

# Multicultural Council of Saskatchewan

## 2018 Board of Director Nominees and Biographies

As of May 23, 2018



# MCoS 2018 Board Nominations and Bios

These are the nominees and bios we have received as of May 23, 2018.

Name of Nominee: **Neeraj Saroj**

Candidate For: **President**

Residence: Regina

## Experience and Achievements

Neeraj was born and raised in northern India- almost half the globe away from Regina. He met his wife when they were in Kindergarten. Seema works with the Ministry of Education, and their son, Arnav, is completing his final year of engineering at the University of Waterloo. Neeraj loves to walk and drive around.

As an engineering student, Neeraj organized several exhibitions of his caricatures and cartoons on the topic of Peace and Brotherhood in the terrorism-affected northern regions of India. These exhibitions went to schools, universities and youth centres in the troubled region. He won a national level award, and was selected as a youth artist for a prestigious National Artists' Camp in Delhi, India, where his cartoon on India-Pakistan Peace was appreciated by Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi.

Neeraj worked in the marketing, sales and operations departments in the automotive, heavy equipment, and construction industry in India. The marketing jobs took Neeraj into almost every nook of India. Neeraj held senior positions in automotive marketing companies (Castrol BP and Mahindra) during the time when India opened its doors to the international companies and moved from a closed economy to a vibrant and competitive global economy. Neeraj launched and managed products and distribution channels in the fast growing Indian market, including the Indian launch of Case New Holland, a Fiat group company.

Fascinated by the stories of prairie pioneer successes, glossy pictures of big Case equipment, and never ending farms, and with a desire 'to do something adventurous', Neeraj, along with his wife and son arrived in Toronto in 2005 to start a new life. It provided cross-cultural opportunities such as learning to walk on icy roads, discovering restaurants serving vegetarian meals in the prairie interiors, and accepting funny pronunciations of his name.

His previous work resulted in a Canadian job that allowed him to travel extensively in Western Canada and various equipment manufacturing sites in the US and Europe for six years. He made lifelong relationships with ranchers, farmers and business communities. Neeraj got his PEng (professional engineer) status while working at Case. To achieve his lifelong desire to complete his MBA, Neeraj left Case New Holland and joined the Roadways Department of the City of Regina as a Senior Engineer, and University of Regina as a research resource in the engineering department.

Currently, Neeraj is the vice-president of Multicultural Council of Saskatchewan (MCoS), having served since 2013, with a focus on governance and strategic direction. He is a past executive board member of the India Canada Association of Saskatchewan and was the Indian Ambassador at Mosaic for four years. He is on the RCMP Commanding Officer's diversity advisory committee.

Name of Nominee: **Meka Okochi**

Candidate For: **Vice President**

Residence: Regina

### **Experience and Achievements**

Meka is a professional engineer with extensive senior leadership experience in strategy execution, business development and project management. He has worked in the oil and gas, renewable energy, municipal infrastructure and economic development sectors. He currently oversees the portfolio and project management office at the Co-op Refinery Complex.

Meka has studied and lived around the world, in countries spanning Africa, Asia, Europe, North America and Australia.

Meka is very active in his local community and has served on numerous boards and committees. He currently serves as the Treasurer of MCoS and is a member of the Governance Committee. He has served as MCoS Director since 2013. He also sits on the Board of the Saskatchewan Soccer Association. He was a candidate for Mayor of Regina in the 2012 civic elections. In 2013, he was recognized as one of 40 individuals under the age of 40 shaping the future of Saskatchewan.

Meka holds a Master's in Environmentally Sustainable Process Technology from Chalmers University of Technology in Sweden and a Ph.D. degree in Environmental Systems Engineering from the University of Regina, Canada.

He is happily married to Funke, his college sweetheart and friend of two decades, and together, they enjoy traveling the world.

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Name of Nominee: **Bob Lesperance**

Candidate For: **Treasure**

Residence: Findlater

### **Experience and Achievements**

Bob self-declares as an Aboriginal person. He was raised on the Métis farm in Lebret, Saskatchewan where his family was part of the management team running the community. When he lived there, the Métis culture was strong and vibrant and he experienced Métis culture as part of his everyday life. Today, Bob follows traditional teachings and has connections with many Aboriginal communities throughout Saskatchewan.

He has been in sales and servicing businesses, schools, clubs and organizations for over 20 years and has been in practically every small town and reserve in Saskatchewan at one time or another. Bob is currently serving his third term as Mayor of his local community of Findlater. He has also spent many years volunteering with numerous organizations including Big Brothers, Kinsmen and on the organizing committee for Telemiracle which is one of the largest fundraisers in Saskatchewan. In 2016, Bob was elected to the Board of Directors of

MCoS and has since served as Director-at-Large. He also sits on several MCoS committees including the Finance Committee, and Constitution and Bylaws Review Committee.

Bob and his wife Heather live on a small acreage between Regina and Saskatoon where they enjoy the wide open skies, visiting with neighbours, and tending their gardens. Bob loves to rebuild VW beetles and spends the summer travelling to show his custom-built chopped VW rat rod. He and his family organize and host the annual summer Findlater VW Show and Shine.

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Name of Nominee: **Cosanna Preston-Igedia**

Candidate For: **Secretary**

Residence: Regina

### **Experience and Achievements**

Cosanna Preston-Igedia moved back to Saskatchewan in 2014 after living outside the province for 12 years and she currently works for the provincial government as a leader in the government's digital transition. Since moving back, Cosanna has been astounded by the changes in the province's diversity and sought an outlet to support the province's growth in multiculturalism to ensure it continues to evolve as our strength and to support our population through this incredible transition.

Cosanna's journey with promoting multiculturalism and inclusive communities is multifaceted. It spreads across three continents and four countries she called home: Canada, Mexico, the United Kingdom and Nigeria. It's based in dance, academia, organizing and her professional experiences.

Dance was one of her first vehicles to explore other cultures and it is one she continues to cherish today. Whether it was her childhood and teen years as a highland dancer (Scotland), her university days studying Ewe (Ghana) and Gumboots (South Africa/Zimbabwe) dance, or studying Soli (Guinea) and Afrobeat (Nigeria) throughout her travels, she has always been struck by the power of dance to tell and retain stories and experiences of a culture. Returning to Regina, she puts this experience to work co-founding AfroSepo, a dance troupe bringing diverse forms of African dance to Saskatchewan audiences, and has started studying Flamenco, a powerful tradition from Spain that, like Gumboots, tells the stories of oppression, resistance and resilience.

As an academic, both as an undergrad at the University of Alberta (political science) and as a masters student at the University of Oxford (African studies), she focused on government-community communication and engagement. Cosanna learned how important it is for groups to speak with each other, rather than past each other, when attempting to drive change through a community.

As an activist, organizer and writer Cosanna has striven to tackle issues of marginalization and voicelessness. At the University of Alberta, she co-founded a collective to unite various campus social justice groups and co-founded the university's chapter of Journalists for Human Rights. She spent time supporting the Lubicon Cree through advocacy and study; and currently serves as a board member with Education as a Vaccine, a Nigerian organization focused on youth public health issues and access.

Finally, as a professional, Cosanna continue to work to build stronger avenues for community communication. In Oxford, she led an NGO focused on building inclusive communities; Oxford is one of the most diverse cities in England with extremely varied experiences of privilege and inclusion. In Lagos, as a public relations professional, she was a key contributor to a city-wide conversation and campaign about identity. And in her current role as a director with the digital strategy team of the provincial government, she is working to build room for deepened and expanded citizen-government engagement in the digital era.

Cosanna has served on the MCoS' Board of Directors since 2017 and sees it as an opportunity for her to return to her community organizing roots to support the real conversations we need to have in Saskatchewan to strengthen our multiculturalism, and ultimately our province.

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Name of Nominee: **Muna De Ciman**

Candidate For: **Member at large**

Residence: Regina

### **Experience and Achievements**

Promoting multiculturalism is Muna's passion. She contributes to the social well-being of her communities through multicultural activities at the local, provincial and national levels. Since her family immigrated to Canada, they have made Regina their home for 23 years.

Known as "Aunty Muna" in the African community in Regina, she supports newcomers to settle meaningfully, get involved in volunteer activities and to contribute to the development of the province. In June 2015, Muna was featured in the Leader Post and Star Phoenix weekly magazines, QC and Bridges respectively, in an article titled "We All Need an Aunty Muna".

She strives to be a bridge builder in the community, including connecting community organizations with MCoS, where she has served as a board member since 2017. She works with schools in and around Regina to implement multicultural activities, including anti-racism and cross-cultural learning. The Igbo Cultural Association of Saskatchewan recognized Muna's work in the community and, in 2015, she was awarded the Bridge Builders Leadership Award for Excellence in community service in recognition of her outstanding service and dedication to the advancement of various peoples and communities. In May of 2001, Muna was awarded the Building a Better Community Award from the City of Regina. In 2013, Muna was awarded a service award by Daughters of Africa International Inc. for her tireless work in the African Canadian community. Muna was the 2012 recipient of the Betty Szuchewycz Multicultural Award in recognition of her outstanding contribution to multiculturalism in Saskatchewan.

Through MCoS, Muna has been the guest speaker at March 21 events in Melfort and Weyburn for the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. She is also involved with the Steering Community of the City of Regina Truth and Reconciliation Commission. She works closely with Sisters in Spirit in advocating for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) to plan and implement the annual walk and feast held in October at the First Nations University of Canada. Muna is a leader with social justice campaigns that focus on immigration rights to raise awareness through volunteer-driven events.

Muna has a master's degree in social work from the University of Regina and a diploma certificate in practical nursing from Saskatchewan Polytechnic. She works at Paul Dojack

Youth Center with 12-18 year olds who have come in contact with the justice system. Muna is a tireless leader in her union, resulting in the 2016 Bread and Roses Award in recognition of promoting equality, justice and solidarity within the labour movement. She demonstrates her commitment to better our community each day.

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Name of Nominee: **Icasiana De Gala**

Candidate For: **Member at large**

Residence: Swift Current

### **Experience and Achievements**

Icasiana arrived in Canada with her six children in November 2009 to join her husband who had been working in Canada for two years. She left behind her legal practice in the Philippines in order for her family to be together.

Icasiana became a lawyer in 1994, and she immediately began working for a Legal Resource NGO joining the Labor Unit. She handled cases that involved labor disputes, safety issues, domestic violence and other crimes against women, and other cases that involved the protection of the rights of the marginalized sectors. Her position also involved providing paralegal education and advocacy work.

Several years before coming to Canada, she started her own law practice specializing in Corporate Social Responsibility particularly in the garment industry. This work entailed working with employers and international brands in order to advocate for better working conditions for garment workers. Her work took her not only to the different factories in the Philippines, but also in Cambodia and Vietnam.

When she arrived in Canada, Icasiana wanted to wait for the right opportunity, a job that would complement her experience as an advocate for others. She believed that her first job in Canada had the power to define her. First, she accepted the position of Community Connection Program Coordinator for the city of Swift Current. After that, she embraced the role of interim Executive Director (ED) of the Southwest Newcomer Welcome Centre in February 2011, and eventually became the permanent ED.

Icasiana believes that her work at the Welcome Centre is a continuation of her advocacy work as a lawyer, and her legal background often comes in handy when dealing with certain issues. Her work in the field of Human Rights has more than prepared her for her present work as Executive Director of the Welcome Centre, dealing with issues of immigrants, and working with people from different cultures. She believes that to be able to work well with a diverse population, one must start with respecting their basic Human Rights.

While working at the City, she pioneered two special projects. Let's Play our Game is an opportunity for newcomer children to learn and play popular Canadian games such as soccer, curling, skating, hockey, and gain new friends. Groovin' in the Park, was inspired by women gathering in parks to exercise together in Cambodia and Vietnam. The City hires professional instructors for this program that targets women who are not able to afford the cost of attending a gym. Before joining the Welcome Centre, she coordinated the multicultural event in September 2010. It was a huge success with participation from different cultures and very good attendance.

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Under Icasiana's leadership, the Welcome Centre helped organize several successful community-based events: a multicultural event with the Lyric Theatre in 2011; the Diversity Works event in 2011 attended by over 300 participants where the entire newcomer community was welcomed by the city and other organizations; Arrêt/Stop Racism youth leadership workshop facilitated by MCoS in Swift Current in 2014 and annually since; numerous activities during Culture Days; socials and thanksgiving events where newcomers and established community members get the chance to meet and know each other's culture; the Southwest CultureFest event over the summer of 2017 for Canada 150; special projects during special events such as International Women's Day and March 21: International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination; cultural performances together with the Southwest Multicultural association; and a variety of programs that promote diversity and help newcomers settle in their community.

In her eighth year as ED of the Welcome Centre, Icasiana has regularly presented before the different organizations within the southwest region on the topic of diversity, cultural awareness, and settlement. She is always looking for programs that promote not just the Welcome Centre's mission and vision, but also that of MCoS.

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Name of Nominee: **Marie Galophe**

Candidate For: **Member at large**

Residence: Regina

### **Experience and Achievements**

Marie was born in the south of France. She holds a Master's Degree in Literature from La Sorbonne, Paris. She immigrated to Canada to study at McGill University, Montreal. Attracted by Ontario's cultural diversity, she has moved to Ottawa the year later to complete a Ph.D. in French Creative Writing at the University of Ottawa. After teaching for one year as a part-time faculty at the University of Ottawa, she taught in India at Miri Piri Academy, an international boarding school run by an American NGO. The school welcomes students from 19 nationalities from all walks of life and offers a unique multicultural experience. These three years in India, 15 kilometers away from Pakistan, gave her a keen sense that positive cross-cultural relations emanate through intercultural communication.

In Saskatchewan since 2016, she is coordinator of the Francophone Immigration Network. Marie made sure to develop partnerships with the Multicultural Council of Saskatchewan (MCoS) and other anglophone organizations to ensure contact and understanding of Saskatchewan linguistic diversity. From July 2017 to March 2018, seven partnerships were established, including with Global Gathering Place, Heritage Festival of Saskatoon, Immigrant Women of Saskatoon (IWS), MCoS, Regina Region Local Immigration Partnership (RRLIP), Saskatchewan Association of Immigrant Settlement and Integration Agencies (SAISIA), and Saskatoon Open Door Society (SODS). Through those partnerships, Marie aims to capitalize on the anglophone majority work and expertise and contribute to the betterment of Francophone immigration in Canada.

Marie helped to coordinate the translation of MCoS' Welcoming and Inclusive Communities toolkit. Marie shared the toolkit with an explanatory notice of the project and on the RIF-SK web site, to all 13 RIF coordinators across Canada and the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne (FCFA), as well as on RadioCanada. Marie conceived, proposed and

coordinated the bilingual Espace Immigration area at the 2018 Heritage Festival of Saskatoon. She sits on SAISIA Francophone Engagement Committee and helped organize the update of the four Settlement Services Maps to include a Francophone lens.

Marie is a feminist, a Western Sikh, an international traveler and advocate of social diversity. Locally, she was a board member of Regina Food for Learning (2016-17), a volunteer tutor for French and English at the Regina Public Library (RPL) (2016-17) and a volunteer at Mosaic Francophone Pavilion (June 2017). Marie also sits on the RRLIP Partnership Council and SAISIA Professional Development Advisory Committee as well as participated in the Saskatoon LIP ethnocultural Forum (2018) and Regina Multicultural Council educational training of “Building Resilient Community, Working with Muslim Clients.” Her professional and personal path is a living example of Saskatchewan motto.

Having a keen interest in communication and human interactions, she has been promoting Saskatchewan Francophone community through various settings: conferences, newspapers articles, blog entries, activities. She is a writer, an associate translator for the Association of Translators and Interpreters of Saskatchewan (ATIS), a public library user, a reader, and an overall happy person.

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Name of Nominee: **Jaspal Gill**  
Candidate For: **Member at large**  
Residence: Prince Albert

### **Experience and Achievements**

Jaspal was born and brought up in India, where people believe in the adage “unity in diversity”, as it truly is a land where all cultures are welcome, all festivals are celebrated, and all communities have a home. This is the message she carries along everywhere she goes, and this is the essence, which she hopes to bring into the MCoS ethos. At the root of MCoS, Jaspal believes exists an innate respect for multiculturalism and global fusion.

Jaspal moved to Hong Kong with her husband in 1997, and then eventually moved to Canada in 2002. She moved to Saskatchewan from Ontario in summer 2016, decided to stay and make the province her home.

Jaspal firmly believes that the different perspectives she brings to the table, due to her varied backgrounds and exposure to different cultures, augur very well for the promotion of cultural diversity among Saskatchewan residents. Jaspal has had the opportunity to attend school with and work professionally with people from a variety of backgrounds in India, Hong Kong, and Canada. She has over the years been successful in gaining a significant body of experience as a volunteer in Ontario and Saskatchewan and the experience has given her a larger “community view” that she wishes to utilize in her work with MCoS. She has been volunteering at the Regina Public Library and at other local events and programs since 2016. She has also volunteered with immigrants and youth in Ontario organizations, including Halton Multicultural Council and Newcomer Centers. This is what she feels will help her in contributing positively and adding value to the promotion of positive cross-cultural relations and multicultural development in Saskatchewan.

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Because of her love for academics, Jaspal never stopped her educational pursuits, and continued to study while working in Hong Kong and Canada. She had completed her law study while in India and worked on immigration matters in Hong Kong. After coming to Canada, she took a short break from studies while working in administration for various companies and then completed her legal papers and courses to qualify as a lawyer. She completed her one year of articling as a student-at-law in September 2017 and she currently works as an Associate Lawyer with a law firm in Prince Albert.

Jaspal truly believes that her cosmopolitan background has not only made her a better student and a better lawyer, but also a better human being. She has a loving and supportive family, who all has a huge contribution in making her the person she is today and giving her the wings to fly. Here in Canada, she lives with her husband and her 19-year-old son, and she feels proud to say that she has extended family, friends, and loved ones in every place she has lived and visited over all these years.

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Name of Nominee: **Annette McGovern**

Candidate For: **Member at large**

Residence: North Battleford

### **Experience and Achievements**

Annette's family came to Canada from Slovenia in the 60's. The family eventually fell apart due to difficulties in attaining employment and language barriers. Two of the three children, including Annette, were taken away and adopted out to Canadian families. Annette was placed with a wonderful French family and was given all the opportunity in the world to become whatever she chose.

When Annette was 30 years old she found all the other siblings. Although Annette had a wonderful upbringing, she did lose that part of her culture which she had been born into. This is something Annette has tried to work at, but finds it very difficult and believes that the culture can never totally be regained. She does, however, consider herself to be of a French background now.

Annette graduated from SIAST with *Certified Dental Assisting* in the 80's and later attained *Business Management* and *Rehab Nursing*. Annette worked in the health field most of her professional life until approximately three years ago. As a health professional she saw many people experience difficulty in their lives due to language barriers and misunderstanding. Annette became an advocate for those people and soon found herself heading in another direction in life. It was at this time Annette chose to accept the position of Executive Director for Battlefords Immigration Resource Center (BIRC). Through this position, she had direct contact with immigrants and felt she was in a much better place to assist when needed.

Annette has been involved in many community issues, the largest issue being to connect the First Nations people with the newcomers. With the knowledge gained through attending MCoS training, the Immigration Centre has been able to hold information sessions, anti-racism events, multicultural facilitating and educate the community on this most important issue.