

ENVISIONING THE FUTURE OF THE IMMIGRANT-SERVING SECTOR: PROPOSED PILOT PROJECT BRIEFS

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INTRODUCTION

With support from the WES Mariam Assefa Fund, ACS-Metropolis Institute began leading a two-year national action research project entitled *Envisioning the Future of the Immigrant-Serving Sector*. In January 2021 ACS-Metropolis began conducting nationwide research to discover how to strengthen the sector so that can be more responsive, collaborative, innovative and sustainable. We identified actionable solutions by engaging service providers, newcomers, policymakers, employers and other settlement sector stakeholders through a mixed-method research approach.

Many challenges, barriers and gaps were identified within the settlement sector through research and consultations. Surveys for settlement providers and newcomers, focus groups, and key informant interviews with experts in the field were conducted.

Through the research and consultations that were conducted with settlement provider and newcomer surveys, focus groups, and key informant interviews until January 2022, many challenges, barriers and gaps were identified within the settlement sector. These included knowledge sharing, capacity, funding, as well as innovation. While the pandemic has presented a multitude of challenges to the settlement sector, it has also highlighted areas and opportunities for improvement.

Through ACS-Metropolis Institute's research, our team has composed the following pilot briefs we recommend to alleviate core sectoral challenges. These potential solutions were discussed with stakeholders working in settlement, technology, employment, social finance, post-secondary institutions, and IRCC. The broad themes of the proposed pilot solutions involve technological innovation, facilitating knowledge sharing, enhancing communication capacity with newcomer groups, reimagining how we serve temporary residents, facilitating employer education, entrepreneurship and employment. ACS-Metropolis Institute encourages research organizations, settlement practitioners and umbrella organizations, non-profits, as well as any newcomer-facing organizations to overview these pilot initiatives and implement those best suited to individual need and capacity.



PROPOSED PILOTS

1. Conduct an analysis of best practices in supporting clients who are not traditionally eligible for IRCC funded settlement services.

Examples of clients include refugee claimants, temporary workers, international students, undocumented workers and others.

Through identifying best practices in supporting clients who are not eligible for IRCC funded settlement services, this pilot will conduct an analysis of the best practices in determining which strategies can be best applied and replicated among a diverse group of service providing organizations. Practices would be documented by creating a best practices repository to be shared with the sector through umbrella organizations, networking events, and social media sharing platforms. Examples of practices would address gaps in service delivery for this cohort and identify funding mechanisms that support these activities. The most promising set of best practices for a specific cohort would be selected and applied to a settlement organization, along with predetermined standards for outcomes measurement, and subsequently evaluated and shared with the sector. By increasing settlement agencies' capacity to provide necessary support to temporary residents, international students, asylum seekers, undocumented workers and other newcomers ineligible for services, this pilot would contribute to the long-term economic, social and cultural integration of newcomers into Canada at a time when they need settlement services the most.



Demonstrated need and projected impact on the sector

As of May 2021, [the Canadian government began accepting permanent residency applications for 40,000 international students, 20,000 temporary workers in healthcare, as well as 30,000 temporary workers in other pre-approved essential services such as food production and agriculture.](#) The government has also increased the goal of accepting Afghan refugees to 40,000.

However, temporary workers, international students and refugee claimants are not eligible to receive settlement services by IRCC funded organizations as temporary residents, exposing a critical gap in supporting newcomer settlement. Many organizations still provide some services and programs to temporary residents through provincial and other funding streams, however funds often come with restrictions resulting in service gaps for these clients. By sharing the repository of best practices and pilot testing a scalable solution that has the lowest barriers for settlement agency adoption, the sector's capacity to support these clients would improve.

Partnerships:

- Settlement agencies who currently offer services to temporary residents
- External organizations who assist with supporting ineligible clients (post-secondary institutions, banks, funders, non-newcomer facing organizations)
- Worker unions
- Immigrant Worker Centres
- Provincial/territorial and municipal governments
- Newcomer led/Community based organizations
- International Student organizations



Implementation:

- Conduct environmental scan to identify best practices for service delivery for traditionally ineligible clients and document in the best practices repository
- Consult with ACS-Metropolis novel funding working group to establish repository of best practices for alternative funding sources
- Create partnerships between agencies/organizations who have a best practices model to collaborate and share knowledge
- Work with newcomer facing organizations and various international student associations
- Identify the most promising program to be scaled and tested & develop performance measurement metrics
- Partner with a settlement organization that is positioned to apply the set of practices to their services and test it
- Evaluate impact and outcomes

If interested in collaborating with the ACS-Metropolis novel funding working group, please contact Sarah Kooi at sarah.kooi@acs-aec.ca

2. Scale and tailor successful entrepreneurship programs for newcomers in rural and smaller urban centres.

By conducting a comprehensive review of existing entrepreneurship programming to identify best practices in supporting newcomer entrepreneurs, this pilot recommendation suggests developing a resource toolkit that is tailored for newcomers who are settling outside of CMAs to be delivered by service providing organizations. This resource would include information on the Canadian business financing ecosystem to facilitate and support newcomer entrepreneurs in learning about business incubators, venture capitalists, government financing programs, tax credits, wage subsidies and more.



Demonstrated need and projected impact on the sector

Newcomers make up over [25% of Small and Medium sized Enterprises in Canada](#), a proportion that has been rising over the past decade. Immigrant entrepreneurs also experienced [more adverse impacts of the pandemic upon their businesses](#), compared to Canadian-born owners. This pilot would address increased regionality within Canada as more and more newcomers move to rural and smaller urban centres due to high costs of living in larger cities, and are in turn helping grow regional economies. Entrepreneurial pathways in these regions tend to be [driven by opportunity versus necessity](#), due to lack of competition and other factors, making it an opportune time to carry out such a program in support of the economic integration of newcomers.



By providing settlement organizations with this training sectoral capacity to set up and run entrepreneurship programming would be enhanced.. Support services and programming for newcomer entrepreneurs can include how to write a business plan, learn about labour market research, create a marketing and sales plan, develop financial plans and forecasts, receive business coaching and mentorship, market research, how to access and/or apply for financing resources in these areas, etc.

Partnerships:

- Social enterprise experts
- Newcomer-facing organizations who provide a variety of services
- Community organizations
- Research institutes
- Umbrella organizations

Implementation:

- Conduct analysis and identify successful models for newcomer entrepreneurship programs
- Recruit settlement service provider partner(s)
- Create repository of resources, partnerships, incubators, investor networks and financial resources and create toolkit
- Create implementation guide and toolkit & share resource with sectoral partner(s)
- Evaluate impact and outcomes

3. Develop anti-discrimination and anti-racism training workshops and learning materials for employers

This pilot would involve engagement with leaders in employer focused anti-discrimination initiatives to identify best practices in delivering anti-bias learning materials to employers. Learning modules would be shared with the sector through e-learning tools, publications and frameworks.. Following the development of online workshops and training the materials and learning opportunities will be shared with service providers to disseminate to employers, employer-facing organizations and more. The workshops will involve diversity and cultural sensitivity/competency training, understanding and overcoming unconscious bias, as well as anti-discrimination policies and procedures to address how employers can successfully accommodate and onboard newcomer talent.



Demonstrated need and projected impact on the sector

Employer bias and discrimination towards immigrant workers has been well documented through a variety of Canadian studies. While there are labour shortages in essential sectors such as healthcare, [47% of internationally educated healthcare workers are un-or-underemployed](#). Some of these [barriers to employment involve credential recognition, lack of Canadian experience, and perceived lack of language fluency, among others](#). The majority of newcomers that arrive in Canada under the economic migrant system have obtained at least an undergraduate degree, yet still have an [unemployment rate almost twice as high with 48% lower earnings than their Canadian-born peers](#).



Through building inclusive workspaces, immigrants will better integrate economically and socially into Canadian society, improve the Canadian economy, as well as alleviate labour shortages. Many organizations around Canada have begun investing in diversity and inclusion strategies within their organizations. Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council (TRIEC) initiated the Scaling Inclusive Workplaces project from 2018-2021, wherein TRIEC developed a community of practice for the exchange of practices and inclusive leadership, as well as piloted frameworks for inclusion to better integrate newcomer professionals. This pilot would be furthering initiatives such as these to include training, workshops and online learning tools for settlement providers to advocate for anti-discriminatory employer practices. The employment of these tools could lead to increased levels of newcomer employment in adequate positions pertaining to their experience and education.

Partnerships:

- Partnerships with other settlement agencies
- Local immigration partnerships
- SPOs who have existing employer relationship
- Immigrant Employment Councils
- Chartered Professionals in Human Resources Canada

Implementation:

- Consult employers and employer facing organizations
- Review and analysis of existing resources
- Onboard partnerships with service providers and local immigration partnerships
- Create training workshops guide and learning modules /online frameworks.
- Disseminate materials to employment-oriented settlement agencies, employers and employer-facing organizations
- Evaluate impact and outcomes



4. Create a national working group on digital standards for the settlement sector.

Working closely with representatives from settlement organizations, a national digital standards for the settlement sector working group would discuss important and emerging issues related to digitization and the use of technology in the settlement sector. Issues explored include digital capacity, access, literacy, inclusion and standardization. This group can also facilitate the creation of technological standards for the settlement sector to address problems surrounding digital vulnerability, privacy and cyber security. By examining what models and standards can be borrowed from other sectors who have been early adopters of digital service delivery such as in telehealth and social work, the working group can jointly establish a set of national digital security and privacy standards, share best practices, and develop implementation guidelines in supporting the sector in the digital realm. Recruitment for working group members would be conducted through umbrella organizations, the National Settlement and Integration Council, the Information and Communications Technology Council, the Metropolis network and more.

Demonstrated need and projected impact on the sector

As the sector continues to expand in its use of technology and digital infrastructure for remote or hybrid service delivery, the necessity of developing baseline standards for digital competencies is growing, particularly as many organizations shifted quickly to remote work in response to the pandemic as opposed to implementing a carefully planned transition. Establishing digital service delivery standards will ensure consistency, security, efficiency and enhance capacity. The [Focus Group Narrative Report](#) found that improving digital infrastructure and creating space for sector-wide discussions about emerging technologies were amongst the most important concerns regarding capacity building in the settlement sector. From [Silos to Solutions: Toward Sustainable and Equitable Hybrid Service Delivery in the Immigrant & Refugee-Serving Sector in Canada](#), it is suggested that the sector advise digital competencies in other digitally mature sectors, such as telehealth, to collect best practice models for data collation, management, security and privacy. Through evaluating the systems of digitally sophisticated organizations (both inside and outside of the settlement sector), the entire sector can collaborate on creating a set digital standards for all settlement agencies, lowering cost, duplication and misemployed resources.

Partnerships:

- Settlement service providers across all regions of Canada
- Provincial Settlement Umbrella agencies (ie: AMSSA, OCASI)
- Settlement Sector Technology Task Group
- National Settlement and Integration Council
- Information and Technology Council of Canada
- Creators of digital baseline competencies in other sectors (telehealth, social work, other digitally sophisticated organizations) as well as within the settlement sector
- Cybersecurity experts
- Digital Regulators
- IRCC (for baseline digital competencies within IRCC/support in streamlining digital standards)
- National Metropolis Conference

Implementation:

- Recruit working group through internal settlement networks.
- Organize initial launch meeting to set working group priorities and sub-committees (i.e. cybersecurity, data management, ethical digital guidelines and policies, etc)
- Conduct consultations based on project priority areas (ie: security and confidentiality) with experts
- Create roadmap for implementation and adoption for the sector
- Schedule presentation/report on findings.
- Evaluate impact and outcomes



Once established, this working group can be sustained beyond the pilot timeframe by transferring ownership to another organization.

5. Create interoperability and linkages between settlement sector knowledge sharing platforms by integrating RSS technology.

Working with emerging knowledge sharing hubs and communities of practice, the objective of this pilot is to integrate [RSS technology](#) to facilitate interoperability and ease of access by aggregating content in a standardized customizable format. Due to the absence of a singular national knowledge sharing repository or knowledge mobilizing network for the settlement sector, this pilot would create linkages between existing platforms to facilitate access to knowledge and reduce the fragmentation of available resources for the sector.

Demonstrated need and projected impact on the sector

As we know, the pandemic has had many implications across the settlement sector, largely with regards to technological capacity and knowledge sharing. Increased discussion between sector leaders is necessary for continued efforts to innovate, build capacity and enhance service provision. Currently, different organizations have disparate portals for client data, referrals, digital service provision, message boards, newsletters and updates, all available through different platforms. By integrating RSS technology into existing platforms, the sector can access evolving knowledge, innovative ideas, and strategies in a streamlined and efficient manner. Rather than utilizing separate platforms, [Campana \(2021\)](#), argues that the sector and IRCC should create interoperable systems to streamline technological standards and uses.

ACS-Metropolis Institute's [Narrative Focus Group](#) report found that there is a need for efficient and constant communication between agencies that does not yet exist. Settlement workers attributed this to working in “silos” which results in the duplication of services and resources. Creating interoperability between platforms through RSS technology will improve capacity and accessibility and enhance service delivery through sharing best practices, professional development resources and other relevant knowledge.

Partnerships:

- Umbrella settlement organizations
- National newcomer networks, such as the N4 Network
- Settlenet.org
- Software/web developer
- Additional settlement agencies



Implementation:

- Engage with existing knowledge sharing hubs to confirm buy-in
- Conduct focus group with users of the various platforms to design UX and features
- Work with software/web developers to customize RSS code
- Implement code on platforms, QA testing
- Launch Application
- Promote and market adoption of RSS tool through umbrella organizations, CoP partners
- Evaluation of project impact and outcomes

6. Create Digital Messaging Training for settlement providers to facilitate newcomer integration

The implementation of this project would facilitate communications training for settlement agencies on how to reach newcomers from 3rd language communities at both the pre-arrival and post-arrival stages of their settlement journey by employing strategic digital messaging tools which can be applied to improving service delivery. With this training, service providing organizations may choose to employ these strategies to improve attraction and/or enhance settlement services by increasing their capacity to identify client needs and receive client feedback, inform newcomer communities, facilitate responsive programming of services or other organizational priorities. By building robust communication channels through digital messaging, settlement providing organizations may also seek opportunities to leverage their newcomer networks with other stakeholders, such as microlenders, employers, and other entities who may be interested in communicating with newcomer communities as an added value or fee for service. In turn, because the success of digital messaging is connected to informal newcomer networks, they will have the opportunity to actively engage in service delivery, provide ongoing feedback, contribute to the collection of evaluation data and more.



Demonstrated need and projected impact on the sector

Communications plays a critical operational role for any organization, yet it is not an eligible funding cost for IRCC, leaving many settlement agencies without dedicated communications budgets or staff. SPOs often lack the capacity to adopt effective and efficient communication strategies both internally and externally. Results from ACS-Metropolis Institute's newcomer surveys and focus groups also confirm that due to the fragmented nature of the settlement sector, newcomers have difficulty understanding and differentiating between the many services and service providing organizations. Newcomers can benefit from having a responsive communications channel with the settlement providers to learn about complimentary services from other settlement actors. By providing settlement organizations with training on how to employ digital messaging methods which are highly efficient and cost effective, settlement agencies are supported in increasing capacity and improving the settlement process for newcomers.

Partnerships:

- Settlement providers familiar with accessing informal newcomer networks
- The Canadian Immigrant Magazine
- Participating service providers organizations
- Social enterprise organizations
- Other settlement stakeholders
- Pre-and post arrival newcomers

Implementation:

- Conduct analysis of digital messaging tools and map 3rd language community adoption to various platforms and tool
- Review existing resources relating to digital tools for newcomer engagement
- Recruit settlement service provider partners
- Develop resource guide for various channels and tools for digital messaging and/or training modules
- Deliver training/disseminate training guides or toolkits
- Evaluate impact and outcomes