



Settlement 2.0 Project: Situational Analysis

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Settlement 2.0 - A Situational Analysis

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Introduction

This report provides a snapshot of the current state of the technological and innovative capacities of the immigrant and refugee-serving sector in Canada. This report summarizes findings from a series of interviews conducted with representatives of settlement organizations, federal and provincial governments, and academics across the country, as well as an extensive literature review.

Summary

Settlement 2.0

PeaceGeeks Society received funding from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) to develop a strategic vision and action plan for exploring how technology and innovation can best support settlement outcomes for supporting newcomers to Canada. The intent is to provide a vision for a brighter future for the sector - a Settlement 2.0 - one that prioritizes empowering newcomers to be agents in their own settlement journey and which builds the overall capacities of the sector to embrace innovative mindsets and more sustainably support newcomers over time.

The Settlement 2.0 project strives to understand the pre-conditions necessary for effective change, and how the sector can embrace tech and innovation in service delivery and strategic principles. This report represents the first stage of the project, and lays out a situational analysis that highlights internal perceptions of the effectiveness of current service delivery models, challenges to open and collaborative innovation in the settlement sector, and supplements interview findings with key literature. We examine what assets and resources the sector holds, and also what capabilities and supports it needs to achieve its ideal outcomes now and in the future.

Sector Values and IRCC CORE Principles

In the latter half of 2018, IRCC held consultations across the country with stakeholders in the settlement sector and adjacent human service fields to identify priority services and gaps. CORE Principles were introduced at these meetings.¹ Further, these CORE Principles are being applied in IRCC's most recent Call for Proposals, indicating the intended longevity through "design, implementation, and evaluation" of this strategic vision (IRCC 2019).

¹What We Heard: NSC Plus - September 2018

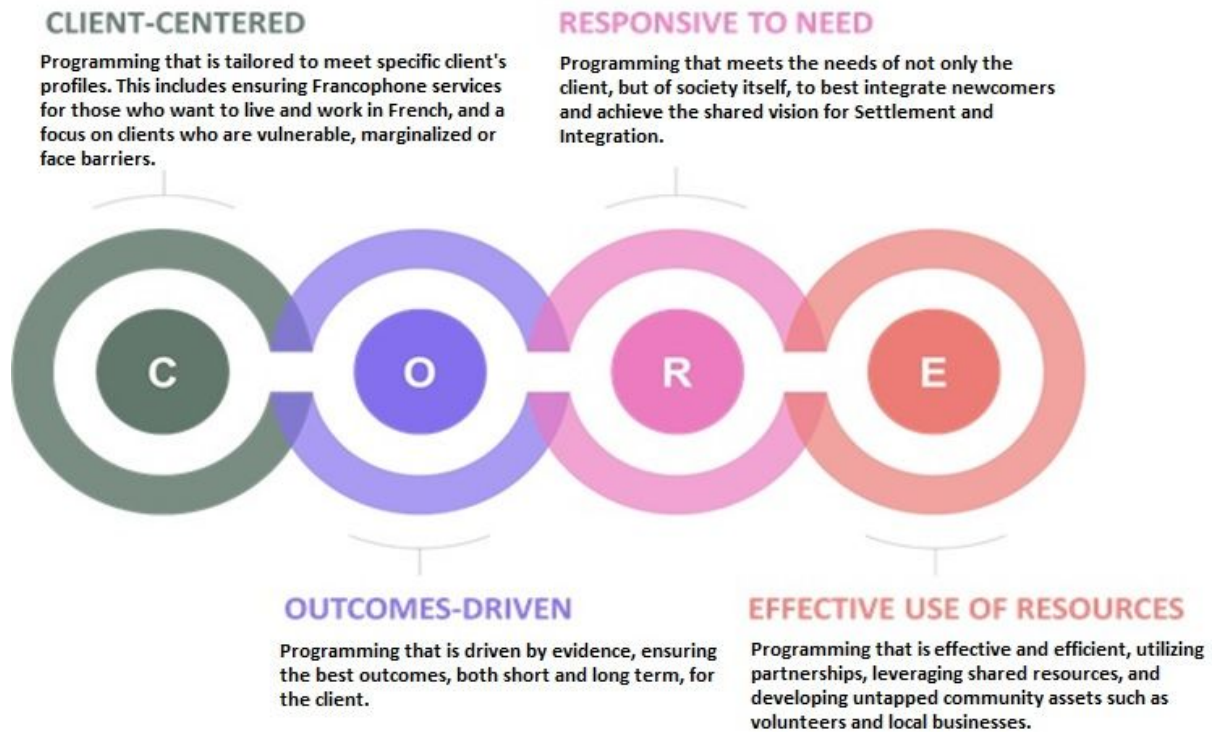


Figure 1: IRCC CORE Principles

These CORE Principles align with the 12 Core Values of Settlement Work identified almost 20 years ago by the sector itself (CCR 2000). They ground the sector in community and newcomer-centric approaches that value collaboration, proactive communication, accountability to our communities, and recognizing that the sector is not merely a service industry, but an agent of change in our communities and clients' lives. The 12 Core Values are:

1. Access
2. Inclusion
3. Client empowerment
4. User-defined services
5. Holistic approach
6. Respect for the individual
7. Cultural sensitivity
8. Community development
9. Collaboration
10. Accountability
11. Orientation towards positive change
12. Reliability

Language being used today to describe innovation, both in describing IRCC's CORE Principles and by civic tech and other innovation actors, includes terms such as client-centric, co-creation,

openness, transparency, empowering communities, addressing vulnerability, and knowledge sharing, among others. The immigrant and refugee-serving sector is rooted in these principles in approaches to service provision, program development, and system change. The foundation, then, is already in place.

Key Themes and Recommendations

Given the significance of IRCC's CORE Principles this report uses them as a framework to provide a view of the current state of the settlement sector, with the following key themes in mind:

- Current state of the sector
- Sector collaboration and barriers
- Technology, innovation and settlement outcomes
- Newcomer use of technology and information practice
- Settlement sector capacity for innovation
- Required service capacity for a new settlement ecosystem

These themes are briefly introduced below, and explored in detail in the body of this report.

Current State of the Sector

As with any human service field, the reality of the settlement sector is complex. With multiple key players, from clients, to service-providers, to leadership, to funders, and considering interactions with surrounding sectors that interact with these stakeholders at various levels, it is clear there are a lot of voices to be heard when we consider the subjects of innovation and change.

The desire and need to share knowledge comes up in interviews consistently. A national "Community of Practice" has recently been launched, and while it is too soon to tell whether this new web approach will meet sector needs, it indicates a step toward more collaborative communication.²

Recommendations: The national discussion about CORE Principles and how they align with the sector's historical values needs to continue and be open to all. Building trust between IRCC and funded agencies is essential for innovation and change to truly occur.

Sector Collaboration and Barriers

² [National Community of Practice](#). It is also worth reviewing previous analyses of [Community of Practice efforts](#).

Interviewees consistently pointed out that the desire for collaboration, and the need for more effective mechanisms to facilitate collaboration, is not a new conversation.³ A common question within the sector is if we know what the lay of the land is, and we know what assets and resources the sector has, and needs, to develop the capabilities to achieve the outcomes our clients want, what are the levers for change that will get us there?

Collaboration is considered one way to address this complexity. When collaboration works, it can be transformative; and there are increasingly good examples of this through Local Immigration Partnerships (LIPs) across Canada. However, there are as many examples of collaboration as there are distrust and competition.

Recommendations: Knowledge mobilization efforts, practice & communication need to be formalized and implemented across the country. Building collaboration between sector agencies needs to be a priority.

Technology, Innovation and Settlement Outcomes

The sector uses technology to deliver services and has a rich history of being innovative with technology. However, there continue to be many challenges to technology implementation in agencies, particularly around service delivery and data, information, and feedback management. In order to achieve innovation and technology outcomes that will propel the sector forward, investments are needed to build the capacity of sector agencies. Feedback to IRCC from the sector about technology capacity has been consistent: the sector needs adequate resourcing, professional development, time, collaboration with experts, and flexibility to iterate, “fail,” learn, and innovate.

Recommendation: Technology access, literacy & infrastructure require investments in training and appropriate hardware as it evolves, and client use of it changes.

Data Collection/Feedback Capacity

Service-providing agencies collect a lot of data and information about clients, primarily for the purposes of output reporting. There is an opportunity to utilize the wealth of existing and archived data for more strategic practices moving forward. Even though agencies consistently express that they want to do more, they also state that they do not have the expertise or the capacity within their agencies. When they say they do have it, in general it is described as a staff person doing it “on the side of their desk.” This is a common theme in the sector, one which is also recognized by the funder (Gay 2018).

³ The [Cities of Migration site](#) is an excellent and successful example of this in practice.

Recommendation: Data/information management capacity & harnessing client feedback require additional resources and external expertise to build sector capacity.

Newcomer Use of Technology and Information Practice

Newcomers are not just consumers of information and technology; they are also creators. They are making, solving, networking, and even bypassing the sector. Multiple studies show that as many as 60% of newcomers don't access services – and at least half of those are not aware of available services (Wilkinson & Bucklaschuk 2014, Lo et al 2010, Esses et al 2013a, Esses et al 2013b, Statistics Canada 2003, Vancouver Immigration Partnership 2015, IRCC 2018, Hanley, Jill, et al 2018, Jalal & Naik 2018). Increasingly, newcomer networks are private (such as private messaging or closed social network groups), which means the sector's ability to reach potential clients might become more difficult. Evidence suggests that informal supports, while more heavily accessed, simply do not provide the outcomes newcomers need. The sector needs to be present where newcomers are online, just like it is offline in community spaces.

Recommendation: Technology access, literacy & infrastructure require investments in training and appropriate hardware as it evolves, and client use of it changes.

Settlement Sector Capacity for Innovation

Implementing a Settlement 2.0 vision requires investments of resources, support, different funding structures and relationships, trust, space, and time. These themes arise again and again in interviews. Agencies have to be able to re- or up-skill their workforce as well as hire new types of roles and staff in order to move forward. Initially, it will mean more resources, not fewer. The lack of standardized professional development and competency frameworks across the sector and at all levels in organizations, from frontline to executive leadership is a challenge that will not go away on its own, and indeed may be compounded by a constantly changing migration reality (CISSA-ACSEI & OCASI 2018, Biles 2018, Koltermann & Scott 2018, Bushell & Shields 2018).

Recommendation: A national sector capacity-building approach is needed that builds on existing professional development efforts, but also brings in approaches from other sectors.

Required Service Capacity for a New settlement ecosystem

Alan Broadbent, Founder of Maytree, a rights-based poverty reduction-agency, coined the "Three I's of Immigrant Integration:" intentionality, instruments, and investments (Open Society Foundations 2014). Intentionality is about "intending to create success at work, home, and in the community...as citizens," while instruments refer to "creating the effective mechanisms to give those intentions traction," and investments encompass "financial investment" to "drive

success,” but also energy investment from “political leaders...and all of us,” (Open Society Foundations 2014). These “Three I’s” are crucial to the success of an innovative, forward-thinking settlement sector.

In recent years the sector has begun building these levers for change in a number of contexts:

- Innovation, technology and discussions of the future of settlement work are on the National Settlement Council agenda.⁴
- Service Delivery Improvement funding. IRCC has invested in a number of innovation and pilot projects which are currently ongoing. The results of these projects will help bring evidence-based information into IRCC about how technology and innovation approaches can improve newcomer outcomes. It can also help support current anecdotal perspectives as well as previous research (outlined in the body of this report) that provides evidence about the needed investments for the sector to fully embrace technology and innovation in client services.
- Innovation practices and labs are emerging throughout the sector – LIPs are fostering collaboration in regions where it's been a historical challenge. [WoodGreen Community Services](#), [MCIS Language Solutions](#), [NouLab's Economic Immigration Lab](#), [SFU's Radius Refugee Livelihoods Lab](#), [Refugee Career Jumpstart](#), [Department of Imaginary Affairs](#), are just a few of note.
- Municipal, Provincial and the Federal governments have all embarked on technologically innovative overhauls of the way they serve the public. They have created innovation labs and innovation practices are becoming core parts of government planning. For example, federally, the government has developed [Digital Service Standards](#), has created a [Digital Academy](#) that strives to support “all levels of public servants in their efforts to modernize operations,” and within the sector’s main funder, IRCC, has created a large [Client Experience Branch](#).
- IRCC has introduced CORE Principles (Client-centred, Outcomes-driven, Responsive to need, Effective use of Resources) into its planning and as an underlying theme in its current Call for Proposals, which will fund projects for at least the next five years.

These initiatives, among others, are promising, and indicate a widespread enthusiasm for innovating the sector, and indeed, a sense of ownership that will encourage sector stakeholders to coalesce around the shared aim of ensuring we’re all working toward an empowered and capable immigrant and refugee-serving sector that keeps ahead of the curve in an ever-changing environment.

Recommendation: IRCC’s funding model needs to better recognize the resource and time needs required to build innovation practice in the sector.

⁴[NSC Agenda Ottawa Jan 31-Feb 1 2019](#)

Methodology

Thirty-six qualitative interviews and an extensive literature review were conducted. Interviewees represented a variety of immigrant and refugee-serving agencies of different sizes, long-standing and new, in urban and rural areas around the country, front-line workers and management. Interviewees also included academics (2), government representatives (3 federal, 2 provincial), provincial umbrella group representatives (5), an organization providing capacity-building services to the sector, and representatives from outside the immigrant and refugee-serving sector. Interviewees were encouraged to be frank and honest in their feedback, assured that their identities and specific remarks would remain confidential. Specific quotes included in this report are thus not attributed to individuals.

The literature review examined existing research, reports, articles, videos, websites, and more, from within and outside of the sector. With every interview, more literature surfaced. While the literature review was extensive, it is likely there is even more material out there. One of the goals of this report is to spark conversation and further exploration of the wealth of knowledge and wisdom that already exists on the subject of incorporating innovation into the settlement sector in Canada.

The findings were complemented by the practice knowledge of the author, who has been involved in delivering and researching innovation and technology use in settlement services over twenty-five years and who has built significant informal networks with practitioners and sector leaders who use a variety of technologies and innovative approaches to deliver services to newcomers to Canada.

Current state of the sector

What is the state of the immigrant and refugee-serving sector?

The Settlement 2.0 project will provide a vision and a strategy on how to help the Canadian settlement sector embrace a culture of technology, innovation, and open practices that can lead to sustained improvements in outcomes for all newcomers, service-providing stakeholders, funders, other involved actors, and the country as a whole. We begin by examining the current state of the sector: its strengths, challenges, and where opportunities exist for innovation.

The sector is complex in many ways, not only within itself, but in the sectors and systems it is surrounded by, and somewhat dependent on, to ensure positive outcomes for its clients. It is, by nature, a human service sector dependent on other community actors to ensure its core clients' success and inclusion. At the same time, the literature and interviewees note increasingly complex client situations and needs. There is a general sense among actors in the settlement sector, and in the literature, that successful outcomes for clients is somewhat beyond the control of the sector. Additionally, while there are pockets of innovation and

technological advancement, knowledge-sharing and transfer are generally limited, both within agencies and across the sector.

One of the critical themes which emerges from interviews and literature is a sense that this conversation repeats itself every few years without moving innovation forward in a consistent or structured way. As one interviewee put it: “Tell the funder to read the reports we’ve already sent them. Every report that we do, from professional development results, from conferences, we do needs assessments, we do final reports, they have all the information. Tell them to go back to their existing reports, read our recommendations...provided year after year.”

Repeatedly, the question arises: “what has to happen differently?” Encouragingly, there are a number of actors and initiatives that appear to be aligning as this project rolls out. The National Settlement Council is talking about these new ideas in a more exploratory way. IRCC’s Service Delivery Improvement (SDI) funding is looking for evidence from projects they are funding to inform future programming. IRCC itself has set up a Client Experience Branch to both test new ideas and consult more actively with newcomer clients.

There is increased interest in newcomer-driven initiatives and new ideas in the sector (including those driven by “unusual actors” such as civic tech groups and businesses outside the sector (such as Refugee Career Jumpstart Project (RCJP), the Together Project, and PeaceGeeks) that are getting involved in co-creation and co-design of technology and other initiatives). The federal government is also actively implementing Digital Service Standards and providing digital literacy education in its School of Public Service Digital Academy. All of these trends together suggest that the next 3-5 years may witness changes in both perspective and approaches from the main sector funder. As this report outlines, there are a number of conditions that will need to be met in order for this to occur in the sector.

What is the settlement sector’s relationship with its largest funder, IRCC? The sector is seen as a partner and implementer of the federal government’s integration vision:

“the current approach to settlement service delivery in Canada can be characterised as a public-private partnership model...benefits of this type of model are that it reduces the size of government administration and allows the federal government to promote consistency of service delivery while still allowing for delivery flexibility based on needs determined at the local level. In addition, since non-profit agencies are often established in the immigrant communities they serve, they are often best qualified to provide services to immigrants due to the organizational skills and connections to communities that allow them to better identify newcomers’ needs.” (IRCC Evaluation Division 2017, Bushell & Shields 2018)

Agencies feel untrusted by IRCC, perceiving themselves being viewed through a deficit mentality by funders instead of assets and equal partners in settlement and integration. They

are overwhelmingly focused on survival, fearing the constant possibility of a financial audit by funders which could threaten current programming:

“The leader of one small voluntary organization said the disproportionate prioritization of direct services in funding formulas "creates a struggle to survive," because of the inability to create economies of scale. Another voluntary-sector informant claimed that organizations will try to take on too many programs in search of more administrative funding. Directors are incentivized to pursue larger contribution agreements in order to increase the salaries of central administrators and hire more administrative assistants.” (Neudorf 2016)

Interviewees echoed this, suggesting that their work is not seen within an asset framework. This deficit mentality drives budget approaches and generates an output versus outcomes focus, such as reporting client data simply as service statistics, rather than analyzing for service learnings, which impacts capacity for service improvement, enhancements, and new approaches.

Many interviewees noted how the sector feels like it is in a constant state of flux. Funders, service providers, and academics are still determining the best approaches to achieve positive outcomes, create welcoming and inclusive communities, and the most appropriate, innovative, and effective service models (Türegün et al 2018). It is also clear from the sheer amount of data, research, and reports that the sector is well studied, reviewed, and analyzed. At the same time, researchers note some significant gaps in studies on the connection between settlement outcomes and services. According to Türegün et al, very little research on settlement services has evaluated the impact of services on newcomer client outcomes (Türegün et al 2018). Interviewees suggest that the outputs versus outcomes reality is a function of the funding relationship and agreements with IRCC.

Agencies and IRCC feel they are having an impact

Many interviewees feel that their services are having an impact, but also that they know more can be done to better serve newcomer clients and communities. Many also comment how it is difficult in social/human services to measure and attribute impact on outcomes. The sector, focused on outputs, does not have a consistent model to measure outcomes, nor attribute them to their interventions.

It is important to note that many newcomers don't actually access mainstream settlement services. In general, research shows that between 60-70% of newcomers do not access services, either because they don't know about them, or don't feel they need them (Wilkinson & Bucklaschuk 2014, Lo et al 2010, Esses et al 2013a, Esses et al 2013b, Statistics Canada 2003, Vancouver Immigration Partnership 2015, IRCC 2018, Hanley, Jill, et al 2018). In many cases, informal settlement supports (in particular, information from family, friends, and other personal newcomer networks) have provided substandard outcomes for newcomers (Fang et

al 2010, Naik & Jalal 2018). Raising awareness of settlement services remains a sector challenge.

IRCC's 2017 evaluation determined that the immigrant and refugee-serving sector serves newcomers effectively (IRCC Evaluation Division 2017). However, a recent report acknowledged that research on the impact of services on clients is "scant" (Türegün et al 2018). One interviewee noted that the sector is good at providing the traditional services to high needs, vulnerable clients, but that it is becoming more challenging to meet the needs of clients with more specific needs, in particular related to employment and occupations, in the general settlement service stream. Türegün et al documented a number of barriers to service access and found that, in particular, services to youth, women, and seniors were inadequate and not meeting the needs of these vulnerable groups.

Türegün et al's research suggests specific ways the immigrant and refugee-serving sector can improve accessibility of services as well as enhance outcomes:

- Adopt a family-centred approach when conceiving, designing, and delivering settlement services.
- Pilot employment and self-employment programs for immigrant seniors and expand existing ones, especially those with occupation-specific job placements, for immigrant women and youth.
- Make language training more accessible and rewarding for immigrant women and seniors by expanding onsite child care, providing transportation subsidies, reaching out to rural communities, organizing flexible class schedules and locations, experimenting with new methods of delivery, and customizing content to diverse needs.
- In addition to in-school settlement workers, employ cultural brokers to mediate between newcomer students/families/institutions of different cultural backgrounds and facilitate service provision in a school setting.
- Approach and deliver health and mental health services in a gender-, race-, and culture-sensitive framework.
- Expand community-based activities, including volunteering, to reduce social isolation among, and increase social support for, all three groups of immigrants

The sector has an increasing need to innovate and provide services in different ways, whether through partnerships, involving other community partners, or new projects and project approaches. According to an interviewee: "we think about settlement broadly defined – who else could we partner with, what kinds of new things could we be doing? We ran ESL classes onsite in a workplace, how else can we partner with business to do more in the workplace, or in some other way?"

The sector knows what it wants

Interviewees in the sector acknowledge impact and outreach deficits, but also believe that legacy funding and program development approaches have hampered their ability to innovate and meet diverse and broad client needs they identify.

It appears that the funder is listening. In late 2018, IRCC organized local consultations to garner feedback about sector priorities that could inform IRCC's funding disbursements for the next five years. The consultations provided insight into what key sector players want and need to move forward under IRCC's CORE Principles. IRCC has since formally incorporated the CORE Principles into its 2019 Call for Proposals, indicating applications need to consider how they will effectively design and implement client-centred, outcomes-driven, proactive approaches to their initiatives. This inclusion will determine how the Canadian settlement sector grows and shifts through 2025.

What is perhaps missing and concerning to many interviewees is the how. How will agencies do this? Do they have the capacity? Are additional resources required? What methods and approaches will agencies use to determine clients' need to ensure that program development meets CORE Principles? Do these principles align with practice?

Innovation is a moving target

While interested in the notion of innovative service delivery, interviewees were concerned that "innovation" remains poorly defined.

Interviewees suggest that the first innovation the sector can adopt is a return to core values and to talk to people in a different way, creating human-centred service design that incorporates technology as a tool to facilitate that, rather than building services around technology.

Interviewees recognize a need to innovate and provide services in different ways, whether through partnerships, involving other community partners asking: who else can/should be involved in settlement? Who else could we partner with? What kinds of new things could we be doing? One said their agency is looking where informal supports exist in a community where a particular client community gathers and has informal settlement conversations, or a business where the owner connects community members to services or resources. How can they better connect with informal leaders in the community whose spaces become hubs?

While innovation is attractive to agencies, interviewees suggest that an entire service model can't simply and quickly be shifted. Workers, as well as clients, expect and need certain types of services and levels of services. There is much work to be done with organizational culture and leadership that needs to work with the current system and those who have always worked in it, while creating new systems and approaches.

The sector doesn't currently have what it needs to innovate effectively

Interviewees acknowledge that change related to innovation and technology is happening, and will become a constant. The reality is that many organizations don't have the leadership, governance capacity and resources to adequately move their organizations forward toward innovation. Interviewees indicate that they need time, resources, space, training, learning from successful projects within and outside the sector, moving innovation currently "on the side of the desk" to something more formal, institutional, and shared.

There are a number of small capacity building pilot projects currently underway in the sector, funded through IRCC's Service Delivery Improvement (SDI) funding. These projects reinforce the feedback from interviewees and the literature that the sector has much capacity-building to do to ensure that innovation practices and technologies are rolled out and used effectively to deliver services. They also point out the level of resources actually required to move organizations towards innovation and build their capabilities. This funding alone is a necessary and welcome investment, but is not sufficient to enable effective innovation. While the intent of SDI is, in part, to identify scalable projects, successful pilots will not scale to the rest of the sector without investments.

Some interviewees have found that staff need a fair bit of support and help to transition to online services, even something as simple as running webinars. There is a lot of initial work to get people to move from the prospect of a good idea to putting it into practice. They struggle with not only how to introduce new service approaches, but when to make them part of staff service expectations.

Another brought up a consistent concern among interviewees: "the issue is funding...if you have to innovate when you don't have stable funding and you don't know if you're going to be able to keep your staff or not... it's a serious barrier. It's not that people don't want to meet the needs to be innovative. If we are looking for innovation, then we have to be funded appropriately." Based on previous experiences, sector actors don't trust that good ideas they pilot will continue to be supported, and are thus sometimes reluctant to try to restart the process again. Sector veterans are wary of hearing about the "next best thing" that will replace their work. At the same time, those iterating with technology in the sector (such as using digital instant messaging as a service channel) have found that, with some clients, their services have become more effective and efficient (Campana unpublished).

There is a sense that this conversation repeats itself every few years without moving innovation forward in a consistent and structured way. In spite of structural changes in the way it approaches funding (i.e. Modernized Approach⁵), funders' audit approaches and rigidity are still perceived as the core culture of the funding relationship Neudorf found that IRCC's move to a

⁵ [Modernized Approach](#)

Modernized approach brought improvements to service efficiency and effectiveness, particular related to measuring client outcomes. He also notes that the process has been slow, in part because of a lack of agency capacity around measurement, as well as a sense from some agencies that measurement equals funder auditing. However, overall, it has been a step in the right direction (Neudorf, 2016).

In particular, settlement agencies in remote, smaller, or medium-sized communities indicate that they lack significant organizational capacities. In particular, they reported that they lack adequate staff levels and skills, ability to mobilize support in the community, and overall strategic planning (Ashton et al 2016). Ashton notes that this lack of capacity is increasingly concerning as newcomers both move and are encouraged to move into smaller or more rural communities, which may lack community and settlement capacity to welcome them effectively.

The recent 2018 National Small Centres Settlement & Integration Conference Summary Report and Calls for Action echoed this research, with specific recommendations for community and organizational capacity among smaller centre agencies, including staff re- or up-skilling, staff retention, better data collection and reporting, cost management and budgeting, more consistent collaboration, a better sector-funder dialogue, and a move from output reporting to impact measurement and reporting (Central Alberta Refugee Effort 2018).

Sector - Funder collaboration

What might a new conversation look like between core funders and settlement agencies? Government digital service standards (municipal⁶, provincial⁷, and federal⁸) prioritize more innovative, responsive and citizen-focused public services. These standards and knowledge have yet to transfer over into agencies governments fund, such as in the immigrant and refugee-serving sector.

Interviewees recognize that the sector needs to have dual focus – mastering the current system (best practice – optimizing existing system) while dedicating concurrent efforts to explore future practices.

What about current innovation practices? Within IRCC, the SDI funding stream is a pocket of change and innovation. Interviewees suggested that while this is occurring, the rest of IRCC is stuck in old ways. An SDI-funded project identifying best practices is currently in progress.⁹ However, interviewees indicated that the rest of IRCC is vaguely aware of some initiatives, but not comprehensively. A common question is not only how to identify best practices, but the

⁶ [City of Edmonton Open City Initiative: Foundational Elements](#)

⁷ [Ontario government digital service standard](#)

⁸ [Government of Canada digital standards](#)

⁹ [P2P SDI project - sharing settlement and integration practices that work](#)

processes through which they might become the new standard for service delivery. Researchers have explored this question in the past, recommending a sector framework to create an annual innovation cycle (Burstein 2010, Burstein & Esses 2012, Flagler-George & Lafreniere 2015).

CORE Principles - the Current State

Client-Centred

Client-centred is defined by IRCC as “programming that is tailored to meet specific clients’ profiles. This includes ensuring Francophone services for those who want to live and work in French, and a focus on clients who are vulnerable, marginalized, or face barriers.”

Workers are seeing more vulnerable clients with newer and more complex challenges

In order to be client-centred, it is important to understand the diversity of clients service providers see and how that is impacting sector workers. According to one report, workers feel pulled in many different directions and need increasingly specialized information across a vast base of knowledge (Koltermann & Scot 2018). If we look for best practices to serve newcomers, they must also recognize this diversity reality. According to another report, sector experts resist the creation of “one-size-fits-all” approaches to service design and delivery because of the diversity of needs among newcomer clients (Bushell & Shields 2018).

This diversity and service complexity has only increased in recent years. Workers feel neither prepared nor supported to meet new and diverse client needs. At the same time, researchers outline how the settlement process itself is complex, can take many years (including after clients become Citizens) and encompasses multiple phases for newcomers. Due to funding and policy pressures, agencies are focused on immediately measurable outcomes at the expense of a more holistic view of family settlement, which the sector has traditionally considered a core value (Bushell & Shields 2018).

This conversation also occurs within the context of ensuring that not only are client needs being met, but that settlement services remain relevant to the needs of changing immigration patterns. On the one hand, skilled immigration favours professional newcomers with high language skills. On the other interviewees say that there is also need to provide services to people with many and complex needs, who have suffered trauma, may not be literate online or in their own language skills. Services need to be targeted and effective for the entire range of newcomers and needs.

Because of this continuum of complexity, needs and varying levels of client vulnerability, interviewees discussed how burnout is an issue for front-line workers as well as leadership.

Sector leaders don't feel there is enough funding/support for organizations to actually take care of their staff who experience vicarious trauma, compassion fatigue and burnout. In the case of staff that work with refugees or very vulnerable newcomers with high needs, this also was raised as a worker wellness issue, especially as workers increasingly work outside of their main offices, away from potential sources of peer support and reflection.

According to interviewees, front-line workers identify feeling isolated, overwhelmed, and unsupported (both internally, and in interactions with other agencies). Themes of client issues, personalization, and worker well-being come up consistently in interviews and in the literature. Workers are seeing clients with more specialized needs (such as low literacy levels, larger families, more trauma, along with highly skilled professionals that continue to face labour market barriers and discrimination) requiring them to both know and be able to access a wide range of specific information and services, while also being able to address client needs in initial interactions with them (OCASI 2012). Interviewees also expressed concern around increasingly vocal negative attitudes expressed toward immigration over the past year or so.

The reality of sector worker precarity is also increasingly concerning (Bushell & Shields 2018). As settlement workers are stretched thin, they are faced not only with their own lack of resources or limitations, but also the resources and limitations of the system they are expected to refer clients into. As one interviewee put it, there is an immediate assumption that settlement workers are not competent, but what are the expectations? It is unrealistic to expect them to know everything about everything. Their role is to provide orientation information and connect clients to community resources and supports. But if those resources and support stores don't exist then what are they to connect them to?

In this increasing complexity, workers feel that they are expected to re- or up-skill on their own. These issues are particularly acute in smaller urban centres and rural areas which have experienced influxes of newcomers over the past few years (Ashton et al 2016). Settlement services are increasingly individualized services, which represents a shift from a traditional service ethos (Türegün et al 2018) and has meant increasing requirements on service providers to serve newcomers with many different backgrounds, abilities, knowledge and needs.

In some cases, workers are also seeing clients who are not eligible for IRCC-funded services, but nonetheless have needs and seek services. There is pressure from within the sector itself to ensure that all newcomers are served. Many organizations can't say no to serving them and end up stretched thin as a result.

Existing community information sources are not being effectively accessed

On top of these challenges, systems are difficult to understand for newcomers and service providers alike. Interviewees suggest that there is lack of adequate knowledge among

settlement workers and agencies about systems, services, and how to determine the most relevant services for newcomers in their new communities. The way service information is communicated is inconsistent, confusing, and can be difficult to access. Settlement workers are expected to “know enough” about everything, but lack training in critical information literacy, assessment, and findability skills.

As one interviewee put it, there are a number of very specific programs that are targeted and meet the needs of a small group of people. A settlement worker needs to know and understand these niches because they might have a client who needs that program - but they may only have one such client in a year.

Settlement workers sometimes act more as gatekeepers to information rather than door openers. The websites and technology-mediated information landscape is as confusing as the systems themselves to navigate. It has become increasingly difficult for newcomers and service providers to evaluate how current, authoritative, reliable information they find is and if it can be acted on with confidence. Creating a more seamless information experience is something all interviewees agree on. One interviewee suggested that systems navigation should replicate a familiar Google Map experience for newcomers accessing services.

There is fragmentation in who has what information. Settlement workers indicate that the information they are seeking is difficult to find, not up to date, or simply not available (Gay 2018). This is concerning in a field dependent on access to accurate information and resources in order to both pass on that information to clients as well as refer them into a complex service ecosystem.

Service-providing agencies and partnerships create their own service directories. There is a sense that 211 data isn't comprehensive or granular enough, but agencies don't collaborate with local Community Information Centres that feed data into the 211 system.¹⁰ 211 is not widely recognized within newcomer communities. Interviewees indicated that there are a lot of issues with 211 in terms of it being up to date and specific enough for newcomers. While many recognize that the 211 system is still the most comprehensive repository of community service information some indicated that it does not provide information at the level of detail that they need. Recently, the 211 system has become open to sharing data through APIs and other collaborative approaches to ensure consistency in base service information. While still a work in progress, there are potential opportunities there for information sharing so agencies don't feel they need to replicate time and expertise-consuming collecting, publishing, and updating of community service data.

¹⁰ 211 is a 3-digit standardized telephone helpline (and web) service that provides a gateway to community, social, non-clinical health and related government services in cities across Canada.

Newcomer information practice

Newcomer information and technology practices are widely researched by academics, but not incorporated effectively into data collection and analysis at the organizational level. Technology practices are more anecdotally known by front-line workers, but this knowledge doesn't always filter up to leadership and funders, or to make changes in ways agencies use technology to reach, inform or serve newcomers. When it does result in changes in how services are provided, it is at times without planning, ethical or secure implementation. Front-line staff indicate that they have the skills to use technology, but lack capacity and guidance around personal use of devices, lack of organizational policies, boundary issues, lack of resources, and uncertainty about agency approval and guidance for the use of digital messaging to serve clients. (Campana, unpublished).

Newcomers have informal networks and systems in place to find, access and act on information. These are increasingly taking place in private networks/technologies (groups, messaging, etc.). Newcomers want and need a combination of face-to-face, phone (multilingual) and technology-mediated (including automated (AI, chatbots) access to information, not always during regular office hours. Determining a service infrastructure to implement these diverse information and technology practices presents a challenge to the sector.

However, there is rigorous academic work looking at the information-seeking behaviour and practice of newcomers. Nadia Caidi's efforts, in particular, have sought to examine the information needs, sources, and barriers to accessing information experienced by those who immigrate to Canada. She posits that social inclusion of newcomers is an information problem. This theme has been consistent throughout other research looking at immigrant information behaviour and practice (Caidi 2005, Caidi 2010, Sexsmith 2010, Esses & Medianu 2012). Their findings have "implications for frontline information providers as well as for policymakers interested in programs, policies and funding priorities concerning information provision and access strategies that enable social inclusion of newcomers and longer established immigrants into the social fabric of Canada."

These findings are complemented by research done within the immigrant and refugee-serving sector, on the capacity and use of ICT by Settlement agencies (covered below). The research increasingly includes context of new and emerging technologies, but also reminds of other methods of information delivery which are important for a heterogeneous diverse newcomer audience. [A summary of this key research on the information practice of newcomers and ethnic communities can be found in Appendix 3.](#)

Newcomer use of technology

Canadian research of newcomer use of technology, along with international research illustrates that newcomers are increasingly digitally literate, mobile first and avid users of digital

technology and the internet when looking for and acting on migration, settlement and integration information. There is also a large and growing body of more recent research providing evidence of newcomer use of technology use in migration and settlement/integration processes.

A summary of this key research on newcomer use of technology and the key role technology plays in navigation migration can be found in Appendix 4.

Outcomes-Driven

In their CORE Principles, Outcomes-driven is defined by IRCC as programming driven by evidence, ensuring the best outcomes for clients.

Data/Information Management Capacity

An outcomes-driven framework is built on agency capacity to collect, evaluate, analyse and act on the right data. According to interviews and the literature, the sector lacks this capacity.

According to one interviewee, the nonprofit sector lags behind other sectors in evaluating service effectiveness and impact. In part she attributes this to an historic focus on outputs. As well, it is difficult to attribute impact in client outcomes for newcomers who access a system of services to meet their settlement needs. Interviewees discussed that the only thing that currently needs to be reported on is outputs – how programs are delivered, monitored - but not necessarily evaluated, which has led to a capacity deficit in this area. The amount of resources that would be needed to follow an individual over time to evaluate their outcomes would require a lot of resources.

One interviewee noted that building agency capacity around data, information management to better utilize client feedback requires new skill sets, or roles. Researchers agree that building capacity will be essential, noting that service providers do not currently collect outcome data and that creating new data collection and analysis approaches would require a great deal of effort. They recommend that it is IRCC's role to fund or build this capacity among service providers (Farthing-Nichol & Kim 2017).

Among interviewees, there was some discussion about client tracking systems and how effective they are at providing agencies with the information they need to make educated decisions around investments and service gaps. Interviewees indicated they still struggle with internal data silos, where client data is collected and entered more than once because of different programs or funder requirements in their agencies.

At the same time, one interviewee suggested that agencies need to shift to user-centred program design sooner rather than later, in order to ensure they are meeting client needs and

measuring outcomes. Service evaluation that is done is not tied to the concrete needs of clients, according to one interviewee. While clients are surveyed about the services they receive, the feedback is not incorporated in program development.

There is also research that outlines the capacity challenges agencies face moving from outputs to an outcomes-focused approach. In 2010, Burstein outlined a service provider innovations strategy that builds on the unique sector strategic capacities to jumpstart innovation and disseminate best practice information. Other research supported this idea and includes ideas about how innovation, in particular through technology, could facilitate access to services for newcomers in smaller or more isolated settings where formal in-person services were not available. (Burstein 2010, Flagler-George & Lafreniere 2015, Mills & Legault 2007). He recommended a pan-Canadian review of agency best practices be created that looks specifically at services in remote areas.

A 2012 report evaluated the innovation capacity and practices of immigrant and refugee-serving sector agencies identifying significant barriers to sector innovation. The report recommended an annual innovation cycle to be implemented by the funder that would also increase knowledge sharing and transfer. Priorities could focus on target groups and services, geographic location, scale, and local infrastructure, in collaboration with IRCC. Both this study and an earlier companion report built on previous observations that action be taken based on a shared interest by governments and the sector to build agency capacity to analyze and innovate (OCASI 2002, Burstein 2010, Burstein & Esses 2012).

Researchers recommend the sector act collectively, to share resources, protocols, promising practices and investments while funders provide the support necessary for such capacity building, including “research, knowledge dissemination, and experimentation with new technologies and new organizational arrangements” to promote consistent technology development, capacity building and rollout in services to clients. Collaboration between the sector and its core funder, IRCC, is recommended (Kerr et al 2002, OCASI 2002, Burstein 2010, Burstein & Esses 2012, Mills & Legault 2007, Gay 2018).

In one promising practice, the Toronto East Quadrant LIP is working with local settlement agencies to aggregate client data they collect to be analyzed by a neutral third party system and shared back to the agencies and community.¹¹ Working with the agencies, the LIP identified a gap in capacity, resources, and expertise to analyze client data effectively within their own organizations. It also identified a need to create a safe and neutral space where agencies can focus on collaboration instead of competition, to ensure that agencies are encouraged to share information, particularly service delivery information, for mutual benefit.

One interviewee indicated that, in her experience, because of capacity and time challenges, agencies prefer to continue to use their existing data systems (although many find them frustrating and not user friendly), instead of being open to learn, adopt and use another system. Capacity building and training on data collection and analysis is an ongoing challenge for many agencies.

¹¹[How UTSC is teaming up with community groups to bring better services to Scarborough’s newcomers](#)

Identifying and Measuring Success

Measuring service impact and client outcomes comes up in interviews and the literature as both important, and a challenge for agencies. Many interviewees are unsure of what it is they should be measuring. Measuring outcomes versus outputs is part of the discourse. In a panel discussion, former IRCC Director General Michelle Lattimore described the importance of also measuring customer experience in service delivery. She suggests that valuing client experiences that are not simply efficient and effective but also build trust with clients is particularly important.¹²

According to the United States-based Nurse-Family Partnership, getting things right means asking the right questions. The simple act of gathering and acting on end-user and partner feedback resulted in changes to the organization's systems, services, and even its business model.¹³

They received a small grant that provides recipients with a framework to be more responsive to the input and feedback from the people and communities they serve^{14 15}. Using a simple five question survey that provided a "Net Promoter Score¹⁶," they were able to streamline their client feedback collection. Importantly, the simple act of listening has had a transformative impact on the organization and has meant the creation of new data and client outreach roles and capacities.

Knowledge transfer/sharing mechanisms are not working effectively for the sector

Taking advantage of these more outcome-driven approaches requires knowing that they exist and how they might be replicated in the sector. Interviewees clearly indicated they are interested in knowledge sharing and transfer, including sharing promising practices in a practical way. However, current knowledge transfer approaches do not appear to be working, are geographically focused, or based on being in the same room at the same time. There are increasingly more knowledge artifacts, such as reports, conference/meeting notes, video recordings of meetings/interviews/webinars/symposia, etc., but little curation, additional analysis, or encouragement of ongoing dialogue about them. They're uncoordinated, not reported on for different audiences in the sector (i.e. What's In It For Me (WIIFM)) and so have become somewhat inaccessible. At the same time, interviewees confirmed that the sector continues to have an information hoarding rather than sharing culture, in part based on the competition culture and fear of having ideas taken by others who will "steal my funding."

¹²[Government of Canada School of Public Service video recording](#)

¹³[How End-User Feedback Can Become a Nonprofit's Innovation Engine](#)

¹⁴ <https://www.fundforsharedinsight.org/>

¹⁵[Tools and Lessons to Make Listening to Clients Feasible](#)

¹⁶ Net Promoter Score (NPS) is used to measure the loyalty of an organization's customer relationships. It is calculated based on responses to a single question: How likely is it that you would recommend our company/product/service to a friend or colleague?

CERIS, Pathways to Prosperity, Metropolis conferences are all spaces where the sector convenes, but they are seen as too academic, and not interpreting research for broad, diverse audiences in the sector. As one interviewee put it, the sector is heavily studied by academics but the knowledge does not return to the sector in a usable way. Researchers indicate that while the sector has deep knowledge, sector-wide knowledge sharing, collaboration and transfer will take time and effort to get right (Gay 2018).

There is a need to create a knowledge mobilization strategy to share learnings and successes from within Canada, and from international case studies and examples. The recent OCASI-led environmental scan on establishing a national Community of Practice (CoP), among other research, suggests there is potential for this strategy to be implemented (Boydell et al 2013, Burstein 2010, Burstein & Esses 2012, Burstein & Qayyum 2014, Gay 2018).

The national Community of Practice (CoP) was recently launched. The goal is to create a unique 'Settlement Hub' for the sector where settlement workers can connect, share, learn and collaborate, through an online space that addresses and grows alongside the needs of the community. It is envisioned to be a space where sector actors can connect, find tools and resources needed to work effectively, and to share skills and knowledge with colleagues across Canada (Gay 2018).

The CoP comes out of extensive past attempts to build a hub, learning from the successful experiences of CoPs in other sectors, as well as expressed wishes of the sector. Interviewees expressed concern about how a sector conversation can be facilitated given that there isn't a culture of sharing and collaboration. Previous attempts at creating a CoP have not been entirely successful.¹⁷ While CoP technology tools provide a framework, the creation of a site alone does not necessarily lead to a shift in approach and culture of sharing and conversation. A CoP in the Canadian language sector¹⁸ has been successful but a question remains: what is the system change necessary for a CoP to be effective, participatory and inclusive of a diverse sector?

One report found structural challenges to knowledge creation and sharing in the sector related to the sheer information overload experienced by settlement workers. The authors suggest that having information does not necessarily lead to knowledge and that more needs to be done to help settlement workers assimilate, conceptualize and build their knowledge capacity in order to become more effective (Koltermann & Scott 2016).

This theme was echoed by interviewees. Some wondered whether a technical solution for a CoP will result in actual discussion, knowledge sharing/transfer, and connections between settlement workers. Their feeling is that technology alone will not be enough and that there are other barriers to online community development in the sector, such as time, knowledge

¹⁷[Video: A Sustainable Model for Communities of Practice in the Settlement Sector](#)

¹⁸[Tutela.ca - Canada's ESL Community of Practice](#)

sharing/exchange competencies, concerns by workers if they raise issues of being sanctioned by managers or funders, and reluctance to communicate in English for English as a second language speakers.

Interviewees suggested that agencies should always be thinking best practices to not duplicate mistakes and learn from them. They would like to see a best practices mindset in the sector. Beyond simply creating repositories of information about promising practices, for example, agencies want ways to bring them to life or replicate in their work.

Interviewees suggested that they don't have time to wade through research or even research summaries that don't have them in mind as an audience. Front-line workers indicate that they feel overwhelmed with information and keeping up to date already. Best practice research and focus requires a deep dive that takes time and structure. Content will need to be explicitly personalized for target audiences. Interviewees commented that funders can also do more to share promising or interesting practices, such as even summaries of SDI-related funding (such as CIRA does with its Community Investment Program¹⁹) to encourage collaboration across or with new projects that have a learning and innovation component.

The IRCC-funded language sector has a successful Community of Practice collaboration model. Interviewees feel that creating the site alone did not lead to its success. The sector also has centralized technology coaching, training and support for LINC agencies²⁰. Research in the immigrant and refugee-serving sector suggests that this support is essential for success. As early as 2002 researchers evaluating the introduction of technology to Ontario-based immigrant and refugee-serving agencies suggested that they continue to be supported to help them manage and take full advantage of the technology investments, as well as plan effectively for future innovation. (Kerr et al 2002).

Responsive to Need

Within the CORE Principle framework, IRCC defines Responsive to Need as programming that meets the needs of clients as well as society, to ensure newcomers are fully integrated in their communities.

Coordinating referrals and sharing client data

Interviewees suggested that systems that allow for sharing of client data (ensuring security, confidentiality, encryption, informed client consent and strong organizational policies) would allow for more responsive and streamlined service provision, and less asking clients for the

¹⁹[CIRA's Community Investment Program - project summaries](#)

²⁰[LearnIT2teach.ca](#)

same information, multiple times. Having better communication systems between agencies for referral follow-up and providing “warm” referrals, would be valuable.

According to interviewees, many agencies are still in the early stages of data collection and evaluation structure and sophistication. While they collect detailed intake and needs assessment information about their clients, agencies indicate that they don’t have people (or even the roles) to more effectively collect, use, and analyze what data they do have. When it is done, interviewees and research indicates that it is work done on the “side of their desk,” not part of their funded work.

An Open North report found that agencies do indeed collect a lot of data but do not share it effectively, often creating informational silos. They suggested that external resources and experts should be brought in to create data management expertise and a shared data culture within the sector (Open North 2017).

Fundamental questions about data and measurement were identified by interviewees that suggest that such expertise would be valuable, and welcomed, in the sector. Interviewees asked questions such as: How do we measure success? Is client success the same thing as program success? Are funder-driven metrics to be considered success? Is meeting the numbers that you're supposed to from your funder actually helping clients to succeed? Or is that just your program looks good, because you met all the numbers?

Overall most interviewees indicated that their agencies don’t have effective client information management systems, don’t use them effectively (a combination of time and knowledge) or are using systems that were not created specifically for nonprofits but were implemented by someone at some point in time. Agency database systems, and a lack of knowledge and capacity to choose, manage, and make strategic use of their features mean that agencies are not necessarily making educated decisions around investments and service gaps.

At the same time, newer sector actors interviewed indicate that they are “data first,” building data collection, measurement, and analysis tools and approaches into their program design and implementation.

New actors in the space indicate that they start with the premise that their interventions can only be valid if they come from needs and interests identified by newcomers themselves. They build their projects with data and information management as key pillars and tools. They’re building interventions around the data. Information management is a core capacity within their organizations. They also indicate they value and are using cloud-based systems which are interoperable with other systems they are using or could use in the future.

Mainstream sector actors that have been funded for years indicate that they have patchworks of systems and few in-house capabilities and resources to effectively manage client data feedback loops and information management systems. In many cases they’re using software

housed on computers located in their agencies, which are not interoperable with other systems they are or might use in the future. Most settlement agencies indicate that they would need an increase in resources, both technical (technology, design and process) as well as human (new roles, or re-/up-skilling of existing staff, along with time allocated for these tasks).

These sector actors collect a great deal of data about their clients but admit they don't know how to use it. They're conditioned to collect and report data to their funder, but it has not been harnessed to inform their service delivery process. Issues that come up that agencies are not effectively able to deal with include:

- Privacy and confidentiality, including proper data storage and access
- The possibilities that data analysis offers
- Service personalization through data analysis
- Data tracking and measuring
- "Real time" impact data can have on service provision

Should agencies build internal expertise or make use of centralized resources that can analyze and provide data back to them? Interviewees suggest that it is both. Agencies need to be able to work with their own data, but also with other external data sources and collaborations (such as government data).

A variety of mechanisms and information management systems are used in different agencies. Many are output focused; data collected to provide to IRCC in iCARES for the purposes of statistical reporting.

Having some resources at an umbrella group or LIP or other centralized neutral sources for aggregate data analysis has also come up as something that would be useful. Another idea would be having a shared researcher who does regular statistical and analyses, including responding to data requests, for local agencies in a LIP catchment area. Ethnographic research is also being looked at as an innovative way to ensure that client's lived context is being incorporated into program design and decision-making.

Lip service paid to collaboration

Responsive programming increasingly requires collaboration among service providers, both within the sector and with other sectors where newcomers access services. IRCC explicitly identifies collaboration as a key part of its Settlement and Integration vision.²¹ However, interviewees indicate that the sector functions more competitively than collaboratively, in part for structural reasons. This is also reflected in the literature. Neudorf found that, while IRCC emphasizes collaboration in its funding, there continues to be competition and mistrust among service providers (Neudorf 2016, IRCC Evaluation Division 2017).

²¹ Government of Canada Settlement and Integration vision

One interviewee stated that many organizations are territorial. On the surface they say they work with each other, but they compete behind closed doors. Others have suggested that this structural reality impacts the sector's ability to innovate, to the point of worsening working relationships between the sector and government (Bushell & Shields 2018).

Some interviewees pointed out that collaboration across sectors is more common and has been more successful. Where services are complementary, and not perceived as competing for funding, collaboration has worked well.

LIPs are emerging as positive, neutral, and trusted coordinators for collaboration

According to interviewees, Local Immigration Partnerships (LIPs) have brought local collaboration back to the forefront in many cases and their successes as convening organizations should be built upon. One LIP representative suggested that their ability to play, and be perceived as playing, a neutral role of community convener has brought sector actors to the table who otherwise might not independently collaborate.

In some cases, local collaboration has improved, trust is building among local sector actors, and between sectors. At the same time, while there is sharing within the LIP network, information sharing across the sector remains somewhat siloed. What happens locally tends to stay local and not scale or share with other communities or actors. Currently, LIPs provide an effective collaboration and convening model but need enhanced knowledge transfer/sharing focus and resources. Interviewees suggest that collaboration takes time and resources, not only for the convening organizations like LIPs, but for those participating as well.

LIP representatives said that they saw their role as an accepted settlement proxy for the region in initiating cross-sectoral discussions, as well as convening local settlement agencies.

While LIPs and other sector mechanisms that facilitate collaboration are being actively studied, newer actors are not.

Emerging actors, such as Refugee Career Jumpstart Project (RCJP)²², the Together Project²³, and Refugee613²⁴, not originating from within the immigrant and refugee-serving sector, are becoming more active, bringing new technologies, new approaches to program planning and implementation. While they currently tend to serve much smaller client cohorts than established sector agencies, their ideas and innovative approaches means they have the ear of political actors and policy makers. They are building to eventually scale their ideas into much

²²[Refugee Career Jumpstart Project](#)

²³[Together Project](#)

²⁴[Refugee613](#)

larger interventions, and have begun to have an impact on the sector. This is an emerging space that requires more attention, sooner rather than later.

Effective Use of Resources

In the CORE Principles, effective use of resources to need is defined by IRCC as programming that uses the most effective means of reaching outcomes, including the use of innovative approaches and pilot testing.

Can innovation in government lead to sector innovation?

Using resources effectively means having the right resources in place to be able to do the work that needs to be done. *Government is the problem* comes up a lot in interviews. However, government may also be a place to look for solutions when it comes to the complexity of innovating within the immigrant and refugee serving sector. Innovation within government has a richer recent history of organized policy and practice work than within the immigrant and refugee-serving sector. Government innovation is very much a work in progress. However, governments have been experimenting, learning, and creating approaches, standards, and leadership in this area.

Recent writing about the challenges public servants face when innovating sound very similar to the sector²⁵. It remains somewhat unclear what innovation means and how to get there. However, governments have recognized the need to re-/up-skill workers as well as introduce new roles. What this means in practice is a commitment to resourcing and time, but also committing to working differently. On a government panel, IRCC former Director General, Michelle Lattimore, described how IRCC's Client Experience Branch was strategically created:

"We very intentionally did not build a lab or a hub or a hive. We built something that we felt was a little more protected against that swinging pendulum of change and put in place something that was pretty permanent and could help us deliver something a little more consistent. Because at the heart of what we do is really change culture. We try to be change agents within our organization and change agents in the government of Canada. We need to prepare people inside and outside for what is happening on a transformational level."²⁶

As previously noted, all of this takes time and an internal complement of staff to support the process. There is much the sector can learn from the experiences of government innovation actors.

²⁵[Innovation... we get it... but...](#)

²⁶[Canada School of Public Service - video recording](#)

Required service capacity for a new Settlement ecosystem

Governments are at various stages of their innovation capacity. It is important to acknowledge that different agencies are at different stages of capability and adoption. Researchers have created a model of three phases of adoption of technology (in their case social media) in government, which can be extrapolated to broader innovation practice: experimentation (informal adoption, decentralized among workers), constructive chaos (workers begin to recognize both benefits and risks of the technology use, organizations attempt to standardize technology use through practice or policy standards), and institutionalization (organizations establish standards, processes, and enforcement measures to control the use of the technology) (Bretschneider & Mergel 2013).

Most settlement agencies are in the experimentation phase, some have moved into constructive chaos, and a few have begun institutionalization. Like any organizational or institutional change process, this progression takes time, leadership (in order to move between stages), resources, capacity development (front-line, leadership, funder), flexibility (within the organization as well as negotiated with funders), continuous learning and room to learn.

Innovation will require more, not fewer, resources to be successful

The stages are useful to think about when it comes to innovation and technology adoption in the sector. When asked about innovation capacity, the issue of additional funding comes up consistently among interviewees, whether for staff/management training/capacity development, creating and hiring for entirely new roles in the organization, creating entirely new structures in their organization, money for outside consulting, or for the creation of external collaboration projects and programs that agencies would participate in.

There are a number of additional themes which emerged in interviews.

Time and space for reflection and participation

A number of people interviewed have innovation practice or structures such as labs within their organizations, whether at the government, academic or agency level. All agree that time, resources, capacity, and additional resources for staff time are crucial to make innovation work. In most cases, innovation is a process that has taken years to not only get off the ground, but achieve returns within organizations. They see it as an investment of time, resources, and relationship-building, as well as organizational cultural change.

One interviewee provided an example of the creation of a local “social impact lab” to spur innovation in the local nonprofit sector that a municipal government created, investing millions of dollars in its creation. While she saw it as a positive, she saw flaws in its implementation. Agencies are encouraged to apply and to run innovation issues through the social impact lab and have support to develop innovative solutions to their focusing on mental health and poverty reduction.

But once accepted into the lab, there is a huge time commitment expectation, about 37 hours spread across a four week cycle. Essentially one week of time over a 4 week period. But she noted that the commitment comes without additional supports, which she saw as unrealistic. If an Executive Director is expected to commit a full week of work over four weeks with no resources or support to backfill that role, their attention will be split between the lab and the day-to-day stresses of their work. She says that this type of innovation requires time for reflection and conversation. Instead of being able to fully immerse themselves, she saw them on their phones at every break or opportunity, “putting out fires” at their agency and doing their regular work. It has meant that they essentially continue to work on innovation “off the side of their desk.”

Rapid pace of change and technology

One interviewee commented that the sector stands to gain from technological and other forms of innovation. Automation, apps, and AI can amplify existing efforts by cutting out low-level administrative tasks and empowering frontline workers with more time with their most vulnerable client. Organizations need to have systems that allow them to track data and analytics necessary to do program evaluation and show impact in real time.

Interviewees indicated they remain unsure about how AI and other rapidly emerging technologies could support agencies. Some suggest that we can look at other sectors, including the private sector, to help better understand the accelerated advancements of technologies and how they might assist our customer experience.

Interviewees agree that there has to be ongoing support for agencies in what is a time of constant and rapid change. If the learning and innovation curve is steep over the decade ahead where an agency might transition from primarily face to face to some sort of a blended (online/offline) service model along with implementing better data processes and more effective client feedback loops, there needs to be constant and consistent funding in the budget for ongoing skills and professional development.

Leadership

Leadership on innovation and technology needs to come from both within the sector and from its funders. Interviewees agree that organization and sector leaders (such as umbrella groups) have an important role to play to set the tone for innovation and manage it successfully.

Funders can create more effective spaces to convene that allow for a higher level discussion with the sector. Initiatives like the National Settlement Council are useful. But interviewees suggested that funders also need to establish better dialogue and collaboration between program/monitoring officers and the agencies they work with.

The issue of risk is a barrier, at the agency level, but significantly at the funder level as well. As interviewees discussed, a conversation among Executive Directors has focused on the idea of innovation and about how to conduct it in a way that funders won't see as risky. Agencies looking to be innovative and experimental within funding agreements need to build competencies around risk assessment and technological aptitude, in order to show their Program Officers that their innovative approach is fiscally responsible, accountable and, ultimately, of benefit to newcomer clients.

Currently, they see this leadership capacity lacking at both the agency and funder levels. Expanding pilot projects, a known and accepted approach to innovate within funding constraints, is seen as one way to overcome these fears. It is essential that learning and knowledge sharing, between an agency running such a project and the funder, but also with the rest of the sector, including why a pilot may not have worked out, occur.

Roadmaps

A number of roadmaps to innovation exist that can be reviewed for implementation in the immigrant and refugee-serving sector. These can help the sector learn from best and promising practices, including learning and professional development approaches. These include approaches by government (specifically in open data and digital services, IRCC's Client Experience Branch, and innovation labs at the municipal, provincial and federal levels), international NGOs (such as IFRC's Data Playbook, NetHope's Digital Nonprofit project, Nurse-Family Partnership's transformative use of client feedback, Techfugees Guiding Principles, and within the sector itself (Woodgreen Community Services' Innovation Lab, Radius SFU Refugee Livelihood Lab, Bow Valley College's Enhancing the Wellbeing of Immigrant Women Retirees project, New Brunswick Multicultural Council/Noulab's Economic Immigration Lab, Toronto East Quadrant LIP data project, and more).

Reviewing these projects to learn, extract promising practices, and possibly replicate aspects of them across the sector should be national in scope and inclusive (to ensure consistency in representation and implementation), and encompass knowledge sharing/transfer with all actors, both within and outside of the sector. It would be no small endeavour.

Creating information products and services for newcomers, especially vulnerable newcomers (not only refugees) requires the same rigour as creating in-person services. When it comes to technology-mediated service delivery, research suggests a fairly common set of practices and approaches an agency should follow. There are a number of existing resources that provide

useful starting points to develop technology and innovation capacity in the immigrant and refugee-serving sector.

Designing digital services should: incorporate human centred design, ensure security and privacy, have curated, checked and collaborative information-gathering and provision, be accessible to clients, be sustainable, involve newcomers in design and iteration, be aligned with organizational service goals and mission (Gillespie et al 2016, Techfugees 2017, ICRC 2017, Idealware 2017a, Idealware 2017b, Mason & Buchmann 2016, Hitchcock et al 2018, NASW 2017).

Organizations should not rely on any one specific technology, but create multi-platform, multi-channel communications strategies rooted in the actual use of technology by clients. Field research with refugees recommends putting people, not technology at the centre of the strategy (ICRC 2017, Mason & Buchmann 2016). Develop a set of guiding principles that starts with a response to the needs of your clients and the technologies they are using to ensure that any service solutions meet their identified needs, preferences, technology access and literacy (Techfugees 2017, ICRC 2017, Idealware 2017a, Idealware 2017b, Mason & Buchmann 2016, Hitchcock et al 2018, NASW 2017)

Build in privacy by design. Use tools that ensure the safety and security of communication with clients. Don't collect data that is not useful to provide service and be clear and transparent with clients what, how and why data is being collected (Techfugees 2017, Gillespie et al 2016, ICRC 2017, ICRC 2017, Idealware 2017a, Idealware 2017b, Mason & Buchmann 2016, Hitchcock et al 2018, NASW 2017, Hitchcock et al 2018, NASW 2017).

Mobile technologies offer rich affordances for newcomers and service providers. However, they are also targets of surveillance, especially in the area of refugee migration. Service providers must be aware of newcomer experiences with technical surveillance and design, provide and communicate the security of their technical services to newcomers (Gillespie et al 2016, Latonero & Kift 2018, ICRC 2017, Idealware 2017a, Idealware 2017b, Mason & Buchmann 2016).

Data skills and data readiness improve agency ability to use and obtain information to support and improve decision-making and project/program design. The IFRC Data Playbook (beta) works to ensure an equitable application of data skills, technology and the potential opportunities this brings (IFRC 2018). NetHope's Digital Nonprofit project outlines a Digital Skills Framework as well as a Digital Nonprofit Ability™ (DNA) Assessment for nonprofits to assess their readiness and identify areas for up-/re-skilling and organizational capacity (Nethope, 2018). Baseline organizational standards around capacity and accountability are provided for in OCASI's Organizational Standards project (OCASI 2011).

These practical reports and approaches with case studies, actionable recommendations and work plans provide practical models, frameworks, guidelines and protocols that can be

extracted for Canadian immigrant and refugee-serving agencies to implement, in conjunction with IRCC and other funders.

Innovation “on the side of the desk”

While there are many pathways for agencies to choose from, it is clear from interviews and the literature that creating an innovation framework, mindset, competencies, and tools requires a commitment to a long-term process of development and resourcing. Even in an organization with strong organizational culture, buy-in, and capacity, the process takes time. The International Federation of the Red Cross Red Crescent (IFRC) Societies has worked for a number of years to increase their data literacy. Even though they see an urgent need to increase worker data skills and data readiness to improve strategic decision-making, the process of getting the organization data ready is an ongoing, coordinated, supported and resource-intensive effort (IFRC 2018).

Agencies with existing innovation capacity, through an internal practice or actual labs, have indicated that the process has taken years to develop and establish. This includes within government, where a much more formal concerted effort has taken place at all three levels.

The Ontario government has been at work establishing digital service standards and practice for over eight years, becoming a mainstream support to other government departments within the last two years. They went through an intensive change management approach resulting in a suite of services for colleagues, offered by a team of workers in very different roles than previously existed within government:

- Providing direct support through training, and making individual management coaching available. Innovation teams get embedded in Ministry projects to see how they work before embarking on change initiatives.
- They have set up user research labs where staff are invited to ask questions or to actually watch a user research session in progress.
- They built a prototyping lab where Ministries can work on a project in a 4 week sprint, to create different prototypes that get tested very quickly.
- And, they have a centralized user Research Lab and design services, made accessible to all who are interested or need the resources.

Creating a support such as this takes time and resources, both at the outset as well as over time. At a recent conference a provincial representative quantified the evolution of e-government in her smaller province. The move to e-government required an initial \$20 million operational investment, with \$1 million per year to maintain. As she said, it's very important that funders for such initiatives understand that this is a long-term investment. Done correctly, she said these investments pay off. In her case, her unit saw immediate results, efficiencies and innovation in how they deliver programs.

IRCC has created a Client Experience Branch focused on the customer experience when clients interact with IRCC. It has resulted in changes in call centres, overseas processing, refugee resettlement (centralized operations centre), including the use of electronic signatures, scanned copies, etc. According to Director General Michelle Lattimore, the Branch focuses on a number of areas:

- engagement - working with clients to design services that meet their expectations for intuitive services
- insights - collection and analyzing data to identify client pain points and set priorities based on this data
- expertise - IRCC brought in behavioural scientists, UXers, anthropologists, and “all these cool people who could help us build something permanent.” (CSPS panel presentation, 2018)

A quick review of the Branch staff complement shows five divisions, totalling sixty-six staff. The human resource capacity needed for innovation and implementation, along with the time needed is clearly large.

While most sector agencies currently do not have this capacity, or time in most cases, the literature is clear (see below in [Technology, innovation, and settlement outcomes](#)) that innovative approaches and the use of technology in the immigrant and refugee-serving sector is not new. Nor are innovative uses of technology to serve clients. However, research on the impact and effectiveness of innovative service methods and approaches, and technology use in service delivery, as well as the digital capacity of immigrant and refugee-serving organizations to provide innovative services to clients is sparse.

That being said, within existing research capacity themes have remained fairly similar:

- Agencies lack capacity to effectively integrate technology consistently across the organization – they're unsure how to implement and manage
- Iteration (refining what works to make it work even better) is more a reality than sector innovation (developing something genuinely new)
- Innovation occurs because it needs to (related to scarce resources), but lessons are not transferred within or between agencies
- Pockets of siloed innovation exist both within and between organizations and sectors
- The hesitation to innovate is, in part, expressed as a result of previous experiences of pilot projects that end even when successful, with much effort and expectations raised, than dashed
- Funders lack capacity to evaluate, manage and monitor innovation or technology requests and the current funding system rigidity does not function with or support an innovation approach to program iteration, testing and learning
- There is a large and varied continuum of formal technology adoption in the sector, with pockets of innovation, but learning is not shared within most organizations where the innovation itself takes place or across the sector

- Technology-mediated interactions are not considered direct service by some funders
- Agencies lack suitable policies and guidelines for technology use to serve clients. Managers struggle with how to manage in this new reality.
- Different models exist in how agencies roll out technology to serve clients - virtual worker vs frontline worker, vs blended worker, re-/up-skilling vs creating new roles, etc. The fact that there is no right answer or formula is itself a challenge for agencies that lack the capacity to make truly informed innovation or technology decisions in their programming.
- There is a lack of knowledge sharing and transfer of promising and successful practices within the sector, in particular around technology-mediated service delivery and innovation.
- Innovation happens “on the side of the desk” a recurring theme that comes up in many conversations. There are pockets of siloed innovation, both within and between organizations, as well as with other sectors (in fact, some commented that innovation and collaboration seems to occur more easily between sectors as there isn’t the same sense of turf and competition for funding and clients).
- The sector lacks standards, ethical guidelines and protocols around technology-mediated service delivery.

Funding and innovation

Interviews and the literature suggest that innovation, its potential, and the capacity of sector actors to harness it to serve clients and achieve positive settlement outcomes must be considered within the context of the main sector funder and its relationship with funded agencies.

According to some interviewees, the potential for sector innovation is constrained by funding contracts and relationships that are audit-focused and inflexible. The sector understands that IRCC is responsible for public money, but does not feel like a trusted partner in delivering services on behalf of the government. There is an overall feeling that much is out of the control of agencies because of this funding system. As one interviewee commented, current funding rigidity is not encouraging of innovation. The potential for sector innovation is constrained by funding contracts and relationships that are audit-focused and inflexible.

Agencies feel untrusted, even if they have decades of funding without any concerns raised by the funder. Some commented that the funder mentality towards the sector is that agencies lack assets and competence. As a result, a survival mentality has emerged which drives budgets and an output focus where service interactions are merely statistics to report, rather than data to analyze against identified outcomes, service learning, improvement, enhancements or new interventions and approaches, including serving clients over time versus getting them in and out the door.

Agency leadership, which tends to be hired from workers within this system, are not set-up for innovation thinking, but for reporting and surviving. Agencies are driven by fear not by passion.

Fear is expressed as 'what if we don't submit reports on time and don't get funding. What if we don't have the numbers we need to meet and IRCC outcomes, we won't get funding.' Agencies have become more focused on what does funder need vs what skills and competencies does the organization need in order to perform.

Some suggested that because of the current approach and knowledge at the funder level, there is a limited capacity to think about new technologies or innovative approaches to programming at IRCC. There is a reluctance to submit innovative ideas. Agencies compete on price, efficiency, but not on new or big ideas.

One interviewee suggested that unless IRCC can actually convince the sector that they're going to focus on outcomes instead of outputs, no one will innovate. He suggested any shift in focus will require additional investment in those agencies.

Agencies are receptive (especially at the front-line) and aware of new approaches incorporating innovation into programming. Many long-term front-line workers and managers have had popular education backgrounds. While they are receptive they also express that innovating is currently "outside of my current job." They don't have funded time to be innovative. They feel constant pressure to meet outputs. At the same time sector leaders recognize that the landscape and speed of change is increasing. Strategic planning sessions feel like they are becoming obsolete. Interviewees expressed that they feel they cannot predict a year in advance, let alone the usual five-year planning agencies have typically done. Rules and realities are changing all the time, and with increasing velocity.

Funder Challenges

For many, there is simply not an effective dialogue between the funder about innovation, technology, outcomes, and how the sector is having an impact on their clients and communities. Agencies consulted feel that technology can provide new opportunities to have greater impact in their work, but they are looking for some guidance from funders. At the same time, funders have indicated that they are waiting for some direction from service providers.

According to funders interviewed, service providers need to explain the effectiveness and efficiencies of using digital messaging to serve clients and not take funder capacity or understanding about the potential for technology use in client service delivery for granted. As one funder said. The funder doesn't know what part of in-person services are best suited to what kind of technology platforms. It's not government policy work to say what the technology solutions are. At the moment, they have very little in terms of evidence in terms of more effective and efficient service delivery. Without that evidence, funders are reluctant to fund or to demand that agencies innovate more in their service delivery.

Based on interviews and anecdotal conversations, funders don't have a deep sense of the diversity of technologies already being used to serve clients, beyond simple website and email

use. They'd like to see evidence from the sector how emerging technologies are being used, and can be used to serve clients. They have an existing evidence base that says how standard services are delivered (including how privacy, data, client confidentiality standards are met), the cost of delivering that service, how effective the service is (for clients – how easy to access, fluid, how quickly do they move through it, etc.). However, they lack understanding and evidence of where technology fits into integration and service scenarios, whether it's an app, online learning, digital messaging, mentoring matching, etc. For funders, any service enhancements have to be efficient and effective.

People inside government working on innovation expressed that implementing innovation requires a great deal of balance, “like changing the tires of a car while still driving it. You can't stop the car, you have to continue to deliver services.” Public sector innovation has that as a common challenge. There is less flexibility to redirect resources.

Given the similarities, some suggest that a better dialogue needs to be created between the sector and IRCC, especially as the funder moves more quickly to make funding program changes based on internal evaluations. Pre-arrival service funding changes were used as an example. While IRCC was lauded for acting quickly after an evaluation showed low uptake of pre-arrival services among potential clients (IRCC Evaluation Branch 2018), knowledge of any successful practices or learning did not transfer from agencies that were defunded into the sector. One interviewee noted that this was a missed opportunity.

Internally, funders indicated that they are still struggling with their own digital literacy and how to evaluate the value of technology in service delivery, in part because it doesn't look like traditional service delivery.

When an agency brings a new project idea that is outside the norm of the funding envelope, such as contracting out and hiring technical staff, interviewees suggested that IRCC Program Officers are unsure how to evaluate different staffing costs. Program Officers are accountable for the money and lack the training or understanding to effectively evaluate what an agency is asking for. It's also difficult for them to assess whether an agency has done their due diligence, even has that technological capacity, and is actually hiring the right staff for a particular job or task.

Part of the struggle centres around funding requests for non-typical resources, such as smartphones/hardware as well as technology development and maintenance. It is challenging when a Program Officer is told it's not within settlement sector funding to pay for a data analyst to be on staff, or website designer, or technology manager/facilitator. Funders want assurances that if programmers are paid larger salaries than sector workers to design a platform or app and it takes additional human resources to maintain the technology, content and maintenance, that the solution created will reach far more clients, far more efficiently, in terms of cost of delivery and the time and effort, for each individual client.

Recent funding of technology and innovation projects in the sector may contribute to changing internal funder understandings of human resource needs, however there currently remains an internal knowledge gap at the funder level. All interviewees recognize that it is hard for organizations, but especially funders to move quickly to shift and adapt. Services are not as able to respond nimbly as new trends arise. They have to determine what they need, get programming, submit proposals, approvals, and hire staff. There is a big ramping up period. New services have to fit into existing programming structure, but also need to allow for quicker implementation.

Also, within IRCC there is debate about whether it is the responsibility of government to do this and do it in a new way. Some see that there are other potential funders for innovation and technology resources, and are not yet convinced that IRCC should be playing a significant role. Within IRCC there is discussion how SDI-funded projects will feed evidence to the funder to show that to deliver services effectively and create innovative services IRCC will need to reconsider the scope of what jobs/human resources are needed at the agency level. Lessons learned from Service Delivery Improvement (SDI)-funded projects need to be very descriptive of how it worked, what worked, why it worked, challenges and how they can be avoided. They need to address questions of how to scale up and replicate. As funded projects report out their experiences, it will be crucial information for IRCC and the sector to jointly analyze and learn from.

Where will the evidence come from to impact this debate? One interviewee suggested that it can only come from IRCC-funded agencies, and they're not being funded to gather the evidence. According to another interviewee, the conversation has to be driven in a number of different spaces. The National Settlement Council meets regularly and has included innovation and the future of the sector in its conversations. Those presentations, notes and summaries should be public for all in the sector to access and reflect on. Agencies, within provinces and across the country, need to have this conversation in a space accessible to all.

Research being done in these areas needs to be made more accessible and include agencies as active partners. At one session at the 2019 Halifax Metropolis conference one agency noted that their recent academic collaboration was refreshing because the agency was not simply "researched on" but actively collaborated on data interpretation.

Research relationships, which can provide evidence that both the sector and funders need, should be funded and encouraged to be more collaborative, as well as to ensure that knowledge transfer or research methods and analysis happens between academics (or community based researchers) and agencies.

There does appear, however, to be an internal analysis at IRCC focused on changing the nature of the funder-sector relationship. In a recent presentation at the Alberta Association of Immigrant Serving Agencies (AAISA) 2018 Alberta Integration Summit, IRCC's Assistant Director

Integration Programs (Prairies and N. Territories) John Biles²⁷ identified a need to re-think the nature of the Program Officer-service provider relationship as the funder looks at how it can improve management of programs it funds. What he outlines is significant, a culture change in the design, delivery, and management of how IRCC develops and implements Contribution Agreements and how they're managed. Part of what he outlined includes improved and collaborative communication, including information sharing, a focus on outcomes and meeting client needs, and building mutual trust between Program Officers and the service providers they manage. As he put it: "Transformational change requires a culture change in the design, delivery and management of how we develop and implement our Contribution Agreement management processes at various levels. This includes changes at the sectoral level as well."

While it is early days, the comments made in this presentation suggest a relationship and dialogue shift similar to what interviewees and prior literature agree should occur. One report reminds us that previous government processes and reports, including the Voluntary Sector Initiative (VSI) 2002 Code of Good Practice on Funding and the December 2006 report from the Independent Blue Ribbon Panel on Grant and Contribution Program are relevant to these proposed changes (CISSA-ACSEI & OCASI 2017).

Professional development is an issue at all levels

Biles also noted²⁸ that there is a need for professional development in the sector, but that funds are not currently equitably distributed, and service providers have difficulty articulating and costing professional development needs. Whether at the front-line, management, or other leadership levels, there is no agreement on core competencies across the sector, let alone competencies for technology-mediated service or innovation practice. Interviewees suggest that capacity development is required at all levels - front-line, management, funder - and there is little agreement on core competencies required for base settlement services, let alone future innovation (Koltermann & Scott 2018).

Tension exists between notions of professionalization of the sector (such as expected levels of education or specific experience in job descriptions) and lived experience (Settlement Workers who are former immigrants/refugees themselves now providing service to peers). "There is concern that 'professionalization may further marginalize and inhibit career advancement opportunities for racialized immigrant women who have years of experience in the sector, but no formal education,'" (Koltermann & Scott 2018). Based on current workforce data, this is a real concern: "While most agencies do not collect data on their employees such as on gender and ethnicity, from those respondents that do, over 80% indicated that their employees represented racialized women," (CISSA-ACSEI & OCASI 2018). Should agencies re-/up-skill or hire for different roles with different competency expectations?

²⁷ [Vision for a Program Management Reset](#)

²⁸ [Settlement Clusters - State of Play and Future Planning](#)

Across the sector there are different models of core competencies, frameworks and professional development models (Koltermann & Scott 2018). What are the predominant skill sets and standards of a typical settlement worker? Interviewees and the research comment that there is no right answer, the debate is unresolved.

For many, sector capacity is directly related to the professional development they can access. Many interviewees noted that there hasn't been much professional development support from the funder. Increasingly it has become the individual worker's responsibility to learn and up- or re-skill (a common theme across many industries).

In recent information sessions about the 2019 Call for Proposals, IRCC staff encouraged agencies to include staff professional development in their proposals. It remains to be seen how this will impact sector learning, in particular around baseline consistency in professional development opportunities and skill development.

There is no doubt in any interviewees' mind or in the literature that more professional development opportunities will only benefit the sector, enhance service professionalism and competency, and enhance outcomes for newcomer clients. Building any new innovation program approaches or technology-mediated service delivery will only mean additional needs for professional development and enhanced capacity.

Research matches what interviewees express about professional development. The sector lacks clear career paths. The lack of funding for professional development makes career progress a challenge for sector workers. (Koltermann & Scott 2018) At the same time, researchers suggest that investing more in professional development will improve service effectiveness (Bushell & Shields 2018).

Interviewees suggest that there is value in having some level of certification process because it ensures workers have a certain level of competency and may increase recognition of settlement workers as professionals in the community. However, they are concerned about who would run and maintain certification, offer ongoing training, and ensure that it is constantly updated. Some suggest that technology can play a role in making the training accessible on a national basis.

The OCASI CoP Environmental scan notes that there is significant interest in professional development among sector workers, but that they prefer to learn on-site and in person (Gay 2018). However, the document also concludes that "online workshops, either live or asynchronous, are a well-tested delivery mechanism for learning, and will likely make up aspects of a CoP since practitioners are located across the country."

Re-/up-skilling or entirely new roles

While there is interest in sector professional development there is no agreement on the baseline competencies settlement workers need and what new competencies all sector actors will need to move forward with innovation and increased use of technology. Agencies are unsure if they need to re-/up-skill, hire workers with different credentials or create entirely new roles/structures. As one interviewee put it, "We don't know what we don't know."

At the same time, there is appetite and opportunity for sector-wide collaboration and discussion about core competencies and new competencies. In particular there is interest in building the foundations for new or innovative thinking and managing, moving away from organizational cultures of fear, competition, survival and output focus.

Agencies indicate they are struggling with the competencies needed for blended service provision - online and offline, "no wrong door" approaches - and how best to staff them. Agency guidelines, protocols and onboarding are not sufficient for new approaches to settlement work, whether technology-mediate or client-centric. The pre-arrival funding experience has meant new types of jobs in pre-arrival programs, with additional technical and instructional designer resources, along with online counsellors to provide services. However, interviewees suggest that pre-arrival expertise has not been shared across organizations, citing organizational silos.

Interviewees want to be able to provide blended services, but remain unsure of what the realistic expectations and supports needed to in order to plan, implement and evolve from face-to-face to online programs.

Some suggest that the sector is inevitably coming to a time when service provision will happen increasingly through technology, including smartphone apps and chatbots/AI. Being able to work beyond face-to-face will mean that new skills are required to communicate using digital messaging or other technology-mediated human service. Written and video communication may become more important as service providers increasingly use messaging/texting and video conferencing to communicate with clients.

Interviewees with online service experience suggest that IRCC and other funders need to be aware that the sector will need funding and increased support for technology, resources for staff training/development, human resource funding (i.e. new staff roles that may be administrative/managerial in nature), experimenting, partnerships and collaboration, and knowledge sharing to learn about platforms and approaches that are already working and successful. This will also include updated hardware (laptops, smartphones, etc.) to ensure all the needed infrastructure supports are in place.

One interviewee outlined what the human resource requirements would be for a data-enabled and driven agency: appropriate vision and investment from organizational leadership, driven by strategic high-level priorities, objectives and key results; attracting top talent but also investing in building internal technical capacity; valuing domain expertise (e.g. social worker) and lived experience (e.g. refugee claimant); incorporating data and analytics in strategic planning, including budget maintenance costs of any technology; creating an online curriculum for settlement workers that every worker can access across the country; increasing data literacy, working with data from research design to data analysis; and, building in privacy and security by design into any data or technology solution.

A chronology of technology and innovation research and conversations in the sector

When it comes to looking at technology to serve clients in the immigrant and refugee-serving sector the conversation, and literature, spans almost two decades. [Appendix 1 provides a detailed chronology of these conversations and related literature.](#)

The literature and interviewees suggest that moving toward Settlement 2.0 requires a workforce and programming model that embraces innovation, technology and continuous learning, has the capacity and know-how to implement innovation, encourages rapid iteration of programs by learning rapidly from failure, and is constantly exposed to new ideas and thinking about how to improve services delivery. While sector agencies have made important strides in improving services delivery in recent years, few examples or case studies have been widely shared about how organizations have effectively incorporated technology and innovation into their programming.

A brief review of sector organizations highlights a number of factors that contribute to this outcome, including: lack of training opportunities to agencies to incorporate technology and innovation into settlement activities; staff that is either not able to or not willing to incorporate innovation into programming; organizational cultures and / or funder conditions / incentives that discourage innovation and reporting opportunities to learn from failure; lack of exposure to concepts such as Services Design and Design Thinking methodologies that could help organizations rethink delivery processes; a lack of awareness on good practice in using technology and innovation and how to implement such programs in other contexts.

Collectively these gaps all lead to less collaboration among agencies, drawbacks in service delivery, and less optimal outcomes for users/ clients.

Innovation and collaboration, interviewees agree, requires time, space and capacity. One interviewee discussed being part of an innovative project which had two years of funding and space to experiment, learn and iterate. This “breathing space” made a difference in building trust and collaboration among sector and non-sector actors at the table, all who had a stake in improving outcomes for a specific client group.

Importantly, the project also had resources built in for agency time. When settlement staff time was allocated to work on the collaboration, it was back filled at the agency, resulting in little to no impact on direct service delivery.

An exploratory community research project approach meant they didn't have to stress about whether or not it was a success, which meant less pressure for agencies at the table. Sector representatives could relax and have the needed time to reflect and participate. Because of that approach, the project was able to successfully bridge gaps between service providers, creating a no-wrong-door approach for their mutual clients.

The literature shows that use of technology in the immigrant and refugee-serving sector is not new. Nor are innovative uses of technology to serve clients new. One report suggests that agencies collaborate with funders on how this innovation can be harnessed consistently across the country:

"The immigrant and refugee-serving sector and CIC should initiate a joint project whose goal would be to establish technical parameters to guide settlement agencies and to promote coherence in ICT development and use. The goal would be to ensure that data from different agencies and locales could be easily integrated and aggregated; also, that ICT-enabled services could be freely exchanged" (Burstein & Qayyum 2014).

Technology and isolation

There is interest to do more in the sector in terms of integrating technology into service delivery. However, according to interviewees, some workers fear that human contact and the "human side" of service delivery will become irrelevant or taken into account when it comes to how technology is used and rolled out in the sector. Front-line workers, in particular, express fear that settlement services will become more impersonal, and that client relationships with settlement workers will disappear. While that may be a sector concern, the reality is that as current national and provincial integration policies shift towards smaller centres (along with settlement patterns themselves, whether primary or secondary migration) technology is likely to play an important role (Burstein 2010).

There are, however, fears that bigger agencies with technology-mediated service capacity will "swoop in" and replace smaller, less sophisticated service providers with remote service offering. Instead of building capacity, some are worried that local expertise and support won't be built.

On the other hand, recent research indicates that technology is increasingly being seen as a way to connect with clients more efficiently and effectively, when the technology is one that clients already use and are familiar with (Campana unpublished). When asked about service efficiencies and effectiveness digital messaging has created in their organization two managers called digital messaging 'a game changer.' More than one interviewee mentioned how using smartphones and digital messaging affords staff more flexibility and ways to communicate with

clients. Overall, the message is clear from front-line workers and managers, technology has become an effective, efficient, and client-centric service delivery tool. For some, it is now essential and the primary way they communicate with and serve their clients.

Research shows that newer technologies have greatly expanded the online human service landscape. Workers can make use of a multitude of technologies and channels, alone or in concert: online counselling, live online chat, telephone counselling, video counselling, cybertherapy and avatar therapy, self-guided web-based interventions, smartphone apps, electronic social networks, email, text messaging (Reamer 2014, Boydell et al 2013).

In order to get the mix of technology-mediated and face-to-face service provision right, the immigrant and refugee-serving sector and its funders must engage in collaborative, consistent, and comprehensive research, analysis and evaluation of the use of technology to serve clients: “service provider agencies generally lack the fiscal room to conduct detailed analyses of their actions, much less to compare those actions to those of other agencies across the country. The result is that excellent local initiatives suffer from ‘locked-in syndrome,’ and the sector as a whole lacks an effective strategy for sharing information efficiently and for learning from each other...there exists a shared interest by governments and by settlement organizations in strengthening the sector through investments in its capacity to analyze and innovate.” (Burstein & Esses 2012)

Charting the future - crafting solutions

Investments are required - recommendations

The immigrant and refugee-serving sector is complex. Moving toward a Settlement 2.0 requires a workforce and programming model that embraces innovation, technology and continuous learning, has the capacity and know-how to implement innovation, encourages rapid iteration of programs by learning rapidly from failure, and is constantly exposed to new ideas and thinking about how to improve services delivery.

Making specific recommendations is daunting given decades of research and sector dialogue on what needs to happen to embrace an innovation culture but necessary in order to move a Settlement 2.0 vision forward. Just how daunting is evident in the insightful outline of what the specific human resource requirements are to create data-enabled and driven agencies that truly embody IRCC’s CORE Principles: appropriate vision and investment from organizational leadership, driven by strategic high-level priorities, objectives and key results; attracting top talent but also investing in building internal technical capacity; valuing domain expertise (e.g. social worker) and lived experience (e.g. refugee claimant); incorporating data and analytics in strategic planning, including budget maintenance costs of any technology; creating an online curriculum for settlement workers that every worker can access across the country; increasing

data literacy, working with data from research design to data analysis; and, building in privacy and security by design into any data or technology solution.

Common to this specific example, and all recommendations, is the need for intentional investment in instruments to build capacity in the sector. As outlined in this report, there are emerging and promising practices, reports and approaches with case studies, actionable recommendations and work plans which offer practical models, frameworks, guidelines and protocols that can be extracted for Canadian immigrant and refugee-serving agencies to implement, in conjunction with IRCC and other funders.

Knowledge mobilization efforts, practice & communication need to be formalized and implemented across the country.

There is a need to create a knowledge mobilization strategy to share learnings and successes from within Canada, and from international case studies and examples. Interviewees and the literature are clear that the sector needs to both surface innovative and emerging promising practices within the sector, but also learn from ideas, projects and approaches in other sectors. A common question is not only how to identify best practices, but the processes through which they might become the new standard for service delivery.

Within IRCC, the SDI funding stream is a pocket of change and innovation. IRCC can more actively solicit and analyze evidence coming from its innovative SDI funding in order to build the internal evidence base necessary to move the innovation discussion internally.

There is a need to create a knowledge mobilization strategy to share learnings and successes from within Canada, and from international case studies and examples, with sector front-line workers and leaders as the primary target audience.

The national discussion about CORE Principles and how they align with the sector's historical values needs to continue and be open to all.

The conversation that started in 2018 between IRCC and the sector that has led to the CORE Principles being embedded in the 2019 CFP process needs to continue. Part of the discussion includes answering a number of emerging questions from the sector: How will agencies do this? Do they have the capacity? Are additional resources required? What methods and approaches will agencies use to determine clients' need to ensure that program development meets CORE Principles? Do these principles align with practice?

Innovation, technology and discussions of the future of settlement work are on the National Settlement Council agenda. That agenda and those discussions should be actively decentralized and pursued within the sector, through the emerging National Community of Practice, as well as in all related conferences that bring together practitioners with academics and funder representatives.

Moving towards the CORE Principles, and cultivating an innovation mindset and culture in the sector will be a challenge. It's hard to move people towards something that they've been explicitly told not to do for some time. It is essential for the sector/funder dialogue on CORE Principles to continue, formally, as well as widely involving the entire sector (including emerging actors).

IRCC's funding model needs to better recognize the resource and time needs of building innovation mindset, practice, and culture.

Overall the sector wants to be innovative with technology, but consensus among interviewees is that there needs to be funding support in terms of building up infrastructure in agencies, as well as communities (such as broadband, high speed internet connections, which continue to be technology challenges in many rural and smaller communities). There is also a need for consistent and ongoing training for staff, not only focused on how best they can use technology, but also how to train clients to use it in a service context.

Innovation is attractive to agencies, but an entire service model can't simply and quickly be shifted. The innovation labs, innovation strategies, and innovation practices that are occurring both within the sector and other sectors and within government need to be looked at to see what could work either at the individual agency level or at a regional level, perhaps through LIP innovation, lab spaces or doing some work with existing labs, and complementing their work.

Innovation practices and labs are emerging throughout the sector – LIPs are fostering collaboration in regions where it's been a historical challenge. [WoodGreen Community Services](#), [MCIS Language Solutions](#), [NouLab's Economic Immigration Lab](#), [SFU's Radius Refugee Livelihoods Lab](#), [Refugee Career Jumpstart](#), [Department of Imaginary Affairs](#), are just a few of note. Municipal, Provincial and the Federal governments have all embarked on technologically innovative overhauls of the way they serve the public. They have created innovation labs and innovation practices are becoming core parts of government planning. For example, federally, the government has developed [Digital Service Standards](#), and within the sector's main funder, IRCC, has created a large [Client Experience Branch](#). All offer insights into how centralized support mechanisms can be structured for the sector as it further embraces innovation and technical literacy.

All of these projects require careful reflection to assess their usefulness for potential replication in the immigrant and refugee-serving sector. Part of that research will need to look at how the time that agencies or workers spend on innovation practice can be backfilled to ensure that service delivery work is not affected. The sector needs adequate resourcing, professional development, time, collaboration with experts, and flexibility to iterate, "fail," learn, and innovate.

Technology access, literacy & infrastructure require investments in training and appropriate hardware as it evolves, and client use of it changes.

The sector uses technology and indeed has a rich history of being innovative with technology. There continue to be many challenges to technology implementation in agencies, particularly around service delivery and data, information, and feedback management. In order to achieve innovation and technology outcomes that will propel the sector forward, investments are needed to build the capacity of sector agencies.

Interviewees indicated that the sector should look at technology from a social justice and service lens, recognizing that there is a digital divide, and that not everyone has access to technology, or wants to access services via technology. Much has been written, identified and codified in other human service sectors (Boydell et al 2013). Most notably, the U.S. Social Work sector has recently outlined standards for Technology in social work practice that can and should be easily transferred to the immigrant and refugee-serving sector (NASW 2017). Resources can be borrowed from there for the settlement sector. Developing guidelines for professional practice on the use of technology in human service delivery is essential. Some immigrant and refugee-serving agencies have started to put in place protocols and guidelines with regards to social media, digital instant messaging and other technologies being used in service delivery. These, as well as others from other sectors need to be shared sector-wide and a baseline set of standards created for sector agencies to adhere to.

Other tools such as [NetHope's Digital Nonprofit project](#), or [TechSoup Global's ICT4NGO Assessment tool](#) provide digital assessment, guidance, and road maps across broad capacity areas and should be evaluated for adoption and replication in the sector.

A national sector capacity-building approach is needed that builds on existing professional development efforts, but also brings in approaches from other sectors.

Consistent and baseline professional development needs to be made available across the sector. While IRCC appears to be building professional development approaches into individual agency contracts in the 2019 CFP, there is value in bringing together those who provide sector-wide professional development such as umbrella groups, colleges, and universities to create a comprehensive, blended (combining online and in-person) learning model. IRCC should look to the language sector professional development model it funds, the LearnIT2teach Project, for what can be replicated in Settlement programming.

Educators in the U.S. Social Work field are actively grappling with how to educate Social Workers in an increasingly technology-mediated service structure. There is value in the immigrant and refugee-serving sector to reach out and learn from a model that could be useful for the sector.

As well, the work being done within the federal government in the School of Public Service Digital Academy has relevance to the sector. The focus on constant access to learning opportunities, including new digital literacy education, should be on IRCC's agenda to ensure that all funded service providers have similar levels of competency and capacity.

At the same time, it is essential to also move the professional development conversation beyond up-/re-skilling to hiring workers with different credentials or creating entirely new roles/structures in the sector.

Data/information management capacity & harnessing client feedback require additional resources and external expertise to build sector capacity.

CORE Principles include client-centred and outcomes-driven priorities. An outcomes-driven framework is built on agency capacity to collect, evaluate, analyse and act on the right data. SDI-funded initiatives are already looking into how sector agencies can better do this work with data. Deep analysis of their work should be shared with the entire sector to learn from these approaches. As well, Fund for Shared Insight, a funder collaborative in the U.S., focused on improving agency capacity to be more responsive to client input and feedback could be approached to assess the replication of their approach in the sector, led through IRCC.

Specific tools like [IFRC's Data Playbook](#) provide hands-on tools to enable organizations to start conversations about data collection and analysis. Open North recently suggested that external resources and experts should be brought in to create data management expertise and a shared data culture within the sector. These approaches and recommendations should be investigated further.

Building collaboration between sector agencies needs to be a priority.

Local Immigration Partnerships (LIPs) have brought local collaboration back to the forefront in many cases and their successes as convening organizations should be built upon. In particular, IRCC's experience implementing its Client Experience Branch needs further analysis. Its role as a culture change agent is something that should be explored in terms of how similar collaborative innovation approaches could be applied in the sector. The emerging National Community of Practice can also play a role here and should be viewed as a tool for information sharing and collaboration.

Building trust between IRCC and funded agencies is essential for innovation and change to truly occur.

IRCC's John Biles presented a [IRCC's Vision for a Program Management Reset](#) at the 2018 AAISA Summit that included comments addressing the issue of trust between IRCC (through Program Officers) and sector agencies. What he outlined is significant, a culture change in the design, delivery, and management of how IRCC develops and implements Contribution Agreements and how they're managed. This includes improved and collaborative communication, including information sharing, a focus on outcomes and meeting client needs, and building mutual trust between Program Officers and the service providers they manage. IRCC's thinking here needs to be explored sector wide, the sector needs to know that this is happening. Identifying how

best to open this conversation between the sector and IRCC is something that should be explored in more depth.

Building the Settlement 2.0 vision

IRCC's CORE Principles offer a pivot point for the sector to embrace collaboration and innovation more formally, working with their largest funder. Exploring the CORE Principles offer tangible, cross-sector priorities and identify existing sector challenges, as well as point to where solutions need to be based.

To build a Settlement 2.0 vision and capacity, the sector needs resources, support, different funding structures and relationships, trust, space, and time. Trust, space and time come up again and again in this conversation. As do capacity and resources. Agencies have to be able to re- or up-skill their workforce as well as hire new types of roles and staff in order to move forward. As is evident with government departments, like IRCC's Client Experience Branch, and experiences of agencies like the Nurse Family Partnership and WoodGreen Community Services, it will mean investing more resources, not fewer, into the sector. The lack of standardized professional development/competency frameworks across the and sector and at all levels in organizations (from front-line to ED) is a huge issue. It will only get bigger.

While there is much in the sector that can and should be learned from, emerging frameworks offer useful starting points for many agencies to assess, map and begin moving towards innovation and more strategic use of technology.

Further dialogue among stakeholders, as well as with funders, and other sectors that are exploring avenues for innovation, will serve to benefit the settlement sector.

Perhaps this will ensure that, this time, the conversation about innovation, technology, holistic program design, and ensuring positive newcomer settlement outcomes moves the sector to action rather than simply identifying challenges and barriers that we have known about for decades. We have re-identified the challenges. We now have a renewed opportunity to craft solutions built around intention, instruments, and investment.

Appendices

- Appendix 1: A chronology of technology and innovation research in the sector
- Appendix 2: key research on technology from the Social Work field
- Appendix 3: key research on the information practice of newcomers and ethnic communities
- Appendix 4: key research on newcomer technology use, and the essential role technology plays in navigating migration
- Appendix 5: Literature review references
- Appendix 6: Settlement 2.0 list of interviewees