

NATIONAL ORGANIZATION OF IMMIGRANT AND VISIBLE MINORITY WOMEN  
OF CANADA



Organisation nationale des femmes immigrantes et des femmes  
appartenant à une minorité visible du Canada

## **Government Relations Training**

**September 2006**

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**NOIVMWC**  
**Government Relations Training**  
**Ottawa, September 9, 2006**

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**A. Introduction**

NOIVMWC brought together the Board, the Policy and Advocacy Committee and the Livelihood facilitators to participate in a discussion on how to strategically move forward the issues that were identified as part of the multi-stakeholders' and employer meetings. Guest speakers were invited for the morning session to situate the session in the current political and federal government context. The afternoon was spent in deciding on the strategy that NOIVMWC would follow.

**B. Hon. Jack Murta – Working Across Partisan Lines**

**Presentation:**

Jack Murta started by describing his previous roles as Member of Parliament (MP) and former Minister of Multiculturalism in the Mulroney government. He has also worked with public and private corporations and has been a senior executive with a number of large corporations. During his time as MP he became involved in the National Prayer Breakfast that allowed him to work with many people from all different political stripes and parties. (He is presently the Chair of the National Prayer Breakfast.

His view now is that it does not matter which political party gets elected to office because the Canadian people will force any extreme views to become more moderate. Put differently, Canadians will move politicians back to the centre ground. He is now focused on bringing politicians of all stripes together to talk not about politics but to support each other on an individual basis. He meets regularly with groups of MPs to facilitate this process and help each other to provide strength and support.

His primary message is that **for us to be successful in our strategy, we need to build human relationships.** How do we do that?

- Put yourself in their shoes. Go into the room having asked yourself the question, “How would I like to be treated if I was in this job?” and relate accordingly. If you attack first then they will get defensive.

- Think about how you can add value to what the government is doing? What do you have to offer them?
- Identify issues that are bigger than partisan politics.
- Be brief and to the point. In 5 to 10 minutes you need to make your case.
- Target people who might be sympathetic and focus on building relationships with them. If you can find a “champion” then they will help you build other relationships.
- Don’t try and get to everyone because it will only drain your energy.
- Be kind to the gatekeeper. Establish a relationship with key aides and assistants.

### Questions and Answers

a) **What about follow up?** If you don’t receive a follow up call/meeting then perhaps you have not done a good job at your first meeting. You have not been able to convince them that it is in their interest to meet or work with you. Review the meeting and see where you might have gone astray. Fix that problem and your relationship may be much smoother. Look at the first meeting as the beginning of a relationship.

b) **What is the timeframe to get action?** It takes time to build relationships. Plan the second meeting while you are at the first meeting. Set the foundation at the first meeting and establish your key points and issues. You have to make a positive impression and establish that you are not there to attack them or create a confrontation.

c) **Are there skills that you can develop to build these relationships?** We all have the skills to relate to people as humans. It is more about attitude than about skills. Some communications training and role-playing may be useful but it will not replace bringing a positive, non-confrontational attitude to the meetings with politicians. As politicians, they can choose from a wide range of people when working on an issue. It is more likely that they will choose to work with you on an issue if the interaction is respectful, engaged and humane.

d) **How do we differentiate NOIVMWC’s positions from other organizations?** Be clear about our own positions before meeting with anyone. This should involve understanding the political climate, NOIVMWC’s allies and also the competition. Be prepared to map out your organization and how and why you have developed certain positions that may be different from the broader women’s agenda or other women’s organizations.

e) **How do we close the deal?** Present the case well. Accept that you may not get everything that you want but be prepared to accept incremental gains while working towards the bigger agenda. Just before you leave the meeting it might be useful to ask the politician for their suggestions about how to deal with the situation.

## **C. Panel - Possible Strategies for NOIVMWC**

### **Presentation by Michael McNeil:**

Michael McNeil is a former lobbyist who worked with the Leader of the Opposition during the 1970's and with Joe Clark and Brian Mulroney in various roles within the PMO. He then worked as President of the Canadian Automobile Association for ten years where he worked on delivering services to members and serving as an advocate to lobby Governments on behalf of the interests of motorists. He also worked with the Natural Gas Association in Toronto and moved back to Ottawa as a political consultant and lobbyist.

The current climate of the political and bureaucratic environment reflects a dramatic change in how business is carried out at both levels. Time constraints continue to have an impact on both access and availability. There is also a "call forward" cycle where you get passed from person to person, none of whom have the real capacity to deal with your issues.

The real climate change has taken place as a result of the focus in the last election on accountability, economic and governance issues. There were also some focus on specific social issues like childcare, and support for families. Another focus has been on fighting terrorism.

There was a great discontent with the previous government and its perceived inaction. That spurred the Conservatives to focus on five issues in the election campaign that won them the election albeit with a minority.

This emphasis on the five priorities has marginalized NOIVMWC's issues and that of other social action groups and put them on the back burner. In order to be successful, in the present climate, NOIVMWC will have to find ways to complement the Conservative agenda and incorporate NOIVMWC's issues into the new Government's agenda.

The biggest barrier is the consolidation of power in the Prime Minister's Office. There are very few people who have access to the inner circle and there is a 'fortress mentality'. This has permeated down into the bureaucracy, which does not want to take any step that could get them into problems with the PMO.

The Accountability Act has led to yet more secrecy, lack of access, delays in funding and contracting within the Federal Government. No one really understands the import of new legislation and this has exacerbated the gridlock in bureaucratic circles.

## **Anu Bose – Executive Director**

NOIVWMC needs to refocus their agenda and techniques in order to be successful in their advocacy issues. Our goal is:

- To have immigrant settlement issues as a number one priority issue for the Government and
- To position NOIVMWC as a credible voice to which the Government will listen. Hopefully this will lead to increased access and funding for NOIVMWC and their issues.

***For a list of possible strategies to pursue, see Section F***

### **Questions and Answers**

**a) How do we take the case that we have on Canada's need for skilled immigrants and make it a priority for Government?** Expanding the issue base. Review all aspects of the Conservative agenda and see where NOIVWMC can 'shoe horn' items/ issues into the existing agenda and push NOIVMWC's agenda further into both political and bureaucratic circles. One way may be to focus on employment and the need to meet Canada's job market requirements today and into the future.

**b) What are the Conservatives short-term goals?** To get re-elected preferably with a majority. They will likely focus on their main priorities and tinker around the edges with other issues. They do have some rising concerns like Afghanistan, the Middle East and climate change that are causing them problems, particularly in Quebec. There are also some new issues getting flagged such as Senate reform that may play as election issues.

**c) How do we deal with the way political parties, especially the Conservatives, connect policy changes with political support?** The Conservatives will try and build support in constituencies where they think they can get additional support. NOIVMWC will have to identify and profile issues that the Conservatives can support and bring forward those that will benefit immigrants. If convinced that the immigrant integration agenda will yield electoral benefits, then the Conservatives may proceed with them.

**d) How do we use research to further our goals?** NOIVMWC's research should help Government to deal with the complexities of the issues. One good example is the Accreditation process where NOIVMWC can offer ways to assist the Government in simplifying the process.

**e) How do we enter the public debate when it is being narrowed?** Certain groups are being discounted and marginalized. One suggestion is that

NOIVMWC become less politicized but it is very difficult when the PMO controls the debate. One way is to focus on bureaucratic channels to build policy support.

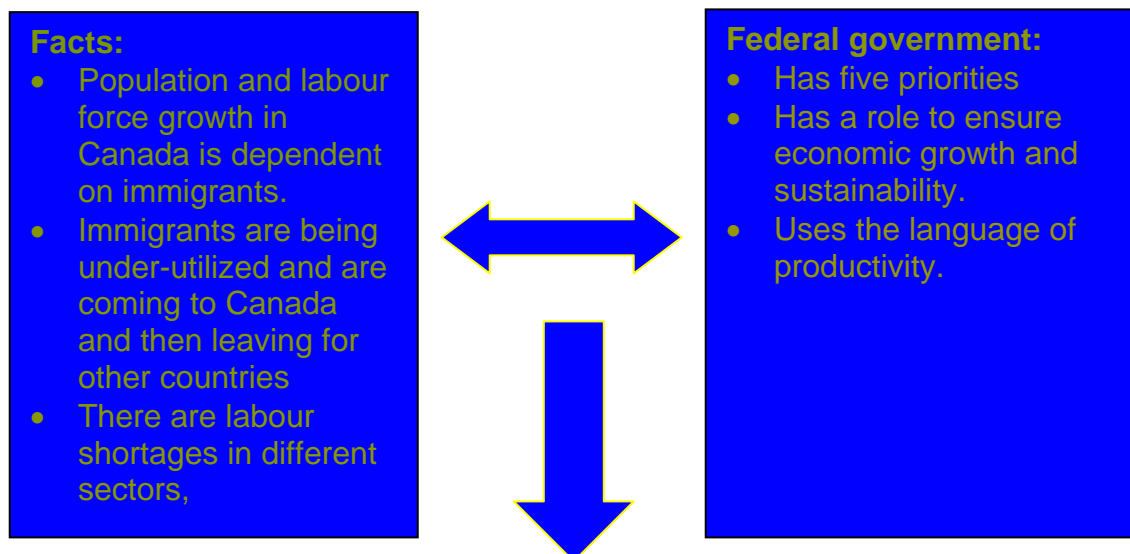
**f) How do we get our issues on the table in light of the five Conservative priorities?** Expand your issue base. Form alliances with other groups. Invite members of the public service to engage in discussions and sit on your committees. Find champions within the public service. Invite speakers from the bureaucracy and political circles to Board meetings. Do Standing Committee presentations and focus on developing specific targets and champions. Focus on the caucus chairs. Be cautious in your approach and be totally above board in light of Accountability Act.

## D. The foundation for our strategy

**i) What did we learn from the morning session that will shape our strategy?**

- The next period of time will be very challenging.
- We need to find ways to adapt our agenda to meet the Conservative agenda, or at least to look like it
- Image management and how we present our issues is important.
- Our issues need to be packaged and broadened to become included in the Conservative agenda.
- We need to enter into alliances.
- We need to find champions.
- We need to know our own positions and be comfortable in our own skins.
- Building relationships is a key to success.
- Don't forget bureaucrats and gatekeepers.
- Don't forget about the provinces and municipalities. We can use the same tools and processes at all levels of government.

**ii) Overview of the situation**



**How do we use these facts in order to influence the Government's current agenda and get them to move forward on NOIVMWC's positions?**

The 8 things that will address the facts and meet the government's agenda:

- Incentives to employers
- Immigration Policy changes
- Job-specific and better quality language training

**Action: Based on the report, develop an overall framework action plan.**

**ii) Report from Livelihood Committee** (see appendix A)

The Committee met the night before and reviewed the results from the Multi-stakeholders meetings. The report included:

**Key Findings:**

- Gender is not a primary problem factor affecting employment status.
- Immigration status, race, language, and other factors are bigger problems affecting employment status.
- There are unique problems facing immigrant women.
- Gender may be more important later in the immigrant's life cycle.

**Strategic Observations:**

- Timing is critical
- It's important to work collaboratively with governments and employers and possibly at both provincial and federal levels.
- A number of promising contacts were created with governments at all levels, and private sector employers and businesses.
- There has already been some movement and NOIVMWC should take credit for the success. E.g. Agency for Accreditation.

**Possible Recommendations:**

1. Create a virtual (on-line) directory or library of programs available in Canada to assist immigrant women in accessing employment commensurate with their skills and qualifications. There are many services, programs and activities in different communities and nationally that could be of use to immigrant women in their job search. This will be a single website where women can easily access all the available information. Building on this, NOIVMWC could develop a report on best practices, which could then be the basis for other projects. (similar to recommendation #8 in Phase 2 report)

2. Work with employers (e.g. Chambers of Commerce, Sector Councils) to advocate for changes in the immigration policy to encourage immigrants whose skills are more suited to Canada's current and future labour force needs. (similar to recommendation #9)
3. Use Prior Learning Assessment or other tools, to recognize qualifications of immigrant women before the actual move to Canada (similar to recommendation #2)
4. Advocate for the federal government to establish a loan/scholarship program specifically for immigrants to undertake upgrading or equivalency education. (similar to recommendation #7)

### **E. Decision on the focus for the Project's next steps.**

**Decision:** It was agreed to move forward on two recommendations, with some modifications:

#### **1. Create a virtual library/portal of programs available in Canada to assist immigrant women in accessing employment.**

- Needs to be done in a way that facilitates a broad dialogue between NOIVMWC, federal, provincial partners and other interested governments, associations, and agencies.
- Website should be directed to immigrant women, employers and agencies.
- What would make it unique? It would provide unique documents collected from the different local and provincial organizations. It would also provide an opportunity for employers, immigrant women and service providers to have a common meeting point.
- Why would potential employers want to access it? It would provide them with information and links that would make it easier for them to access immigrant workers.
- Potential funders for this may include Status of Women, HRSDC, Service Canada, and private funders.
- Some model websites might be Ontario, Alberta and Australia.
- Language needs to be considered when promoting the website and as an introduction on how to find employment. Need to decide which languages will be used on the site.
- Promote success stories and models that are working on the website.

**2. Revised - Advocate for the federal government to establish a loan/scholarship program specifically for immigrants to apply for and develop equivalency in qualifications, undertake upgrading and/or job specific language training and education**

- This should include job specific language training, upgrading qualifications and job skills.
- This may take the form of tax breaks or tax credits.
- Consideration should be given to persuading universities to establish funds.
- Consideration should be given to establishing our own NOIVMWC fund. Alberta has a model that should be seriously considered. It could be built upon as they have indicated an interest in expanding nationally.

## **F. Actions and next steps.**

1. **Framework Document** to be produced that provides an overview of the issues and possible solutions.
2. **The Report of Phase III – The Dialogue with the Employers** be finalized, translated and distributed to all participants of Phase III and other interested stakeholders.
3. **Actions for the staff and board of NOIVMWC:**
  - Create a panel of champions including ex-politicians and high profile immigrant women and men.
  - Create a panel of internal champions in the political and bureaucratic circles to push NOIVMWC's issues and agendas.
  - Hold MP and political staff breakfast meetings with those who have shown an interest in NOIVMWC's issues along with key staff from the Minister and PM's offices.
  - Tele-conferences with Regional Caucus Chairs and Opposition Caucus Chairs.
  - NOIVMWC members to meet with individual MPs.
  - Face to face meetings with key politicians in House and Senate, and key staff with PMO, and within the bureaucracy.
  - Run advertisement in Hill Times if sponsors are available.
  - Get the Hill Times to sponsor a special section on immigration.
  - Staff to revive SDC-HRDC contacts.
  - ED to meet with former ADM at Citizenship and Immigration.
  - ED to meet with aide to former Minister Volpe.
  - ED to meet with President of Treasury Board President, John Baird
4. Pursue funding for further the priorities identified.
  - Status of Women Canada
  - Service Canada
  - HRSDC
  - Royal Bank and other corporate sponsors.

## **G. When meeting with leaders and bureaucrats**

The group then discussed what is needed to prepare for meetings.

### **Before Meeting**

- Do your homework and be clear on your positions. (NOIVMWC staff will provide the information on the approach and position)

- Know what you want from the meeting and take the time to know the person you are meeting with. (NOIVMWC will advise you with whom you will meet). You will need to do some research about the person yourself)
- Be comfortable with material and yourself.
- Be grounded and ask the question: How would I like to be treated? Go in with that attitude in mind.

### **At the Meeting**

- Make a human connection
- Note that you have reviewed the person's position and agenda
- Make a connection to your issues and agenda
- Offer to share your thinking (NOIVMWC will provide a short handout)
- Ask if they have any suggestions about what can be done.
- Close with a human connection
- Follow up

### **Suggestions for Follow Up**

- At the meeting make sure that one of your group makes an effort to connect with the EA or staff person.
- Offer to prepare notes from the meeting and to get any additional information that might be mentioned at the meeting.
- Have someone take notes from the meeting, particularly any decisions or agreements made by the politician.
- After the meeting call or e-mail the gatekeeper to thank them for their assistance. A thank you note is always appreciated.
- Prepare the notes from the meeting as soon as possible after the meeting and send them by e-mail to both the EA and the politician.
- Ensure that any promised materials are delivered as soon as possible.
- Follow up the e-mail with a call to the EA or staff person to make sure they got the material and to open a conversation about how they felt the meeting went.
- Offer to be available as a resource to their office on these issues and thank them for their time.
- Stay in regular contact with the EA by providing information, copies of press releases etc.

## **H. Conclusion**

The Government Relations training day was very successful in providing NOIVMWC members with information. The discussions resulted in strategic decisions to move the Livelihood Project forward. It reminded everyone that the work of the project continues to be critical in supporting not just immigrant women but Canada by furthering an agenda of inclusion and economic prosperity.

## Appendix A

### **NOIVMWC: Livelihood Project Committee Report**

The Livelihood Committee met on Friday, September 8, 2006 to review the report from Phase 2 of the Livelihood Project and to propose future directions for the consideration of the board.

#### **Phase 2 Report**

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The committee reviewed the report and felt that it accurately reflected the content of this phase of the work, and is ready to be released to participants.

The report highlighted that, for some stakeholders, **gender is not a major issue in the transition of immigrant women to employment commensurate with their qualifications.** The committee reflected on this, and added some further nuances which may be important in the next phase of NOIVMWC's work in this area:

1. Employers are reluctant to identify gender as a factor in their hiring practices. It is unclear if this is because gender is, in truth, not a factor, or if gender influences decisions but employers don't wish to say so (or are not conscious of it).
2. Immigration status, race, language and other factors loom larger and more immediately than gender in the minds of employers and the women themselves, and NOIVMWC needs to acknowledge this. However, this is not to say that gender is irrelevant – it may subtly intersect with immigration status in ways that are not always obvious.
3. Notwithstanding this impression given by some stakeholders, there is considerable data, which shows that there are unique challenges for immigrant women, such as childcare. NOIVMWC needs to be conscious of these gender-specific realities, even if they were not foremost on the list of issues for stakeholders.
4. Gender may become more important later in the immigration experience. Certainly NOIVMWC has heard at other stages of the Livelihood Project that immigrant women have specific concerns.

## Strategic observations from Phase 2

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The committee heard firsthand reports from each of the consultations, to get a sense of the participants and the discussions. Several observations emerged from this discussion.

- Timing is critical. There is momentum and activity in some areas, e.g. certain provinces and municipal governments are actively interested in immigrant issues. Some employers are also very engaged on this question. Now seems to be a very good time to be working on immigrant concerns, and NOIVMWC needs to capitalize on this.
- It will be important to work collaboratively with both government and employers, and possibly at both the provincial and federal levels, especially where there are provinces that show interest and potential.
- A number of promising contacts were established, e.g. in government (MLAs in BC, Alberta PC leadership candidates, mayor of Edmonton), some progressive employers (Royal Bank, Bowen Personnel, and possibly others), and organizations (Conseil des relations culturelles, and FIPIQ, an association of immigrant professionals, both in Québec).
- There are many programs and initiatives out there, which seem to follow at least some of the principles and practices, set out in the various reports of the Livelihood Project.

## Possible recommendations for future focus

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Phase 2 identified a large number of recommendations for action – too many for NOIVMWC to act on all of them. In order to assist board discussion, the committee attempted to focus on a few.

The criteria that the committee suggests for selecting the focus are:

- Sustainability: the area chosen needs to generate revenue for NOIVMWC
- Desirability: the area occurred frequently in the interviews and multi-stakeholder meetings
- Beneficial: Produces benefits for a large number of immigrant women
- Twofold foci: Addresses both services for immigrant women, and works for policy changes
- Promotes NOIVMWC as a credible partner: Showcases NOIVMWC's leadership (i.e. it is not something that everyone else is doing)
- Opportunity to make progress

1. Create a virtual (on-line) directory or library of programs available in Canada to assist immigrant women in accessing employment. There are many services, programs and activities in different communities or nationally that could be of use to immigrant women. This will be a single website where women can easily access all this information. Building on this, NOIVMWC could develop a report on best practices, which could be the basis for other projects. (similar to recommendation #8 in Phase 2 report)

Advantages: sustainability (probably a fundable idea that would generate money for NOIVMWC), would benefit many women, addresses services, would be a high profile activity by NOIVMWC.

2. Work with employers (e.g. Chambers of Commerce, Sector Councils) to advocate for changes in the immigration policy to encourage immigrants whose skills are more suited to Canada's current and future labour force needs. (similar to recommendation #9)

Advantages: would benefit many women, addresses policy

Disadvantages: too ambitious? Can NOIVMWC make an impact on this? Employers are already concerned about this – maybe we are not needed.

3. Use Prior Learning Assessment or other tools, including before migration, to recognize qualifications of immigrant women. (similar to recommendation #2)

Advantages: would benefit many women, addresses policy

Disadvantages: it appears to already be underway (pilot project by ACCC), but has been delayed 19 months. Perhaps we need to monitor the situation and intervene if progress is not being made.

4. Advocate for the federal government to establish a loan/scholarship program specifically for immigrants to undertake upgrading or equivalency education. (similar to recommendation #7)

Advantages: seems modest enough to be achievable

Disadvantages: we don't know the players as well in this sector, so our strategy is not clear yet

Further to the issue of sustainability, the Committee would also propose that the board re-activate the concept of a foundation, and investigate the feasibility of either creating a foundation, or working with Community Foundations. There are many financially successful immigrants in Canada, and some of them would support NOIVMWC's work.