

# **City of Kitchener's Municipal Newcomer Strategy (2026–2028)**

## *Fostering a Caring Kitchener, Together*

### **Background**

Kitchener is home to a growing and diverse newcomer population that enriches the cultural, social, and economic fabric of our community. We recognize our role as a lower municipality in ensuring all residents, including newcomers can access the information, services, and opportunities they need to thrive and contribute to our community. Through the City's 2022 Strategic Plan consultations, newcomers were identified as a priority for focused municipal action. In response, the development of a Municipal Newcomer Strategy was included in the City's 2023–2026 Strategic Plan under *Fostering a Caring City Together*. This strategy recognizes that newcomers contribute in meaningful ways across sectors through workforce participation, entrepreneurship, cultural vitality, civic engagement; and that municipal support can help ensure newcomers continue to thrive and participate fully in the community.

### **Why This Strategy Matters**

Demographic trends also emphasize the importance of this strategy. As of the 2021 Census, immigrants constitute 30% of Kitchener's population (up from 26% in 2011 and 2016), and of that immigrant population, approximately 22% are recent arrivals (within five years). Additionally, Kitchener saw a doubling of recent immigrant numbers between 2016 and 2021, with notable shifts in countries of origin. Newcomers represent a significant share of Kitchener's population growth and play a vital role in strengthening our workforce, growing small businesses, and enriching neighbourhood life. At the same time, many newcomers face unique challenges related to navigating municipal services, finding housing, securing employment, and feeling connected to their community.

This strategy provides a coordinated municipal approach to supporting newcomers, one that centres newcomer voices, complements the good work of community and regional partners, and focuses on practical, achievable actions within the City's jurisdiction.

### **Newcomer Strategy Development Process**

#### **The Engagement**

This strategy was shaped by extensive community engagement that centred the lived experiences of newcomers. Between May and September 2025, the City engaged:

- Through more than 25 activities, including community-led events, festivals, and other channels
- Over 1,000 newcomers through community events, pop-ups, cultural gatherings, and targeted conversations
- 25+ newcomer-serving organizations across the settlement, employment, and cultural sectors
- 60+ City staff through internal consultations

These conversations provided direct insight into what newcomers identify as their needs, priorities, and barriers, not what the City assumes those needs to be.

## **The Working Group**

A Municipal Newcomer Strategy Working Group guided key aspects of the strategy's development. The group consisted of:

- Newcomers with lived experience,
- Representatives from newcomer-serving organizations, and
- City of Kitchener staff from multiple departments

The Working Group met six times to review engagement findings, validate insights, provide context, and help prioritize the recommendations in this strategy.

## **Newcomer Categories**

Newcomers in Kitchener are not a single group, they represent a wide range of experiences, backgrounds, and immigration pathways. For this strategy, newcomers include individuals who have arrived in Canada within the past 10 years, including:

- Economic immigrants (skilled workers, entrepreneurs, etc.)
- Refugees and protected persons
- Family-sponsored immigrants
- Temporary residents, including:
  - International students
  - Work permit holders
  - Canada-Ukraine Authorization for Emergency Travel (CUAET) visa holders
  - Other temporary categories

This broader definition ensures the strategy reflects the realities of Kitchener's newcomer population and the unique challenges each group may face in accessing services, supports, and community life.

## **City of Kitchener's Newcomer Landscape**

Kitchener is one of the fastest-growing communities in Ontario, shaped significantly by immigration. As of the 2021 Census, recent immigrants accounted for 69% of the population growth between 2016 and 2021. Newcomers arrive from diverse regions, with notable growth from countries such as India, Eritrea, Syria, Nigeria, China, and Brazil.

Beyond permanent residents and refugees, Kitchener has also seen increases in temporary residents including international students and work permit holders, whose needs continue to evolve as federal immigration and post-secondary policies change. This strategy reflects these changing trends and positions the City to remain adaptable, welcoming, and forward-thinking.

## **Guiding Principles**

The Municipal Newcomer Strategy is grounded in the following principles, which guide all actions and decisions:

### **1. Newcomer-Centered**

Newcomers' lived experiences, priorities, and voices shape the strategy. Actions focus on what newcomers tell us they need, not assumptions about their experiences.

### **2. Focus on Municipal Responsibility**

The strategy emphasizes actions within the City's jurisdiction to maximize feasibility, impact, and efficient use of municipal resources.

### **3. Equity and Inclusion**

Supports are designed to improve access to City services and promote fair outcomes for all newcomer groups, regardless of immigration status.

### **4. Collaboration, Not Duplication**

The City recognizes and values the work of staff, community organizations, and regional partners. This strategy aims to complement, strengthen, and align with existing efforts.

### **5. Community Belonging and Connection**

Building a welcoming community is central to newcomer success and benefits the entire city.

### **6. Transparency and Accountability**

The City is committed to clear communication, measurable progress, and ongoing engagement to ensure continuous improvement.

## Themes, Objectives, and Recommended Actions

### **Theme 1: Boosting Awareness of City Services**

**Objective:** *Deliver an innovative, inclusive, and user-focused experience that makes it simple for newcomers to find information and access services.*

Recommended Actions	Anticipated outcomes
<p>1. Create a central, accessible, and easily recognizable point for information where newcomer-related services/programs and information are shared.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved awareness and understanding of City services</li> <li>• Increased use of City programs, facilities, and supports.</li> <li>• Reduced confusion and duplication by consolidating information in one easily navigable location.</li> </ul>
<p>2. Develop a newcomer-specific ongoing communications strategy in partnership with Corporate Communications for the launch and ongoing implementation of the newcomer strategy.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More culturally relevant communications tailored to newcomer needs.</li> <li>• Stronger reach across diverse newcomer groups through targeted channels and messaging.</li> <li>• Consistent, citywide messaging that supports long term strategy implementation.</li> </ul>
<p>3. Explore ways to engage with newcomers beyond generic approaches. For example, through trusted community, cultural, and faith-based channels to reach different newcomer groups.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stronger relationships with cultural, grassroots, and faith-based partners.</li> <li>• Increased engagement of newcomer groups that may not access traditional outreach methods.</li> <li>• More representative feedback and participation from diverse newcomer communities.</li> </ul>

## **Theme 2: Small Business and Employment Supports**

**Objective:** *Support newcomer economic integration through job access, entrepreneurship capacity building, streamlined business processes, and opportunities to engage with the City.*

<b>Recommended Actions</b>	<b>Anticipated outcomes</b>
4. Create a paid internship program that allows newcomer professionals to work at the City of Kitchener to gain some experience while earning an income.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved employment pathways for newcomer professionals.</li> <li>• Stronger understanding of municipal operations among participants.</li> <li>• Enhanced access to diverse newcomer talent.</li> </ul>
5. Temporary FTE (18 months), Small Business Centre, to implement the following actions: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) A tailored program for newcomer business owners, using existing Starter Company model</li> <li>b) Curated information for newcomer business owners on decision-making &amp; loss prevention</li> <li>c) Tailored networking sessions for newcomer entrepreneurs &amp; business owners</li> <li>d) Orientation for newcomers on the City's Bids and Tenders process.</li> <li>e) "Newcomer" category in Pitch Kitchener.</li> <li>f) Targeted needs assessment for refugees regarding economic participation</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased business startup success among newcomers.</li> <li>• Easier access to accurate, relevant business information.</li> <li>• Reduced navigation barriers for newcomer entrepreneurs.</li> <li>• Strengthened local economy through newcomer led businesses. led businesses.</li> </ul>
6. Take part in the Global Skills Conference job fair and Workplace and Immigrant Network Fairs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved access to newcomer talent pools.</li> <li>• Increased awareness of City employment and volunteer opportunities.</li> </ul>
7. Develop a partnership with Workplace and Immigrant Network (WIN) to conduct targeted outreaches to newcomer professionals.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More effective engagement with newcomer job seekers.</li> <li>• Enhanced collaboration with regional employment stakeholders.</li> </ul>

### **Theme 3: Community Belonging and Connections**

**Objective:** *Build a welcoming and connected community by fostering opportunities for engagement, advancing outreach efforts, and ensuring full implementation of supportive policies.*

<b>Recommended Actions</b>	<b>Anticipated outcomes</b>
8. Coordinate and increase the City's participation in the Immigration Partnership's annual Welcoming Week.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Increased opportunities for cross cultural connection and community building.</li><li>• Strengthened relationships between newcomers and longtime residents.</li><li>• Greater visibility of the City's welcoming efforts in the community.</li></ul>
9. Consistent City representation on Immigration Partnership Steering Groups to empower staff with relevant information and relationship building opportunities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Strengthened relationships with cultural and faith-based communities.</li><li>• Better understanding of emerging needs and community dynamics.</li><li>• Increased capacity for culturally informed service design.</li></ul>
10. Targeted information & awareness of the City's Access Without Fear policy for newcomers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Increased newcomer confidence in accessing City programs and services.</li><li>• More consistent service delivery across City departments.</li><li>• Greater clarity and awareness of the City's commitment to newcomer support.</li></ul>
11. Increased community centre signages targeting newcomers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Clearer cues that City facilities are open and safe for all residents.</li><li>• Reinforcement of the City's commitment to inclusion and belonging.</li></ul>

#### **Theme 4: Targeted Supports for Newcomers**

**Objective:** *Expand targeted newcomer supports by fostering civic engagement, facilitating mentorship, and delivering tailored education programs for varied newcomer groups.*

<b>Recommended Actions</b>	<b>Anticipated outcomes</b>
12. Funding for Immigration Partnership Waterloo Region (IPWR) to support Kitchener newcomers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Strengthened coordination with regional initiatives on newcomer support.</li></ul>
13. Continued proactive housing and bylaws education program targeted to diverse newcomer groups including international students.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Improved understanding of local housing rules, rights, and responsibilities.</li><li>• Reduced bylaw violations and housing related issues among newcomers.</li><li>• Stronger relationships between newcomers, landlords, and municipal services.</li></ul>
14. Create youth leadership and civic engagement program/opportunities for newcomer youth.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Increased civic participation and leadership confidence among newcomer youth.</li><li>• Improved sense of belonging and long-term community connection.</li></ul>
15. Participate in mentorship program to connect City staff with newcomer women professionals (Kitchener Waterloo Multicultural Centre).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Expanded professional networks for newcomer women.</li><li>• Increased access to career insights and advancement opportunities.</li></ul>

## **Theme 5: Equipping Team Kitchener**

**Objective:** *Equip Team Kitchener to better support newcomers through staff training, an internal knowledge base, and consistent communications.*

<b>Recommended Actions</b>	<b>Anticipated outcomes</b>
16. Create newcomer-focused information package for internal teams across the City to use when developing strategies/action plans.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• More culturally responsive and equitable service delivery.</li><li>• Increased staff confidence and competence in newcomer engagement.</li><li>• Improved newcomer experiences across City touchpoints.</li></ul>
17. Create an internal guiding document for staff in relation to newcomer engagements, interactions or project/policy/initiatives considerations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Consistent standards and practices across departments.</li><li>• Clear reference tool to support planning and decision making.</li></ul>
18. Build awareness with staff on use of newcomer businesses for small procurements (>40K)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Broader and more diverse vendor participation.</li><li>• Increased economic opportunities for newcomer owned businesses.</li><li>• Procurement practices that reflect the City's equity and inclusion commitments.</li></ul>
19. Monitoring & reporting on implementation of all actions of the Newcomer Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Clear visibility on progress and impact of the strategy across all themes.</li><li>• Improved accountability and ability to adjust approaches based on evidence and emerging trends.</li></ul>

## CSD-2026-030 Recommendations | Implementation Plan | 2026 – 2028

Theme	Objective	Actions	Lead Team	Timing	Financial Resourcing ?
<b>Boosting Awareness of City Services</b>	Deliver an innovative, inclusive, and user-focused experience that makes it simple for newcomers to find information and access services.	1. A central online information hub for newcomers	TIS	2027	No
		2. Ongoing, comprehensive newcomer-specific communications strategy	COMM S	2026	No
		3. Deepen newcomer engagement through trusted channels.	COMM S	2026	No
<b>Small Business and Employment Supports</b>	Support newcomer economic integration through job access, entrepreneurship capacity building, streamlined business processes, and opportunities to engage with the City.	4. Paid City of Kitchener internship program for newcomers	HR	2027	Yes
		5. Temporary FTE (18 months), Small Business Centre	EC DEV	2027/ 2028	Yes
		6. Increased City participation in job fairs	HR	2026	No
		7. City partnership with Workplace and Immigrant Network (WIN) for targeted employment outreach	HR	2027	No
<b>Community Belonging and Connections</b>	Build a welcoming and connected community by fostering opportunities for engagement, advancing outreach efforts, and ensuring full implementation of supportive policies.	8. Increased City participation in Immigration Partnership's "Welcoming Week" for newcomers	HR	2026	No
		9. Consistent City representation on Immigration Partnership Steering Groups	REDI	2026	No
		10. Targeted information & awareness of the City's Access	HR/NPS	2026	No

Theme	Objective	Actions	Lead Team	Timing	Financial Resourcing ?
		Without Fear policy for newcomers			
		11. Increased community centre signage targeting newcomers.	NPS	2026	No
<b>Targeted Supports for Newcomers</b>	Expand targeted newcomer supports by fostering civic engagement, facilitating mentorship, and delivering tailored education programs for varied newcomer groups.	12. Annual funding for Immigration Partnership Waterloo Region (IPWR) to support Kitchener newcomers.	REDI	2026	Yes
		13. Continued proactive housing and bylaws education program mainly targeted to diverse newcomer groups including international students.	BYLAW	2026	No
		14. Youth leadership and civic engagement program/opportunities for newcomer youth	PRS	2027	No
		15. City participation in existing mentorship program for newcomer women (KWMC)	HR	2028	No
<b>Equipping Team Kitchener</b>	Equip Team Kitchener to better support newcomers through staff training, an internal knowledge base, and consistent communications.	16. Create newcomer-focused information package for internal teams across the City to use when developing strategies/action plans	CSD	2026	No
		17. Create newcomer community engagement guidelines.	COMM S	2027	No
		18. Build awareness with staff on use of newcomer	EC DEV	2027	No

Theme	Objective	Actions	Lead Team	Timing	Financial Resourcing ?
		businesses for small procurements (>40K)			
		19. Monitoring & reporting on implementation of all actions of the Newcomer Strategy	REDI	2026	No

### Monitoring and Evaluation Plan

The City’s Reconciliation, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (REDI) division will be responsible for the oversight and tracking of the implementation process for the Municipal Newcomer Strategy. Staff will report back to Council at the end of the strategy’s cycle to ensure accountability and continuous improvement.

### Partnerships and Community Alignment

The City recognizes and deeply values the work already being done by local community organizations, cultural associations, faith groups, and regional partners to support newcomers. This strategy is designed to **complement—not duplicate—their efforts**, and to strengthen alignment across initiatives, programs, and resources. Collaboration remains essential to achieving meaningful and lasting impact. As the City advances this strategy, it will continue to work closely with the community to respond to evolving newcomer needs and opportunities.

### Our Commitment Moving Forward

The Municipal Newcomer Strategy (2026–2028) reflects the City of Kitchener’s commitment to fostering a caring city where newcomers feel welcomed, included, and supported to succeed. Over the next three years, the City will:

- Advance the actions outlined in this strategy
- Strengthen internal capacity to better serve newcomers
- Implement targeted actions across all five themes to meet emerging newcomer needs.

While municipal jurisdiction is limited, the City plays an important role in shaping a welcoming environment and improving access to local programs, services, and opportunities.

### Looking Ahead

Newcomers contribute to Kitchener’s economic vitality, cultural richness, and community life. As immigration continues to shape the city’s future, the Municipal Newcomer Strategy provides a clear pathway for building a more connected and thriving community. Together, with residents, partners, and City staff we can ensure Kitchener remains a place where **newcomers and long-time residents thrive, together.**