



National Small Centres Conference

Small Centres. Big Impact.

RECOMMENDATIONS BRIEF

August 2023



Supporting Organizations | Aider les organismes
Supporting Immigrants | qui aident les immigrants

Funded by:

Financé par :



Immigration, Refugees
and Citizenship Canada

Immigration, Réfugiés
et Citoyenneté Canada



TRENDS, SUCCESSES, AND CHALLENGES OF SETTLEMENT IN SMALL CENTRES – PREPARING FOR THE NEXT 5 YEARS

This report is a non-exhaustive summary of the main recommendations that came out of the 8 in-person and 4 virtual roundtables that took place during the National Small Centres Conference. With the support of Tim Merry (engagement specialist and systems change facilitator), 12 facilitators working in the settlement and integration sector led the discussions using the World Café methodology. Participants actively contributed to identifying the changes needed to serve immigrants and refugees better in small centres. Dynamic note-takers from the sector were able to cluster the ideas and recommendations that were later compiled by the Atlantic Region Association of Immigrant Serving Agencies in the present report.

1. GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS



- It is recommended to work more concretely and proactively towards **better preparation for new and future arrivals**, in terms of transparency and management of expectations. In this way, newcomers would be better equipped to make informed decisions about their future and their immigration plans.
- It's crucial to adopt an **intersectional, systemic approach at all immigration levels and re/settlement chains**. Such an approach must be the basis of settlement and resettlement programs and service models.
- It is recommended to work towards a **systemic strengthening of the community**, to better serve its needs and better welcome newcomers.
- **Training, collaboration, and accompaniment** are needed to protect settlement and integration sector professionals from chronic burnout and build tomorrow's communities together.
- For Service Provider Organizations (SPOs), it is important to engage in continuous improvement by **conducting evaluations and progress assessments**.



2. EMPLOYMENT

- Increasing client needs in this area include bridging, **job placements**, **credential recognition**, resume and interview preparations, alignment of expectations, and motivations. This necessitates building greater **funding** capacity and **national collaboration** to respond to these needs.
- **Employer education** about the immigration process and experience is needed to recruit newcomers and support the development of **an anti-racism and anti-oppression** workplace culture.
- Help support realistic expectations for newcomers through clear **pre-arrival** information and services.
- Clients holding **work permits** should be eligible for IRCC support and have the **same rights** as Permanent Residents (e.g., be eligible for LINC, short-term upskilling and reskilling programs to assist in filling critical labour gaps, and pre-arrival services; have equal benefits for their children to work, access student loans, and pay local student fees at post-secondary institutions).
- Alleviate **foreign credential recognition** barriers and ensure consistent standards across provinces.
- Enable **employment language training** for all Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB) and **access to language training in both languages**.



3. CHILDREN AND YOUTH

- Youth programming is changing the lives of newcomer children. **Increased funding and support** for youth programming are needed and **training for youth settlement workers** is key to ensure they are equipped to deal with the severity of the youth mental health crisis post-COVID.
- We need to **collaborate and partner** to build better future generations through school systems and to empower newcomers to stand up for themselves. The power lies in the youth, so we need to proactively engage with them.
- Provide **cultural sensitivity training** to service providers and those who collaborate with them so they can better meet client needs.
- There is a need for **holistic, flexible, and accessible services** that are **intersectional and** based on **evidence-based data** that reflects specific realities, not generalities.
- **Activities** should not be labeled for newcomers because locals won't feel invited and will miss the opportunity to learn about different cultures.

4. HEALTH AND WELLNESS



- **Build trust** through ongoing group programming, creating safe spaces for connecting and sharing, supporting mental health coping skills (e.g., cooking classes, hiking), and providing social connections and mentorship.
- **Building connections** through social and recreational activities is critical in improving mental health. Raise awareness of community resources, build connections with community partners, get the “experts” in, and host guest speakers in our organizations on health, wellness, and safety topics.
- Collaborate with newcomers in defining and establishing **successful client-centered agencies**.
- Equip newcomers with the appropriate tools to understand the settlement process and **develop self-advocacy skills**.
- **Destigmatize mental health** for immigrants, increase specialized services, offer mental health support systematically, and embed health and wellness into regular programming. Address concerns about dropped referrals to external organizations for mental health support that result in individuals not receiving the critical support they need.
- **Develop skills** for SPO staff around finding information, setting goals, assertiveness, and listening to client needs. Also, provide training on **cultural competency** for healthcare practitioners as well as those working outside of healthcare. Focus on **staff wellbeing**.
- In Canada, the number of those experiencing **food insecurity** is on the rise. Efforts to address food insecurity among newcomers are crucial to ensure their health and wellness and require **coordination between community, provincial, and federal levels**.

5. ANTI-RACISM & EDI

- We need to move towards action-oriented anti-racism over static multiculturalism approach, and **support continuous, actionable, EDI training** including **Indigenous communities** and focusing on **youth** to break stereotypes.
- **Collaborate** at all levels of government to address **infrastructure** challenges.
- Spread compassion, kindness, and empathy through our programming to **empower** the voices of those impacted. Engaging the public as well as provincial and municipal leaders in **anti-racism campaigns** that share or replicate the same approach across Canada, through social media and TV.
- Create mandatory **employer anti-racism training**, such as what is done in the Atlantic Immigration Program and the Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot Program, for all immigration streams. Any employer leveraging immigration to fill labor shortages could be required to take anti-racism training.
- Provide a safe space to **report discrimination** (e.g., Kids Help Phone, 2-1-1, anonymous reporting tools) and put **data** that is difficult to access, into the hands of those working in settlement and those that can impact change.



6. REFUGEE SETTLEMENT



- Adopt **empowerment-focused approaches and programming** and seek **consistency** in private sponsorship, government sponsorship, or by-country responses.
- Connect refugee families to a support network while considering family reunions and educational opportunities. **Social and community connections** are vital to improving settlement outcomes and increasing retention.
- Provide accurate **pre-arrival information** to refugees to manage their expectations and **support early intervention programming** while in temporary accommodation.
- Focus on programs that support **early childhood education** and **vulnerable and isolated mothers** such as the Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY) program.
- Ensure the next IRCC call for proposals provides a **balance between the numbers of Anglophone and Francophone (RAP)** agencies to provide equal opportunities for refugees to access services.
- Recognizing that people need opportunities to work, keeping a balance between the ‘job now’ and the ‘right job’.
- Increase the **housing allowance** for the Government-Assisted Refugees program (GAR) in response to both record-high housing prices and inflation, with a special focus on singles with no kids.

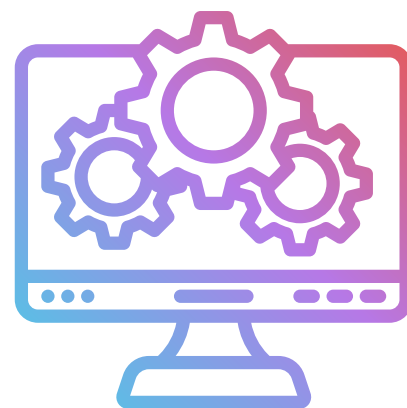
7. LANGUAGE

- Provide **flexibility within SPOs and with guidelines**, to create programming that accommodates various rates of learning and language learning needs through creating flexible schedules for students who work and building increased flexibility into funding to allow for programming adjustments in response to changing needs.
- Reduce **wait times/wait lists for language assessments** by ensuring that new/upcoming assessment tool is reliable and ideally takes less time than it currently does. Create opportunities for small centres to do assessments in-house.
- Increase funding, including **equity among language programs and among clients**, and consistency to allow language support for all newcomers (Temporary Residents, International Students, Permanent Residents).
- Provide **competitive salaries** to recruit and retain instructors and assessors avoid losing them to the public education system with higher salaries.
- Offer **employment-focused programming** that meets practical needs and builds confidence for interaction outside the class. Many clients, especially CUAET visa holders, feel they must choose between working and learning English. They should not have to choose between one or the other.
- Encourage the development of **digital literacy** for instructors and clients, and potentially have digital literacy champions/teachers who can train clients and staff.
- Facilitate **access to LINC programs** for newcomers in rural or remote communities where there are no SPOs or SPOs without LINC programs.
- Provide **childcare services** for clients to be able to attend language classes.



8. OPERATIONAL CAPACITY

- Focus on **digitalization** as a tool to increase SPOs' efficiency and reduce workload. Utilize **platforms for collaborations and resource sharing, streamline databases** and prioritize **interoperability**. Revamp websites to increase accessibility to **chat options** and modernize communication through **social media** while prioritizing **cyber security**.
- Increase **flexibility in funding**, including the ability to transfer between budget categories to respond to needs. Create space for flexible programs that include both **virtual and in-person services** to fit client needs/preferences.
- Provide practical **training** for frontline settlement workers and leverage **volunteers** to support program delivery.
- Focus on **client outcomes** instead of outputs and **scale successful pilots**.
- Improve access to services by providing **itinerant service delivery** - Go to clients. Open our services 7 days a week and give classes on weekends.
- **Increase the number of staff**, particularly in a small center environment where there is less staff and an ongoing need to pivot to newcomer needs versus the specialization that is possible in larger centers. **Improve compensation** for qualified staff to ensure retention.



9. HOUSING & TRANSPORTATION

- Work with all levels of government, local businesses, and municipalities to **tie immigration levels to infrastructure growth levels** and enhance **transportation** and **housing**.
- Connect retired residents to newcomers (e.g., retired residents open their homes in exchange for help, company, transportation, and different services).
- Ensure the work and all messaging relate to “all” residents, rather than singling out newcomers: We are welcoming to “all”, housing, and transportation for “all”.
- Give **incentives to encourage ethical rental practices** (e.g., a tax break for landlords who rent at a maximum of 30% of renters’ income) and **motivate developers** to build the right kind of houses.
- **Zoning bylaws** should dictate the kind of houses that allow for higher density.
- The government should make **proof of adequate housing a prerequisite** to employers and post-secondary institutions for admission and recruitment of newcomers.





SOME COMMON, RECURRING THEMES ACROSS ALL TOPICS RELATED TO WORKING IN A SMALL CENTRES

- **Access to services** can be a challenge for immigrants in small centres. Find more ways to **increase services** so newcomers don't have to move to large centres.
- Allow **flexibility in programming and funding** to pivot to respond to emerging needs in each small center context. "Our numbers are smaller. We can't offer all of what a large center can offer, which makes us less attractive. But with funding flexibility, our inherent nimbleness, and sheer determination, we can move to where the needs are – if the funding allows us to."
- **Access to language support** and alleviating language barriers are essential to the provision of all services.
- **Anti-racism work** is critical, where discrimination is shown to be higher in small centers.
- **Accountability and collaboration** across all levels of government and community is crucial to advance our joint objectives.