



# The Multicultural Association of Pictou County (MAPC) Case-Study

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## 1. Introduction: MAPC's Role in Building Community

For over 15 years, the Multicultural Association of Pictou County (MAPC) has been a key player in creating a more inclusive, welcoming environment for newcomers and long-standing residents alike in Pictou County, Nova Scotia. At its heart, MAPC is a community-driven, volunteer-led organization that strives to foster connections between individuals from different cultural backgrounds through social, cultural, and educational initiatives. Although completely volunteer-run, MAPC has had a vast, noticeable presence and impact in the Pictou County community.

MAPC's uniqueness lies in its Board, which is composed of both long-time residents and newcomers to Pictou County. This diversity in leadership allows MAPC to reflect the needs and experiences of the entire community, ensuring that the organization is not exclusively focused on newcomers, but instead works to celebrate and integrate the rich cultural diversity of everyone who calls Pictou County home. "We've always tried to bring everyone together—those who have lived here for generations and those who are just arriving. That's what makes MAPC so different," explained one Board member.

Becky Cowen, Director of Immigration and Community Integration at the Pictou County Partnership, echoed this sentiment: "MAPC isn't just about services for newcomers—it's about creating spaces where people can come together and feel like they belong, regardless of how long they've been here. They focus on fostering relationships, which is the key to integration."

## 2. Values that Drive MAPC

MAPC's approach to multiculturalism is guided by several core values that shape its programs and initiatives. These values are the foundation of the organization's work in Pictou County and help ensure that its efforts create lasting change in the community.

### Inclusivity

At its core, MAPC is about inclusivity. The organization believes that for a community to thrive, everyone—regardless of their background—must feel valued and included. This commitment to inclusivity is reflected in everything MAPC does, from Fusion Festival to its cultural potlucks to its educational work. Unlike organizations that focus solely on providing services to newcomers, MAPC strives to create a community where both newcomers and long-time residents get to create a sense of belonging, together.



*Recreational activities from snowshoeing to cricket, build a sense of community and cross-cultural understanding.*

A Board member shared, “We’ve always emphasized that MAPC is for everyone, not just for newcomers. That’s why we have long-time residents on our Board, and why we make sure our programs cater to the whole community.”

This value of inclusivity also extends to the partnerships MAPC has built with other organizations. By collaborating with schools, businesses, Municipalities and local institutions, MAPC is able to reach a broader audience and ensure that inclusivity is woven into the fabric of the entire community. These partnerships have allowed MAPC to offer services and programs that meet the diverse needs of Pictou County’s growing population.

### Celebrations of Diversity, Multiple Cultural Traditions

Another important value that drives MAPC's work is the celebration of diversity. MAPC sees cultural diversity not as something to be managed or tolerated, but as something to be celebrated and embraced. This belief is most visible in MAPC's flagship event, the Fusion Festival, which brings together people from all cultural backgrounds to share food, music, cultures, and traditions.

“The Fusion Festival is a celebration of everything that makes Pictou County unique,” said one Board member. “It’s an opportunity for people to express pride in their heritage and for others to learn about the different cultures that make up our community.”



*Free potluck dinners and multicultural food fairs bring people together in a celebratory atmosphere of mutual learning. They build a sense of pride and belonging.*



But MAPC's celebration of diversity goes beyond the Fusion Festival. Throughout the year, MAPC hosts many more intimate events like potlucks and cultural exchange days, and even an evening playing cricket that provide ongoing opportunities for people to share their traditions and learn from one another. These events help create a culture of respect and understanding, where differences are not only acknowledged but celebrated.

### Fostering Belonging

Another core value that drives MAPC's work is the belief that true integration goes beyond providing services—it's about fostering a sense of belonging by taking a long-lasting relational approach. While many organizations focus on helping newcomers find housing or employment, MAPC understands that long-term success in settlement requires more than meeting those basic needs. It requires creating spaces where people can feel connected and part of the community.

"Belonging is essential," said a Board member. "You can have a job and a house, but if you don't feel like you belong, it's hard to stay and drop roots in the community. That's why we focus on creating spaces where people can build friendships and feel a part of the community."

MAPC's more recent Conversation Circles are a perfect example of how the organization fosters belonging. While these weekly gatherings provide an opportunity for newcomers to practice their English, they are also about forming those social connections. The informal setting allows newcomers to meet long-time residents, share respective experiences, and build lasting friendships. By helping newcomers feel more connected to their community, MAPC ensures that they are more likely to stay in Pictou County long-term.

### Genuine Community Engagement, Empowerment

One more guiding value of MAPC is community empowerment, helping people develop a sense of agency. MAPC's grassroots approach empowers individuals to take an active role in shaping the community. The organization provides a platform for newcomers to share their cultural traditions,



*MAPC volunteers promote understanding through multicultural presentations at elementary schools and with community groups.*

art, food and make meaningful contributions to the broader community. This empowerment is evident in MAPC's volunteer-driven model, where newcomers become an integral part of shaping and managing the events. MAPC's potlucks are organised collaboratively, everyone chipping in, bringing their food traditions and cultures, co-managing the events. In everything MAPC does, everyone feels engaged, an integral part of it.

A Board member shared, "We've always believed that the people should be the ones driving MAPC's work. It's not about providing services—it's about creating those opportunities to co-create the kind of community they want to live in."

This value of empowerment also extends to MAPC's subtle work in promoting multicultural understanding. Regularly called on to represent the voices of newcomers in local policy discussions, MAPC ensures that their needs and concerns are heard at the municipal level. While

MAPC consciously does not engage in formal advocacy, its informal role in framing those conversations as a community advocate is a significant influence is shaping the dialogues and local decision-making.

### Education, Awareness, Building Multi-cultural Sensibilities

Education and awareness raising are implicit in MAPC's mission of fostering inclusivity and respect for diversity. Through workshops, public awareness campaigns, and partnerships with local schools, MAPC has engaged in building deeper awareness in the broader community about the importance of cultural understanding. This educational aspect, though less prominent, has been an important element of MAPC's presence in a rural area like Pictou County, where exposure to different cultures can be rather limited.

"Education is indeed key," said Nancy Dicks, Mayor of New Glasgow. "MAPC has done a tremendous job of raising awareness about the importance of diversity. They help people see the value of multiculturalism, not just in economic terms but in social and cultural terms as well."

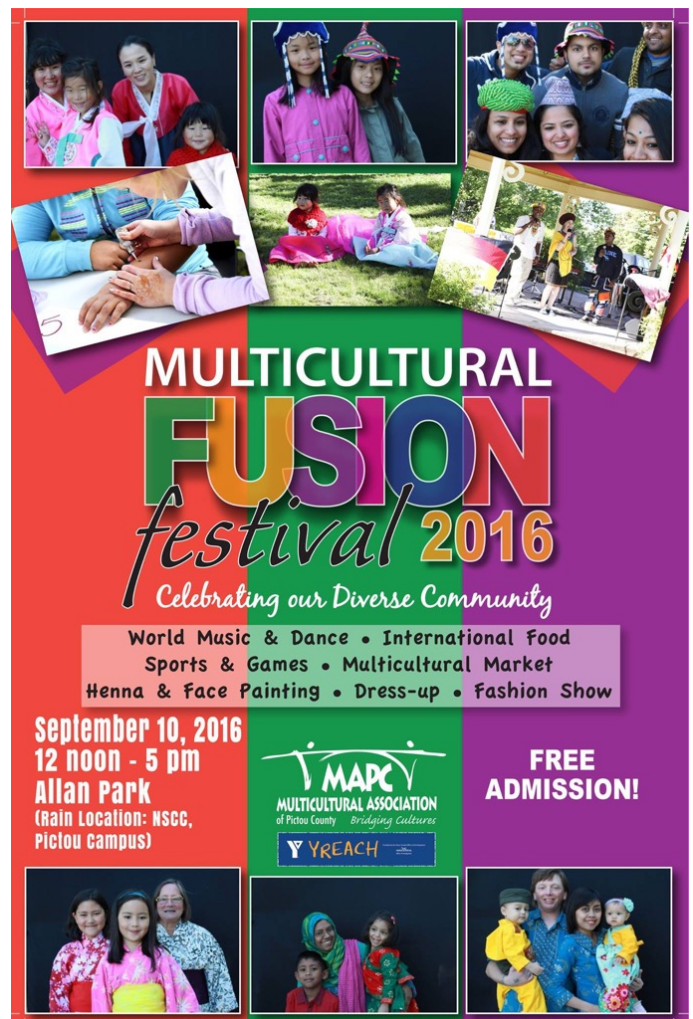
MAPC's cultural competency and awareness sessions are one of the ways the organization promotes education. These sessions are offered to schools, and other public service organisations to help them understand how to create more inclusive spaces and environments. These sessions provide practical tools for engaging with people from different cultural backgrounds and emphasize the importance of fostering an inclusive community where everyone feels valued.

## 3. Fusion Festival, MAPC's Signature Event

The Fusion Festival is perhaps the most visible example of MAPC's presence and commitment to celebrating cultural diversity. Held annually, the festival has grown into one of the largest and most anticipated events in Pictou County, attracting hundreds of participants each year. The festival is a vibrant celebration of the region's cultural richness,

featuring performances, music, food stalls, and cultural displays from around the world.

But the Fusion Festival is about more than just entertainment. It serves as an important, informal space for fostering connections and conversations among newcomers and long-time residents. This festival profiles many diverse cultural traditions – music, dances, traditional fashion, food, and in that process, many conversations and laughs, helping break down stereotypes and build mutual respect and multi-cultural sensibilities. Many community organizations join this festival every year to share information about their work and services at exhibition booths, whether it is a health support group or a youth organization.



*The Fusion Festival has been a signature event for over ten years – recently attracting 1,000 people to celebrate multiculturalism*



## Bringing Cultures Together Through Music

Janet, a music teacher by profession, has been a key figure at MAPC for over a decade, volunteering her time and passion to create a vibrant and welcoming community. Initially, she was asked to help out, but after meeting the “most marvelous people,” she became an integral part of MAPC. Janet leads the music and entertainment part of the Fusion Festival, working with newcomers and residents alike to celebrate diverse music traditions and cultures.

10 years back, the musical performances at Fusion festival were rather limited, often built around traditional Scottish dance and music. As the community grew more diverse, Janet noticed that many of the children from newcomer families often didn’t want to perform the traditional music of their own heritage. “They wanted to be part of the new home,” she says, recalling how they initially gravitated toward local, popular songs. But with gentle encouragement, Janet began to persuade them to embrace their roots. “I would say, ‘You can sing this popular song, but will you sing this traditional song too?’” Often, then the parents would get involved as well, supporting the children to engage with their cultural heritage.

This evolution has made the Fusion Festival a beautiful reflection and microcosm of the community’s diversity. Janet proudly explains, “This year, for the first time, initially we didn’t have a single Scottish act. Instead, we had Colombians, Africans, Ukrainians— rather an embarrassment of riches (chuckles). And we indeed did then invite our highland performers.” It is a testament to how MAPC had grown into a space where cultures could not only coexist but thrive together, showcasing a blend of traditional and modern music that reflected both where people came from and where they are now.

For Janet, the role of music at MAPC is about more than entertainment—it’s about helping newcomers find a sense of belonging. “Music and dance are so important,” she says. “It allows people to celebrate their culture from home.” At the Fusion Festival, the performances don’t just entertain; they foster connections. As newcomers share their songs and dances, they begin to feel like part of the community, see their identity acknowledged. Janet has seen the joy that comes when children and their parents proudly perform their cultural songs. “It’s a beautiful way for them to feel proud of where they come from, while also feeling a part of this community.”

Janet’s personal experience as a newcomer motivates much of her work with MAPC. Though she moved to the town in 1980 from Boston, Massachusetts, blended well with her white skin and spoke English fluently, she recalls feeling a deep sense of isolation when she first arrived. “It took me two years to make friends,” she says, explaining that small towns can be tough to break into. “People here had made their friends when they were five years old, and they didn’t feel like they needed any more.” This sense of loneliness made Janet empathize with the newcomers MAPC serves—especially those who arrive without speaking the language or understanding the local culture. “I always thought, if it was that hard for me, how much harder must it be for those who don’t speak the language?”

This empathy drives Janet’s work at MAPC. “When I meet people who say they don’t have friends, I always end up asking, ‘Have you heard of MAPC?’” Janet sees MAPC as a crucial lifeline for newcomers. MAPC not only brings together diverse cultures but also creates lasting bonds between newcomers and long-time residents. As Janet summed up, “We’re still learning, but through music, we’re bringing people together and making them feel like they belong.”



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A Board member explained, “The Fusion Festival is a space where people come together, not just to enjoy the performances or food, but to learn from and with each other. It’s about breaking down barriers and building connections.”

For many newcomers, the Fusion Festival is their first opportunity to share their culture with the wider community, which can be a source of pride and belonging. It also serves as a space where long-time residents can experience new cultures and develop a greater appreciation for the diversity that newcomers bring to Pictou County.

## **4. MAPC’s Expanding Role in Education and Advocacy**

In recent years, MAPC has expanded its role beyond cultural celebrations to weave-in elements of education within their mandate, but all done by volunteering their time. MAPC recognizes that fostering a welcoming community requires more than just social events—it requires gently changing mindsets and promoting understanding of the other. To achieve this, MAPC has developed a series of educational programs aimed at increasing cultural awareness and fostering inclusivity in schools, workplaces, and public services.

MAPC’s cultural competency workshops are designed to help participants understand the value of diversity and teach them how to engage respectfully with people from different cultural backgrounds. These workshops cover a wide range of topics, including cultural differences, communication styles, and creating inclusive spaces. The goal is to equip participants with the tools they need to foster a more inclusive community.

Nancy reflected on the importance of these educational programs: “What MAPC is doing with their workshops is so important. It’s not just about welcoming newcomers in ‘our’ community—it’s about changing how we think about diversity as a community.” In addition to its educational work, Nancy believes that MAPC has the potential to become a more active advocate for newcomers, not only promote but protect their sense of belonging. While

MAPC has not engaged in advocacy formally, it often is a go-to organisation to represent the voices of newcomers in discussions with local governments and other service providers. MAPC promotes a vision of harmony within the community, so chooses not to engage in potentially divisive or overtly political issues but rather, welcomes multiple perspectives in the spirit of learning and sharing. MAPC’s Board members have played a key role in advocating for more inclusive policies and services that meet the needs of newcomers. In doing so, MAPC helps ensure that Pictou County is a place where everyone, regardless of their background, can thrive.

## **5. Collaborative Spirit: Building Stronger Partnerships**

MAPC’s successes seem largely due to its ability to build strong, collaborative relationships with many local institutions, businesses, and service providers. By working together with others, MAPC has been able to expand its reach and organise a more comprehensive range of programs and activities. This collaborative approach has been a critical factor in fostering the sense inclusivity among both the new and the long-time residents of Pictou County.

One of the important partnerships MAPC has developed is with the local library, which provides a central hub for many of MAPC’s activities. The library hosts conversation circles, cultural programming, and workshops, making it a central point of meeting and connections for newcomers. “The library is where a lot of newcomers first encounter MAPC,” said a Board member. “It’s a welcoming space where people can come for information and stay for the community.”

MAPC has also partnered with local schools, offering workshops and presentations that promote cultural understanding among students, influencing their young minds. By working with educators, MAPC helps ensure that the future generation grows up with an appreciation for diversity, where students develop deeper awareness of growing diversity in their classrooms. These periodic sessions have

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become an essential part of MAPC's desire of creating a more inclusive and understanding community.

MAPC also works closely with the local businesses to promote workplace inclusion. By offering cultural competency training and helping businesses understand the needs of their diverse workforce, MAPC helps create more inclusive work environments where newcomers can thrive. These partnerships benefit both newcomers and local businesses, which gain access to a wider pool of talent.

Danny MacGillivray, Mayor of Stellarton, commented on the importance of these partnerships: "MAPC's work with businesses and schools is critical to creating an inclusive community. By working together, we can make sure that newcomers feel welcomed and supported in every aspect of life here."

## **6. MAPC's Success, and The Challenges that Success Brings**

While MAPC has made significant strides in promoting multiculturalism and inclusion in Pictou County, the organization faces several challenges as it looks to the future. One of the primary challenges is the complete reliance on its volunteers. With no paid staff, MAPC's programs and initiatives are entirely dependent on the dedication and time of its volunteers, most of whom balance their MAPC work with their full-time jobs.

A Board member explained, "We've always been a volunteer-driven organization, and that's something we're proud of. But if, and as we grow, we're realizing that we need more resources to keep up with the demands."

MAPC is exploring ways to secure more consistent funding to support its activities, including the possibility of hiring part-time staff members. By formalizing certain aspects of its operations, MAPC hopes to expand its activities and sustain its growth, but is very keen in maintaining its grassroots, relational spirit.

Another opportunity for growth lies in strengthening and expanding MAPC's relationships with the Indigenous people of the land, Pictou First Nation community and the African Nova Scotian community of New Glasgow. While MAPC has made efforts to engage, MAPC members feel that there is still more work to be done. Groups from these communities have been involved in the Fusion Festival and MAPC members have attended events hosted by these communities. The Board recognizes the importance of building stronger relationships with these groups and ensuring their historical perspectives, values and traditions become an integral part of a truly inclusive Pictou County of the future.

A Board member reflected, "We've started building connections with Black and Indigenous communities, but there's more we can do. It's important that everyone feels included in the work we're doing."

MAPC also sees potential in expanding its education and advocacy efforts. As demand for cultural competency training grows, MAPC is exploring ways to offer more workshops and presentations to businesses, schools, and public institutions. One option for doing this could be to partner or collaborate with other historically marginalized groups in the area already doing this kind of work. By expanding its educational programs, MAPC hopes to play a larger role in shaping the future of inclusion in Pictou County.

## **7. MAPC as a Unique Go-To Organization in Pictou County**

What makes MAPC truly unique in Pictou County is not only its wide range of activities but also the way it is helping shape a new, emergent community. MAPC is increasingly becoming the go-to organization for schools, businesses, local governments, and other institutions seeking guidance on inclusion and multiculturalism. MAPC's approach goes beyond traditional ideas of "integrating" newcomers into the existing community—instead, it is actively creating a new, emergent kind of community, one

that reflects the cultural richness of all, both newcomers and long-time residents.

MAPC plays a crucial role in helping many newcomers “settle” by providing not just practical assistance but also emotional and social support, spaces for people to engage and connect, opportunities for their cultural and creative expression. It’s not just about finding a job or a house—it’s about creating that sense of belonging, a sense of a new home in Pictou County. A Board member described MAPC’s unique role: “We help newcomers feel at home, not by making them fit into an existing mold, but by allowing them to contribute to the creation of something new—a community that values everyone.”

MAPC’s ability to foster belonging and create a sense of home has made it an indispensable part of Pictou County, largely an informal, volunteer run organisation for the last 15 years that has created and left many footprints along the way. By emphasizing ‘fostering relationships’ over ‘offering services or helping in integration’, MAPC is creating a pathbreaking approach for multiculturalism—one that creates multiple informal spaces for celebrations, conversations, and in that spirit, empowers everyone to actively participate in the creation of their own community.

## 8. Conclusion: Celebrating Inclusion Through Community

MAPC’s journey has largely been one of celebration—celebrating many diverse cultures, experiences, and contributions of the people who call Pictou County home. Through its wide range of cultural events, some educational initiatives, and implicit advocacy efforts, MAPC has become a central actor in building a more inclusive community.

As MAPC continues to build on its successes, the possibilities for deepening its impact are endless, but those possibilities of growth also bring their own challenges for MAPC. With carefully designed growth pathways and the right support from government agencies, local businesses, and community members, MAPC can continue to foster a sense of belonging for everyone in Pictou County through partnerships and collaboration with a whole range of settlement services providers, remaining focussed on socio-cultural dimensions of settlement, helping create a community where diversity is celebrated, multi-cultural sensibilities get built over time, and inclusion is lived every day.

A Board member summarized the heart of MAPC’s mission: “MAPC isn’t just an organization—we’re a community. And our goal is to make sure that everyone, regardless of where they come from, feels like they belong here in Pictou County.”

