



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

## Innovating for Impact

Meeting Report – March 11, 2024  
Halifax, NS

April 2024

902-431-3203 • [info@araisa.ca](mailto:info@araisa.ca) • 2132B-6960 Mumford Road, Halifax, NS B3L 4P1

[araisa.ca](http://araisa.ca)

The Innovating for Impact project, funded by IRCC, was launched by ARAISA and Inspiring Communities as a two-year capacity-building program for settlement agencies in the Atlantic Region. The goal was to help service provider organizations increase newcomers' sense of belonging by building capacity in social research and development (Social R&D) and incorporating new tools, and approaches to their work.

This report is a summary of the meeting held on March 11, 2024 in Halifax, NS, to discuss the successes and challenges of the project.

## Recurring Themes from Participants

- Community outreach was a significant strength for one of the prototype teams.
- Learning new concepts and methodologies was a strength.
- Francophone participants were not able to participate fully in some of the in-person sessions due to language barriers.
- Communication and follow-up could have been more consistent throughout the project.

### **When participants were asked what drew them to the project, responses included:**

- Helping newcomers
- Building bridges
- Connecting with others during COVID restrictions
- Hearing from the public
- Learning new tools, perspectives, and approaches
- Learning and evaluating our thinking and group interactions
- Learning how to submit a proposal for funding

## Strategic Planning Workshop and Presentations from Participants

In the morning, attendees participated in a strategic planning workshop in which they learned about the ART (Analyze, Rethink, Transform) framework. In this framework, Analysis stage focuses on understanding current realities in one's field. One tool used in this stage is PESTEL, which can be used to evaluate Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Ecological, and Legal factors affecting an organization. Participants also learned about the SOAR method which assesses Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, and Results. Systems Mapping was also presented.

The Rethink stage focuses on co-creation and finding solutions. This stage includes establishing a mission, vision, and values, as well as establishing strategic pillars. Strategic pillars should be two to five areas of focus that can help achieve an organization's vision. The Transform stage includes the SOMIA (Strategies, Objectives, Measures, Initiatives, Activities) tool. This tool is meant to be a simple, yet high level, tool that allows for the monitoring of a strategic plan, and for changes to be introduced when necessary.

Following the strategic planning workshop, CODAC and MCAF presented their prototype projects.

## CODAC

This program started as a partnership between Conseil pour le développement de l'alphabétisme et des compétences des adultes du Nouveau-Brunswick (CODAC) and Réseau en immigration francophone du Nouveau-Brunswick (RIF NB). Project conceptualization began in November 2022 and sought to address low retention among Francophone newcomers in New Brunswick by improving their sense of belonging. The project also sought to better understand immigration in New Brunswick, including the experiences in rural versus urban settings, and experiences of systemic racism. The seven pillars, which included: Ideation, Creativity and Innovation, Collaboration, Communication, Problem Solving, Adaptation, and Closing Workshops.

Participants were drawn from those who had participated in previous programs by CODAC. Four types of activities were tested with participants:

- Mystery Box (to develop socio-emotional competencies)
- 5 Whys (why do newcomers leave)
- Ideation
- FFOM analysis (Forces, Manieres, Opportunities)

The project team found it challenging to attract host community members and had to leverage personal connections to do so. They learned that it was important to emphasize the value of the project for host community members, rather than solely focusing on how the project would help newcomers.

## MCAF

This project was initiated in December 2022 as a collaboration between the Multicultural Association of Fredericton (MCAF), the Multicultural Association of the Greater Moncton Area (MAGMA), and Horizon TNL; however, the team from MCAF was the only one who remained by the end of the project. The project developed Bubbles-an innovative e-platform. Bubbles features news, e-learning, volunteering and other resources, with the

intent of fostering community connections and increasing the sense of belonging among newcomers in Fredericton.

Project deliverables included:

- Environmental scan
- Evaluation plan
- Theory of change
- Focus groups and surveys
- A 5-year plan

MCAF felt that their participation in the project was a valuable learning experience in innovation and research and development, and that it gave them an opportunity for them to apply new knowledge.

## Discussions

Following the presentations, attendees participated in a group discussion to review the strengths and challenges of the program.

## Positives

### Community Engagement

Attendees highlighted several key benefits of the project. One key advantage was the opportunity to engage the wider community and gather input, which was seen as a significant learning opportunity and a valuable means of evaluating the pilot project. Attendees particularly appreciated the validation of the project through community involvement, noting this as an improvement over the typical process of rolling out projects without first testing the concept. Community consultations were deemed highly beneficial, fostering engagement and motivation among participants and the wider community. Additionally, participants noted the value of consulting individuals and

organizations beyond the settlement sector, highlighting the benefits of gaining diverse perspectives. Collaborating with other organizations, especially given COVID restrictions, was also seen as advantageous, providing opportunities to work with individuals who possessed varied skill sets.

### **Learning and Testing New Approaches**

Attendees appreciated the learning opportunities gained through the project, and the exposure to diverse partners they might not have otherwise encountered. They also valued the program's flexibility, which allowed for adjustments as needed throughout the project duration. The ability to test new approaches and pivot when necessary were also highlighted as key strengths.

### **New Tools and Technologies**

Participants emphasized the benefits of learning about new tools and technologies. Specifically, the Miro Board was cited as a valuable tool for mitigating the impact of staff turnover by facilitating the transfer of essential information to new staff. Additionally, participants found that visually depicting their ideas enhanced their understanding and conceptualization of projects.

### **New Concepts and Theoretical Frameworks**

Participants benefitted from the introduction of new concepts and theoretical frameworks during the project. Specifically, they highlighted the value of human-centered design, acknowledging its capacity to foster heightened sociological, creative, and imaginative thinking while prioritizing the human experience. Analytical tools like PESTEL also received favorable feedback. Participants noted their utility not only within the project context but also in their other work and community consultations. Finally, participants appreciated the feedback sessions conducted at the end of each session, underscoring their value in facilitating reflection and improvement.

## Challenges

Despite the positive aspects, attendees highlighted several challenges encountered during the project.

### **Language Barriers for Francophones**

Many Francophone participants found it hard to fully engage during in-person sessions. Some would have preferred separate groups for Francophone and Anglophone attendees, noting distinct issues faced by each community, and limitations for partnership across language groups. Training sessions were primarily tailored to Anglophones, and inconsistencies in the quality of simultaneous interpretation hindered comprehension for Francophone attendees, who would have preferred to work in French.

### **Communication Gaps**

Participants indicated that there were communication gaps throughout the project. They would have appreciated more consistent updates from ARAISA regarding the overall progress of the project, its objectives, and timelines. Some participants from the first cohort indicated that it hadn't been made clear that there would be an opportunity to submit a proposal to launch a project.

### **Gaps in Training and Support**

Some participants noted inconsistencies in the level of support throughout the project, and felt that more consistent training and follow-up from ARAISA would have been beneficial. More frequent meetings with ARAISA and among the participating organizations would also have been beneficial.

### **Budgeting Challenges**

Participants pointed out a number of budgeting and financing issues that impacted the success of their projects. Some expressed the need for additional funding to adequately support their initiatives, while others highlighted challenges stemming from unclear

guidance about the budget. Certain participants also voiced uncertainty regarding the amount of funding they could request, indicating a need for clearer guidelines in this regard.

### **Challenges of Structure and Leadership**

While participants appreciated the project's flexibility, some felt that a better balance between flexibility and structure would have been beneficial. Likewise, participants encountered difficulties stemming from a lack of clear leadership. Without a clear mechanism for one organization to take the lead on prototype projects, the projects faced challenges and ultimately faltered. Participants emphasized the importance of organizations assuming leadership roles in projects, highlighting the need for adequate financial support to play this role effectively.

### **Timeline**

The project timeline posed a challenge for participants, with some participants expressing that the project was too long and required too much investment in terms of time and effort. Participants felt that this was one of the reasons for the high attrition rate, which resulted in significantly fewer participants remaining by the end of the project. Some participants found it challenging to stay engaged during the summer months when they weren't working.

### **Evaluation**

Participants highlighted challenges they encountered with project evaluation. There was an expectation of ongoing support for evaluation throughout the project, which was not consistently met. Supplementary training on evaluation was later introduced, but for some, this delivered too late as it was after their prototype projects had already been



completed. Participants also indicated that they felt the number of evaluations of the I2 project was excessive.

### **Staff Turnover**

Participants also experienced internal organizational and cohort-related obstacles. High staff turnover rates within organizations impeded project success and hampered collaboration among participants.

### **Final Thoughts**

The Innovating for Impact project, launched by ARAISA and Inspiring Communities with funding from IRCC, aimed to enhance the social research and development capacity of settlement agencies in the Atlantic Region while creating a sense of belonging for newcomers. The final event, held on March 11, 2024, in Halifax, summarized the project's achievements and challenges.

Participants appreciated the project's flexibility, the opportunity to engage with the community, and the exposure to new tools and methodologies which contributed to their professional development. Participants also shared challenges, including language barriers, communication gaps, and inconsistencies in training and support. Budgeting issues, lack of clear leadership structure at the prototype level, and high staff turnover further impeded the project's success. Despite these obstacles, the project met its key objectives. It provided opportunities for participants to strengthen their knowledge and test new ideas, contributing to the successful settlement and retention of newcomers in their communities.



*I2 Final Event – March 11, 2024 – Halifax, NS*



Supporting Organizations  
Supporting Immigrants

Aider les organismes  
qui aident les immigrants

902-431-3203  
info@araisa.ca  
2132B-6960 Mumford  
Road  
Halifax, NS B3L 4P1

**araisa.ca**