

(REPORT) THE ATLANTIC IMMIGRATION PILOT:

LEARNING AND STRENGTHENING TOGETHER

SETTLEMENT STAKEHOLDER
CONSULTATION

AN ARAISA HOSTED DIALOGUE

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PREFACE

The value of convening a highly participatory consultation such as *The Atlantic Immigration Pilot: Learning and Strengthening Together* workshop is the direct inclusion of diverse voices and opinions. Verbal and written recommendations are captured as stated or recorded. This noted, on occasion stated or written recommendations may include the inaccurate use of acronyms, process/organizational names or concepts. In writing this summary report, every effort has been made to represent the verbal or written comments as close to original as possible. When an error has been noted, the authors of the report have adjusted the language, but ensured that the integrity of the message is maintained.

BACKGROUND



The Atlantic Immigration Pilot (AIP) is an innovative immigration program that is piloting a unique partnership model between Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), the Atlantic provinces, the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (ACOA), employers and settlement service provider organizations.

The Atlantic Region Association of Immigrant Serving Agencies (ARAISA) on behalf of IRCC, convened a meeting with designated service provider organizations (SPOs) who deliver settlement services (including pre-arrival services) to eligible clients under the Atlantic Immigration Pilot, provincial and federal government representatives, and other stakeholders. The meeting was originally planned for one and a half days, on February 12th and Wednesday, February 13th, 2019. Unstable winter weather conditions forced an immediate on-site decision to compress the workshop into one very full and demanding day. This workshop compression did not seem to impact negatively the outputs of the workshop. Participants came together with focused energy and collaborated to “get the work done”. This meeting was a follow-up to a prior meeting held in April 2018 in Halifax, Nova Scotia. The meeting focused on settlement aspects of the AIP, to help share best practices, identify ongoing or additional gaps, and bring forward further recommendations for improvement.

WORKSHOP GOAL

To build a shared understanding of key strengths (and areas requiring strengthening) of the settlement aspects of the AIP to deliver an effective and sustainable program.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. To review the outcomes, recommendations and organizational responses to the April 2018 consultation.
2. To update information on program results and evaluation process.
3. To share specific and relevant experiences focusing on the settlement aspects of the AIP that highlight both what is working and gaps.
4. To discern good practices for the settlement aspects of the AIP, and how these may be strengthened or adapted in responding to existing gaps.
5. To state key recommendations for the AIP, IRCC, the Provinces and the settlement and integration sector to deliver a effective and sustainable program.



KEY RECOMMENDATION OUTCOMES

This summary report highlights key recommendations. It is hoped that the thoughtful contributions and recommendations of over eighty AIP stakeholders may further inform and strengthen the direction of the Atlantic Immigration Pilot. Various methods were used throughout the day to draw out common themes around what is working well, what requires monitoring, and what needs strengthening or attention. The following recommendations are based on what emerged.

APPRECIATION

Dialogue-based sessions like this service provider consultation “bridge the gap”. As reflected in the evaluation conducted at the end of the workshop, participants highly appreciated the participatory design and facilitation of the event. Of note, participants valued IRCC’s responsiveness to previous recommendations and concerns. This was stated several times.



DIALOGUE FOR COLLABORATION

Participants arrived well informed, ready for shared and participatory dialogue leading to enhancing the Atlantic Immigration Pilot. Biannual dialogue-based workshops are recommended. These opportunities result in concrete recommendations to strengthen the technical aspects of the AIP, but equally important, they afford an opportunity to strengthen the relational and functional aspects of effective programming.

The consultation workshop offered an open opportunity for reflection. AIP stakeholders confirmed that the successful integration of clients and effective support by employers requires cross-sectoral collaboration that ensures clarity of roles and responsibilities as well as sharing lessons learned and good practices. It was noted several times and in several places that the inclusion of AIP clients and employers (including industry associations), and the perspective of municipalities, would contribute significantly to the dialogue for learning.

DIRECT RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PARTICIPANTS

“Keep talking! Conferences such as this one, for example, are amazingly informative in terms of inspiring discussion among front line SPO staff.”

“3C’s – constant, collaboration and communication.”


“Education and clarity of process for all involved - government, employers, SPOs, candidates.”

"More dialogue. Communication between all partners strengthens our mission. Time spent sharing info, practices, service models, perspectives and approaches, is more valuable than we originally realized. Keep getting partners together."

"Develop stronger communication between clients, employees, government, immigrant serving agencies, municipalities. When we know people's needs and challenges, we can do more to help."

"Invite AIP newcomers and designated employers to such meetings to share with us their stories and challenges to know what could be done better. Not to be left out of the process."

STRENGTHENED RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PRE-ARRIVAL SERVICES AND ATLANTIC SETTLEMENT SERVICE PROVIDER ORGANIZATIONS FOR SEAMLESS SERVICE PROVISION

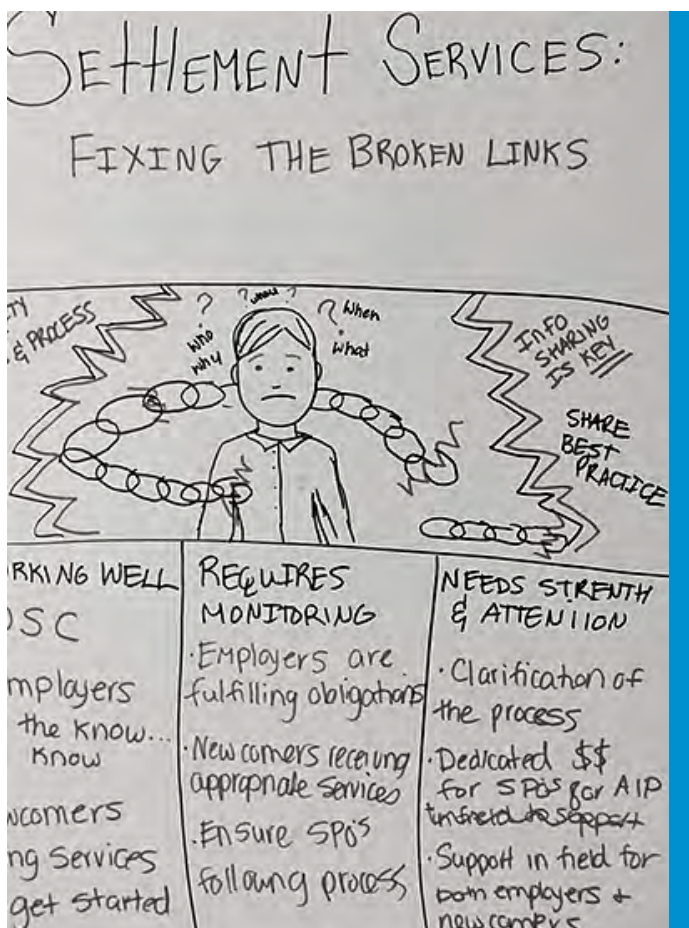


Although the brief afternoon panel presentation and discussion with national pre-arrival settlement services was well received and insightful, evaluative data indicates it remained at a “high-level”. More opportunities to deepen the discussion on how to effectively work together to ensure successful integration would be helpful. It was noted that there may be a gap in the AIP client/employer understanding of what real settlement requires, and what is available in response. This is particularly relevant during the initial integration period. There needs to be a strengthened awareness and capacity to access settlement support before problems arise. Further dialogue to strengthen the relationship between pre-arrival and domestic settlement service provider organizations to ensure a seamless line of service is recommended. Ensuring that up-to-date information on local services is available in each of the four Atlantic provinces, and particularly for smaller centres within each province, would be helpful to those providing pre-arrival services.

Discussion during the Pre-Arrival Services session suggested the development of an interactive “map” (perhaps as an application) might be useful for all stakeholders of the AIP. This might support a broader coordination function.

DIRECT RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PARTICIPANTS

“Recommendations: 1. provincial governments to be closely connected and involved with SPOs and the AIP process. 2. More communication with pre-arrival providers and post-arrival.”




"Strengthen the relationship between pre-arrival and local SPOs."

"Interactive map of Canada to identify national SPOs, local SPOs, communities. They should work together to make immigration easier for immigrants and employees."

"Take away - pre-arrival SPOs to coordinate with each other on connecting with domestic SPOs. In the works with new 'coordinator' function."

SERVICE MAP AND INFO-GRAPHICS




As collaboration strengthens, so does the requirement to communicate effectively and be accessible to all stakeholders of the AIP. The development of an interactive and accessible “map” (as a web-based application) of key national and regional stakeholders might be useful for all, and might support a broader desired coordination function. Additionally, a repository of frequently used templates and key messages would be very useful and would ensure consistency across the AIP.

DIRECT RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PARTICIPANTS

“Develop a comprehensive service map that is interactive and includes info on all services and players involved with the AIP.”

“Recommendations: IRCC should provide all SPOs with consistent messaging that they can use to provide a better client experience. Share communication tools and ideas in a central repository templates guide - info graphs to be singing the same song.”

SYSTEM NAVIGATORS




Complementary to the recommendation to develop a service map and appropriate info-graphics, is the recommendation to fund the role of AIP “navigators”. Navigators would provide the initial entry-point for client and employer questions or concerns, and ensure that clients are aware of their rights and the supports available not only for the Principal Applicant (PA), but for their families as well. They could assist employers in carrying out their roles and responsibilities, and close the loop by alerting SPOs when the PA receives residency status.

DIRECT RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PARTICIPANTS

“AIP Navigators: referral service to help the players navigate the system. Requires a combination of federal and provincial funding.”

“Strengthen employer support since it is an employer-driven program. IRCC should provide more support to settlement service providers through more funding. IRCC could prescreen application for completeness upon receipt of the documents and then return back to the applicants when they notice any missing documents, rather than waiting 3 months.”

EMPLOYER AWARENESS



There is concern as to how well employers may understand the role of settlement service provider organizations and the supportive role they are able to provide towards the effective integration of eligible employees. It is recommended to increase awareness of the value of these existing services, while also strengthening the capacity of employers, particularly those representative of small and medium-sized enterprises.

DIRECT RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PARTICIPANTS

“Employers need to receive support on the process - application process, preparation for the program, settlement services.”

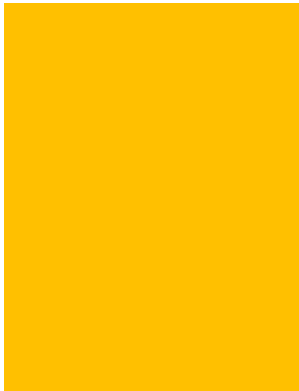
“Employer education – clarify expectations, process, awareness of newcomer needs, knowledge of AIP and immigration, more collaboration with SPOs.”

“At first contact, the client should be asked if they have received pre-departure services - if not, identify why.”

“Employers should be required to refer their new AIP employee to the settlement SPO in their community immediately after arrival (within the first few weeks that they are here).”

“Greater connection with employers identifying needs, gaps, and opportunities to support them.”

CULTURAL COMPETENCY TRAINING



During the one-day workshop, reference to cultural competency training was frequently raised (although there may be a need to define the parameters of what cultural competency training might look like). There is a strong recommendation that employers and their employees, as well as the client themselves, undertake culture competency training to ensure a welcoming, inclusive and effective workplace.


DIRECT RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PARTICIPANTS

“*Make employer guidelines/responsibilities mandatory.
Involve SPOs directly in employer education.*”

“Make cross-cultural training mandatory.”


“Require a face-to-face meeting between SPOs and employers (with the right people from HR departments) to discuss challenges and how to jointly overcome them. Develop a success plan of clients that will actually support the employer’s bottom line. Need a process for meaningful SPO and employer dialogue to have client at the center.”

FOCUS ON INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN ATLANTIC CANADA



It is recommended to continue to find ways to connect with Atlantic-based international students to ensure they are aware of the AIP. Strengthening retention of this talent pool has many advantages, as most international students will have already made many of the adjustments that will facilitate their integration into the workplace.

EVALUATION OF THE AIP



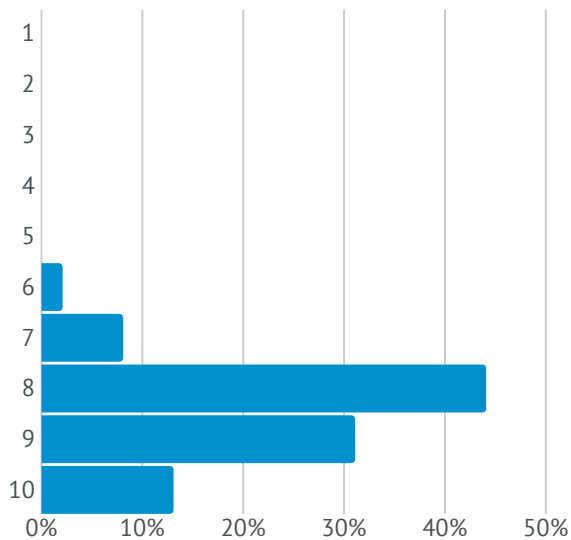
Workshop participants welcomed the well-presented IRCC framework for evaluating the AIP. This provided an opportunity for IRCC not only to share current and intended approaches, but also to gather feedback from participants. There was a stated desire to be kept informed of and involved in the evaluation process.

Participants noted the importance of gathering evidence from the many diverse stakeholders that are essential to the success of the program, as well as cross-referencing available comparable data from other sources (e.g. ESDC, Statistics Canada, etc.). While the ultimate success or failure of the AIP will be determined based on overall aggregated data, there was an acknowledgement of the complexity of measuring employment and retention outcomes. The importance of comparing ‘apples to apples’ (e.g. community size, type of job, rates of remuneration, family status, those who accessed the program from within Canada versus from outside of Canada, access to settlement supports and cultural competency training, etc.) was underlined on several occasions.

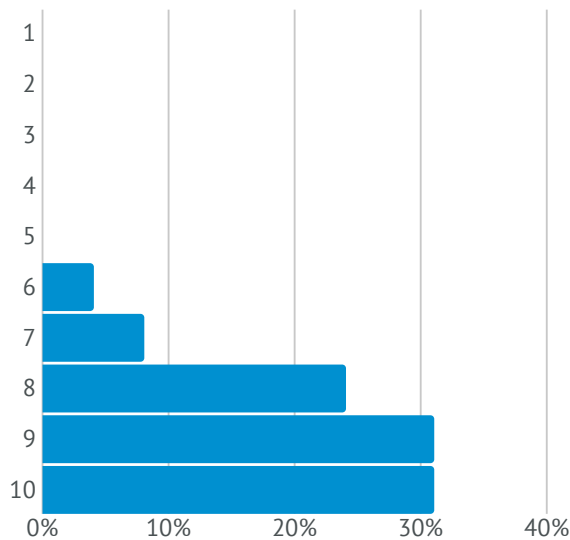
REACTION LEVEL EVALUATION

At the conclusion of *The Atlantic Immigration Pilot: Learning and Strengthening Together. Service Provider Organization Consultation* participants were invited to complete a short written reaction level evaluation. A compilation of responses is held with ARAISA. Summary results from 45 responses from SPOs indicate:

LEVEL OF SATISFACTION WITH THE AIP CONSULTATION
(1=Not Satisfied, 10=Highly Satisfied)



LEVEL OF USEFULNESS OF THE AIP CONSULTATION
(1=Not Useful, 10=Highly Useful)



“Connecting with pre-arrival and domestic SPOs was very beneficial.”
 “Missing the perspective of clients and employers in the room.”
 “Very informative and should be conducted frequently.”
 “Participatory approach increased engagement of attendees. Great job!”

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EVALUATION



ARISA has convened two participatory consultation workshops with an explicit goal of strengthening a shared understanding of key strengths (and areas requiring strengthening) of the settlement aspects of the AIP to deliver an effective and sustainable program. At the conclusion of these workshops, written reaction level feedback indicates the high value AIP stakeholders place on these AIP learning focused events.

Collaborative and multi-stakeholder learning strengthens a shared vision of, and commitment to, a successfully implemented AIP. Learning together in an inclusive environment with diverse representation enhances systems thinking and analysis. This generates specific recommendations that can be supported by stakeholders at large. Ultimately, this contributes to the effective functioning of a complex, inter-provincial pilot and consequently to the achievement of results.

It is requested that as the IRCC evaluation strategy is developed for the AIP, consideration be given to evaluating the role of ARISA in convening a series of strategically focused workshops and the difference this has made to the success of the AIP.

“It is heartening to see we are all sharing the same successes and the challenges. If we are all facing them together, the challenges should be easy enough to fix.”

– Meeting participant

Thank you to all those who contributed!