

Settlement 3.0 Project

INNOVATION IS IN OUR DNA



Final recommendations
to IRCC

DELIVERED BY PEACEGEEKS AUGUST 2021



FUNDED BY:



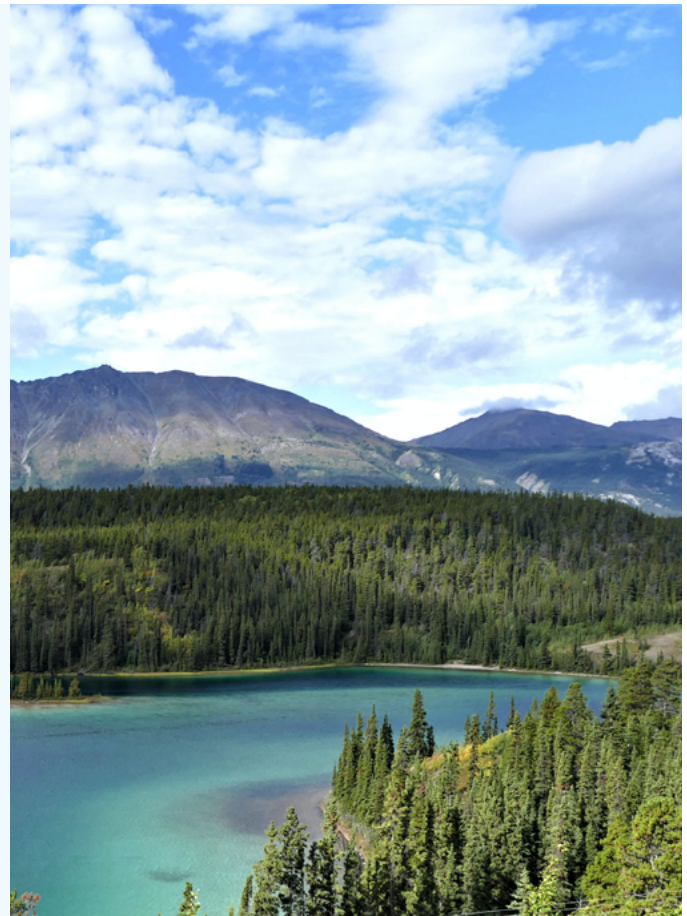
Immigration, Refugees
and Citizenship Canada

FINANCÉ PAR:

Immigration, Réfugiés
et Citoyenneté Canada

Executive Summary

This report comprises PeaceGeeks' final recommendations to Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) regarding the Settlement 3.0 Project.



This report includes a detailed **Project Summary** which provides an overview and timeline of the project, and key recommendations grounded in contextual, qualitative research, which provide actionable insights into how IRCC can lead Canada's settlement sector—from rural and remote communities to large urban centres from coast to coast to coast—to more widespread innovative and collaborative practices, what enabling conditions are required, and what are already at work within the sector.

Our formal recommendations are made up of two key overarching priority recommendations and a number of specific recommendations with sub-recommendations, organized in a “**Now, Next, Then**” framework.

Now means work should begin within the next 6 months. **Next** suggests a medium-term focus: 6 months to 2 years. **Then** means longer-term: 2 years on, leading up to the next IRCC national Call for Proposals (CFP). Additional evidence-based work, such as that generated by upcoming IRCC Service Delivery Improvement-funded projects, is likely required. We’ve indicated below where a recommendation should be led by IRCC, the sector, or jointly for maximum impact.



The “bird’s-eye view” recommendations are:

- **SECTOR & IRCC:** Empower newcomers to be agents of innovative practices and drivers of their own settlement journeys. More work can be done across the sector to put newcomers at the centre of sector innovation efforts. This goes beyond centring newcomers as clients, to centring newcomers as experts in understanding their needs and strengths, and sources of innovative solutions to meet those needs, regardless of whether they access formal settlement services or not. This recommendation dovetails recommendations from [PeaceGeeks’ Settlement 2.0 report](#) as well as the recent [Settlement Sector & Technology Task Group report](#).
- **IRCC** should create a National Small Center Working Group (as part of NSIC) made up of sector and IRCC representatives from all regions. This project has identified the many things smaller centres across the country have in common with each other, as well as particular strengths and innovative strategies—often born of necessity—that could benefit larger centres and national conversations. There is value in bringing their collective voices, experiences, and innovations together. This brings small centres to the table at the national level, highlighting and prioritizing the small centre lens in NSIC conversations.

The specific recommendations, organized by a “now, next, then” framework, are:



RECOMMENDATION 1:

Create clear and commonly accepted working definitions of innovation and outcomes

Now:

- The **sector and IRCC** should work together to create a clear and commonly accepted working definition of “innovation.” This report proposes some definitions. There was broad agreement on the project’s approach to innovation. A quick sector-wide discussion is possible to confirm broad acceptability.
- The **sector and IRCC** should work together to create a clear and commonly accepted working definition of client “outcomes.” There are existing projects and promising practices in the sector (including specific projects within the PNT) that require an evaluation framework and sector discussion to build on. This can be done immediately, and transparently.

Next:

- **Sector:** Promote the definition and innovative mindset and support collaboration by building on existing innovation efforts in the sector.
- **Sector:** Research promising innovative practices from other sectors with an eye for replication within the sector that fit the sector definition.
- The **sector and IRCC** should work together to create a sector-wide knowledge sharing & mobilization strategy to share pilot projects focused on creating outcomes-focused services.

Then:

- **IRCC** should operationalize how innovation and outcomes will be formally supported and evaluated within funding and program approaches.

**RECOMMENDATION 2:**

Encourage and support customization & localization of program delivery models across different regions and varying population demographics

Now:

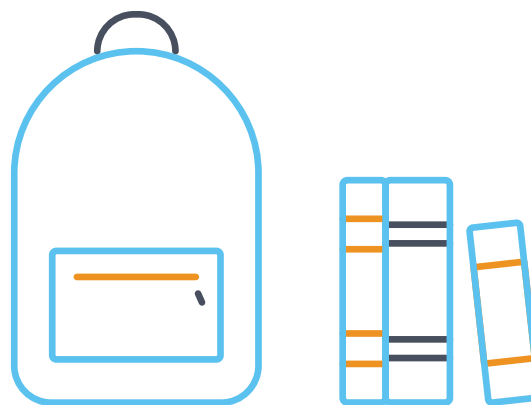
- **IRCC** should create a National Small Center Working Group (as part of NSIC) made up of sector and IRCC representatives from all regions.

Next:

- **IRCC** should acknowledge that replicating promising practices requires customization & localization for smaller centres and different regions across Canada, which in turn requires investment. Smaller centre SPOs need time and space to be able to reflect on information shared and how they might use it. They are also homes of promising practices. They need the time to reflect on their own practice, learn from it, use it to impact their programs and services, as well as share their promising practices out to the wider sector.

Then:

- **IRCC** should expand service eligibility to allow SPOs to formally serve clients including international students and Temporary Foreign Workers (TFWs).



**RECOMMENDATION 3:**

Build and resource more innovation-focused, flexible funding arrangements to allow for hypothesis testing and responsive/adaptive programming

Now:

- The **sector and IRCC** should work together to create a formal sector discussion to better encourage, support, and incentivize innovative and collaborative practices and processes, to continue to make effective use of resources, identify perceived pain points and further build trust between funders and funded agencies.
- **IRCC:** Identify and communicate how the CORE Principles and Program Reset are being operationalized within IRCC and the sector, and how they impact funding approaches and arrangements.

Next:

- **IRCC** should invest in knowledge mobilization and professional development resources for sector service providers. This means allocating sufficient resources to the various sector Communities of Practice to facilitate sector discussions and curate content, as well as collaborate in cross community engagement to build on each other's unique niches.
- **IRCC** should research and learn from successful innovation-focused funding approaches and mechanisms that have been used in other sectors, such as international development, to pilot with the settlement sector.

Then:

- **IRCC:** Create mechanisms to ensure that all SPOs have access to evidence-based programs evaluation, promising practices, and space to evaluate for local replication.
- The **sector and IRCC** should task the various funded Communities of Practice to compile and share information in a common, shareable (technically interoperable) format for access across sites.
- **IRCC** should ensure all IRCC-funded projects have funded, formal evaluation processes, using similar/consistent tools, with processes that allow for rapid information sharing within IRCC and to the sector in order to capture and identify promising trends, as well as areas where program pivots are necessary, easily accessible to all SPOs.

**RECOMMENDATION 4:**

Allocate technology as an operational rather than administrative cost

(The below recommendations align with the Settlement Sector & Technology Task Group's findings. There should be collaboration with that national effort.)

Now:

- The **sector and IRCC** should comprehensively identify and catalog the different needs of smaller centres when it comes to technology infrastructure for newcomers and settlement organizations. Smaller organizations without technical infrastructure have different capacity than large organizations with multiperson technical and communications teams. Similarly, newcomers in communities with low technology infrastructure are navigating a different settlement landscape than in contexts where digital access is widespread and more affordable. While we have scratched the surface on these nuances, they must continue to be explored to ensure that the sector and IRCC have baseline understandings of the diversity of organizational capacity, digital divide in agencies, regions, and clients, and that support, interventions, and investments are allocated equitably. This recommendation aligns specifically with *Recommendation 6: Ensure sector nuances are taken into account*, from the Settlement Sector & Technology Task Group report.

Next:

- **IRCC** should fund tech capacity improvements to increase SPO capabilities and uplevel and diversify program delivery to clients.
- **IRCC** should invest in sector technology access, literacy & infrastructure as it evolves, and client use of it changes.

Then:

- **IRCC** should create funds dedicated to improving organizations' digital strategies.
- **IRCC** should create funds dedicated to developing organizations' digital maturity.

These recommendations are detailed according to the CORE Framework in the remainder of this report.



Sector Priorities and Validation

As the final phase of our research, we invited the sector—settlement sector frontline staff and management, IRCC and other settlement funders, and recent newcomers to Canada—to validate the two overarching recommendations together with the four primary recommendations in an abridged Delphi process. The survey asked respondents to rank the six recommendations by their order of importance, and indicate why they prioritized the recommendations the way they did.

“Empower newcomers to be agents of innovative practices and drivers of their own settlement journeys” was ranked as the most important recommendation to allow newcomers to thrive in Canada by every group—frontline staff, management staff, funders, and newcomers themselves. This is not surprising, as newcomers have long been innovative, adaptive, and resilient in their settlement journeys, even at times when the sector has not. As one survey respondent noted, “Newcomers are resourceful and they come with a lot of potential—they are selected as such but once they arrive they are treated [as] incapable.” Faced with an even more dynamic, technologically reliant, post-pandemic future, the sector clearly sees empowering newcomers’ agency in their settlement journey as an opportunity to catalyze innovation, and further embrace technology

and collaborative processes: “[this] is an excellent overarching statement and vision to follow.”

Empower newcomers was followed by *“build and resource more innovative-focused, flexible funding arrangements to allow for hypothesis testing and responsive/adaptive programming”* as the second highest ranked recommendation. We know this is something the settlement sector has continuously pushed for and we can see funders understanding the necessity of it. Building off of this, the third and fourth highest recommendations were *“allocate technology as an operational rather than administrative cost”* and *“encourage and support customization and localization of program delivery models across different regions and varying population demographics”*. It should also be noted that there were no significant variants in ranking between Francophone and Anglophone respondents.

A Brighter Future

These recommendations have policy as well as practical implications, and require leadership from both settlement providers, and IRCC. They will only be realized when the sector and IRCC come together in conversation to create a future vision of settlement services.

The COVID-19 pandemic catalyzed a number of enabling factors for innovation. In the face of this crisis, the sector and its main funder prioritized flexibility, collaboration and a dynamic rethinking of how to serve newcomers in new ways. At the centre of many of these responses were newcomers themselves, who used ingenuity and resilience to design and implement creative solutions to meet community needs.

We are confident that these experiences can be learned from, built upon, and impact this conversation to create the innovation culture needed to ensure newcomers to Canada thrive.

Project Summary



In 2018, PeaceGeeks received funding from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) to develop a strategic vision and action plan titled Settlement 2.0 for exploring how technology and innovation can best facilitate settlement outcomes for supporting newcomers to Canada.

SETTLEMENT 2.0 COMPRISED TWO PHASES:

PHASE I involved the undertaking of a situational analysis to explore the effectiveness of current service delivery models and challenges to open and collaborative innovation in the settlement sector. Stakeholders were interviewed all across Canada, with the majority of the research coming from Ontario and British Columbia.

PHASE II sought to design and convene community consultations between stakeholders in the settlement sector across British Columbia's Lower Mainland, to explore how effective collaboration and innovative responses might address challenges identified in the previous phase. Specifically, Phase II sought out which enabling conditions needed to be present to facilitate innovative practices within the sector.



Settlement 3.0 serves as an expansion of Settlement 2.0. Made possible with additional funding from IRCC, this project's scope specifically targeted Service Providing Organizations (SPOs) in the Prairies, the Territories, the Atlantic Region and smaller, rural, and remote communities across British Columbia.

SETTLEMENT 3.0 ALSO INCLUDED TWO PHASES:

PHASE I expanded on Settlement 2.0's original situational analysis by providing a deeper dive into regional and small centre perspectives. This included conducting a survey of key literature and recommended reports from the Prairies, the North and Atlantic Regions, and additional interviews with settlement sector stakeholders including frontline service providers and employees at IRCC.

PHASE II sought to understand, from both those providing and receiving services, what conditions need to be in place to encourage innovative and collaborative work in the sector cross-nationally. Phase II sought to assess various possibilities in the current settlement sector environment by exploring opportunities and generating insights on ongoing innovative work that can be built upon.



Considering the geographic, cultural, and linguistic diversity across Canada, convening the consultations at a national level offers an opportunity to evaluate and compare findings across communities, thereby revealing a diverse set of perspectives while also surfacing a common set of recommendations.

Such an undertaking is not only timely but also critical, given the way in which the COVID-19 pandemic has shifted the landscape of the settlement sector, and changed how government, nonprofits, and businesses operate, perhaps permanently. With organizations having to innovate in new ways—including embracing technology in order to continue delivering services—**expanding the dialogue to a national level has the potential to promote a whole-of-society approach to supporting newcomers in their settlement journey from pre-arrival to full and meaningful integration.**¹

1 | The ways in which the COVID-19 pandemic have in many ways created enabling conditions - and in some cases, barriers - is explored in further detail later in this report.



Phase I

Building on the series of 36 qualitative interviews conducted as part of [Settlement 2.0](#) with settlement sector stakeholders at varying levels of leadership, from agencies large and small, and from urban and rural regions, interviews for Settlement 3.0 were conducted with an additional 29 interviewees representing smaller, rural, and remote centres in Yukon Territory, Northwest Territory, British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick.²

The 3.0 Situational Analysis likewise included a comprehensive literature review. The analysis mapped out internal perceptions of current service delivery models, challenges to collaboration and innovation, unprecedented adaptations as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, and what capabilities and supports the sector requires to strengthen client outcomes.

What we wrote in our [Settlement 2.0 report](#) continues to hold true: Settlement 3.0 reconfirms “the inherent complexity of the newcomer-serving sector. 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.”

2 | Throughout this report, the term “smaller centres” is used to refer to smaller, rural, or remote SPOs (in contrast to metro/urban SPOs).

Several key themes emerged from the interviews and are expanded upon throughout this report.



Innovation is in the DNA of smaller-centre organizations: smaller, rural, and remote centres are resilient, creative, innovative, focused on their clients (who SPOs expressed are also their neighbours), and committed to their communities. Being client-centred is an embedded and natural part of the culture, reality, and an outcome of geography and client diversity in these centres.



Collaboration likewise comes naturally to smaller centres as a reflex of their geography and culture.



Smaller SPOs serve everyone from every immigration status to varying degrees. The importance of international students and temporary foreign workers to many small-centre economies, coupled with increasing paths to permanent residence status and the ongoing need for newcomer retention in these communities suggests that **expanding service eligibility is essential**.



Customization is critical to the replication of promising practices. Interventions that are customized for smaller centre realities are already showing results. The Atlantic Pilot and municipal pilots that centre immigration with local settlement have already [shown greater retention results](#).



Knowledge transfer requires time, space, and resources.



More agile and flexible funding arrangements, coupled with better program officer relationships are key conditions to ensure the natural innovation in SPOs can be more formally operationalized. The experience of the pandemic should be evaluated and built upon.



Technology is both core to program delivery, and an inherent challenge to learn and apply.

Phase II

Nation-wide consultations took the form of virtual semi-structured focus groups with settlement sector workers who are involved with settlement-facing work within agencies, libraries, financial institutions, academia, nonprofits, and employment services. Newcomers with lived experience of settlement were also invited to participate in focus groups. In total, 12 semi-structured focus groups were conducted in January

and February 2021, totalling 70 participants. Seven Anglophone settlement sector worker focus groups were conducted in the Atlantic Region (Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, P.E.I, and Newfoundland), BC Small Centres, the Territories (Yukon, Northwest Territories, and Nunavut), and the Prairies region (Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba). Additionally, three cross-regional focus groups were conducted in French, totalling 24 Francophone participants, and two cross-regional newcomer focus groups were held.

The consultations delivered the following recommendations:



Ensure that efforts geared towards fostering innovation are grounded in a common definition of innovation that is agreed upon by all players within the sector. This will ensure concerted and streamlined efforts, as well as an effective and efficient allocation of resources.



Explore the feasibility of establishing a consistent funding model parallel to the current IRCC funding model, which allows for risk-taking, supports the long-term implementation of viable innovative ideas, and places more flexible expectations around evaluation metrics and reporting requirements. Consider having in place a systematic approach for selecting and funding innovative projects and initiatives based on their viability and their role in addressing key priorities within the sector. This could be coupled with a feedback mechanism that allows for demonstrating lessons learned from both successful and unsuccessful initiatives. This could be the existing SDI model, or something new and different.³



Promote an innovation-oriented mindset across different levels of the sector that encourages open communication between funders and service providers, and allows for risk taking and unconventional ideas to be explored.

3 | Another Government of Canada funding model that emerged as an example of a promising model for innovation, collaboration, and evidence-based future funding is the Fund for Innovation & Transformation (FIT) for advancing women's and girls' rights. FIT's self-described goal is to "cultivate a working environment in which SMOs are empowered to experiment, fail, adapt, and try again."



Support partnerships and collaborations across the sector. Consider having collaborative partnerships as a precondition for certain funding, especially for organizations based in smaller centres. Create dedicated physical and virtual spaces to enable various players across the sector to forge partnerships and collaborations that allow for innovative ideas to flourish, while establishing key priorities and opportunities for innovation. As well, support knowledge and information sharing events and initiatives that allow for the sharing of information, resources, ideas, and best practices.



Support funding for enhancing efficiencies within organizations in order to free up staff time to innovate. This could include funding technology that can be used to make day-to-day tasks more efficient, or creating a centralized service for offloading administrative tasks such as client onboarding. Alternatively, consider supporting the creation of staff positions that are dedicated to advancing and championing innovation within organizations.



Support more training and capacity building within organizations, and prioritize technology training for smaller-sized organizations. As well, ensure organizations are well-equipped with the hardware and software technology needed to be able to function efficiently and effectively.



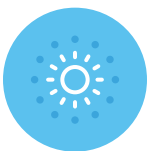
Address digital access and digital literacy barriers among newcomers. Prioritize digital literacy training for those who are facing language barriers, are of older age groups, or are considered lower-skilled.



Take regional differences into account, factoring in the realities and challenges that are unique to each region. Support further cross-regional consultations in order to enable a more in-depth exploration of regional differences and priorities in regard to innovation.



Promote a bottom-up approach to innovation by leveraging newcomer strengths and talents and ensuring they are part of conversations about innovation within the sector.



Use the current momentum that has been spurred by COVID-19 to further innovative work within the sector and establish key learnings that can inform future innovation initiatives.

Defining innovation

Create a clear and commonly accepted practical definition of innovation

In this project, the definition of innovation was considered to be: “the digital and non-digital practices and approaches that foster the adaptability and agility needed to enable the settlement sector to stay ahead of the curve in a rapidly changing migration and settlement landscape, with the goal of better serving newcomers to Canada.” We noted a distinction between innovation: a process of developing something genuinely new; and iteration: a process of refining what is already working to make it even better. Focus group participants added to our understanding of what innovation means within the settlement sector.⁴



THEIR EXAMPLES OF INNOVATION INCLUDED CHARACTERISTICS AND PRACTICES OF WHAT SECTOR STAKEHOLDERS CONSIDER TO BE INNOVATIVE:

- Work that is centred on partnerships and collaborations
- Work focused on addressing systemic barriers
- Holistic and newcomer-centric approaches, grounded in community
- Use of technology to facilitate access to services and/or improve service provision for newcomers, whether directly or indirectly

The lack of an agreed upon definition is indicative of a need for establishing a common understanding of what innovation means and what this looks like in practice. Many project participants cautioned against overcomplicating the notion of innovation. Some commented that they liked having a point of reference distinguishing between innovation and iteration, not a value judgement that one was better than the other.

Several SPOs indicated that during the pandemic they felt they were regularly innovating by having to adapt to unprecedented and rapidly changing circumstances. For many, it has been genuinely new to offer online services and to extensively rely on technology in service delivery. At the same time, interviewees and focus group participants indicated they were frequently dealing with clients' digital literacy and digital divide challenges. The digital divide is a lived reality in many smaller centres that predates the pandemic, but few agencies previously were as actively dealing with it as they are now.

4 | IRCC may find it useful to explore other ideas of innovation that don't use language such as “failure” and “risk taking” common to innovation literature. In some ways, Settlement 3.0 illustrated that sector stakeholders use this same language because it's generally what they are exposed to in conversations about innovation. Phase I of Settlement 3.0 included a [brief exploration](#) of how various SPOs across Canada conceive of the word “innovation” in practical terms.

Innovation around technology was not solely focused on service delivery. SPOs creatively dealt with not only their own, but also their clients' digital divide challenges.

The concept of innovating “off the sides of our desks” arose constantly during the Settlement 2.0 project. Unsurprisingly it came up frequently within smaller-centre 3.0 interviews. Interviewees in both 2.0 and 3.0 agreed resoundingly that it would be useful to build time and space for innovation into funding and program models. Time and space are also essential to share and mobilize knowledge, and increase intra-sector collaboration, in order to operationalize innovation: “when useful tools or processes have been created in one area it would be useful to know about it, and have the time to evaluate if it could work in the local setting.”

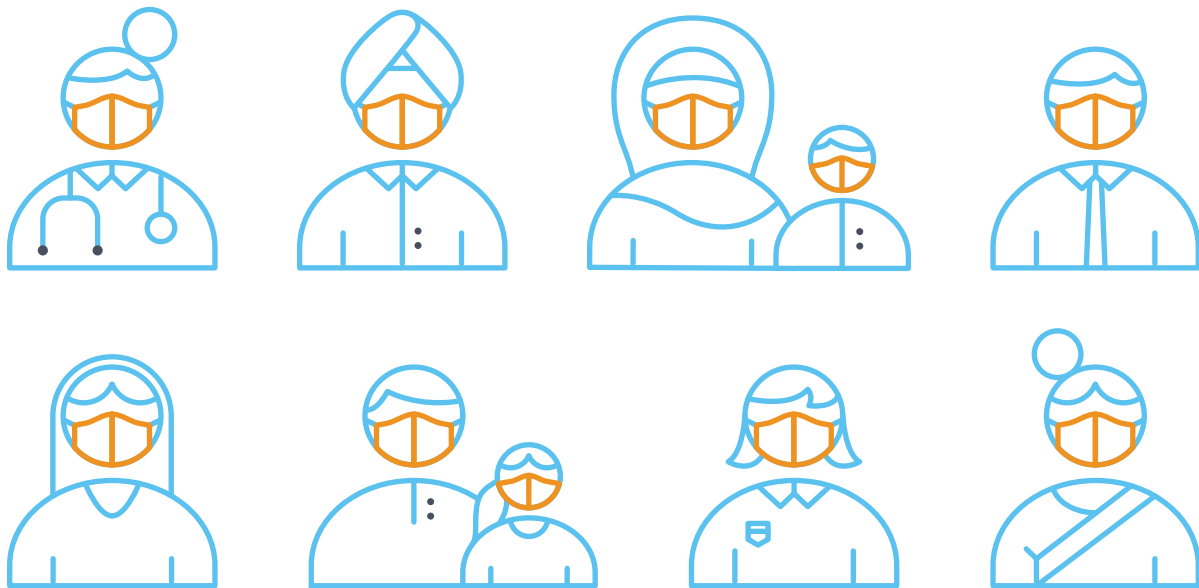
Innovation and collaboration are embedded within the DNA of the sector, especially within smaller centres. Smaller centre SPOs work together to meet basic needs, with a holistic approach focused on community development and a neighbourly relational approach. They are focused on working and learning together to help each other. As one interviewee stated: “innovation helps keep [SPOs] nimble, farsighted, and prescient in many ways. There’s such a strategic advantage in a DNA that helps the [SPO] look over the next hill, espousing timely change, internally and externally.”

In addition, participants noted the importance of a strong culture of innovation and collaboration being set by leadership. As part and parcel of culture development, trust within the organization is key, between leadership and staff, in both directions. As one interviewee noted: “It goes back to culture. If you don’t have the leadership, you won’t create the culture. Otherwise, innovation, [as you’ve seen in] your research, is just a buzzword.” This leadership applies both within SPOs, the sector as a whole, and within IRCC. All stakeholders should collaborate on the leadership and culture-setting role.

Many conversations about innovation throughout Settlement 2.0 and 3.0 trended towards technology. However, process innovation is as important, if not more so, than tools, and this became clear within the context of smaller centres. This notion was summed up by one interviewee: “there’s some technological and digital advances that I think can help streamline service automate processes, of course, but I think there’s a lot of that non-digital work, which can be the face-to-face connection with clients, the way the collaboration, the way our decision-making, and the engagement of stakeholders that will also lead to greater adaptability and agility. Innovation can happen in leaps and bounds and create entirely new projects. But I think sometimes there’s great successes in that continuous fine-tuning and updating of the processes that can continue making some network easier and better across the board.”

This idea was echoed during the community consultations. Participants frequently cited the role that collaborations and partnerships played in innovation. They referenced examples of building partnerships across different community-based organizations (CBOs), or between CBOs and the private sector to offer holistic services to newcomers. CBOs partnered together to provide workshops that newcomers would otherwise not have access to. They also partnered with the private sector to offer comprehensive supports related to housing, employment, transportation, and various other services at reduced prices. Participants considered these examples innovative because they allowed the collective strengths of different organizations to be leveraged. In turn, these partnerships helped meet multiple newcomer needs through comprehensive and streamlined services.

IRCC and SPOs have an opportunity to co-create a practical definition of innovation that is accepted by, and applicable to, the settlement sector.



Impact of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic caused a major disruption to the settlement sector. The sector continues to illustrate that it is capable of adapting and finding new ways of reinventing itself in response to uncertainty or crisis, and COVID-19 has ignited innovation across the sector in unprecedented ways. This was apparent throughout the Settlement 3.0 Project.

Notably, interviewees and focus group participants experienced increased support and flexibility with funding arrangements. As a result, SPOs have been able to respond more effectively to sudden shifts on the ground. There has been less resistance to new ideas and new approaches. As a result, organizations feel more supported and more able to have open communication with their funders.

A sector worker stated that “COVID-19 helped us to focus on ‘what do we need right now?’ And ‘what do our clients actually need?’ Priorities shifted. And it gave us, as a small program, quite some freedom. Right now, it’s really a great time to talk with your funder. And I feel like there’s flexibility and there’s real interest in helping us right now. I don’t know if I’ve ever experienced that before. I have the feeling that the funder is [now] really listening and supporting [our] ideas. Because they’re also moving away from ticking boxes, right? At the moment, [that’s] not the first priority. I hope that maybe we could get this kind of thinking forward into post COVID-19 times. So that we can be innovative without fearing that, oh, this might backfire on us, big time.”

Technology illuminated endless possibilities for delivering services. For some, previously sceptical of technology's role in service delivery, technology created access and inclusion. SPOs expanded service reach to populations previously excluded.

They found themselves delivering virtual programming using channels and technologies never before explored. The shift to online service delivery also highlighted existing challenges around digital access and digital literacy for both SPOs and newcomers. It also raised concerns about the ability to build rapport with clients, create meaningful human interactions and onboarding new clients effectively using technology.

COVID-19 led both to new possibilities and hindrances in service delivery. Project participants noted in equal measure that for some, "there are some clients who are happy to have remote service delivery indefinitely" and that for others, "we tried to bring people into online classes, and only one student was able to do [the class online.] It didn't work for us." Although complicated, and sometimes much more challenging than in the pre-pandemic era, participants reflected that ways of working through COVID-19 that wouldn't have worked before the pandemic are second nature now, and noted that there is a stronger understanding of having to think outside the box. "Before, when we brought up new ideas or new approaches, everyone was reluctant to change. People were hiding behind 'Oh no! it's not possible! It's going to take a long time to implement, et cetera.' But when everyone was faced with the truly universal constraint of the pandemic, we saw that everyone had no choice but to change and adapt."

5 | An example of this is explored in detail later in this report.

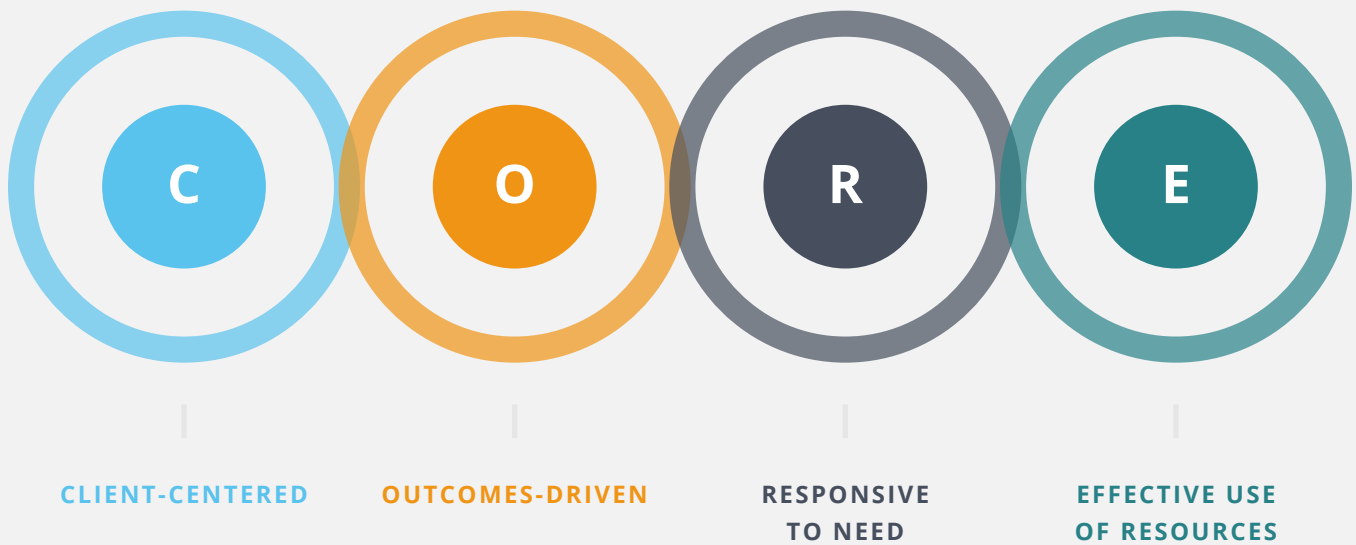


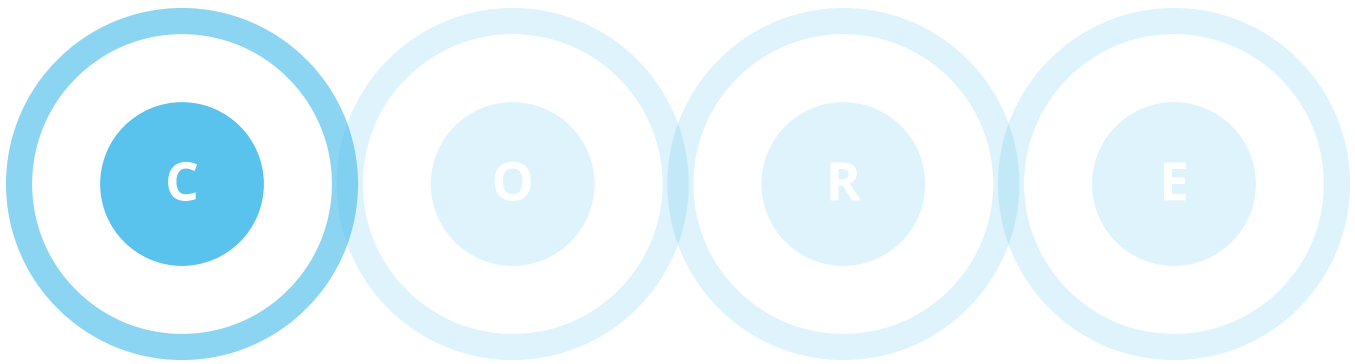
While COVID-19 has been both a barrier and an impetus for innovation, it is difficult to predict what it all will mean in the long run.

Community consultations illuminated what has been made possible thus far in terms of funding and adopting an innovation-oriented mindset. Additional questions remain around how partnerships will be leveraged, the types of spaces that will be created to foster collaborations, how organizational capacities will be supported, how the digital use divide will be addressed, how regional differences will be accounted for, and **how newcomers will be empowered to play a key role in driving innovation forward.**⁵ Tackling these questions will require an intentional and concerted effort across the sector.

Recommendations

As with the Settlement 2.0 report, recommendations are linked to IRCC's "CORE" Principles, as they were formally implemented into IRCC's 2019 five-year Calls for Proposals and continue to guide IRCC calls for proposals.





Client-Centered

“Client-centered” is defined by IRCC as programming that is tailored to meet specific clients’ profiles, with a focus on clients who are vulnerable, marginalized, or face barriers.



The Settlement 2.0 Project recommended:

Engage the broader Canadian community into the settlement conversation to promote a whole of society approach to supporting newcomers in their settlement journey.

Pursue asset-based language, programming, and outreach across the sector and beyond.

The Settlement 3.0 Project validated those recommendations and further determined:



Innovation is part of the DNA of smaller centre SPOs. Smaller, rural, and remote centres are resilient, creative, innovative, focused on their clients (neighbours), and committed to their communities.



IRCC has an opportunity to **formalize practices around encouraging innovative mindsets and collaboration**—this is expanded upon further in the “Promising practices” sub-section of this report.



Being collaborative is an embedded part of smaller-centre SPO culture, and an outcome of geography and client diversity.

CLIENTS ARE CENTERED IN SMALLER CENTRE SPOS

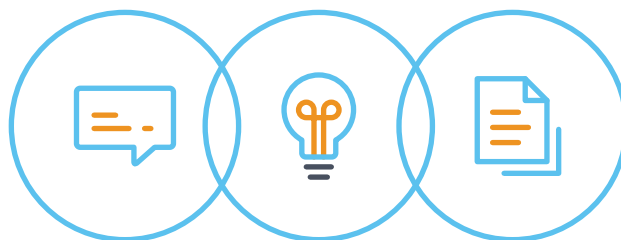
As introduced above, the notion that clients are not central to SPOs is a misperception. In both the Settlement 2.0 and 3.0 projects, SPO representatives spoke eloquently about their commitment to clients, and the myriad ways in which they work “off the sides of their desks” and strive to innovate within budget and resource constraints to meet clients’ needs.

What is clear is that there are times when doing so is less feasible. While immigration and settlement require agility, funding structures and funding relationships remain rigid, mired in an audit mentality, and inconsistency between jurisdictions, types of funding, and between IRCC program officers. The COVID-19 pandemic has provided a unique set of circumstances where these structures and mentality have had to shift from audit to support. Interviewees brought up conversations with program officers that focused on how IRCC could help agencies during an extraordinary time, rather than constricting their agility and ability to meet client needs, suggesting that adaptability and flexibility from core funders is well within the realm of the doable.⁶

Without a whole community approach to settlement and inclusion, small centres simply are not able to retain newcomers. This means SPOs must ensure connections

with other actors in the community, including employers, to ensure that newcomers and their unique assets and challenges are taken into account. Because of compressed hierarchies in smaller centres, SPOs are actively able to reach decision-makers and key actors and tailor solutions with them. For SPOs this means **getting to know clients as neighbours**, and tailoring solutions to their needs. For smaller centres, being client centric is a natural outcome of their circumstances: “the community wraparound is our strength. Trust is essential, especially for people coming from places of low trust. It’s a real shift when they know they can trust community and services,” said one interviewee.

FOSTERING COLLABORATION IN SMALLER CENTRES



There has historically been a perception within the sector that SPOs can seem resistant to collaboration. However, Settlement 3.0 participants demonstrated almost overwhelmingly that COVID-19 became an enabling factor in increased communication and collaboration between SPOs and between SPOs and funders. The pandemic created an urgent need to collaborate. As one interviewee stated: “I would say that we definitely have to continue breaking down the competitive nature of funded agencies and developing more cohesive, collaborative environments.” Coordination is essential: “if ultimately, we’re all working towards the same values of supporting newcomers,

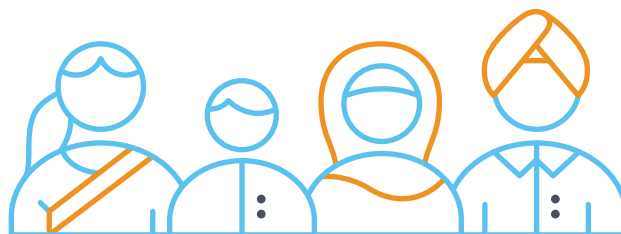
⁶ | It is important to note that some of this funded agility came to an end on March 31st 2021, and it is not clear if some of the unique supports, funded roles, device supports, and other tangible differences in the relationship between the sector and its biggest funder will remain temporary or be supported as the need continues to exist.

and really wanting to ensure that newcomers feel included in the communities, I think we really need to start pulling away that competitive veil between organizations. But for us, it has worked really, really well [collaborating between SPOs at the smaller-centre level]. So we were seeing great successes, and I think if any other province was interested in looking at this for their own regions, **we'd be more than happy to share experiences** around that as well."

Furthermore, collaborating increases accountability: "when we, as an organization, collaborate with others, or we within ourselves are collaborating, you tend to hold yourself more accountable. **You tend to live up to expectations, or exceed expectations** that way. **In order for that work, people have to be [able to be] more transparent.** And I've noticed that people have become more transparent that way. Our funder has been more transparent than ever [as a result of COVID-19]. That wouldn't have happened in the past. And it's been very positive, that we've had this ongoing communication that's occurred with our funder. It's been quite the shift, actually, it's been more of we're hearing you, we want to see how and what these ideas that we're seeing, like they're actually seeing kind of on the ground level, what's happening. And they're seeing that there are solutions. And, and they're willing to take a chance, and that trust aspect, in trusting those that they're actually funded."

COVID-19 can be seen as an opportunity to deconstruct this perception of resistance to collaboration and engage in dialogue between sector stakeholders to understand what has contributed to perceived and real barriers, and how to dismantle those moving forward.

LEVERAGING NEWCOMERS' STRENGTHS: "YOU LEARN FROM EVERY SINGLE CLIENT"



Settlement 3.0 participants recognized the important role that settlement organizations play in assessing newcomers' needs and continually adapting their services to be able to respond to those needs.

Stakeholders also recognize that any efforts to address newcomer challenges and barriers are only effective if they are rooted in newcomers' voices and lived experiences. Interviewees and consultation participants stressed the importance of viewing newcomers as the primary source of innovation, and leveraging their strengths and talents in a bottom up approach. Newcomers are highly intuitive, resourceful, adaptive, and responsive to sudden shifts in their environments. In many respects, they embody what it means to be innovative, and should be part of conversations around enabling conditions for innovation within the sector. Focus group participants in particular agreed that many great ideas have come directly from newcomer clients.

Utilizing asset-based language and striving to “fulfill potential,” rather than stop-gap deficits, is key to serving newcomers. As one focus group participant stated:

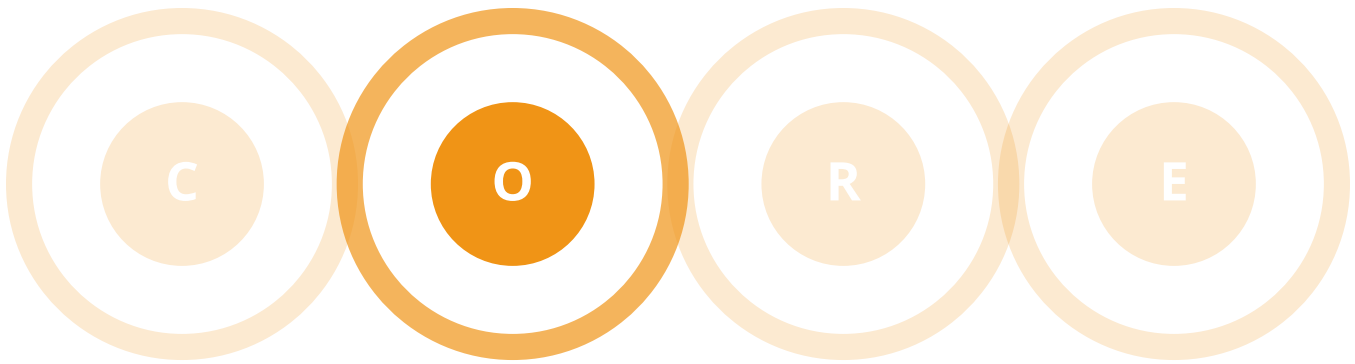
“...having services, programs, open opportunities, initiatives, projects that amplify and tap into [newcomer] strengths, much more than into filling in their needs. And I have seen a little bit of a shift in IRCC funding more strengths-based approach and funding programs that are tapping into the strengths of [newcomers]. I would love to see more of that.”

IRCC has the opportunity to leverage asset-based language and attitudes to encourage innovative and collaborative practices throughout the sector.

Focus group participants reflected on how adaptive and proactive newcomers are to their circumstances and settlement journeys. By contrast, SPOs identified feeling both proactive and reactive within their roles, and perceive IRCC as relatively reactive. This highlights a pain point, and also an opportunity, for cross-sectoral dialogue about the current characteristics of the settlement sector, and what the sector wants to embody moving forward. Innovative practices require both responsiveness to changing situations, and proactivity in anticipating what’s on the horizon. One settlement sector worker reflected: “the government is 90% reactive and the SPOs have a little bit more leeway to be more proactive. [But] really, **the ones who are**

proactive all the time are the [newcomers]. [So we really need to be] looking at their resourcefulness and looking at how they are managing to solve problems in an informal way. Because most of the best ideas are going to come from them.”

The sector should look more closely at the ways in which newcomer innovation occurs both in the context of receiving settlement services (see the Yellowknife swim night example in the Promising Practices section of this report), and in the context of not receiving services—whether due to a lack of awareness, availability, access, or negative experience. For example, private social media groups on Facebook and WhatsApp created by newcomers for newcomers (one such group for Indian and South Asian newcomers has more than 80,000 members in Toronto), have long flummoxed the sector because they seem to run parallel to what SPOs (and IRCC) are trying to provide, without intersecting. But there is a unique opportunity here to meet newcomers where they’re at, and provide a forum for discussing their needs and ideas. Newcomers are creating solutions for themselves, which should be celebrated within the context of their settlement journey—**how can the sector further empower newcomers to action their ideas for navigating a new life in Canada?**



Driven by Outcomes

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



The Settlement 2.0 Project recommended:

Formalize and implement knowledge mobilization efforts and practices.

Settlement service-providing organizations need investment to build their own capacity to adopt emerging technologies as a means to improve client-centred outcomes and drive efficiency.

The Settlement 3.0 Project further determined:



Investing in knowledge mobilization and professional development resources for sector service providers will empower and enable SPOs to customize, replicate, and improve service delivery.



Interventions that are **customized for smaller centres** are demonstrating promising early results.



There is a lack of common, practical understanding of what the term “outcomes” means. **Co-creating working definitions of outcomes (sometimes customized for regional or demographic needs) is essential.**



Empowering newcomers to be agents of their own settlement journeys is a significant enabling condition for driving innovative practices forward and improving client outcomes.

INVESTING IN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT



Settlement 3.0 participants noted that while COVID-19 had made it increasingly possible to access training opportunities online, SPOs desire more support in training and professional development in order to ensure they can maintain their capacity to champion client services. This desire came up strongly regarding technological capacity development, as stated in the above section of this report, however, the desire for more consistent knowledge mobilization pre-dates the pandemic, and encompasses more than just tech capacity. This was expressed during Settlement 2.0, and was emphasized by smaller centres during both Phases I and II of Settlement 3.0.

While new roles are emerging within the sector, they lack formal funding supports to sustain them. These roles emerge from outcomes-driven program delivery and would benefit from formal funding supports from IRCC.

DEFINING CLIENT OUTCOMES

There remains a lingering question from the sector about how to measure client outcomes. IRCC interviewees wondered how to measure progression, impact, and how to define settlement as “complete.” Outcomes measurement is a typically a management tool, but the Settlement 2.0 and 3.0 projects, and by extension, the settlement sector as a whole, seem to be speaking about client outcomes more holistically: within the framework of the ability of a newcomer to

be “successful” in their settlement journey by being able to make Canada their home. IRCC and SPOs can more explicitly work together to create a more practical definition of “client outcomes” that encompasses the goals of the sector when it comes to serving newcomers, and basing impact measurement reporting on the phrase.

One interviewee reflected on the intersection between client-centred approaches and outcomes-based programming. If SPOs are competing for funding, there’s a sense that “SPOs tell us what they think we want to hear, whereas I think we need to see what the clients say they need. Maybe the SPOs are right, I don’t think there’s a giant disconnect, but there’s a good chance that there are things we’re [all] missing [by not asking the clients proactively].”

During the Settlement 2.0 project, we found that both SPOs and IRCC were essentially waiting for the other to define, and operationalize, innovation. It appears that there is a similar “wait and see” approach occurring when it comes to outcomes measurement and data use/analysis. A funder interviewee reflected that it can seem as though “the sector is waiting for us to say: ‘this is how we want you to be tracking your outcomes,’ but we’re open to innovation in the reporting piece, and the tracking of outcomes and measuring success. Can they tell us what they think is best to measure their programming? Because we don’t have a clue sometimes ourselves.”

These answers will likely alter reporting structures, and funding streams.

Unsurprisingly, funding was considered by Settlement 3.0 participants as a fundamental component of innovation, and a key enabling factor for innovative work within the sector. There is a perception, particularly among SPOs throughout the country and during both the 2.0 and 3.0 Projects, that the current funding model is more likely to disincentivize innovation because it

does not build in room for trial and error, and is time-bound, and therefore considered rigid. Focus group participants expressed that the current finding model inhibits a culture of risk-taking within the sector. “There’s an inherent risk of failure in innovation,” stated a focus group participant. Participants pointed out that innovation also takes time, so building in allowance for experimentation at the SPO level—in terms of time and resources—was voiced by participants throughout Settlement 3.0 as an enabling factor for stronger client outcomes.

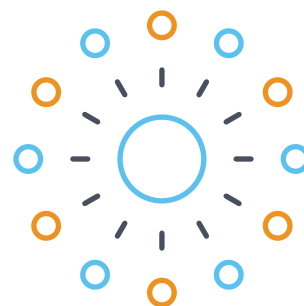
The idea of developing a pilot or hypothesis incubator for proposals on a rolling basis is one that arose repeatedly throughout Settlement 2.0 and Settlement 3.0. As a 3.0 interviewee put it: “it would be useful to have some sort of open structure with IRCC or another funder where you could say, listen, this is timely, and it’s innovative, and here’s why we need to jump on it now. And let’s pilot something without waiting for the next formal call for proposal, to see if it works.”

PROMISING PRACTICES

During Settlement 3.0, several promising practices of innovation and collaboration emerged from sector stakeholders, which warrant further exploration as to how they might be scaled up and applied on a broader scale.

The common denominators of these promising practices seem to be that they a) emerge from conversations between local SPOs and IRCC representatives and b) are rooted in the local reality on the ground. Thus, the working conception of “outcomes” is defined in the local context, creating a basis for which to measure growth and success.

COMPLETING VERSUS COMPETING



In New Brunswick, the rural settlement network connects groups of agencies with one to five staff to support each other with sharing best practices and resources. They meet on a regular basis. This has, according to one interviewee familiar with the network, really “shaped a sense of collaboration and some level of standardization across the province.” The network connects smaller or newer agencies with larger or more established and long-running agencies to learn from one another. The network is wrapping its first year, but hopes are high that it will become a permanent fixture in the province. Collaboration and innovation are occurring more naturally within the network as the sense of competition for funding is reduced. As the interviewee describing the process explained: “making sure you’re actively listening, and looking for these opportunities,” is key.

According to an IRCC staff member interviewed for the Settlement 3.0 process, this networking is also occurring in Manitoba. The interviewee suggested that IRCC had encouraged extremely small SPOs to reach out to one another and help build capacity. This has increased organization strength by numbers, but also by diversifying skills sets, freeing up frontline service providers to be on the ground while administrative staff handle more of the paperwork,



for example. This particular network emerged from a conversation during the last Call-for-proposals in 2019 between SPOs and IRCC in Manitoba, who mutually agreed that the system was not best serving anyone in smaller centres especially. For example, extremely small SPOs could not prove their client numbers because they lacked the time to log them in management systems. IRCC strongly encouraged one-person SPOs to partner with each other or with larger agencies to share the workload and fund multiple offices under one contribution agreement, which has the dual benefit of reducing administrative barriers at IRCC and increasing collaboration among SPOs.

In Alberta and the Northwest Territories, SPOs have been working with community partners on one of IRCC's local needs assessment and case management models, with a "complete versus compete" mindset. The mindset means working together to leverage strengths, ideas, and projects together to create something bigger. The process is one that requires trust and dialogue.

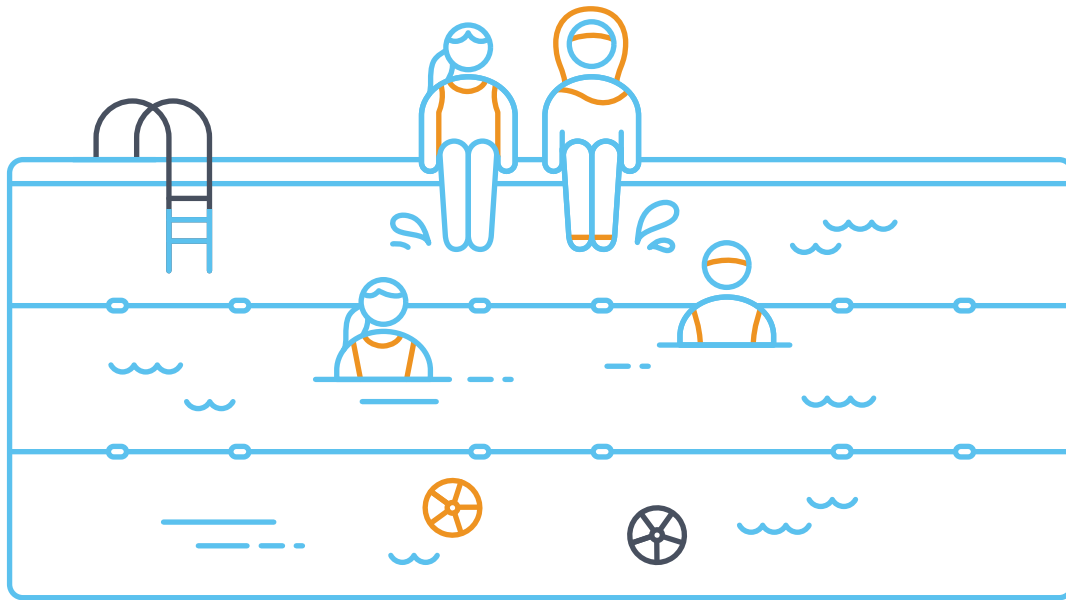
One interviewee reflected on a back and forth conversation where several sector stakeholders clung to deeply-held beliefs that they wouldn't, or couldn't, work together—that their competitive mindset and the region's resulting dysfunction couldn't be shifted.

But approaching with a strengths-based mindset, rather than a scarcity mindset, is crucial to forming new avenues of thought and ways of working.

The interviewee's response to this back and forth was to say "thank you so much for saying all that, and we're listening and we can improve. But ultimately, we're all here to complete, so how can we work together?" After further dialogue, these SPOs all agreed that working together would bring about the best outcomes for their clients and their region.

In the case of the complete versus compete mindset being applied in the Northwest Territories, one interviewee pointed out that the idea came from local SPOs, rather than IRCC. The examples of service hubs and cooperation being started by IRCC and SPOs across Canada illustrates that it doesn't matter who begins the conversation about collaboration or innovative thinking, but rather that IRCC and SPOs simply get that conversation started and agree to work together to implement new ideas. There are willing partners across all stakeholderships.⁷

7 | A detailed reflection on case management approaches can be found in the Settlement 3.0 Phase I [Interview Summary](#).



FROM VISION TO REALITY

One of many examples of promising practices emerged in Yellowknife with the implementation of a women's only swim night. This idea in fact came from a newcomer herself, who acted as a mentor to other newcomers in the area.

Originally from Pakistan, she brought with her an idea from her time in England, a “women-only” swim night at the nearby public pool. Because in some cultures, women may not be able to access public amenities easily if they are not gender-exclusive, organizing a women-only swim night and creating that space for clients was beneficial to their informal support networks. In addition, in Yellowknife, which is surrounded by

hundreds of lakes small and large, swim night doubled as a safety course for women to help them feel more comfortable around bodies of water and get adjusted to their physical environment. This program expanded to include canoe clinics on the lake, which allowed women to bring their children and partake in picnics.

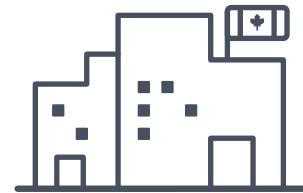
The result is something that is popular amongst clients and successful according to current IRCC standards: from its origins in learning from a SPO client, women-only swim night won a local innovator's award for its organizer, brought several newcomers together, and strengthened the fabric of the community in Yellowknife.

Newcomers have a desire to be enabled and empowered to come up with, and be involved in, initiatives that drive their settlement journey forward.



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.



In Settlement 2.0, we recommended:

A sector-wide capacity building approach is needed that builds on existing efforts and incorporates models from outside the sector.

Ground settlement work in communities to support newcomers in bridging their settlement journey from the early stages of their settlement to when they feel ready to meaningfully call Canada home.

The Settlement 3.0 Project has further determined:

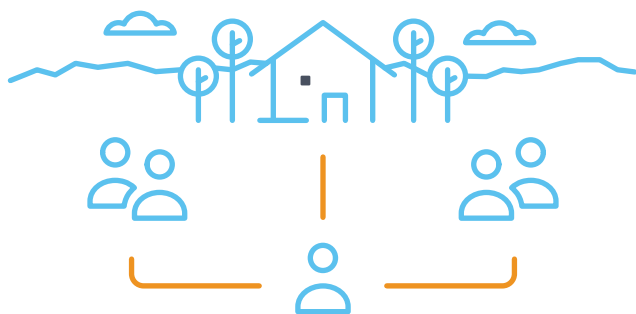


Smaller SPOs serve everyone from every immigration status to varying degrees. The importance of international students and temporary foreign workers (TFWs) to many small centre economies, coupled with increasing paths to permanent residence status and the ongoing need for newcomer retention in these communities suggests that **expanding service eligibility is essential.**



Replication of promising practices requires customization & localization for smaller centres and different regions across Canada.

SMALLER CENTRE UNIQUE NEEDS AND OPPORTUNITIES



Participants highlighted the importance of taking into account the unique challenges and contextual realities that characterize different regions. A majority of the cross-regional focus groups touched on the importance of contextualizing innovations based on regional differences.

Due to a lack of human and other resources, and a community closeness with newcomers, smaller centres must be creative, innovative, and look for different ways to serve diverse populations. Smaller-centre SPOs are, out of necessity, generalists. Each client presents unique needs and situations, not unlike anywhere else. What is unique about smaller centres is that niche programs and providers are less common. There isn't access to as many services. For example, a SPO may have an employment specialist, but they likely have to serve every type of employment situation, from regulatory

bodies and recertification, to resumes, to unskilled workers, to TFWs and international students, and so on.

This creates an environment in which innovation—adaptability and agility to anticipate client needs—occurs almost as a muscle reflex. Collaboration among stakeholders and with clients builds deeper connections. With more compressed hierarchies in smaller centres, SPOs have easier access to other decision-makers in the community. This allows them to be nimble, partnering with them to help newcomers, sometimes on a very specific and individual basis. SPOs can find informal mentors, connect people directly (warm referrals), better eliminate the unknown for newcomers and create a more welcoming community. SPOs can also intervene more in-person and directly if there are issues.

A core challenge in smaller centres is that there are fewer specialists, which can be difficult in geographically distant regions. Settlement workers are “community connectors, liaison officers, housing specialists, mental health advisors, advocates, and so on. Settlement work has evolved significantly.” Front-line workers identified at various times feeling “isolated, overwhelmed, and unsupported.” 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.

One interviewee reflected that “settlement work is no longer just settlement work.” It's also about “housing, access to healthcare, and reimagining the mental healthcare system, for example.” Workers are being “pulled in a number of different directions, which allow for incredible creativity and innovation,” but can also lead to burnout when funding extends to specific tasks

without allowing for the space to, “even if you have the great idea to implement it, dedicate time and extra resources to it,” to bring innovative initiatives to life and sustain them from the side of the desk.

Focus group participants in BC small centres discussed challenges related to limited resources. With limited staff numbers, smaller centre SPO staff have numerous responsibilities including administrative work, client onboarding and, more recently, training clients as well as themselves on the use of technology.

The limited resources in organizations serving smaller communities has served as an impetus for building partnerships and alliances as a means for relieving staff burdens and facilitating the sharing of resources and clientele. That being said, competition for funding among organizations within close geographic proximities has at times prevented partnerships from materializing.

Moreover, the task of forging and maintaining partnerships requires a significant amount of time and effort, and occurs “off the sides of desks.” Participants expressed the strong desire for structured support for building partnerships, as well as increased support in terms of staff training and capacity building. They further highlighted the need for regional and cross-national collaborations and knowledge exchange opportunities which allow for identifying best practices and common barriers to innovation among organizations serving smaller communities with much more limited capacities.

Over the past year while providing services during the pandemic these themes and challenges have been exacerbated.



At the same time, SPOs indicate a commitment to their newcomer clients and communities that is perhaps stronger than ever before, in part because those communities may be more vulnerable to isolation and impacts of the pandemic. Because smaller-centre SPOs are closer to their clients, literally in every way in the community, their commitment to them is neighbourly. While SPOs acknowledge that this can present challenges related to professional boundaries, it is also simply the reality of smaller centre community building and engagement: “we used to laugh about ‘don’t go to Walmart on a Friday night, you’ll be there all night.’ Because you’ve run into all your clients. They want to talk to you about something, right? Or some in my neighborhood, don’t go for a walk because they’ll run out of their house, ‘Hey! You know...’. Because it’s not just a nine to five. You step out of your house, and you’re gonna run into somebody who needs something. In a small town, somebody may text you and it’s about our work, but to them, it’s they’re texting a friend asking the question, right. So it’s hard because we stay connected to them. There’s a wide swath of grey between clients and personal sometimes.” This observation was captured in Settlement 2.0, and remains consistent throughout interviews with small centre SPOs.

REPLICATION REQUIRES TIME AND SPACE FOR CUSTOMIZATION:

“in the past, national projects may have been suggested for smaller centres, but there are unique challenges and conditions that might not be taken into account.” In the Territories, similar challenges in smaller centres are compounded by the vastness of geographic locations. There has been increased support from IRCC to bring organizations together under one umbrella. Some organizations are funded to provide services in their own communities as well as in neighbouring small centre communities. Nonetheless, geographical barriers continue to form limitations in terms of the ability to offer services in rural areas. Leveraging technology and addressing barriers related to digital access and digital literacy in the region as a whole was viewed by interviewees and focus group participants as an important step for expanding the reach of settlement services to further include smaller centre communities.

When it comes to replication, smaller centre SPOs tend to lack the time and space to be able to reflect on information shared and how they might use it: “Just getting those ideas and sort of bouncing them around the room and then you get an idea of what works in what types of communities...you get a better sense of whether or not something is worth trying when you have a chance to talk to people who have done it. You know, if it works in Smithers, but it doesn't work in Kamloops. And you get an idea of whether or not it's going to work here. It's causing me a lot of anxiety. Because there's so much information coming at us. And we're trying to filter through what we can use.”

Most agencies feel they are innovative but lack the space to operationalize innovative practice. This means being able to take the time to reflect on their own practice, learn from it, use it to impact their programs and services, as well as share their promising practices out to the wider sector. As a focus group participant stated:

“I would love to see [opportunities for knowledge exchange] for smaller centres [with organizations offering services on a very small scale]. Because when we're talking about innovation, it looks different for a small centre than it looks for a big centre.”

SPOs are interested in support to create those opportunities. As an interviewee reflected: “there's just three of us in the office here. We have over four hundred clients. And when we do something, somebody will say, 'Well tell us a good story.' And you think 'I don't have anything.' And then you think, 'Oh, yeah, we did that. Yeah, we did that.' But we don't think of it at the time as something extraordinary. We just do it. And then we do the next thing. So it's hard to sit down and think, 'yeah, we're actually doing that.'”

Likewise in the community consultations, a settlement worker in the North stated: “It'd be nice to have more of a national framework and contact list so that the jurisdictions that are newly beginning or adopting certain policies and programs [have someone to reach out to]. In the north, it's kind of unique because you have to kind of take what the South is doing. And then kind of alternate and morph it into what fits best for a Northern community. Starting it and laying a template and a foundation is always difficult up North because you don't have anything to go by and we are unique in how and what we need to serve.”

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

Smaller centres in British Columbia, in particular, have had historical experience serving TFWs and international students and indicate the importance of continuing to be able to support them.

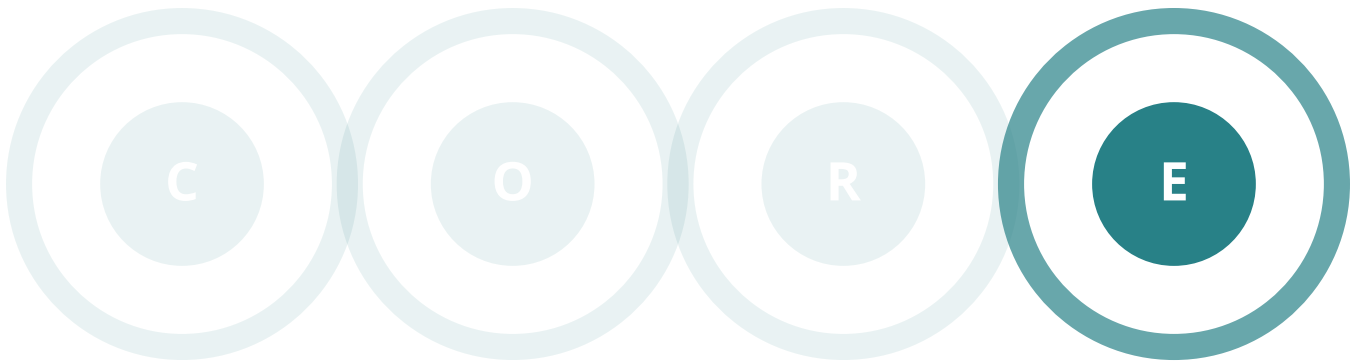
As Canada's immigration system increasingly creates clearer pathways to permanent residency for those with temporary status, it makes sense to support these newcomers even when they are considered temporary.

Regardless of their capacity or funded permission to serve these groups, smaller centre SPOs faced with these challenges work towards collaborative solutions in their communities: "So start with just information sharing. For instance, as you know, colleges and

universities across the whole country are bringing in international students. Even in our small community, we do have issues with housing, and the costs are going up and it's a very limited market. In just a few years the college went from a handful to about 50. Now there are 300. And nobody knows anything. The city council doesn't know so the planning hasn't really happened. The college is doing their thing. The information doesn't flow. That's just one example of **the need for community planning**. How can we support the people because especially international students, right, they can do such a great job, then promote, you know, staying in the community or promoting retention?"

SPOs cultivate these community connections to improve outcomes for newcomers. They are interested in learning how others have done what they are doing and have many practices that might be shared. As recommended in Settlement 2.0, IRCC and the sector should be working together to create a knowledge mobilization approach to harness and formalize this interest.





Effective use of Resources

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



The Settlement 2.0 Project recommended:

Engage in conversation with the settlement sector about how funding structures might shift to better encourage, support, and incentivize innovative and

collaborative practices and processes, to continue to make effective use of resources, and further build trust between funders and funded agencies.

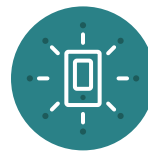
The Settlement 3.0 process has determined that:



Knowledge transfer (in all directions) requires time, space, and resources.



More agile and **flexible funding arrangements** coupled with better program officer-SPO relationships are key enabling conditions to ensure that natural innovation can be more consistently operationalized.



Technology is both essential, and a significant challenge. It is not an administrative cost, but **core to program delivery; and as such, must be reflected in planning and forecasting.**

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FUNDERS AND FUNDED AGENCIES



Information flowing up, but not back down, is a common concern among SPOs. They report statistics, submit narrative reports, and program evaluations, but see little knowledge transfer and mobilization occurring formally in the sector.

While the rhetoric of innovation and transformation is being discussed, it is still difficult to operationalize in the sector. Participants noted the need for a mindset shift within the sector as another enabling factor for innovation. One aspect of this involves moving away from a “scarcity mentality” towards an openness to new ideas and new approaches.

It’s a delicate balance to strike. This was acknowledged in the community consultations. Participants expressed that innovation inherently challenges the status quo. They were also keen to identify that pointing out funding constraints is not a blatant criticism of funders, but rather that the nuance of striving for innovation within

the current funding infrastructure is complex. **Investing in innovation requires a leap of faith.**

Settlement 3.0 participants expressed a desire for funders to foster a culture that normalizes risk-taking in program initiatives. Risk-taking was viewed by interviewees and focus group participants as an essential component of innovation. Failure was likewise considered to be a worthwhile investment in learning and improving services for clients.

Participants in Settlement 2.0 and 3.0 consistently spoke directly to the tensions within the sector of a culture of competition for funding from IRCC. Service agencies apply for operating funding from IRCC based on the provision of services to newcomers within a close geographic area. This necessarily entails service overlap, and means that organizations can feel that they are in competition for fixed resources with other agencies. According to participants, this was a key hindrance for innovation, and most emphasized the desire for greater partnership and collaboration across the sector in order to be able to streamline services in such a way that avoids duplication and offers a holistic means for addressing newcomer needs.

Reducing this competitive culture would naturally lead to more collaboration between sector stakeholders. As a focus group participant put it: “one of the great innovations would be, let’s knock down these walls and say, ‘You have a strength in this area, you have a strength in this area,’ you know, maybe it’s four or five organizations that come together to solve the problem.”

It is true that some sector stakeholders, SPOs included, may be resistant to change. Funders have acknowledged throughout Settlement 2.0 and 3.0 that this resistance can take the form of isolationism or self-interest. IRCC has in the past been successful in supporting the taking down of these walls and fostering a more collaborative landscape. For example, the IRCC-funded pilot case

management project in the PNT Region is an emerging example of this collaboration. In essence, one local SPO is tasked with needs assessment and in-depth case management where necessary. That agency refers clients to other SPOs and other community agencies for services and no longer provides the direct services themselves. The idea is to remove potential duplication, as well as the needs assessment agency favouring their own services when referring: “similar to how now in our region, the language assessment, folks do not actually provide language classes themselves, they do the assessment, and they refer them but they don’t actually have a vested stake in the game. So we wanted a similar approach. The idea is in our strategy that there would be an independent and appropriately trained agency who could do the triage piece, and then would refer based on level of need.”

While the approach is still very much in the initial phases (implementation is scheduled between 2021-2023), much structural work has been done to define the case management system to ensure collaboration rather than competition. To further the collaboration approach, along with the case management system, and the SPO doing case management not providing direct services, service zones are being established in cities. According to [one IRCC presentation](#) the goal is to have case management triage leading to transparent enhanced case management, with a clear division of labour amongst providers. Services are provided when/where clients indicate desire to access them. SPOs develop centres of expertise for vulnerable clients, and develop a strategy for each zone: “major Urban centers across PNT are divided into Zones in which service providing agencies engage a wide array of partners to locate newcomers, enhance service provision, connect newcomers to ‘mainstream’ institutions and systems and proactively engage newcomers on a regular basis during their settlement journey.” IRCC is explicit in the presentation that this approach seeks to create an effective use of resources in each city/region.

The emergence of interesting and innovative models and projects being piloted in the PNT Region begs the question of what might be happening in other regions that is not known, shared, or evaluated with a whole-sector mindset. Any effective use of resources must also include knowledge mobilization, which starts with an entire sector view of innovative projects and approaches, in particular those funded and supported by IRCC itself.

An additional enabling factor for innovation is having the allowance of time and space to innovate. This is articulated throughout this report, and was echoed by Settlement 3.0 participants at all stages of the Project. Stakeholders emphasized the need for time to be able to develop and implement innovative approaches, and build collaborative relationships.

“Sometimes even when you have the funding, you don’t have the time,” stated one participant, suggesting the development of additional roles to ease workloads and create time and space to experiment, and go out into the world to intentionally build partnerships: “[Building a partnership] took months and months of going to [community events] and getting to know people and networking, networking, networking. I invested a lot of time and then I started to see the benefits of that. It wasn’t quick, and it took persistence. There were a lot of benefits, but it involved a lot of investment of time and a kind of a trust that this would lead to something because

there weren't quick results. But there were many after a while."

One focus group participant reflected that "when it comes to innovation and collaboration, there's a perception that it needs to be quick. And that's not inherently the case. Innovation requires you not give up on your idea," until that idea has been fleshed out, applied, and evaluated. "It can take time."

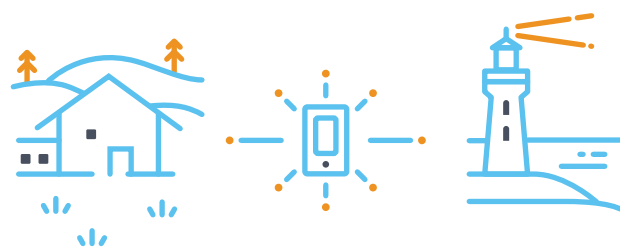
Further, rich lessons can be drawn from other sectors that have invested in designing, testing and learning how to build successful innovation-focused funding approaches and mechanisms. One example is Canada's [Fund for Innovation and Transformation \(FIT\)](#). FIT is a program of the Inter-Council Network of Provincial and Regional Councils (ICN) made possible through funding from Global Affairs Canada and administered by the Manitoba Council for International Cooperation (MCIC).

FIT is designed to support Canadian small and medium-sized organizations (SMOs) testing innovative solutions, through hypothesis-testing frameworks, that advance gender equality in the Global South. FIT's goal is to cultivate a working environment in which SMOs are empowered to experiment, fail, adapt and try again. In addition, the program fosters collective learning and builds the capacity of SMOs through the creation of knowledge-sharing spaces and practices.

Fostering innovation and collective learning in the field of humanitarian support and peacebuilding has inspired the creation of formalized spaces to discuss program interventions that were tried and "failed" in an incentivised environment, thus creating enabling conditions for learning and improvement. Annual forums, sometimes termed a "Fail Fest", are hosted by organizations and funders with a goal to incentivise exposing things that went wrong, rather than hiding them, so that it can be learned from and serve to strengthen practice going forward. Fail Fest's success

requires a shared investment in mutual learning, such as mandating that both funder and grantee partners share their respective failures, and the provision of sufficient safeguards to not disincentivise sharing (for example, allowing anonymity to prevent grantees losing grant funding as a result of sharing).

INVESTING IN TECH



It is not in the scope of this report to dive deeply into one specific area (such as technology). The Settlement Sector & Technology Task Group report should be referenced for additional recommendations and sector innovation related to technology. There are many overlapping themes in this report and the Task Group's findings.

Settlement 3.0 participants pointed to the need for increased investment in technological infrastructure, and for ensuring that organizations are adequately equipped with hardware, software, and training required to be able to deliver services effectively and efficiently. Technological infrastructure was a notable challenge for organizations located in smaller centres and rural areas.

SPOs suggested that tech costs be reconsidered as program delivery costs that require updating, maintenance, and renewal. Interviewees identified tech costs including hardware, software, website development and maintenance, security features,

IT supports, and even subscription fees to streaming services such as Netflix and Disney+, particularly in smaller centres that act as community hubs for clients and bring them together for social reasons, which are in fact settlement interventions. For example, parents with small children who need to come in for appointments and do not have access to childcare benefit greatly from the opportunity to let their little ones watch a show for half an hour while they focus on their settlement service appointment.

Additionally, community movie nights fulfil a dual purpose of a potluck-type gathering and informal support provision, which often lead to formal support. Perhaps more conventionally, newcomers might look to a SPO website for initial information before determining when, where, how, or why to seek services from a local SPO. These are not administrative costs, but essential modes of service delivery.

CHALLENGES & POSSIBILITIES OF USING TECHNOLOGY WITH SETTLEMENT SERVICE



While essential and incredibly useful to service delivery, technology is not without its challenges. It goes almost without saying that **digital capacity and literacy is an essential enabling condition for innovative practices throughout the sector.** Common themes among interviewees included internal tech capacity and the steep learning curve that new softwares or practices bring, digital literacy, and digital divides both in remote communities, and among newcomers.

For example, there is a widespread recognition that a number of services and tools are not mobile-friendly and so even though many clients have smartphones and internet connection, they are limited in what they can do.

Ensuring that investments in technology, especially those that might scale across the sector, is essential: “I think of the small rural organizations through the challenges just like turning to tech and digital worlds, I’m a young millennial, and I’m even having a hard time keeping up with different forms of technology. And thinking about the ways that we can serve clients, thinking about rural communities, or older staff, and general tech ‘saviness,’ it can be intimidating, and not very user-friendly. Are we going to go and invest hundreds of thousands of dollars in a CRM that most of our member agencies are just going to be too afraid to even open up the software and or on their computer? So how do we build that capacity and ensure that that’s part of professional development, training and kind of evolution of the sector as well, because COVID-19 has forced us to work from home and work virtually, but the delivery of programs has been a major challenge. If you want to be innovative, **building this capacity within the sector will be important.**”

On the subject of client information management systems, focus group participants mentioned that using these to facilitate knowledge sharing among SPOs offered an effective means of accessing and sharing client information, reducing burdens on service providers and freeing up more time for them to spend with clients. What’s clear is that having the time and space to learn the ins and outs of technological software and programs is a critical step for success in this area.

It is crucial to avoid a one-size fits all approach.

As one interviewee stated, echoing comments made at focus groups, “while technology can bring innovation, innovative practices are only as good as the people they’re intended to be used by. If the product or service



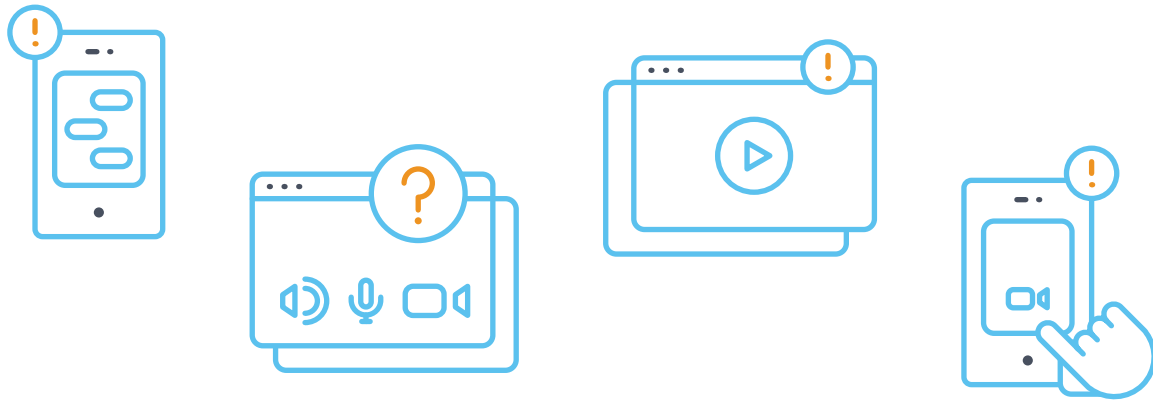
does not have that level of functionality for those people to use, it loses itself. Technology needs to be so personalized and individualized because everyone is at different levels of comfort and curiosity.”

Technology opened up avenues for virtual supports through the first year of the pandemic:

“we started to pull from our waitlist and put students online, learning in different places because virtually you’re all in the same space, right? Your place doesn’t matter anymore. We have students who technically reside in one city, who learn with people who reside in other cities. So they went virtually and started supporting parents and children alike. They started to be able to have this kind of network online where they could help support families and parents and positive parenting and child development, and the anxieties of COVID-19 and also being able to have conversations

about what the current situation was in where the people were living. Because the vast majority of the people we cater to don’t receive their news from local news agencies, they still receive all of their information from abroad from where they came from. Right. So they were really left kind of in the dark, wondering what’s happening. So all of these outlets have technology and the fact that everybody who’s constant is constantly in communication with one another, the communication aspect has been the biggest key to continuing to evolve quite rapidly, but in a very positive way.”

The proliferation of online services as a result of the pandemic has propelled innovation forward and enhanced access to services. Yet digital access and digital literacy continue to form significant barriers for newcomers especially in rural and remote centres: “[The shift to online services] has allowed us to reach a clientele that was not traditionally served by settlement workers. [But] the problem of connectivity in some communities, particularly in rural areas, is an undeniable fact.”



Throughout Settlement 3.0, discussions around digital access were coupled with discussions around digital literacy. Participants pointed to the disproportional ways in which digital access and digital literacy impacted newcomers.

The implications are much greater on older age groups, lower-skilled newcomers, and newcomers with low language competencies. Low language competency paired with low digital literacy was viewed as a double barrier and a significant challenge, especially when technology is used as a means for teaching or enhancing language skills. Some participants pointed to the importance of prioritizing digital literacy training and making it a core component of newcomers' settlement journey.

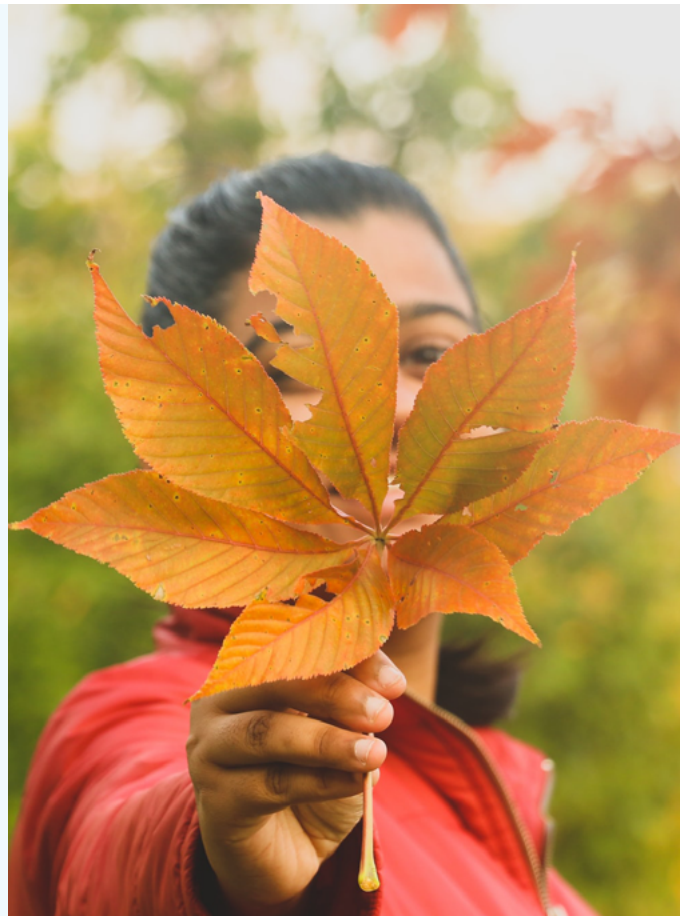
Participants noted building organizational capacity as another key enabling factor for fostering innovation within the sector. On the one hand it has been increasingly possible to access training opportunities online. On the other, there has been no formalized benchmarks in technology or innovation capabilities. Participants expressed the desire for more support in training and professional development in order to ensure organizations have the capacity to champion innovative approaches within their own work.

In particular, participants emphasized the need for increased training and capacity building around the use of technology. With the recent shift to online service delivery, some participants felt that the task of upskilling, testing, and implementing new technology happened on the go without formal supports. This has been daunting for smaller centres that had had limited technological capacities to begin with. In some cases, frontline workers have not only had to teach themselves how to make online classes and programs engaging for clients, but they have also had to train their clients on the technology and troubleshoot technological issues without prior training.

Next Steps

Settlement 2.0 was considered by PeaceGeeks to be the beginning of a larger conversation between IRCC and the sector across the country.

PeaceGeeks advised IRCC to continue exploring innovation and collaboration within the settlement sector outside of the Lower Mainland region of BC, and throughout large and small centres in various regions in Canada.



Settlement 3.0 has established this conversation between stakeholders in urban and smaller centre areas, in Atlantic Canada, the Prairies, the Northern Territories, and with Francophone communities, highlighting the most important topics for IRCC to focus on moving forward in order to continue building trust and credibility as the primary funder of the settlement sector, toward the goal of better serving newcomers to Canada. The “Now, Next, Then” framework established in the Executive Summary section of this report offers a timely, measurable, and realistic rubric by which the recommendations that emerged and were expanded upon throughout the Settlement 3.0 process may be pursued and implemented.



Settlement 3.0 revealed that the co-creation of clear, commonly accepted, and living definitions of innovation and client outcomes are essential to program delivery and monitoring and evaluation efforts across the sector.

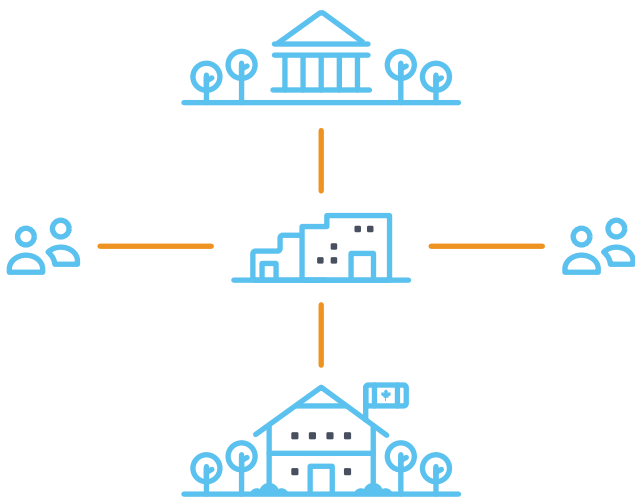
Being “outcomes-driven” looks different in different communities, as does being “innovative.” Early assessments of promising practices in rural and remote communities, and in larger centres including Calgary and Edmonton, that occurred during Phase I of the Settlement 3.0 Project, determined that customization is likewise a significant enabling condition for success in program delivery and relationships between sector stakeholders.

Further, the 3.0 Project built on 2.0’s findings that innovative and collaborative practices are part of the

sector’s DNA in various ways across Canada. As the core funder of the sector, many stakeholders, particularly SPOs, look to IRCC to listen to the sector, as well as lead the sector in advancing forward-thinking, impactful ways of operating.

IRCC can promote innovative mindsets and support collaborations by kickstarting productive dialogue with SPOs at all levels, between program officers and agencies, and across the sector more broadly, utilizing a “complete versus compete” mindset. There continue to be resounding calls from the sector to look at the existing funding model to allow for hypothesis and pilot testing, responsive resourcing, and more clearly promote cooperation over competition among SPOs. It may be argued that IRCC’s Service Delivery Improvement (SDI) funding has the potential to focus on some of these things. However, the issues and challenges, as well as opportunities, innovation raises are systemic, cross-sectoral and impact different organizations differently. It is important that the values of innovation become part of larger settlement funding models.

One of the most valuable insights that quietly emerged from Phases I and II of Settlement 3.0 is this: smaller centres inherently take a whole of community/society approach to their work, and they innately operate within every element of the CORE Framework.



Smaller-centre SPOs view their clients as neighbours, they keep fellow community members (such as municipal governments, local schools, et cetera) apprised of information and situations that may be relevant, and collaborate in multiple ways with others in the settlement sector, and outside of the sector. Smaller centre SPOs use their resources—often limited—as effectively as possible, and prioritize client outcomes when resources are thin. The settlement community more broadly, and especially larger urban centres, can learn from smaller centre SPOs.

While overhauling the funding structure is a daunting prospect, one which will require enormous time and energy, a beneficial change which can be made relatively quickly is re-allocating technology costs as operative, rather than administrative. Technology is a core feature of service delivery across the country. In Settlement 3.0, interviews and consultations with smaller centre stakeholders and stakeholders in diverse communities in Canada revealed that technology is absolutely critical to programming. Clients rely heavily on technological tools—many obvious, some not so—as key components of their settlement journey.

Moreover, many clients lack a strong digital literacy or consistent digital access. As discussed more substantively in the Settlement Sector and Technology Task Group report, in some cases, the Internet is unreliable, services available on desktops are not available on mobile phones, or clients require education to utilize digital tools. Designating resources to advance clients' digital capacities will streamline program delivery. In addition, it is equally essential to ensure the digital capacities of frontline service providers, who utilize client-facing and backend technologies (including client management software) every day.

In smaller centres especially, expanding service eligibility to allow SPOs to formally service clients including foreign students and TFWs is part and parcel of taking a client-centered, outcomes-based approach. In smaller centres, foreign students and TFWs are key actors in their communities, and including them in program delivery is part of a long-term view of community vitality. Investing time and resources in all newcomers—even temporary ones, as many of them choose to stay in Canada—will only benefit the broader Canadian community over time.

The COVID-19 pandemic was—and continues to be—a reminder that the settlement sector can and does rise to the challenges imposed by unexpected and unprecedented crises. Without making light of an extremely difficult and tragic time, in many ways,

the pandemic became an enabling condition for innovating practices and collaboration across the sector, country-wide. While not perfect, the various ways in which SPOs and IRCC have responded and adapted to the pandemic in urban centres and smaller centres alike, in various communities across Canada where COVID-19 had very different effects, have demonstrated that the sector is innately innovative (iterative) and can absolutely be collaborative on a wide scale.

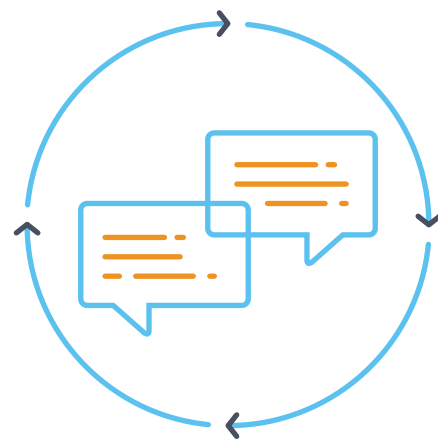
There is a lot for the sector to learn from the pandemic—while fifteen months in, many are nearly burnt out by it, in a post-Covid future, it will be beneficial to look back and reflect on how adaptive practices did or didn't assist the sector.

The sector undertook this analysis after the 2015 refugee crisis and applied learnings to all areas of settlement in Canada, from funding structures to frontline service. There is an opportunity to act similarly in the face of this global pandemic.

As one interviewee stated: "I think it's time to take a step back from all of this and ask ourselves honestly, 'Do we really want to make a change in the sector?' And 'what changes do we want to see?' and 'what are the means we want to implement to be able to achieve this?' And I think [the pandemic] gives us [some] answer so that we can put in place concrete actions, be part of the innovation and get off the beaten track."

It is clear from both the Settlement 2.0 and Settlement 3.0 projects that the answer to the first query—both from SPO and IRCC perspectives, is a resounding "yes."

To the second, the answer appears to be a combination of wanting to be more agile, innovative, and collaborative. To the third, the interviewee is clear: we have already learned a great deal from the circumstances in which we currently find ourselves, and engaging in cross-sector conversation will reveal new avenues of thinking and action.



The Settlement 3.0 project continued this discussion in the sector and with IRCC. The pandemic has led to more proactive communication between stakeholders.

IRCC and the sector might take this opportunity to seek to better understand the barriers to progress from one another's perspectives, in an iterative and ongoing basis. Both funders and service providers ostensibly agree that they want the sector to change in order to improve outcomes for all newcomers: perhaps now is the time to collectively commit to driving change forward.

PeaceGeeks' final recommendation at the conclusion of the Settlement 3.0 process is this: **the conversation does not end here.**



IRCC, SPOs, and newcomers should leverage the momentum gained during the COVID-19 pandemic and continue to engage with one another in this dialogue about furthering innovative and collaborative practices across the sector.



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