

Envisioning the Future of the Immigrant Serving Sector —

Final Project Report

Executive Summary—

Between 2021–2023, ACS-Metropolis uncovered an array of challenges and opportunities for growth and tested solutions which would support innovation, collaboration and capacity building in the Canadian settlement sector through a mixed methods action research approach.

Our **surveys, focus groups**, and key informant interviews conducted between April 2021-January 2022 with newcomers, settlement service providers, and stakeholders in the immigrant-serving sector uncovered multiple barriers for newcomers to integrate economically. In addition to high unemployment rates (27.3%), 19% of newcomers with a bachelor's degree were working in gig, temporary or seasonal work, consequently resulting in less financial stability. **2022 Statistics Canada Data** reports that 7.7% of newcomers aged 25–54 years of age who arrived 5 or less years earlier were unemployed, versus 3.9% of Canadian born citizens. Similarly, **2023 Statistics Canada** data states that 92.6% of Canadian born citizens with a university degree are employed, versus 78.7% of recent immigrants with a university degree. However, this data did not account for whether or not Canadian born versus newcomers were working in their field of study.

In our study, an astonishing 71.8% of newcomers surveyed stated that they were spending 30% or more of their income on housing. **In 2018, Statistics Canada** reported that 31% of recent immigrants (those who landed in the country less than 10 years ago) spent more than 30% of income on housing/shelter costs, while 18% of the total Canadian population spent more than 30% of income on housing and shelter. Similarly, **2018 Statistics Canada** reported 20% of recent immigrants in a state of core housing need, versus 9% of the total population. The discrepancy between the rate in our survey and Statistics

Canada data could be attributed to a smaller sample size, however our survey confirms a trend of higher rates of unemployment and lack of affordable housing for newcomers compared to the general Canadian population and Canadian-born citizens. These differences point to the need to offer more support and workforce integration on behalf of policymakers, professional regulators, employers and settlement services and employment agencies.

43% of settlement service providers reported an increase in service delivery demand during the pandemic. 25% of those who reported an increase in demand indicated that this need was in relation to digital literacy and accessibility. 56% of respondents strongly or somewhat agreed that it was difficult for their organization to obtain long-term funding, resulting in instability, limited capacity and less opportunity for innovation. 32% of respondents indicated that the implementation of long-term programs and services was the most challenging priority due to short-term funding agreements.

Participants in our focus groups heavily discussed issues of digital infrastructure and IT concerns due to the sudden shift towards hybrid service models. Participants noted that there was a lack of available technology for their agencies as well as for their clients. This proved particularly challenging for vulnerable populations such as refugees and newcomers in rural areas.

A lack of adequate funding was also discussed, as participants stated that some programs or initiatives such as wraparound services, infrastructure, staff retention, and mental health services for staff were not considered as a funding priority by IRCC. Participants also felt as though current IRCC funding structures were restrictive and did not cover

all supports needed, mentioning international students who are ineligible for IRCC funded settlement services, requiring SPOs to source funding elsewhere.

Due to the recurrent themes uncovered through our research regarding the operational needs of settlement providers to have access to unrestricted funding and the need to enhance service provision in the areas of digital capacity building, digital equity and digital inclusion, we centered our pilot testing phase on the *Digital Champions for Newcomers* project and an *Alternative Revenue Generation for the Settlement Sector Community of Practice* and learning sessions, delivered in collaboration with our partners at GEO Nova Scotia, The Mhor Collective and LIFT Impact Partners.

Beginning with an initial cohort in Nova Scotia from September 2022-November 2022, we worked closely with partners GEO Nova Scotia and Mohr Collective to deliver a ‘train the trainer’ approach for settlement workers who wish to enhance the digital skills of newcomers and lessen the digital divide. Settlement workers participated in a 2–2.5 hour training session wherein they learned about the importance of digital inclusion work; why Digital Champions can make a huge difference;

and how we can best support newcomers in developing digital skills including handling information, communicating, problem solving and transacting online. The goal was to instill confidence in the digital champions and learners.

Due to the highly referenced discussion of the need for alternative funding structures and reticence to seek non-IRCC funding, we partnered with LIFT Impact Partners to create a Community of Practice (CoP) to explore alternative approaches to revenue diversification for the Canadian Settlement Sector through a series of workshops and webinars. Various approaches to funding diversification were discussed, such as social finance and social enterprise methods, strategic partnerships, and grant writing. From September 2023-February 2023 participants from settlement organizations, provincial umbrella organizations, settlement sector networks and councils, private sector actors, capacity building organizations and social finance experts met regularly to share key learnings, and exchange information.

Through the accumulation of our research and pilot projects, a set of recommendations for settlement service providers, the IRCC, employers, and other sector stakeholders will be provided at the end of the report.

Introduction

With the support of World Education Services Mariam Assefa Fund, since January of 2021, the Association for Canadian Studies-Metropolis Institute has been engaged in a project called *Envisioning the Future of the Immigrant-Serving Sector*. This project consisted of conducting research on the immigrant-serving sector to uncover key challenges and barriers faced by settlement workers which hinder the long-term economic and social success of newcomers in Canada with support from a multisectoral advisory committee.

Our nationwide research intended to discover how to strengthen the sector to be more responsive, collaborative, innovative and sustainable. Through a series of surveys with settlement workers and newcomers, focus groups, and key informant interviews, we selected two predominant areas of focus for our pilots: funding models within the sector, and digital equity and inclusion for newcomers. After exploring actionable solutions to issues within these areas of focus through our mixed-methods approach, we created two pilot projects based on the needs we uncovered.

We partnered with GEO Nova Scotia, the Mohr Collective, and LIFT Impact Partners to execute our pilot programs with great success.

Research Summary—

In January 2021, the Association for Canadian Studies (ACS) and the Metropolis Institute began conducting multimethod, nationwide research to situate issues found within the immigration sector, uncover gaps, and discover possible ways to strengthen the sector. The following summarizes key findings from our research where we engaged service provider organization employees and newcomers through surveys conducted between May and June 2021, and through focus groups with service provider organization employees, held over September 2021.

Surveys

Newcomer and SPO surveys were conducted with the goal of determining key challenges facing newcomers and sector workers prior to and during the pandemic, while identifying opportunities for growth. This consisted of the first phase of our research, and helped inform design of focus groups and Key Informant interviews. There were a total of 1017 participants for this phase.

Newcomer Survey

The newcomer survey was completed by 628 respondents, with 456 valid respondents (those who completed the majority of questions). Results included all 628 respondents so as to gather as much knowledge as possible from the survey. These participants had all landed in Canada within the past 10 years and represented all of Canada aside from Yukon and Nunavut. 69% of respondents were female, and 29% were male, with the rest preferring not to respond.

There was a high level of unemployment amongst respondents, at 27.3%. 62% of men were employed full-time, compared to 49% of women. For those who were working, 68.6% were not currently working in their field of study, with 17% of these not working in their chosen field because they were still in school. Only 27.8% of respondents with a bachelor's degree were working in their chosen field, and 19% of these were working in gig work or temporary/seasonal work. While most respondents (54.6%) found information about jobs on their own online, job placement service was the most coveted settlement provider service at 32.4% (followed by language training at 9.8%).



The survey also found that most newcomers received information surrounding health policy, immigration and employment and other information using the internet, and it is difficult to say whether they were accessing safe or reputable services this way.

Regarding COVID-19, over half of respondents (53.3%) indicated that their income had been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, and the majority were not accessing settlement services during this time (only 24.5% were doing so). However, for those who were financially affected to the point where they found it difficult to meet their basic needs, 46.1% did access services. The youngest respondents (18-24 years old) were most negatively affected by the pandemic in terms of losing income.

71.8% stated that they were spending 30% of more of their income on housing. 22.4% mentioned that they faced discrimination related to employment (the top three groups being Arabic respondents, followed by Black respondents and South Asian respondents). Respondents were more likely to access settlement services if they considered employment services highest priority, and those who had not accessed services during the pandemic were employed full-time (68%). Overall, it was evident from the survey that employment services were the most in demand according to newcomers, while most accessed crucial information on their own, online.

SPO Survey

The SPO survey had 389 respondents and 254 valid respondents, with all responses included, as above, to provide the most information possible. Participants represented all of Canada apart from Nunavut. In terms of size of organization, most surveyed worked at organizations employing 11-49 people at 26.8%, with 36.2% serving between 101-1000 clients per year.

According to these SPO worker respondents, 43% said service delivery demand increased during the pandemic. Larger organizations reported a higher increase in demand (53%). 75% of SPO workers said that their clients' needs had changed (with the highest rate in British Columbia at 90%) and 25% of those saying needs had changed indicated that this was in relation to digital literacy and accessibility. This was followed by mental health concerns of clients, at 17%.

In terms of upskilling and professional development of SPO employees, 71% reported sufficient opportunity, but the region with lowest capacity for this was in the Atlantic at 60%. Reasons for lack of opportunity to upskill and pursue professional development was related to lack of time, limited budget and insufficient training opportunity.

Related to the considerable interest of newcomers in employment-related services uncovered through the newcomer survey, the SPO survey

indicated that the majority of organizations were offering these services, at 76%. 83% of organizations were working with newcomers to find jobs. Larger organizations were more likely to do so. Respondents noted that their clients' greatest challenge in relation to the labour market was lack of Canadian work experience at 71%. Relating to soft skills, 30% of clients were deemed to require help with communication skills. Larger organizations were in general able to offer more services.

Regarding funding challenges, across Canada, 56% of respondents strongly agreed or somewhat agreed that it was difficult for their organization to secure long-term funding, with 32% ranking the implementation of long-term programs and services most difficult to meet out of several priorities. The second most difficult-to-meet priority was the reskilling of staff and professional development within SPOs.

One third strongly agreed or somewhat agreed that their organization focused upon outputs over outcomes. 92% of respondents indicated that their organization partnered with local organizations to provide services, and 77% strongly or somewhat agreed that they could easily share knowledge on best practices.

Focus Groups

Four focus groups were conducted with settlement provider organization employees, between September 14th to September 17th, 2021. Groups ranged in size between 6 to 10 individuals, with a total of 34 participants. 90-minute sessions were held over Zoom, with our project team coordinators acting as facilitators. Participants belonged to organizations in an array of professional capacities, and some were newcomers themselves in addition to working at settlement provider organizations. They were selected based on their experience, knowledge and expertise. Selection criteria ensured diversification of organization size (from up to 250 employees) and longevity of organization. They were regionally dispersed across Canada.

The topics of the four focus groups were: Building Capacity in the Settlement Sector; Best Practices in Knowledge Sharing and Collaboration; Exploring Funding Models for the Settlement Sector; and Improving Attraction and Accessibility of Settlement Services. As summarized below, many issues overlapped across groups.



Canada Arrivals
Arrivées Canada

The following summarizes the main solutions and recommendations that came out of each group:

1 Building Capacity in the Settlement Sector

The subject of collaboration between settlement agencies was most discussed, at 24.7% of references. This centered around the need for better communication across agencies and notably between urban and rural, and Anglophone and Francophone agencies. The lack of communications was noted to result in duplication of services, and successful practices not being widely shared.

Another highly referenced topic, at 16.9%, was digital infrastructure and IT concerns. Much centered around the swift move to online services due to the pandemic, and the sense that there was not enough support. This was related both to technology available to themselves as settlement agency employees, as well as for their clients. Notably, vulnerable clients, such as refugees and those in rural areas, had issues with digital access.

Participants also discussed the problem of lack of funding, and the issue that some programs or initiatives were not considered as priority for the IRCC, such as for wraparound services, infrastructure, staff retention, mental health of staff, and more. Also, there was the issue of international students who are not traditionally eligible for IRCC funding yet make up a crucial portion of newcomers to be retained and properly supported in Canada.

Proposed solutions to these issues included increased partnerships within the community, such as with differently-sized organizations, etc., partnering with umbrella organizations, informal networking, and sharing resources and

opportunities related to grant writing and funding. Increased funding could address the noted gaps, such as in infrastructure and IT, rural inequities, professional development issues and staff retention. Digital equity would have to be a greater priority in order to address digital illiteracy amongst certain newcomers as well.

2 Best Practices in Knowledge Sharing and Collaboration

The most highly referenced discussion points surrounded effective partnerships between employers and umbrella organizations, at 29% of references. Local immigration partnerships were also commonly mentioned in knowledge sharing for program development and communications.

Another priority was building capacity towards helping newcomers find employment in their chosen fields, partnerships with government agencies and referral programs to make these meaningful connections for their clients, and building capacity for accreditation programs. Participants found it important to engage employers in the process, helping them learn to adjust their leadership to account for diverse communities, and engaging them in diversity and inclusion practices. Conversely, it would be important to help newcomers with upskilling in order to meet employer needs.

Participants ideated potential solutions related to knowledge sharing, such as the creation of a central knowledge hub, or center of excellence, to share data and facilitate referrals. Ideally, data across federal, provincial and municipal governments would be shared on one platform with the goal of evaluating efficiency of programs, and measuring outcomes and outputs. This would also help smaller organizations learn from larger ones.

3 Exploring Funding Models for the Settlement Sector Focus Group

The most highly referenced topic, at 30.6% of references, surrounded the issue of short-term funding and the restrictive nature of program sustainability and the ability to innovate due to strict adherence to IRCC parameters. There was also the sentiment that the IRCC could sometimes be out-of-touch with priorities and needs on the ground—some participants noted that they had increased efforts to communicate with the federal department so that the IRCC had a better understanding of their work.

Lack of funding also affects the ability to invest in internal capacity and administrative costs. There is also funding inconsistency, leading to salary setbacks and job retention problems. Larger, urban organizations were said to be better funded than rural ones.

Another important issue discussed is that IRCC funding does not support all newcomers in need, namely international students. Other newcomers do not meet the settlement program criteria, are in between statuses, and are thus technically ineligible for services.

Also discussed was the issue of the IRCC focusing upon outputs over impact and outcomes measuring, which would allow for better program assessment and lead to better innovation of programs and greater success. It was also suggested that scaling up smaller, successful and innovative initiatives would be a good idea as opposed to starting over with new large-scale ones, especially as scalable

initiatives are appropriate for smaller, rural organizations.

In terms of solutions, participants discussed the need to find ways in which to diversify funding, such as through partnerships with banks, private foundations, universities, municipalities and more. The idea would be to complement and build upon core IRCC funding through nontraditional funding models. Innovative ways to think about funding would be to utilize public and private sources, and create partnerships with community and other stakeholders such as post-secondary institutions. Outcomes-based funding models are other potential areas for exploration, and it was argued that these could be best suited to employment-based programs.

Overall, a shift in thinking was argued to be useful for the sector, moving away from a purely charity-oriented mindset. This would involve learning new ways, related to marketing and much more.

4 Improving Attraction and Accessibility of Settlement Services

A major concern amongst participants was related to insufficient information and assistance made available to newcomers — this was associated with all the facets of settlement, such as housing, employment, credentialization and more. In addition, many newcomers are unaware of the services available to them. International students were a notable example, as they often go without settlement support after graduation.

Participants discussed challenges towards making information readily available, related to digital literacy or language issues, especially for vulnerable newcomers such as refugees. In addition, wrap-around services were important in increasing the accessibility of services, taking into consideration challenges such as transportation or childcare. Programs would do well to incorporate a holistic mindset, encompassing housing, schooling, etc. as opposed to offering standalone services.

Once again, in terms of potential solutions to the issue of attraction and accessibility of services, the creation of partnerships and collaboration with other agencies, community organizations and private sector was most referenced, at 21%. In this way, information can circulate about all of the available services through various means,

using promotional materials, ethnic media, cultural institutions, etc. Participants suggested that outreach should also be done with employers, post-secondary institutions, municipal and provincial boards.

Alliances and referral programs are key, whereby there is a collaborative approach towards referring clients to settlement services in their area. Examples are zone referral programs, where clients are placed based on their postal code. There is also the potential to make the connections pre-arrival, whether through official pre-arrival programs or informal networking groups (such as WhatsApp). In general, informal newcomer networks are of great value in promoting settlement services, using a culturally sensitive approach along with the power of word of mouth

Implications from the surveys and focus groups that would help inform our choice of pilots:

- > Employment in newcomers' chosen field of study was a major priority and preoccupation. Notably, most newcomers were seeking job-related information on their own, online.
- > In general, newcomers were accessing many types of information online (health-related, settlement-related, etc.) and it is uncertain as to whether they were proficient in accessing the most reputable and safe information this way.
- > SPO workers indicated that the biggest change they had witnessed regarding client needs during the pandemic was related to digital literacy and accessibility.
- > Over half of SPO workers agreed that it was difficult for their organization to secure long-term funding, notably for the

implementation of long-term programs and services and staff upskilling and professional development.

- > The need to partner and collaborate with other settlement agencies, community organizations, employers and other entities was a subject that came up continually throughout the focus group discussions.
- > Another topic that came up frequently was related to digital infrastructure, upskilling, unequal access amongst clients and the importance of providing adequate support in this area.
- > It was often noted that increased funding would help fill many gaps, related to digital inequity, capacity issues in providing the best possible programming, lack of professional development, difficulty in supporting certain key newcomers such as international students, and much more.

Summary of Key Stakeholder Engagement—

Introduction

We interviewed 41 senior-level professionals in a variety of occupations related to newcomer settlement through semi-structured interviews from October 2021-January 2022. The purpose of these interviews was not only to propose potential pilot briefs, but also to gain further insight into challenges and barriers faced by the sector and key stakeholders throughout the pandemic. Alongside the challenges, discussion of novel initiatives, trends, and opportunities that arose from changes in the sector ultimately informed our pilot project selection. Participants worked in areas ranging from newcomer service provision to employment, funding/social finance and social enterprise, education, digital inclusion and knowledge mobilization.

Key discussion themes included:

- > Knowledge transfer & mobilization
- > Funding/Social Enterprise/Social Finance
- > Digital Equity & Inclusion
- > Hybrid Service Delivery
- > Employment
- > Other General Themes & Trends [pre-arrival, language, housing, International Students]

List of Participants:

- > **Hyder Hassan**, Chief Executive Officer, Immigrant Services Calgary
- > **Marco Campana**, Immigrant and Refugee Serving Organization Digital and Communications Consultant
- > **John Shields**, Professor, Ryerson University
- > **Jake Hirsch-Allen**, North America Workforce Development and Higher Ed System Lead, LinkedIn
- > **Raffi Markarian**, Senior Policy Advisor, Federal Government of Canada
- > **Usman Khan**, Manager, Monitoring and Evaluation, Immigrant Services Calgary
- > **Sahar Zohni**, Project Manager, National Newcomer Navigation Network
- > **Mariah Maddock**, Partnership Development and Engagement Lead, National Newcomer Navigation Network
- > **Patrick MacKenzie**, Chief Executive Officer, Immigrant Employment Council of B.C.
- > **John Gilliam**, Digital Services Senior Manager, Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants
- > **Hana Taleb-Imai**, Dean, Global Access and Foundational Learning, Bow Valley College
- > **Nick Mintcroft**, Intern, Criterium Group & McKinsey
- > **Alison Pond**, Chief Executive Officer, ACCES Employment

- > **Matt Spurway**, Executive Director, GEO Nova Scotia
- > **Stephanie Wilson**, Vice President, Lighthouse Labs
- > **Wendy McCulloch**, Executive Director, Impact North Shore
- > **Irene Mackintosh**, Director, Mohr Collective
- > **Shona Munro**, Director, Mohr Collective
- > **Claudia Hepburn**, Chief Executive Officer, Windmill Microlending
- > **Wayne Miranda**, Policy Analyst, Employment and Social Development Canada
- > **Corrine Price**, Director General, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada
- > **Jean Viel**, Assistant Director, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada
- > **Katie Crocker**, Chief Executive Officer, AMSSA
- > **Shawn McCarty**, Manager, Key Partnerships, Windmill Microlending
- > **Ian McClean**, President/Chief Executive Officer, Greater Kitchener Waterloo Chamber of Commerce
- > **Chris Friesen**, Chief Operating Officer, Immigrant Services Society of B.C.
- > **Myriam Berube**, Consulting Director, Tamarack Institute
- > **Ryan Conway**, Program Director, Innoweave
- > **Tal Elharrar**, Senior Director, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada
- > **Ryan Drew**, Program Director, S.U.C.C.E.S.S.
- > **Queenie Choo**, Chief Executive Officer, S.U.C.C.E.S.S.
- > **Ian Stecher**, Senior Associate, Impact Finance and Investment, MarS
- > **Dean Ruffilini**, Assistant Director, Social Innovation, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada
- > **Rosemary Holmes**, Senior Policy Analyst, Government of Canada
- > **Caroline Guimond**, Special Advisor, The Association for Canadian Studies
- > **Bruce Dewar**, President and Chief Executive Officer, LIFT Impact Partners
- > **Rosaline Oh**, Director, Urban Changemaker Coalition
- > **Sonya Goldman**, Senior Manager, Workforce Development, Woodgreen Community Services
- > **Lama Chami**, Consultant, Refugee613
- > **Justine Sterling**, Coordinator, Programs and Services- Employer Engagement for Immigrant Integration, Woodgreen Community Services
- > **Salman Khan**, Director, Resource Development, Immigrant Services Calgary

Knowledge Transfer, Mobilization and Collaboration—

The onset of the pandemic generated a greater willingness from settlement providers to share learnings as the sector dealt with unprecedented challenges. Stakeholders suggested that the sector should continue to create lasting legacy partnerships between organizations who have different strengths, such as digital maturity or innovation. For example, LIFT Impact Partners organized virtual meetings for interested participants within their partnering organizations to engage in open discussion about employment opportunities for the sector and to encourage further collaboration, share experiences, and encourage networking, asking participants questions such as “What keeps you up at night?”. LIFT also has a cohort Slack channel set up for all members to share information and post questions.

The Gateway Program at Calgary Catholic Immigration Society, which was in development pre-pandemic, focuses on collaboration versus competition through encouraging referral partnerships between organizations. The program involves a standardized newcomer intake and needs assessment, after which a designated caseworker follows the newcomer throughout their settlement journey and cross-refers the individual to other agencies depending on organizational strengths and newcomer needs. The program encourages collaboration between agencies through partnerships and decreases intake form and service duplication.

Newcomer Knowledge Hubs / RSS Feed

A key stakeholder suggested the creation of a centralized knowledge sharing platform to share tools, communities of practice, and increase interoperability between various knowledge hubs

through an RSS feed. Embedding RSS feed technology into communities of practice within the sector through a website aggregator would redirect the user to the desired information instead of searching through a multitude of websites. This would further collaboration between settlement agencies through the use of a shared platform. Utilizing metadata to target messages to specific audiences, such as upcoming sector-related events through the system was a further recommendation.

Challenges involve limited capacity and a dedicated team monitoring and developing the program. Many settlement workers have been stretched thin during the pandemic due to the nature of IRCC contribution agreements, leaving little room for operational costs such as communications, engagement and innovation.

Funding / Social Enterprise / Social Finance

Stakeholders cited an apparent lack of interest from SPOs to pursue social finance and social enterprise initiatives. This is in part due to the ‘risky’ perception of these endeavors as well as a lack of internal capacity. However, incorporating additional funding models would enable SPOs to have greater autonomy over decisions made within the sector as IRCC policies can be slow to evolve. Revenue diversification creates greater flexibility to be innovative, attempt new projects or initiatives, and can lead to better outcomes for newcomers. Stakeholders suggest that currently the majority of the sector is 85-90% reliant on federal dollars. Direct program funding is not flexible enough to allow for significant creativity or innovation. Government related funding is often outputs-based rather than outcomes-based, focusing on quantitative analyses such as number

of newcomers served, rather than ultimate output such as newcomer success. Output is often difficult to measure quantitatively as it does not take long-term success, newcomer backgrounds, or other challenges newcomers may face into account. Furthermore, the structured nature of individual program funding often does not allow for a holistic wrap-around service approach. IRCC funding structure focuses on direct measurable outcomes, theories of change, as well as short-medium-long term growth models, and requires SPOs to prove how their program reaches these outcomes.

“Helping to create more stability through revenue diversification is something that’s really critical”

The Better Beginnings, Bigger Impact program initiated by LIFT assisted settlement agencies with expanding their capacity to assist newcomers with language skills, employment, need assessment and networking. The stakeholder involved in this project discussed this program assisting SPOs with moving into a more innovative mindset, resulting in pushing agencies to expand partnerships and look at social enterprise opportunities. LIFT assists SPOs with assessing social enterprise opportunities, operational advice, and has conducted a series of workshops surrounding the diversification of revenue.

Calgary Catholic Immigration Society has launched the Affinity program, which partners with the private sector and institutions, such as major league sports teams, the municipal zoo, and banks to monetize clients through referral



programs. For example, CCIS may refer clients to the zoo in return for a referral fee and an increase in multilingual signage at the zoo. Not only is this mutually beneficial for both parties, but creates a more welcoming and inclusive environment for newcomers. However, an ongoing challenge with social finance in the sector is the difficulty associated with measuring long-term programmatic outcomes, and demonstrating direct evidence of success is difficult.

A comment from a stakeholder suggested “Outcomes-based and performance-based models, [to develop] sector specific training approaches that could educate people within the sector about the possibilities for social finance models, making them more attractive, or just setting them up as an option”.

In terms of training components, it is suggested that understanding the scope, limitations, and generating a better understanding of how these

models could be customized within the sector should be included. However, a predominant limitation concerns the flexibility of the IRCC as the predominant funder to allow SPOs to explore these alternative funding options. The infrastructure of the agencies should remain the same, and the idea of social finance should be utilized as complementary rather than replacement. Financial literacy within the sector should be improved upon before engaging in complementary funding structures. Windmill, for example, requires some applicants to do an online money management module offered by Prosper Canada for those who have weaker financial literacy. A stakeholder from Windmill suggested that IRCC provide financial resource information to newcomers when they arrive, as well as connect them with Windmill. Windmill also curates referral partnerships with post-secondary institutions, such as Humber College, to provide educational financial aid.

A stakeholder also discussed the use of outcomes rate cards. These refer to a menu of outcomes you may wish to achieve for an identified target population. Some of the items may be: comfort using official languages; comfort in social settings; and achieving and maintaining employment. IRCC can determine what price they're willing to pay for the

“Organizations are definitely still in that education space. And there’s a lot of skepticism around outcomes finance. How much risk does it expose them to when maybe payments are locked into outcomes?”

achievement of these predetermined outcomes. Using a binary evaluation method can also simplify the measurement process.

Unfortunately, awareness is a key concern. A stakeholder noted that Imagine Canada released a report indicating that 66% of the sector has never heard of or is unclear about what social finance/ social enterprise means. Therefore, placing focus on the education and adoption of the information out there is a key first step, as well as placing importance on incentivization. Some sort of self assessment or guided assessment can assist with understanding what the organizational needs and goals are.

Digital Equity & Inclusion—

It was noted by participants that a gap in digital literacy training exists. Many pre/post arrival programs do not speak to issues of digital literacy for newcomers. At the onset of the Afghan refugee crisis, IRCC implemented a digital lending program through which refugees were loaned chromebooks while they stayed in temporary accommodation over quarantine, enabling them to access online services. While this program was extremely beneficial, larger-scale digital training and lending programs have not been implemented sector-wide.

GEO Nova Scotia is a novel non-profit organization established in 2022 with the goal of “getting everyone online” (GEO). Through the onset of the pandemic, it became apparent that many families in Nova Scotia did not have adequate access to internet or devices, limiting access to services and communication during the lockdown period as well as into the recent wave of hybrid service delivery. GEO works with referral partners to coordinate free internet and devices for people in need. GEO focuses on three main pillars: Devices; Internet; Skills.

Digital Champions partnered with the Mohr collective, another organization centered around digital equity for vulnerable populations, to create digital literacy training modules as well as provide devices. Stakeholders from GEO and Mohr emphasized digital inclusion as a social determinant of health as digital literacy becomes more and more crucial for participation in society. From access to government services to finding housing and employment, digital literacy is crucial for overcoming social exclusion.

In terms of sector engagement with digital messaging platforms, Refugee613 utilized WhatsApp to share accurate and updated information for Arabic speakers. Through partnerships with local groups and trusted community members, they were able to create WhatsApp groups in Arabic to divulge key settlement information about available resources. For individuals with lower digital literacy, the voice note feature could be used. Harnessing informal networks is another great tool for disseminating settlement information.

“I think where the challenge comes in is how digitally savvy are the staff to start with to even feel comfortable being on these engagement platforms. There’s definitely some Zoom fatigue and training fatigue and other things online. In person is still going to be a ways away, but I think it’s this piece around, if someone is not comfortable with technology, how do you get everybody to that same baseline of user comfort with a platform in order to get that asynchronous engagement you really need?”

Hybrid Service Delivery—

As we know, the unforeseen transition to digital service delivery caused difficulties for many service providers who previously provided services predominantly in-person. However, since the switch to digital service provision, most settlement agencies indicated that they would continue with hybrid service delivery in the future and continue to build on their digital delivery platforms. While the transition was challenging, hybrid delivery enabled an increase in program reach and accessibility to those who could not attend in person. General challenges involved the quick transition to remote delivery resulting

in organizations not having time to develop baseline competencies/standardization in regards to privacy and literacy for both staff and clients, or evaluation tools and metrics.

An increase in utilizing AI in service delivery has also been observed. ACCES employment in Toronto began using a chatbot to direct newcomers to the myriad of programs they offer rather than employing a person to do so. PeaceGeeks also created an Arrive in Canada app designed for settlement across B.C. to direct newcomers to various resources in all areas of the province.

Employment—

Adequate employment continues to be a centre of conversation in the settlement sector. Due to accreditation/recertification expenses and time constraints, many skilled immigrants end up being trapped in a cycle of gig economy work or lower-skilled employment. A tremendous mismatch exists between the experience newcomers have and the jobs they are offered once they arrive to Canada, which is perpetuated by employer bias/discrimination issues. Some of these employer biases include perceived accent, culture differences, and language barriers. Occupational-specific language training would also be extremely beneficial.

Some suggestions for overcoming challenges to adequate employment for newcomers involve employer bias sensitization training, documenting best practices for integrating newcomers through

“Cost of accreditation is a frustrating block, many employers complain it takes too much time, i.e. 5-6 months of unpaid internship... we want newcomers to meet Canadian standards, however we don't want to make meeting those standards unnecessarily time consuming, costly and burdensome”

a diversity, equity and inclusion lens, as well as sector partnerships with employers. This would require network building and engaging employers at the centre of the newcomer/refugee discussion, as well as incentivizing employers through discussion of existing labour gaps. Three way partnerships with learning institutions, employers and the settlement sector may also enable newcomer clients to move into similar professions that require less re-accreditation. A stakeholder who works with employers stated that it is not that employers do not want to hire newcomers, it is simply that they are looking for the path of least resistance and need to fill labour gaps with qualified workers as soon as possible.

Examples of such include ACCES partnering with IKEA to run specific employment programs paired with mentorship for available positions. Similarly, IRCC hosted a presentation at the steering committee from Walmart to promote their employment opportunities. Woodgreen, an organization dedicated to addressing the issue of immigrant inclusion in the workforce, provides inclusivity training for employers. Woodgreen engages employers through educational workshops and resources, as well as provides a talent pool of readily-available professional immigrants. This program is attached to their sister program *Mentoring Pathways to Employment*. The educational workshops centre around cross-cultural communication, cultural diversity, employer expectations and onboarding supports to create better retention of immigrant professionals in the workplace. *Mentoring Pathways to Employment* is a program for immigrant professionals to offer job readiness workshops, employment coaching, as well as a mentorship match in order to get newcomers into employment that commensurates with their education and experience from their country of origin.

ISSofBC has an Ascend program, which provides training as to understanding what employers are looking for when they are seeking candidates, as well as how to market and present oneself to hiring managers. The B.C. Job Connect program at ISSofBC is an online repository where immigrants can upload their skills profiles for employment matching. They also have a Career Success Guide that provides an interactive road-map of employment trends in each province for newcomers. ISSofBC is also involved with mentorship programs to match newcomers with settled immigrants to navigate the job field, as well as an employer engagement program to train employers as to how to recruit and retain immigrant applicants.

International students are also a largely untapped market within the Canadian labour shortage. Streamlining employment services for international students through connecting international students with specific training programs in high demand areas/programs with employers will encourage international students to utilize their skills in Canada rather than returning to their country of origin. If international students were targeted in employment related training, ideally international students would then apply for permanent residence.

A further suggestion was to create a dashboard for streamlined information in regards to labour market information in each region. As the IRCC has the administrative newcomer data including intended port of landing from the point of application submission, that information could be cross-referenced to provide job prospects, post-secondary information, average employment rates, salaries, etc. Employers and newcomers would benefit from this information alike, providing transparent and accessible linkages between newcomers and job prospects.

Other General Themes & Trends—

Stakeholders also discussed trends and recommendations related to other various elements of the settlement sector including pre-arrival services, language training, housing, and services for international students. Stakeholders suggested that there is a need for a streamlined channel for SPOs to share trends, sector needs and challenges, experiences, best practices, and hybrid delivery models. Currently there is too much duplication in the sector leading to a waste of resources.

Expectation management was also discussed. From an outsider perspective, Canada is sold to newcomers as a country with a plethora of growth and employment opportunities, however often the realities of securing employment, wage gaps, and housing rates are under-emphasized.

Increased data sharing between different agencies, such as the CRA, would enable the sector to cross-reference information longitudinally in order to obtain more information about the long-term outcomes of newcomers.

Sector employee burnout was also touched on. Low wages, time constraints, lack of resources and infrastructure contribute to limited professional development for salaried employees. Although there may be resources and communities of practice dedicated to housing and mobilizing information, many sector workers may not have the capacity to engage fruitfully. Greater psychological support should be provided to employees as well, as many frontline workers deal with clients experiencing PTSD and other health issues. Due to these underlying issues, recruitment and retention is an ongoing challenge.

IRCC could encourage collaboration through including a provision in contracts stating that funding recipients are required to obtain a minimum number of partners either from within the

“You’re seeing a higher than normal turnover because of wages or just the demands of the nature of this type of work... What I’ve heard from the sector is that I think they would like to have more opportunities to really provide feedback and have discourse with IRCC beyond just the regular kind of program/officer check-ins. And I think those kinds of trust and relationship building exercises can only really serve to be a win-win for both parties”

sector or private partnerships, as well as organize a roundtable to discuss different pilot ideas and solutions for the sector.

In terms of discussion surrounding international students, a suggestion from a stakeholder was to charge post-secondary institutions a fee as part of the student VISA process which would separately fund the immigrant-serving sector to develop a pan-Canadian support program for international students. This could particularly focus on funding for mental health and social integration initiatives. This could also include pre-arrival orientation to campus life and community resources in the area.

An interesting and valuable initiative mentioned by a stakeholder involved an IRCC funded pilot program in Halifax, which employed 20 Syrian refugees as housekeepers in a hotel. Due to their need for language training, they organized occupational-specific English lessons onsite in the hotel boardroom over lunch or following their shift.

In terms of housing, it was noted that housing is difficult to secure for middle class, Canadian-born families, let alone newcomers and refugees, particularly in metropolitan areas where luxury housing continues to be built. Due to the combination of the global pandemic and the housing crisis, IRCC continues to struggle finding available and affordable housing, often needed for large families.

Rational for Pilot Selection—

Ultimately, we selected digital inclusion/equity and alternative funding models as the pilot projects to move forward. Although our discussions with key stakeholders identified a massive need for a multitude of challenges within the sector, we felt as though we could make the biggest impact with the selection of the Digital Champions Training and Alternative Funding Approaches pilots given our timelines and budget allocations. Through our existing networks and capacity of delivery partners, including LIFT Philanthropy Partners, Mhor Collective and GEO Nova Scotia, we decided to move forward and deliver direct sector specific learning opportunities within these areas of interest.

Funding Models Community of Practice — Partnership with LIFT Impact Partners

Throughout the research phase of our project, it has been clear that issues related to funding amongst

settlement sector workers are of great concern in the sector. During the **focus group session** entitled Exploring Funding Models for the Settlement Sector held on September 14th 2021, participants discussed strict funding agreements with the IRCC, not having enough funds to fulfill internal capacity requirements, lack of innovation due to rigid funding structures, and much more. Several solutions emerged from the discussion — amongst these were “engaging private organizations in social finance/social enterprise”, and exploring “outcomes-based funding models”.

There are many sector-specific issues surrounding funding, such as which newcomers are eligible for services funded by the federal government — for example, international students are key to fulfilling immigration quotas and filling labour market shortages, yet they are **not eligible** under the IRCC settlement program. Issues such as these may necessitate the sector to find innovative means to fund the programs and/or roles they deem important in their organization, and for Canada. During our KI interviews, it became apparent that

the sector was still very much in a discovery phase when it came to funding diversification, which pointed to a need to educate the sector on their options.

In order to fill this gap, the ACS found a subject matter expert in the areas of finance as applied to the non-profit sector in order to disseminate this knowledge, partnering with LIFT Impact Partners to create a pilot program entitled Alternative Funding Approaches for the Canadian Settlement Sector. Based in Vancouver and Toronto, LIFT Impact Partners supports social purpose organizations from across the country through a valuable combination of skills, expertise, and resources to improve their strategy, operations, accountability, and sustainability. LIFT also engages a national partner network of leading businesses that provide pro bono services to increase the organizations' capacity. Ultimately, they aim to build sustainable and effective organizations that can reach more people across Canada.

Four interactive, informational sessions were held, on September 21st, October 26th, November 16th, 2022 and February 1st, 2023. These were titled, *Revenue Generation Opportunities*, *Organizational Insights*, *Getting from Ideation to Implementation* and *Revenue Diversification Fireside Chat*, respectively. A Slack channel was also created for the project as a community-of-practice space dedicated to sharing information related to funding diversification and revenue generation in the settlement sector.

The following is an overview of what was covered in the workshops:

Workshop 1 — Revenue Generation Opportunities

The objectives of the first workshop were to understand the concept of revenue diversification; to understand the basic types of revenue streams and revenue generation opportunities; to see the possibilities associated with revenue diversification; to understand key factors that may shape revenue diversification objectives.

Participants were instructed on the key benefits of revenue diversification, introduced to “smart revenue diversification”, and revenue generation opportunities — grants and contributions, fundraising and donations, corporate partnerships, earned income, outcome contracts and impact investments. The session provided examples of the uses of impact investing, from launching a social enterprise, asset purchases and the ability to upscale.

They were also instructed on when it would best be recommended to diversify revenue. These reasons mirrored the concerns of the sector, uncovered through the research phase of the project: your SPO has become reliant on one of few revenue sources; your SPO is looking to reach more people, broaden its mandate, or scale programs beyond your current scope; your existing funders are showing signs that they may be looking to reduce their funding or change their funding objectives in the foreseeable future; your SPO would benefit from more unrestricted funding to improve operations, enhance financial stability, and develop innovative programming; your SPO is looking to improve your investment readiness to successfully secure an impact investment.

Participants were then engaged in a breakout activity, where they were asked, “What are some of the top revenue diversification challenges your organization is facing?”, “What are some opportunities for your organizations” and “what does your organization need to be thinking about from an internal lens?”. Finally, a guest speaker from Community Foundations of Canada was invited to share their insight.

LIFT Impact Partners, September 2022,
Alternative Funding Approaches for the Canadian Settlement Sector, Workshop 1: Revenue Generation Opportunities [PowerPoint]

Workshop 2 — Organization Insights

The second workshop aimed to guide participants in assessing their organizational needs and internal capacity. They were provided with an overview on how to prepare to pursue alternative funding, defining the purpose of these funds and how best to measure and communicate outcomes to support requests for funding. They were reminded of the challenges involving the lack of internal resources, expertise, etc. as well as the opportunities for growth and key reflections — such as aiming for sustainability, the importance of being proactive, the potential for great partnerships, and more. They were encouraged to define their purpose (their cause and what they believe in), their process (the specific actions taken to accomplish their purpose), and imagine what they would accomplish as a result of their purpose.

The workshop provided an opportunity for participants to reflect on their organizational culture and how it can result in a shared purpose, with the reminder that revenue diversification necessitates an organizational culture shift. It is important

to have a shared clarity of purpose and vision including a concise strategic plan and assess the organization’s risk appetite. Participants were encouraged to reflect upon how well connected their organization is to the community, as revenue diversification is most often dependent upon community stakeholders. Strong partnerships were emphasized as an indicator of success, and participants were urged to think about who their strongest allies were and who remained an untapped potential for partnership. The importance of credibility was also emphasized, with a reminder to remain regularly accountable to supporters as it builds trust. Participants were also encouraged to reflect upon their organizational capacity and leadership team.

In terms of measurement and management, presenters discussed the ability to define success and tracking goals towards success, requiring robust impact and financial management. Internal resources must account for a certain amount of funding and commitment of work in order for plans to come to fruition, as well as strong leadership skills in business practices and planning.

LIFT Impact Partners, October 2022,
Alternative Funding Approaches for the Canadian Settlement Sector, Workshop 2: Organizational Insights [PowerPoint]

Workshop 3 — Getting from Idea to Implementation

The third workshop aimed to guide participants in determining the revenue diversification options best suited to them, and how to shift from ideation to implementation. Presenters provided an overview on how to apply a Business Model Canvas for the

purpose of identifying activities, partnerships, resources and considerations related to finance. Participants were prompted to think about what word comes to mind when thinking about social enterprise. As per Mentimeter engagement, the most common response was “social impact”.

Social enterprise was then defined for the audience as “sales of a product or service to customers that addresses a social or environmental issue; social enterprise is about continuous operation and sales centered on customer relationships; the term is used broadly by different groups and in fact some corporations now have co-opted the term [...]”.

Participants were given many reasons as to why they could or should be pursuing social enterprise, such as unrestricted funding, enhancing capacity, developing spirit of innovation, and more. They were provided examples of existing social enterprises, such as from EthniCity Catering and Mosaic Engage Centre for Diversity. Next, a guest speaker named Shelly D’Mello, Executive Director of Mennonite New Life Centre of Toronto, was invited to share her experience.

Participants were taught about the common characteristics of successful social enterprises. These included having clear goals on what is being sought to achieve, aligning goals with the organizations mission, meeting customer needs and growing demand, knowing whether customers would be willing to pay for the service, possessing a unique value that would distinguish the goal from competitors, best utilizing the organization’s assets and competency, etc.

The workshop provided a path from idea to implementation: “brainstorm potential ideas; conduct a quick and simple screen to select the most promising ideas; develop business concept note for top ideas (feasibility); conduct more rigorous screen

on top ideas to select the 1 or 2 most promising; develop a business model; create a business plan”. Attendees were instructed to brainstorm regarding their client base, and were prompted to think about who their customers might be, whether they would pay for their current service, and whether there might be any new customers.

In turn, they were prompted to think about whether there could be a new product that could be sold that would leverage existing skills and capacity, and if there could be a product that could leverage existing assets such as real estate. They were presented with a Business Model Canvas that provided a rationale on how to “create, deliver and capture value”, and discussed partnerships, activities, value propositions, relationships with customers, customer segments, resources, channels, cost structure and revenue streams.

After defining a business model, participants were advised to consider their business plan and how the model would be implemented, what the potential would be to pilot in order to test their idea, consider their structure and whether they would need increased insurance, etc., how to secure investment, assess risks, and evaluate their progress against their defined outcomes.

LIFT Impact Partners, November 2022,
Alternative Funding Approaches for the Canadian Settlement Sector, Workshop 2: Social Enterprise
[PowerPoint]

Workshop 4 — Revenue Diversification Fireside chat

The fourth and final workshop invited speakers from an array of capacity building organizations and social finance experts to discuss how SPOs can

diversify revenue to scale impact. This included learning about novel opportunities for revenue generation and experiences of other SPOs during the developmental, launch, and implementation components of these initiatives, and how these initiatives fit with each organizations' mission. What would be done differently in retrospect was also discussed. Guest speakers included the following: Patrick MacKenzie, Immigrant Employment Council of BC; Lori Smith, Rise Asset Development; Megan Morris, Jamie Baker and Aisha Umar, Association for New Canadians; Alison Henderson and Karishma Prasanna, Blake, Cassels & Graydon LLP; and lastly, Shannon Kot, Deloitte.

LIFT also utilized a Slack Channel to encourage peer-to-peer learning between sessions to facilitate resource and funding opportunity sharing. Resources included a Revenue Diversification Strategy Workbook and guided template, case studies of implemented social finance and social enterprise models, as well as information about the Investment Readiness Program at LIFT and research on Social Impact Bonds. Participants from over 20 organizations signed up to access the channel.

Findings—

Following the workshop sessions, LIFT circulated a survey to gather feedback and shape future iterations. All participants either agreed or strongly agreed that they were made aware of potential revenue diversification opportunities and strategies outside of IRCC, that they will be applying knowledge gained through these sessions, and that their understanding of internal capacity needed for revenue diversification was enhanced. All participants also agreed that learning objectives

were clearly understood, there was an appropriate amount of time allotted to cover the content, the content was presented in an engaging manner, the workshop series met expectations, and they would recommend the series to other organizations. The pilot clearly demonstrated sector interest in better understanding and exploring revenue diversification. A future focus with impact measurement training was noted to be beneficial.

Digital Champions Pilot- Partnership with The Mohr Collective and GEO Nova Scotia—

Research from the first phase of our project also found that there was a need for increased digital inclusion within the sector, which provided the rationale for the development of the Digital Champions pilot. It was evident, for example, that digital equity was top-of-mind amongst focus group participants during the sessions held in September 2021. Part of the main solutions and recommendations that came out of the **discussions** were, “Improving IT infrastructure, as well as providing digital literacy training for newcomers; allocating additional funding to increasing internet access/bandwidth; digital technology lending library programs for newcomers; professional development seminars on emerging technologies in the workplace for SPOs”. During the pandemic, hybrid service delivery had become a necessity, while the digital divide became apparent as clients had different levels of digital **literacy**. Addressing this digital divide remains paramount as digital inclusion is recognized as a **social determinant of health**.

The ACS partnered with the Mhor Collective and GEO Nova Scotia in order to implement the pilot. The Mhor Collective is based in Scotland, and as per their **website**, they “develop and deliver digital participation programmes which give individuals the skills and confidence to make the most of the benefits of today’s digital technology” and “work with local communities and groups, with private sector companies and key public sector organizations such as local authorities, housing associations, health boards and enterprise agencies to ensure that [their] work is both sustainable and resilient.” Their services cover many aspects of digital participation, including the delivery of digital skills training and the development of digital inclusion strategies. The Mhor collective moderated the training sessions throughout the pilot.

GEO Nova Scotia is a new non-profit organization (founded in 2022) with the goal of ensuring that Nova Scotian citizens have what is needed to access the internet. Their near-term goals, according to their **website**, are to “help more people get the technology, internet access, and skills they need to be online; learn as much as [they] can about how best to deliver that support; and cultivate a broad, multi-sector network of partners to develop and deliver projects and programs that ensure digital inclusion for all.” GEO Nova Scotia assisted in making connections throughout their province, and helped facilitate the Digital Champions sessions.

The Digital Champions program is based on the model used by Connecting Scotland, which is a Scottish government-funded initiative. The program offers a basic approach for frontline staff or volunteers at non-profit organizations to engage their clients in the digital realm. It is meant to ensure digital inclusion using trusted intermediaries to provide support with digital skills as part of wider, holistic support. Digital champions are not required to be digital experts; however, they must be understanding, communicative and committed to helping those that they work with.

The program was tailored for the Canadian settlement sector, beginning with two co-design sessions delivered over Zoom and using Mentimeter in order to collect data and facilitate engagement. Organizations present during co-design included ISANS, YREACH, ARAISA and others. Co-design with these individuals centered around what the responsibilities would be for Digital Champions in the sector, what a newcomer-specific approach would look like, potential barriers and solutions, and certain program details such as the scope, outcomes and evaluation.

The Digital Champions pilot delivery ran between September and November 2022, beginning in Nova Scotia and scaled out to the rest of Canada. Session participation was capped at a maximum of 25 participants in order to ensure that sessions were engaging and interactive. Following co-design sessions wherein participants provided input on how to tailor the Digital Champions model to the Canadian settlement sector context, sessions in Nova Scotia were held on September 22nd, September 28th, October 4th and October 6th. Sessions for the rest of Canada (including Nova Scotia) were held on October 25th, October 27th, November 8th, November 15th and November 17th. Sessions were also conducted over Zoom and using Mentimeter.

During the sessions, Mhor Collective moderators presented using the same set of slides each time. The sessions defined Essential Digital Skills as the ability to (safely and legally) communicate online, problem solve, handle information and data and perform online transactions. They introduced the learning outcomes they hoped to accomplish over the session, which were to: understand and explain the benefits of being online; understand what [is meant] by ‘essential digital skills’; understand how a Digital Champion can support a new learner; understand how to engage a new learner who has limited or no digital skills/confidence; and explore new resources to help [them] in [their] frontline role. [how to reference?]

Participants were placed into two breakout rooms throughout the session where they were asked, “How does the internet impact newcomers to Canada? What are the challenges and/or barriers you see?” and “Staying safe online: what are our

main concerns for ourselves and the people we support”? Participants were also encouraged to find “the hook” when working with their clients, in order to prompt them to think about online literacy — this is done by understanding their clients’ interests and needs (accessing key services, such as related to finance, health, determining their hobbies, etc.)

Moderators shared the following resources with participants: ABC Internet Matters (and more!), Learn My Way (UK), Telus, ABC — Family Literacy, DuoLingo, and Google Translate. Regarding staying safe online, the session covered misinformation, online scams, virus guards, password security and how to identify secure websites, and the following resources were shared on this topic: Get Cyber Safe, Media Smartz, Common Sense Media (US) and Be Internet Awesome. Lastly, participants were presented with a Digital Skills Assessment Form, which was designed to help the Digital Champion and their client(s) think about their digital skills, identify what they are proficient in as well as what they need more help with.

A feedback survey was sent out to participants. 34 participants completed the survey during rollout to the rest of Canada. They were asked to rate their levels of satisfaction in terms of length of session, how engaging the session was, timing of the session and applicability of content. The majority indicated that they were very satisfied (average 48.81%) followed by satisfied (average 46.43%). The vast majority (94.44%) of respondents said that they would apply what they learned in the training sessions to their work. In terms of what was most useful about the training, respondents noted the “resources” shared.

The following are examples of responses:

- > “Learning from each other. Knowing about new apps which can be useful for us and our clients.”
- > “The conversation between attendees. I also enjoyed the resources and websites shared during the session.”
- > “Knowledge of the great need for digital literacy.”
- > “I liked the suggested resources, the group discussion and the use of the Mentimeter.”

Participants were asked how the program could be improved. Suggestions included, “providing some training on how to train clients to not fall for scam emails/calls”, switching up the groups of people in the breakout rooms, elaborating on certain elements that were covered (such as Google translate as a Chrome extension), providing more case studies, and more. When asked how they would apply learnings to their work, participants identified that they would apply several aspects, including the resources list, the assessment tool, the helpful links shared, cybersecurity tips, and using Mentimeter. Overall, the pilot was well received across Canada.

Implementation Guide

In order to direct Canadian settlement sector workers through the implementation of the Digital Champions training within their organizations, we created a training guide. This guide contains several resources to assist with the adoption of this training, including: The Digital Champions Training Guide, the Digital Skills Assessment

form, the Digital Champions Trainer Handbook, and lastly, the Digital Champions Training Program Evaluation Guide.

The Digital Champions Training guide is a sample discussion guide for leading a Digital Champions training session. The guide contains a series of questions to ask future Digital Champions, including learning outcomes, the purpose and meaning of digital inclusion, discussion of challenges, and skills related to becoming a Digital Champion. The guide also contains a series of useful resources to assist new learners. The Digital Skills Assessment form is a tool to assist service providers with assessing their clients’ current and evolving knowledge of essential digital skills and establish a baseline digital competency. The Digital Champions Trainer Handbook, adapted from the successful Scottish Government and SCVO Connecting Scotland Digital Champion program, outlines the Digital Champions program step by step, creating a framework for what is required of a Digital Champion, building digital confidence, and delivering remote support, along with tips for working with newcomers. Lastly, the Digital Champions Training evaluation guide was developed to measure the success of the program as it is implemented within SPOs organizations. The guide contains a variety of evaluation tools, including surveys, focus groups and frameworks for measuring digital skills and how they have evolved.

Stakeholder Recommendations

Throughout our focus groups and key informant interviews, along with conversations with our expert advisory committee members, we have collated numerous recommendations for sector stakeholders, including settlement service

providers, government/policy-makers, sector-adjacent organizations such as post-secondary institutions and employers, as well as related private sector organizations. Overarching recommendation themes include: Partnership; Centralized Knowledge; Alternative Funding; Standardization; Employer Inclusivity Training; Centering Newcomer Voices; International Students; Mental Health; Digital Literacy; Pre-arrival Services; Program Expansion; and lastly, Employment.

Recommendations for Public / Private Sector Partnership & Employment

It is recommended that smaller SPOs with less capacity **maintain legacy partnerships between other local settlement agencies with different strengths**. For example, the creation of long-term fruitful partnerships between agencies who have better employment programs, and partnerships with employers between organizations who have a greater focus on language programs. This would enable smaller agencies to focus limited resources on the delivery of fewer services at a higher quality, determine specific client-bases, streamline service provision, and decrease duplication in the sector and increase capacity and resiliency in the sector. Through this reciprocal support, organizations may also collaborate on models of case management and the replication of successful programs, as well as exchange letters of support or collaborate on joint funding applications within the public and private sector.

Settlement agencies are also encouraged to **continue building on learning and opportunities that arose from the COVID-19 pandemic, including partnerships and creative solutions that had been**

forged out of necessity. It is important to ensure the creative solutions created through COVID-19 response efforts continue to be built upon to avoid reverting back to the previous silofication of the sector. For example, many SPOs integrated hybrid service delivery models, AI, and new database systems for client information. Building on the use of technology, as well as knowledge sharing between organizations, will continue to improve the resilience of the sector.

Through these partnerships, **successful program service delivery should be expanded to rural and/or vulnerable areas**. This would involve scaling up smaller, successful and innovative projects within larger SPOs, as opposed to creating larger-scale programs that cannot be scaled down for rural communities. This would require successful programs to be evaluated and assessed for duplication.

It is recommended that **a higher level of collaboration also be fostered between settlement organizations and umbrella organizations**. While some settlement organizations indicated a high degree of collaboration and participation within their umbrella organizations, other jurisdictions indicated a smaller level of participation. Collaboration between umbrella organizations and settlement organizations can be utilized to increase knowledge transfer between SPOs in the same region, such as upcoming grant opportunities or sector and labour market trends. This would also aid in maintaining efficient, constant communication between Anglophone and Francophone agencies as well as urban and rural agencies.

The IRCC, alongside civil society organizations, should create a centralized knowledge sharing platform in order to create a community of practice, further collaboration and share tools, and

improve interoperability between knowledge hubs through an RSS feed. The sector can utilize internal metadata through this feed to target messages to specific audiences through the system. Data-sharing agreements between the government and agencies would also assist. This will require support and collaboration with umbrella organizations to involve all SPOs within that region. **It is recommended to create a centre of excellence**, in which organizations with greater capacity for research conduct analyses and disseminate findings across the sector. This would enable smaller SPOs with less research capacity to obtain sector knowledge and stay in the loop regarding ongoing trends and findings. Corroborating data on the newcomer settlement journey would assist with the creation and modification of services.

It is recommended that an **online dashboard** be created to streamline trends, needs and challenges, best practices, experiences, hybrid delivery models and information related to the labour market per region. This tool could also be used to cross-reference IRCC internal data with job prospects, employment rates, salaries and post-secondary information in order to provide clear linkages between newcomers and job prospects.

Similarly, referral partnerships between agencies and private organizations should be encouraged, such as The Gateway Model at Calgary Catholic Immigration Society. **Referral partnerships with external private organizations** can be utilized to direct newcomers to a private organization's services for a referral fee, which increases funding diversification. Other potential SPO partnerships with the private sector include employment or post-secondary institution partnerships, wherein SPOs refer clients to these stakeholders through mutually beneficial referral contracts. **Multilateral**

partnerships between SPOs, post-secondary institutions and employers can be used to facilitate a training and employment pipeline for newcomers, as well as increase retention rates of international students. For example, through a referral program wherein SPOs refer newcomers to post-secondary institutions for occupation-specific training, post-secondary institutions could then partner with employers to employ newcomers following course completion. This would assist in the retention of international students as they would be secured employment opportunities following their studies. **Ongoing partnerships and communication between employers and SPOs** should be cultivated to ensure information about roles and employment opportunities are shared.

This would also enable SPOs to recommend specific upskilling programs to fit employers' regional needs. Furthermore, incentives for employers to hire international students, or the creation of bridging visas that allow international students to work after completing their studies would increase retention. Lastly, it is recommended that SPOs facilitate focus groups and meetings between employers and newcomers to discuss employment opportunities, expectations and the process of acquiring employment. **The IRCC could improve employment outcomes for newcomers through offering provincial training grants, bridging programs, paid internships, and mentoring programs.** It is recommended that alongside SPOs, **the IRCC should foster reciprocally beneficial partnerships with employers by working closely with industry associations**, keeping employers' needs in mind. Through working with industry associations, the IRCC and SPOs can provide regionally-based labour market information pre- and post arrival to newcomers as they

begin their settlement and Canadian employment journey. In doing so, less newcomers may settle in areas that have lower occupation rates in certain sectors. This partnership would benefit employers as they can prepare for newcomer employment opportunities and decrease employment gaps.

Employment services should be streamlined for international students, by connecting them with specific training programs in high demand areas as well as with programs with employers. This would require partnerships between post-secondary institutions and employers. In doing so, international students would have immediate employment opportunities post-graduation. Targeting international students in employment-related training would encourage them to apply for permanent residency.

Bias sensitivity training for employers to learn best practices for integrating newcomers using a diversity, equity and inclusion lens would assist newcomer employment levels, as well as recruitment and retention. Improved newcomer employment rates would not only be beneficial for newcomers, but for employment gaps as well. The sector should work with employers in order for leadership adjustments, including training supervisors and teams to work with culturally diverse communities, and increase inclusive hiring practices. Lastly, bias sensitivity training would decrease layers of unconscious bias, such as bias regarding perceived accent. It would also be beneficial for SPOs to create workshops around cross-cultural communication, cultural diversity, employer expectations, and supporting newcomers through the onboarding process.

Settlement provider organizations should develop employment programs for immigrant professionals

such as job readiness workshops and employment coaching paired with available positions for newcomers. The sector should also prioritize occupational-specific language training. Mentorship programs to match immigrants with more settled newcomers to navigate the job market would also be extremely beneficial for successful integration into the workforce.

The creation of an online repository wherein newcomers can upload their skills profiles for employment matching would also be a valuable tool for employers to access a talent pool of readily available professional applicants.

To improve collaboration within the settlement sector, it is recommended that **the IRCC promote partnerships between settlement organizations by creating funding opportunities that require a minimum number of partners within their call for proposals**. Alongside required partnerships with other SPOs, this could include a number of partners within the public or private sector. The use of tech strategy, digitalization, and standardized approaches for benchmarking led by the IRCC within the settlement sector would also boost collaboration and information sharing.

It is also recommended that **SPOs and funders hold quarterly or semi-annual in-person meetings to ensure continued communications with the IRCC and other funders/partnerships in addition to regular reporting**. Having regular check-ins, or the opportunity to do so with program staff and stakeholders beyond reporting requirements, will increase communication and cohesion within the sector. Funders may take the initiative to schedule these meetings as part of their funding requirements.

Alternative funding—

We highly recommend that SPOs diversify funding sources, including implementing social finance and social enterprise models into their organizational structure where applicable. These additional revenue sources would supplement, rather than replace existing IRCC funding to boost program development, infrastructure, capacity and innovative initiatives.

Alternative funding structures also include exploring outcomes-based and performance-based models, particularly for employment-related outcomes. An example of such would refer to if a SPO was paid following the employment of a client for a certain period of time by a private sector employer. A shortcoming of this approach, however, is that clients' performance is not necessarily reflective of the settlement agencies' capabilities. That said, engaging and experimenting with innovative funding models may redirect SPOs away from operating like a charity, and towards operating as a sustainable social enterprise.

Financial literacy training for the purpose of implementing novel funding structures through education, awareness and incentivization will assist SPOs in acquiring additional sources of wealth aside from direct donations. This may involve webinars, resources, and materials on alternative funding sources, outcomes-based and performance-based models.

It is recommended that a fee be charged to post-secondary institutions as part of the student VISA process, which would assist funding the immigrant-serving sector in developing a pan-Canadian support program for international students. Project research found low retention rates of international students, and it was discovered that this is largely due to a lack of cohesion between the sector, post-secondary institutions, and policy concerning access to settlement needs for international students. Post-secondary institutions could also pay for settlement services for international students as part of the retention initiative.

Standardization—

It is recommended that the sector develop baseline competencies and standardization for digital literacy and digital privacy for their staff. Through discussions with SPO workers, it was found that baseline competencies were not identified and many guidelines were created informally as issues arose. The standardization of these competencies would ensure a higher level of safety and consistency within organizations.

The implementation of a standardized needs assessment for newcomers would create a centralized knowledge base in order to share data and referrals. This assessment would be inputted into a shared database, measuring outcomes and outputs achieved through their settlement journey. If SPOs created a standardized nationwide needs assessment, newcomer data across all three levels of government within one platform would

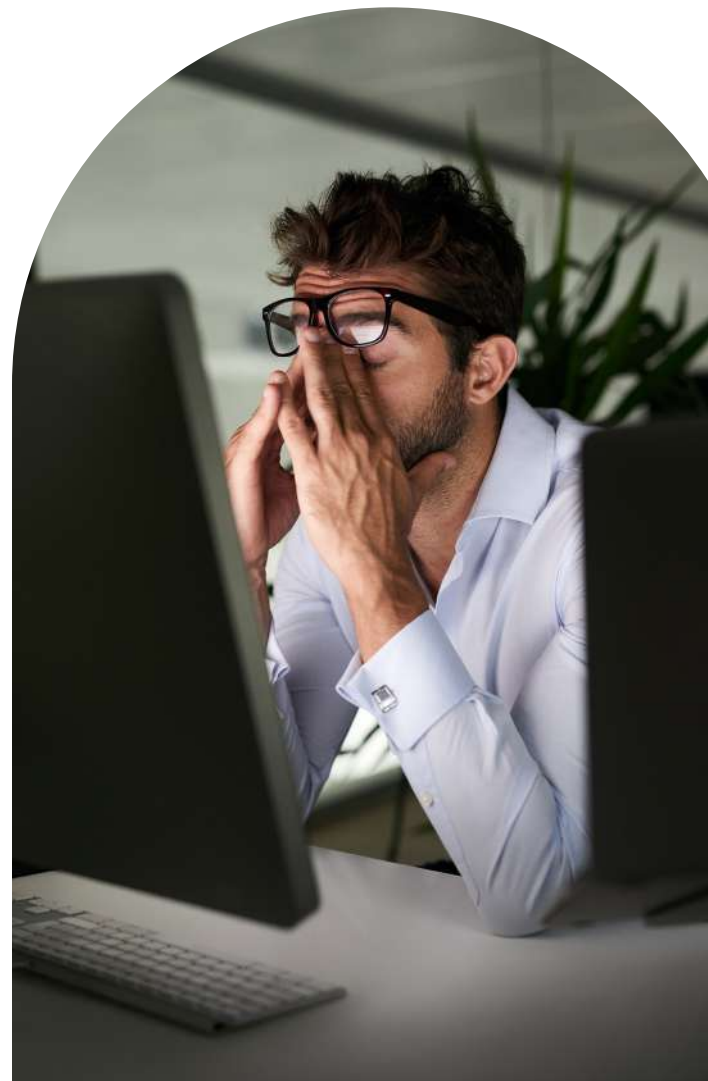
be accessible to service providers. Furthermore, this would result in saved time and resources as newcomers would only need to fill in one needs assessment, rather than multiple assessments as they access different service providers for differing needs. This would also enable centralized referrals across SPO regions.

The standardization of informal feedback protocol is recommended. This refers to informal feedback regarding professional development opportunities; the use of informal networking; the development of evaluation protocol; expanding service delivery to rural and vulnerable newcomer communities; the challenges and opportunities caused by COVID-19; newcomer engagement; and lastly, the lack of concerns heard by funders and the IRCC.

Mental health—

Throughout the research it was found that many settlement workers struggled, particularly throughout the pandemic, with their own mental health challenges as well as with compassion fatigue. Many refugees and newcomers arrive with past trauma, and often settlement workers are their first point of contact. **It is recommended that SPO workers be provided with psychological support** to deal with the myriad of challenging issues they face with their clients.

It is also important to provide a culturally-sensitive approach to service delivery, with mental health support made available to newcomers who have experienced trauma, in their language of origin. **An IRCC funded stream for professional development in trauma-informed care for settlement workers** would also benefit the settlement process for vulnerable newcomers and refugees.



Digital literacy, Internet and Technology—

The sector should improve IT infrastructure and provide digital literacy training for newcomers. As many newcomers come with varying degrees of familiarity with technology, training programs are recommended for newcomers with lower levels of digital literacy as the use of the internet for employment, housing, licensing and healthcare require a level of digital knowledge. Similarly, **digital technology lending library programs for newcomers** would allow newcomers to learn digital skills on their own time, as well as enable them to use technology to continue their settlement journey. Vulnerable newcomers need greater support in accessing technology to use social media, email, access government websites, housing, and employment opportunities.

Additional funding for increasing internet access and bandwidth at SPOs is also encouraged, as many settlement workers mentioned a lack of reliable technology. The IRCC does not currently fund settlement organization infrastructure, which inhibits settlement workers from providing optimal service. **Settlement workers should also be provided with professional development opportunities related to the use of evolving technologies** so they can best assist newcomers including covering the costs of acquiring digital tools and devices, address issues surrounding privacy, security and confidentiality and other related training opportunities.

Other General Recommendations for the Sector—

- > **SPOs should increase professional development opportunities**, including upskilling, emerging technology training, cross-training among departments, and opportunities for upwards mobility within their organizations. There should be a baseline of professional development opportunities with training for staff related to novel programs and models. Throughout the project research, it was found that the sector lacks some physical infrastructure and retention of staff. Increased investment in staff well-being would also help alleviate some retention challenges. The sector requires improved internal capacity building, as well as consistent mental and physical health support.
- > **The creation of holistic wraparound services** should also be prioritized, such as providing CV building support alongside programs that provide affordable child care, transportation, housing, and more.
- > **Service delivery should utilize a culturally sensitive approach**, which takes cultural differences into account when planning programs for particular demographics. Sessions, workshops and conversations should be tailored to their ethnically diverse groups to allow newcomers to feel welcome and accepted.

- > **The sector should advocate for the use of long-term funding agreements**, encouraging continuity, stable and sustainable programming for the sector. Our research found that short-term agreements require more reporting and hinder innovation in the sector.
- > **It is recommended that pre-arrival supports ensure that newcomers are aware of certain barriers they may face upon arrival**, such as the credential recognition process, as well as ensure that expectations are managed, related to employment and housing. There should be a link between pre-and-post arrival settlement services to provide the correct information for clients, and to direct them to the appropriate organization for their needs upon arrival. At the pre-arrival stage, newcomers should be provided with invitation letters as well as links and information about life in Canada, including where they may access more materials, in order to streamline the immigration process.
- > It is recommended that **settlement agencies reach out to international student organizations to showcase the services, particularly the employment-related supports they provide**. In doing so, a higher percentage of international students may decide to apply for permanent residence.
- > **Newcomers should be engaged at the centre of the newcomer and refugee discussion**. Newcomers should be consulted in program development and evaluation methods, as well as in higher-level policy discussions with the IRCC and the sector. It is recommended to create a volunteer network of spokespeople within newcomer communities, such as ethnic group leaders or religious leaders. This would ensure equitable communication between SPOs and clients, as well as safeguard newcomers' perspectives and assure that their voices are heard.
- > Furthermore, **partnerships with community leaders, ethnocultural centres, religious institutions and any other community-based organizations should be cultivated for informal newcomer networking initiatives**. Through these partnerships, settlement organizations can gain access to informal word-of-mouth networks in newcomer communities as well as messaging groups such as Whatsapp to share information on available services to attract new clients and increase knowledge dissemination. SPOs can harness these informal networking opportunities through encouraging informal connections across agencies by organizing conferences, meetings, and focus group discussions. It is important to note that evaluation metrics should be created to collate informal feedback and information.

