of the different units and identify where you might find possible community facilitators.)
- Statistics about the target population in your community. For example: How many seniors live in your community? Where do they live? Are there new families in which there is a primary stay-at-home caregiver?
- Your community resources (Community Adult Learning Councils [CALCs], Volunteer
- Tutor and Adult Literacy Services [VTALS], family and social services, government, victims' services, schools, sports programs, etc.)
- Your community's cultural resources (restaurants, associations, religious gathering places, potential cultural interpreters, etc.)

b. Publicize Roots and Connections

Once you have a picture of the needs in your community, spread the word that you have a program to meet those needs. Remember that due to language barriers you may not

always be able to target potential learners directly; still there are a number of ways you can get your message out.

Use your community networks and let the community know that you are offering this program. Have registration forms available for distribution. An example Registration Form is provided in the appendix.

- Present information at various venues (such as interagency meetings, your local advisory board, your board of directors, your local Chamber of Commerce and Family and Social Services).
- Use the media. Consider putting out a multilingual advertisement in the local newspaper.
- Have information available that is translated into the language of potential participants. (An adaptable poster and information brochure are available in the appendix.)
- Identify other places your target learners may gather, and post information there (such as places of worship, ethnic organizations, coffee shops and restaurants).
- Attend ethnic events such as religious holidays and national and cultural celebrations.

c. Gather Names of Potential Participants

Interest in the program may come from an employer of immigrants, a family member, a friend or the potential participant. At this stage the most important thing to do is to get names and contact information.



Step 2. Meet with Potential Participants

Meeting with participants is a valuable part of ensuring that the *Roots and Connections* program meets the needs of learners. Face-to-face communication is ideal because it will enable you to begin to build a relationship and establish trust.

a. Contact Potential Participants

Contact the individuals who have been identified. The logical way is to make a phone call; however, there are some things to consider when contacting newcomers by phone.

- People at the level targeted by the *Roots and Connections* curriculum (CLB2) often have great difficulty speaking on the phone in English. Ask if there is someone who speaks some English who could act as an interpreter. If you are able to talk to someone, try to set a convenient time and place to meet. Remember that newcomers may not have transportation to come to you.
- If you leave a message, remember that many people will likely not return it. This may be because they didn't understand it, because they lack the confidence to speak on the phone with limited English or because they are leery of calls from strangers. Call in the evening when children or partners may be home to act as a bridge.
- An effective way to communicate about the program is through a bilingual volunteer. This will allow for better communication about what the program

will offer. Identifying someone through a community contact may ensure that the person you find is a trusted person in that community.

- Try to find a person to translate or interpret for you who will be well received by your learners, considering issues such as culture (age, gender, position) or history (different clans or pre-migration conflict).
- Should you have several potential participants with a common language, bring them together with a bilingual interpreter and conduct an information session. At this "focus group" meeting you can find out learners' interests and needs.

b. Register Participants and do an Informal Cultural Assessment

Now you are ready to register the learners who want to attend the class and, with the help of an interpreter (if needed and available), have them complete information sheets or gather information through an informal conversation. This can be done one-on-one or as a focus group.

Since this may be your first chance to meet the new participants, enjoy the process of discovery and gathering information as a means to building a relationship and establishing a sense of trust. Note that this process is more conversational than a "traditional" intake process. If a less structured, conversational information gathering approach doesn't feel natural, don't worry. You will develop it with time and will discover that it is a very useful skill to have when working cross-culturally.

At this time you can also be doing an informal cultural assessment. It is widely accepted that cultural identity plays a significant role in the wellness of individuals and their communities. Cultural assessment is a process to determine how culture affects someone's ability to settle and adapt. It can help to identify cultural needs as well as any cultural supports necessary to promote adjustment to the new culture.

While registration procedures are fairly standard, you can apply a cultural perspective when collecting information from your participants. Use the **Interpretive Guide to**



Registration from the **Instructor Resources: Intercultural Toolkit** to help you interpret and apply the information you receive from your information-gathering “conversation.”

c. *Build your cultural knowledge*

Once you have met the program participants, it is time to do a little homework. Use the **Cultural Knowledge Building Tools** found in the **Instructor Resources: Intercultural Toolkit** to gather information about the different ways they may make sense of the world.

Cultural Knowledge building tools include three parts:

1. A **Culture General Framework** to help identify patterns of culture that show how different people make sense of various aspects of culture such as use of space, dress, time and communication.
2. An **Interpretive Guide to Registration Information**. This tool applies knowledge from the **Knowledge Builders** as well

as the **Culture General Framework** to interpret information you can gather using the *Roots and Connections* Registration form.

3. A **Culture Specific Exploration Tool**. This tool is a collection of questions to guide your attention toward specific information about a specific learner.

Together these tools can help you collect information to support the cultural bridge role described in the Instructor Guide.

Being a cultural bridge involves:

1. **Anticipating:** Using the cultural knowledge provided in this resource to anticipate and notice cultural knowledge gaps
2. **Asking:** Using cultural knowledge and information gathered through cultural assessment to guide questions to help you get more information about your learners' experiences
3. **Bridging:** Using cultural knowledge to help learners and community members make sense of why and how things are understood or done in Canada and in other cultures
4. **Absorbing:** Adjusting to a new culture can be difficult and disorienting. Helping learners name and normalize their experiences can offer them great relief and reduce feelings of isolation. You will find information in this resource to build your understanding of aspects of the immigrant experience and you will learn a lot more from listening to your learners!



Step 3. Organize the Logistics

The next step in setting up a program using the *Roots and Connections* resource is to arrange logistical details such as location, cost, schedule and child care and transportation if necessary.

a. Choose a Location

The location of your community orientation program could be almost anywhere. However, keep these factors in mind:

- Where potential participants live and their ability to access the class
- Whether it is a neutral location (some learners may not want to meet in a church basement)
- Cost of the facility
- Size of the classroom space
- Environment – is it clean, roomy, and adequately lit? Does it have comfortable chairs? Are there tables to write on?
- The potential need for childcare space and the need to seek other supports in the community to address this.
- You may want to consider alternative locations for delivering your program, depending on your community context. For example:
 - Combine your Community Orientation program with a Community Kitchen Program.
 - Enhance a “Books for Babies” class by extending the time and delivering *Roots and Connections* to the mothers while the children are cared for in a separate space.
 - Mothers can take turns caring for the children (Childcare Co-op).

- Combine your Community Orientation Program with a parenting class.
- Integrate with a Seniors Program
- Deliver the class at Community Adult Learning Council facility.
- Hold the class as a “Coffee Circle” in a local coffee shop.
- Meet in a community hall or at the public library.
- Hold your class in a participant’s home. Take the program to them. (For more information contact Central Alberta Immigrant Women’s Association and ask about their Home Visitation Program www.caiwa.ca).

b. Build a Budget (If applicable)

The money required to operate the program will vary from one community to another. Some communities may need to rent suitable or additional space. Use the “Budgeting Tool” from the *Roots and Connections* toolkit to start thinking about how much money you will need to run the program. Items in this budget should cover staffing or human resources, facility, supplies, instruction, print materials and other supports such as childcare and transportation.

c. Secure Funding (If applicable)

Plan to secure funding from appropriate sources to allow delivery of the *Roots and Connections* curriculum in a method appropriate to your community and learners. This may include approaching community organizations or businesses to support the project in various ways,

such as providing instructional space, transportation or childcare.

d. Arrange the Schedule

The *Roots and Connections* resource supports programming that you can adapt to fit a variety of delivery formats. The scheduling plan must reflect the availability, interests and levels of the learners as well as the availability of instructors, space or childcare. The curriculum can be covered in a variety of formats. Here are some examples of different ways to schedule *Roots and Connections*.

Possible delivery formats:

1. One on One tutoring
2. Group lesson

Scheduling Information

- 8 units each with 5 modules
 - Total: 40 modules
- Approximately 3 hours/module (could be more or less depending on depth)
 - Total: 120 hours of in-class materials

Step 4. Select and Train Instructors and Volunteers

a. Identify and Recruit Instructors and Volunteers

Find an Instructor

You will need to find an instructor to prepare and deliver instruction. Ideally, the instructor will have experience teaching ESL to adults. The class may also benefit from involving volunteers.





In small communities it may not be easy to find just the right person. It is important, however, to know what general characteristics are needed so that you can work to a common set of expectations. With a part-time program you will need people who have flexible schedules, are willing to work on a part-time basis and are interested in learning and developing their skills.

General skill set:

- willing to learn
- self-motivated and can work independently
- willing to collaborate and share new information with others
- understands the “bigger picture” of community orientation
- able to work with multiple stakeholders
- confident speaking to small groups

- can identify newcomers’ needs
- knows how and when to access community support services
- fluent in English (an instructor can be someone with English as an additional language)
- has computer skills (needed for research and preparation)
- demonstrates intercultural sensitivity
- creative and fun

As you build capacity in your community these are additional characteristics to work toward:

- has knowledge of language and integration challenges for immigrants
- demonstrates general “intercultural competency” and an interest in personal ongoing learning
- has experience teaching a multi-level adult language class (preferably an ESL class)

- has knowledge of adult learning practices
- has a working knowledge of Canadian Language Benchmarks
- has experience developing lessons specifically designed to meet the language skill gaps of immigrants

Find Volunteers.

There are many ways in which people can participate in the *Roots and Connections* program as volunteers. Invite interested community members to attend a volunteer training session. Adapt the Sample Brochure in the *Roots and Connections* toolkit to publicize the program and recruit volunteers.

1. Tutors

Volunteer tutoring through Community Adult Learning Councils (CALCs), the Volunteer Tutor Adult Literacy Program (VTALP), Family Literacy Programs, Literacy Alberta, local libraries and other organizations is well established across the province. Volunteers may tutor learners one on one or in small groups. This provides an opportunity for learners to practice language learned in the units, get help with pronunciation and build relationships.

2. Cultural liaison or Interpreter

There may be some untapped resources in your community. Some people who have already settled in your community know what it is like to be a newcomer. If they speak the same language as more recent newcomers, they can be invaluable for both cultural and language interpretation. Even if they do not speak English perfectly,

they may have other skills to offer. Keep your eyes open in your community; this person may be in the most unlikely place!

For example, a woman accompanied her husband to a small community in Alberta because he had a job. Before moving to Canada, she was a professional in marketing and speaks English at a Canadian Language Benchmark 4 level. For various reasons, including language proficiency, she is not able to continue in her profession but she could bring a lot of transferable skills to your program.

Consider graduates or participants from previous classes. A newcomer to your community who participates in the orientation program can provide excellent support for the next program even if his/her English is still developing. In fact, you may want to consider offering program graduates or participants in other language programs an opportunity to put their language and adaptation experience to use, in essence developing your own community mentors. You will find there is a rich source of unused skills hidden within the newcomer population. Newcomers can use their skills, gain confidence and be involved in the community. You will have someone who can act as a cultural liaison, help to interpret the newcomers' world for the host community and interpret the new community to the newcomer.

3. Coffee Encounter Volunteers

This can be anyone! Find people who are interested in having a cup of coffee with a newcomer from the



class. Coffee encounters are a way for people in the community to get involved and connected. It provides a way to establish personal connections between the participants and people in the community. Be prepared to offer some guidelines and expectations for the relationship, especially around language and conversation. Make copies of the Coffee Encounter Guide (Appendix 2) and hand it out to people who might be interested.

4. Community Facilitators

A community facilitator is an individual in the community who:

- can facilitate a community field trip in his or her place of work
- be a guest speaker to introduce some aspect of community knowledge (related to the unit themes)
- is interested in establishing a relationship with newcomers.

Community facilitators receive a Community Facilitator Information Package (available in the Toolkit) to help them prepare.



Examples of people in the community to approach to be a Community Facilitator include:

- pharmacist
- public health nurse

- bank customer service representative
- librarian
- school principal
- police officer
- firefighter
- emergency medical technician (EMT)
- post office customer service representative
- nurse (at local hospital)
- social services worker
- provincial government services representative
- federal government services representative
- local business person
- appliance salesperson, home renovations expert, or furnace repair person to explain about aspects of individuals' homes from a safety perspective
- hockey or soccer coach

b. Provide Training

You may need to train your staff. The Roots and Connections Instructor Guide is designed to be a self guided training resource but can also be used as a group training tool.



