Settlement 3.0 Project

INNOVATION IS IN OUR DNA

Final recommendations to IRCC

DELIVERED BY PEACEGEEKS AUGUST 2021

PEACE GEEKS

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
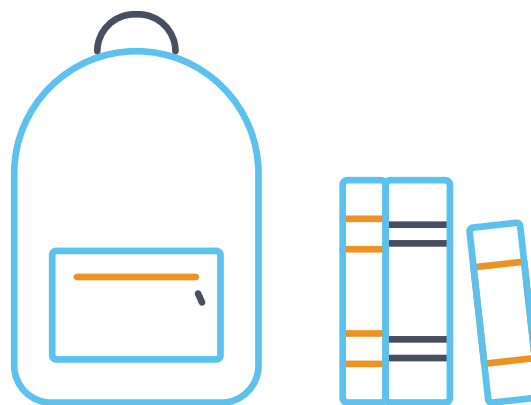
Now:

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

Then:

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

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.

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.