

# NEWCOMER RESEARCH *IN ACTION*

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**THE NEWCOMER KNOWLEDGE HUB**



**UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY**  
FACULTY OF SOCIAL WORK

# THE NEWCOMER KNOWLEDGE HUB



## OUR VISION

Create new knowledge to improve newcomer services, practices, and societal systems.

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# LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT



In the spirit of reconciliation, we take this opportunity to acknowledge that we live, work, and play on the traditional territories of the Blackfoot and the people of the Treaty 7 regions in Southern Alberta, which includes the Siksika, the Piikani, the Kainai, the Tsuut'ina and the Stoney Nakoda First Nations including Chiniki, Bearspaw, and Goodstoney First Nation. The City of Calgary is also home to the people of Métis Nation of Alberta (Districts 5 and 6).



# FROM THE EDITORS

I invite you to join us as we explore the intricacies of newcomers' settlement and integration, unveiling the challenges and triumphs that shape their experiences. The journey of embracing a new culture while preserving one's identity involves complexities, resilience, and transformative experiences. In this inaugural issue of "Newcomer Research in Action," our aim is to reveal the dynamics of this journey, uncovering innovative strategies, insightful perspectives, and compelling narratives that underscore the important work of building inclusive communities.

As an immigrant and a researcher, I am committed to understanding the nuances of newcomer integration, exploring the intersection of policy, research, and personal experiences. Through the lenses of research, client service, and community engagement, we seek to illuminate the transformative power of innovation, collaboration, and partnership.

In this publication, you will discover empirical research on newcomer settlement and integration, innovative initiatives facilitating a more streamlined and empowering settlement process, and recent sector developments that impact the trajectories of newcomers' journeys. It is my hope that these narratives will stimulate innovation, promote dialogue, and ultimately contribute to the creation of more welcoming communities for newcomers in Canada.

## **Dr. Vibha Kaushik**

Director: Research and Policy Development,  
Immigrant Services Calgary

Bienvenido/a... Khush amadid... Benvenuto/a...  
Bem-vindo/a... Salaam... Ласкаво просимо...  
नमस्ते... Hoş geldin... Witaj... Selamat datang...  
Bienvenue... Добро пожаловать... Karibu...  
لأبقت ساة لافح... Ndewo.... Báwo ni

Welcome to the inaugural collection of the Newcomer Research in Action community magazine! Newcomers are a vibrant community of shakers, makers, innovators, shapers, and originals. The collection of short stories and reports that we have included provides a window into select yet diverse journeys of newcomers, practitioners, researchers, and those who support the work of the Newcomer Knowledge Hub. The written pieces are filled with resilience and resistance, and some might feel like they are extraordinary and yet very familiar. Whilst reading the range of work that we (including our partners) have compiled, I urge you to reflect on our shared humanity, fight injustices, and spread joy, peace, and love wherever you go!

## **Dr. Ajwang' Warriá**

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# BACKGROUND

## NAVIGATING INTEGRATION CHALLENGES IN CANADA'S IMMIGRATION SECTOR: INSIGHTS FOR PRACTITIONERS

**Vibha Kaushik, Megan Gill, Katerina Pannenbecker, and Benedicta Asante**

### **Introduction**

According to the Government of Canada (2023b), the immigration levels plan aims to welcome 485,000 permanent residents in 2024, 500,000 in 2025, and 500,000 in 2026. Factors such as the Covid-19 pandemic, population aging, and declining birth rates have created a sense of urgency in increasing Canadian immigration. The pandemic led to a reduction in immigration numbers, and an aging workforce further amplifies the need for skilled newcomers to bolster the economy (Government of Canada, 2022a; Stojicevic, n.d.; Wister, 2019). There are, however, reasons for concern when considering the ethical aspect of boosting immigration solely for the purpose of supporting the Canadian economy.

### **Integration Challenges, Innovative Programs, and Collaborative Approaches**

Despite Canada's reputation for its high standard of living and inclusivity, effective integration of newcomers into mainstream society continues to face challenges (Kaushik & Drolet, 2018). The most significant challenges affecting the successful social and economic integration of newcomers encompass a range of factors, including: (a) limited access to essential information and guidance; (b) difficulty in having foreign credentials recognized; (c) obstacles

in validating previous work experience, and employer expectations for Canadian work experience; (d) language barriers and insufficient language skills; (e) challenges in obtaining credible references; (f) prejudices, stereotypes, and discrimination; (g) cultural integration difficulties; (h) the need for social and emotional support; and (i) health and wellbeing concerns (Kaushik & Drolet, 2018). Moreover, it has been observed that these challenges can have adverse effects on the mental health of newcomers (Raihan et al., 2023). Addressing these challenges comprehensively is vital for enhancing the effective integration of newcomers and for enabling them to contribute fully to their new communities and economies. In response to the growing demand for settlement services resulting from the increasing number of newcomers, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) has emphasized the importance of sector-wide digital transformation.

Research reveals that the resources available upon newcomers' arrival in Canada are insufficient to meet their settlement and integration needs (Kaushik & Drolet, 2018). To streamline support processes, service-providing organizations (SPOs) have initiated the use of smartphone applications and other digital platforms as a starting point in leveraging technology to assist

newcomers navigate Canada's support systems and processes (Couldrey et al., 2022). For instance, PeaceGeeks developed the Welcome to Canada app that helps newcomers plan their settlement journeys in Canada. Similarly, Immigrant Services Calgary (ISC) developed Gateway, a standardized system for intake, assessment, and settlement planning for all newcomers in the Calgary region. Gateway uses sophisticated technology to streamline processes, personalize service delivery, and address social determinants of health (SDoH) that impact immigrants' well-being. By using technology solutions, Gateway optimizes data collection, facilitates collaboration among service providers, and tailors interventions to meet individual needs, ultimately enhancing the system's efficiency and effectiveness in supporting newcomers' successful integration into their new communities.

With the ongoing growth in immigration to Canada, the complexities involved in serving diverse groups of newcomers have

escalated. Various stakeholders, including grassroots community organizations, organizations providing services to immigrants, and academic researchers, have been actively collaborating to enhance the support provided to newcomers as they integrate into Canadian life (Newcomer Research Network, 2022). However, it has been suggested that the resilience of these communities can be augmented through the centralization of services (Atanackovic, 2014; Burstein & Esses, 2012; Kaushik, 2020). These agencies can not only offer direct services but also promote empowerment, community and social integration, networking, sharing of experiences, and can contribute to the physical and mental well-being of newcomers (Bushell & Shields, 2018).

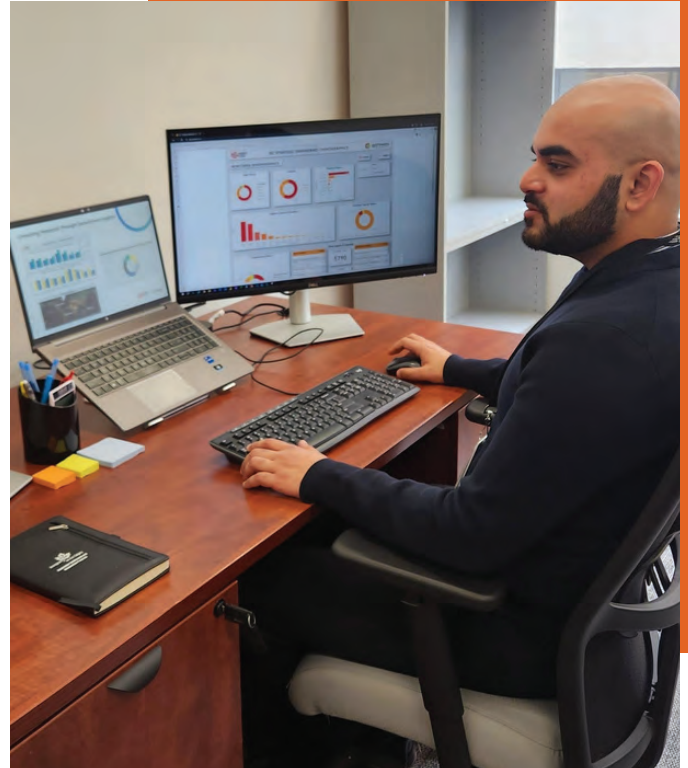
Despite the progress made by these stakeholders, there have been limited opportunities for collaboration and centralization to ensure newcomers' needs are effectively addressed (Newcomer Research Network, 2022).



## Leveraging Research and Data Analysis for Improved Services

Recent years have seen significant transformations in migration research and the immigrant and refugee-serving sector. There has been a growing sense of urgency within the social service sector to utilize data for more informed decision-making and performance evaluation. For instance, organizations like the Rexdale Women's Center, the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants, and the Canadian Immigration Integration Project have embraced data analysis to refine their services. Noteworthy is Wellesley Institute's Community Knowledge Program which has also emerged as a pivotal initiative fostering networking, collaboration, and resource and knowledge exchange among stakeholders in migration, integration, and settlement domains in the Greater Toronto Area. The success of the Community Knowledge Program in shaping strategy and decision-making stems from the meticulous collection, analysis, and synthesis of qualitative and quantitative data derived from the immigrant population within the sector. However, many organizations still grapple with the challenge of data and service integration (Center for Community-Based Research, 2023; Mooney, 2021; Newcomer Research Network, 2022; Wellesley Institute, 2022).

Research and data analysis are pivotal in creating and enhancing innovative programs and processes. Working in tandem with Gateway, ISC's Newcomer Knowledge Hub (K-Hub) undertakes data analysis to improve client services. K-Hub aims to create a vibrant



collaborative network comprising research and policy stakeholders. This network will serve as an invaluable resource for shaping future policies and research endeavors focused on newcomer experiences. Its primary objective includes a continuous tracking of newcomer-related and sector-specific data over extended periods. These insights are regularly presented at major national and regional conferences, enriching the discourse on newcomers. Additionally, the K-Hub produces bespoke datasets and research reports tailored to specific information requirements.

To ensure timely and insightful reporting of newcomer data, the K-Hub develops dynamic dashboards. This real-time visual representation of data facilitates





and innovative programs are necessary, there remains a need for comprehensive solutions that address the diverse and complex needs of immigrants. Collaborative efforts among various stakeholders, including grassroots organizations, service providers, and academic researchers, are crucial in enhancing support systems for newcomers. Moving forward, it is essential to continue leveraging research, data analysis, and information sharing to identify best practices, and create and enhance innovative programs and processes that address the evolving needs of newcomers. Overall, by prioritizing collaboration, innovation, and evidence-based approaches, Canada can better support newcomers in their journey to integrate into society, contribute to the economy, and thrive in their new communities. ■

informed decision-making and enhance transparency in service delivery. In pursuit of operational excellence, the K-Hub actively identifies opportunities for process improvements and the integration of best practices in newcomer planning. This commitment to refinement contributes to the overall effectiveness of services provided to newcomers. As part of an innovative approach, the K-Hub designs and implements optimized workflows for achieving the utmost efficiency and efficacy in serving newcomers.

**Conclusion**

As Canada continues to experience an increase in immigration levels, there arises a pressing need to address the challenges associated with effectively integrating newcomers into society. While technological advancements



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# PRACTITIONER VIEW

## THE VALUE OF COLLABORATION IN THE NEWCOMER-SERVING SECTOR: THE CEO'S PERSPECTIVE

**Shirley Philips and Alka Merlin**

The old adage “two brains are better than one” is applicable in many aspects of life—and certainly in the social services sector. Collaboration in the newcomer-serving sector was, and still is, often a result of a need to tackle a complex issue that requires an all-hands-on-deck approach within a confined timeframe and with limited funding. While this approach often yields positive results, collaborations on a long-term, grander scale are harder to implement. The reason for this may be the funding structure of Canada’s settlement system.

### **The Original Premise of Gateway: A Collaborative Approach to Supporting Newcomers**

**Traditionally in Calgary, the settlement sector has been siloed, with each organization functioning individually, rather than in coordination with one another.** While many agencies provided exceptional services, the organizations had no control over or ability to track a client’s settlement journey or progress once that client was referred to or accessed another agency for support. In many ways, this was the direct result of a competitive playing field and a lack of a standardized approach to tracking and reporting on client outcomes.

In 2019, the House of Commons Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration released a report summarizing the state of Canada’s settlement services and how they can be improved (Whalen, 2019). Those recommendations to Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) included supporting the settlement sector by continuing to facilitate opportunities

for innovation and the sharing of best practices between frontline organizations across Canada. It was clear the system had to be adjusted to help Canada achieve its goals. To support the improvement of settlement service delivery and reporting, Immigrant Services Calgary (ISC) underwent an examination of its role in the settlement sector.

During the same year, ISC leadership commenced work on a strategy to transform the organization and the newcomer-serving sector in Calgary to better serve and support newcomers in Calgary and the surrounding area. This work resulted in the development of Gateway—an initiative that would help transform the sector through greater use of technology, data management, and the adaptation of best practices. In 2020, ISC was awarded funding from IRCC to manage and facilitate



the implementation of Gateway in collaboration with agencies in Southern Alberta.

### **Bringing Innovation and Collaboration to Life Through Gateway**

Gateway utilizes a standardized needs assessment, settlement planning, and referral methodology to provide comprehensive, streamlined support to newcomers. It allows case managers to track clients' progress throughout their settlement journey and conduct appropriate follow-ups. **Through Gateway's client-centric model, there would exist a single point of entry for newcomers to Calgary, which would eliminate the need for multiple intakes.** The newcomer would be guided by a personalized plan, built uniquely to meet their needs, goals, dreams, and priorities, and one which would connect them to the right program at the right agency. **For agencies and the sector, Gateway acts as a central source of data and learnings to help identify gaps within the system, improve programming and practices, and anticipate needed programs based on emerging trends.**

The development of the Gateway strategy resulted in a new mission for ISC: Connecting newcomers to the right service at the right agency every time. To achieve this mission, ISC shifted from an organization structured around funding envelopes to one built around a client-centric process. This implies a seamless, end-to-end client journey with clear hand-off and metrics accountability at each stage and a client experience built on trust, human connection, and community. A thorough evaluation of ISC programming was conducted to assess



which programs and services aligned with the new Gateway transformation and which would need to be offboarded to partner agencies whose expertise better served the client. An example of this was the transfer of programming from ISC's Therapy and Support Centre to the Centre for Newcomers, which already ran comprehensive and successful mental health and support services for newcomers.

To be successful, ISC recognized the importance of offboarding or ending services to eliminate competitive programming. With buy-in from partner agencies, ISC as the operator of Gateway,

would aim to become the first point of entry for all newcomers to Calgary, conducting standardized needs assessments, after which the client would be referred to an agency or program that best meet their needs.

To succeed in such an ambitious goal of collaboration, it was imperative to meaningfully engage sector leaders in the transformation. The Gateway governance structure was intentionally designed to incorporate sector leader perspectives, knowledge, and experience. This resulted in the creation of the Gateway Partner Advisory Council (GPAC), a group of seven partner organizations that provide advice, input, and feedback on strategies, options and analytical frameworks in the development and execution of Gateway. The group included settlement sector leaders, funders, and academia.

The Gateway system went live in September 2021. Since its launch, Gateway has signed 81 partners, onboarded over 1,500 programs and services into the system, and served over 39,000 unique clients. Outside of signed partners, some referrals are made to non-signed community organizations with the belief that those organizations can provide the client with the specialized support they need. Through the Gateway Personalized Plan, clients can be referred to 132 organizations in Calgary. Since September 2021, Gateway has sent over 129,000 referrals to agencies across the city. Gateway has also secured secondments and co-location of two specialized partners: La Cité des Rocheuses (the Francophone operator of Gateway), and the Calgary Bridge Foundation for Youth, which specializes in supporting newcomer youth and their families.

## **Implementing Learnings from Successful Collaborations to Improve Gateway**

In response to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Gateway initiative embarked on its first testing phase around 10 months prior to its official launch. This testing coincided with a significant surge in COVID-19 infections in Calgary's east quadrant, which is renowned for its cultural diversity (Toy, 2020). Initially, it was assumed that the spike in infections was primarily attributed to newcomers not adhering to government-mandated guidelines. However, sector agencies discerned that the neighbourhoods with the highest infection rates also had a substantial population of frontline workers and multi-generational households, including a significant proportion of non-English speaking newcomers.

To address this critical situation and meet the needs of newcomers and ethnocultural communities in northeast Calgary, seventeen community-serving organizations collaborated to establish the Calgary East Zone Newcomers Collaborative (CENC). With the support of an early iteration of the Gateway platform, CENC organizations mobilized resources, leveraging subject matter expertise, and securing support from government and the private sector to launch extensive community outreach and education in 20 languages. As vaccines became available, CENC's collaborative efforts were pivotal in ensuring vaccine accessibility for residents in northeast Calgary, leading to a number-one ranking in first-dose vaccine coverage in Alberta.

In April 2022, in response to the influx of Ukrainian evacuees, the core members of the CENC's Advisory Committee once again joined forces, expanding collaboration to the whole city to form what is now known as the Calgary Newcomer Collaborative (CNC) powered by Gateway. CNC partners implemented outreach activities to support Ukrainian evacuees at the Calgary International Airport, government-funded evacuee hotels,

and a local Ukrainian church. These collaborative initiatives underscore the sector's remarkable ability to work together effectively. However, sustaining large-scale collaborations requires substantial resources and support from both the government and the private sector. Empowering those dedicated to upholding the social fabric of society remains a top priority. ■

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# PRACTITIONER VIEW

## FROM COUNSELLING TO PLANNING: SUPPORTING NEWCOMERS TO ACHIEVE THEIR GOALS

**Souhila Loucif, Cheryl Christine-Fletcher, Megan Gill, and Casey Kennedy**

Immigrant Services Calgary (ISC) has been a key part of the Calgary community, working to make a meaningful difference in the lives of newcomers and immigrants (ISC, n.d). With this vast experience as a settlement service within Southern Alberta, ISC has been able to witness the drastic changes within the Calgary and area settlement sector. The Government of Canada (2023) has set targets to bring in 485,000 immigrants in 2024 and 500,000 in 2025 and 2026. Immigration in Alberta serves as a key driver of population growth and the primary source of labour force expansion (Mueller, 2019, Par. 7). To adjust to the growing population of newcomers and ensure they are being adequately supported on their settlement journeys in Canada, ISC recognized a need for a shift in how services were navigated and accessed within the sector. Research shows that despite the existence of a wide range of settlement services, “newcomers lack awareness of the services available to them in their local community, both in-person and internet based” (Campana, 2019, para 5). To increase the accessibility of Southern Alberta’s settlement sector, ISC transitioned its mission from being a service provider to “connecting newcomers to the right service at the right agency every time” (ISC, n.d, para 3).

This shift was complex and required foresight and collaboration from all parties involved. Some key questions that drove ISC to pursue this transition were: **(i) Are current settlement services the most efficient and effective use of taxpayers' dollars given the low access rates? (ii) Are the low access rates impacting the settlement sector's ability to optimally**



***address the unique needs of each client?***

To address the first question, ISC examined their own service delivery model, prior to the Gateway system, and identified shortcomings in their outcome tracking. We realized that due to a lack of settlement service navigation support, many clients were accessing ISC services multiple times. While this seemed positive in terms of number of services accessed, it did not reflect individual settlement success and goal achievement. ISC predicted that other organizations might be tracking similar outcomes and determined it was essential to shift focus from outcomes tied to the number of clients and services offered to outcomes related to settlement experience and goal achievement. We achieved this by relying less on standardized needs-based assessments and transitioning towards assessments based on unique skills, needs, and goals. We employed the evidence-based Social Determinants of Health (SDoH) model to guide our assessments, which enabled us to address concerns about optimizing taxpayers' funds by making appropriate referrals every time, ensuring the skills, needs, and goals of each unique client were being recognized. On a micro scale, utilizing the SDoH model directed newcomers through an assessment process that pinpointed their priority needs, leveraged their current skill sets, and established tangible steps towards goal achievement. On a macro scale, it created a comprehensive plan for newcomers that addressed all aspects of their settlement journey, reducing the need to access services on multiple occasions to navigate an extensive settlement service sector. ISC believes that this is a significant step forward toward ensuring effective utilization of taxpayers' funds and addressing unique settlement needs of the newcomers, as it can enhance the settlement sector's capacity and service delivery accuracy, without requiring additional financial resources.



At ISC, “we are forward thinking, adaptable, and optimistic [and] we value accountability, collaboration, and impactfulness” (ISC, n.d). This forward-thinking mindset is what spearheaded the collaborative process that Gateway has initiated through its Partner Success division. ISC observed a pattern of clients expressing dissatisfaction with the need to recount their immigration experiences, often traumatic, multiple times across agencies to effectively communicate why they needed certain supports at each settlement agency they accessed. To alleviate this Gateway’s Partner Success team has signed on over 70 settlement agencies in Southern Alberta as partners. The goal of this extensive partner

profile is for Gateway to become the first point of contact for newcomers in Southern Alberta, gathering required client information, and then leveraging technology to securely share this information, with client consent, among partner agencies through a digital platform. This approach significantly reduces the need for redundant storytelling to access services, streamlining the assessment, referral, and service delivery processes, thereby reducing wait times and unnecessary repeat visits.

Another key element supporting ISC’s Gateway program was the practical adjustments that front-line staff had to make in transitioning from Settlement Counsellor to Gateway Planner. Their approach now places a greater emphasis on recognizing the assets that clients bring to Canada, highlighting their strengths, experiences, and multilingual skills rather than focusing solely on their needs and deficits. This transition required a complete overhaul of longstanding operational procedures. As mentioned earlier, **a pivotal change was the transition away from needs-based assessments to asset-based assessments. ISC took the initiative to develop a new asset-based assessment tool consisting of over 400 questions covering all aspects of the SDofH.** This new assessment tool was digitalized and incorporated skip-logic, allowing each client to be presented with a tailored set of questions from the list of 400, that are applicable to them based on their individual responses. Gateway has been utilizing this assessment approach since September 2021 and staff have observed that it has helped in reducing non applicable or redundant information gathering and subsequent referrals.

**Table 1: Select examples of job title transformations and language adaptations**

Previous Terms	Current & Revised Terms
Settlement Counsellor	Gateway Newcomer Planner
Assessment (NAARS)	Holistic Questionnaire & Planning Session
Settlement Plan	Gateway Personalized Plan
Emphasis on Needs	Emphasis on Assets and Needs
Questioning	Co-Creating
Sympathy	Empathy
“Client is...”	“I am”
“Client needs...”	“I want”

Gateway planners underwent extensive training and invested significant time into familiarizing themselves with the revised workflows and newly implemented technological systems. Previously much of their work had relied on Word documents or Excel spreadsheets. The new assessment tool, however, was integrated into a Salesforce application called Gateway K-2, which was collaboratively developed by the YMCA of Southwestern Ontario and ISC. This shift was strenuous and required dedication and patience from all involved, but the motivation was the creation of an assessment and referral process that promoted inclusivity and empowerment. To further with this objective, Gateway Planners made a linguistic shift to promote inclusivity and empowerment in their daily communication with clients, aiming to promote the adoption of similar language shifts across the Southern Alberta settlement sector (see Table 1). ISC naturally has an interest in assessing the impact of the Gateway program and has gathered client feedback through

post-service follow-up surveys. Below are some client excerpts regarding how the Gateway program has supported clients in reaching their settlement goals:

*"The Gateway helped me to talk about my strengths, experiences, and skills. I think this was the first time for me to talk about my dream and how I would like to pursue a successful career in Canada.*

*I had a planning session with a Gateway Planner. He asked me about my dreams, my goals, and my priorities. It was an eye opener for me to learn about the system and to learn about the services and opportunities I have never heard of. I got a detailed personalized plan that is reflecting "Me". I felt connected and that I have someone I can trust."*

The Gateway transformation represents a truly innovative initiative involving changes in process, technology, and the mindset of all stakeholders. Since Gateway's launch in September 2021, over 19,000 clients have benefited from Personalized Plans, resulting in 108,000 referrals to over 81 Gateway Partners. The Gateway Planners team has expanded from 15 to 30 members and is now funded by all three levels of Government. An online learning platform has been developed to streamline staff onboarding and reduce administrative time spent on training. At the forefront of our success is the newcomer experience and the client response to Gateway has been overwhelmingly positive. This is exemplified by the Gateway Program's Net Promoter Score (NPS), which shows that 87% of clients would recommend the Gateway program to other Canadian newcomers. Our hope is that the Gateway program not only supports newcomers in building a life where their children's dreams become a reality but also encourages them to dream themselves, knowing they are supported in realizing those dreams by the ISC team. ■

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# PRACTITIONER VIEW

## ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN AND SYSTEMS MAPPING OF NEWCOMER SERVICES IN CALGARY

Jenalyn Ormita, Gurleen Matharu, and Katerina Palova

### Introduction

Immigration is a complex and ever-shifting journey. The local context and services play a crucial role in the transition, integration, and success of newcomers in new places of settlement. This paper presents a summary of findings from a multi-method study conducted by The Immigrant Education Society (TIES), in collaboration with Calgary Local Immigration Partnership (CLIP) and funded by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), to examine the organizational and service landscape (TIES, 2022), as well as organizational relations, within the immigrant-serving sector in Calgary, Alberta. Methods include (1) a web-based environmental scan, (2) a survey administered to settlement agency staff, and (3) interviews with settlement agency staff, newcomers, and immigrants in Calgary.

### Findings

**Core-Periphery in Calgary's Immigrant-Serving Sector.** A core-periphery model provides a framework for the presentation of our findings (Tambiah, 2013). This model can characterize Calgary's immigrant-serving sector as its structure is largely decentralized with no formalized central authority but nevertheless functions with a core through which both the core and periphery are informally formed and yield material impacts. We illustrate below how

a small set of organizations and services are core, while others are peripheral. The core includes large and well-established Settlement Provider Organizations (SPOs) and government bodies, including funding and oversight agencies; while peripheral is smaller, grassroots organizations and non-SPOs. Further, we also posit that these findings call for attention to power dynamics and to "issues of inequality and equity, dominance and securities, vulnerabilities and precarity as constitutive of Calgary's immigrant-serving sector" (TIES, 2022, p. 51). **These findings highlight resources and affordances that are yet untapped as well as the collaborations among organizations that are developing, yet unable to fully flourish.**

**Core Organizations.** *The Big 8 SPOs conduct 78% of all services.* Core organizations in Calgary's immigrant-serving sector comprise of 24 settlement service provider organizations (SPOs). These 24 organizations assist the integration of newcomers through three priority service areas: settlement, employment, and language services. Results from the web scan reveal that of those 24 SPOs, eight of them conduct 78% of all services ('The Big 8'). Interview findings reveal the power, privilege, and influence amongst large organizations, organizations, further illustrating their dominance. The centrality and visibility of these players denote power dynamics within the sector, as funding and

representation are concentrated amongst a small set of organizations. Further, it is not only services or actions that are centralized, but also decision-making and discourse-setting. **This means that a democratic and participatory process is hindered, thereby possibly leading to gaps and inefficiencies in services and unmet needs for immigrants and newcomers.**

*The government occupies a clear and central funding role.* Findings across all methods reveal that the government is the main funder for organizations. Due to the dependence on government funds, there seems to be no other sufficient sources of funding for organizations to supplement government support. Over-reliance on government funding may overwhelm and subsume organizational independence regarding their missions and priorities.

**Peripheral Organizations.** Only 9% of all scanned non-SPOs offer services targeting immigrants, highlighting their unfulfilled

role in services that address needs based on intersectional identities of newcomers. Peripheral organizations comprise of non-settlement service provider organizations (non-SPOs) that do not primarily serve newcomers and only deliver one or two of SPOs' three priority service areas. Out of 94 non-SPOs found in the expanded web scan search, only 9% provide services that specifically target newcomers. This includes 10 non-SPOs of four types: ethnic-based, health, women's organizations, and K-12 schools. Non-SPOs encompass the broader nonprofit sector and are vital to the immigrant-serving sector. Survey findings about organizational relations illustrate the frequent interactions with many non-SPOs.

*Intersectionality.* Findings point to discussions on intersectionality, whereby certain positionalities, such as being an immigrant or newcomer, lead to specific needs and issues. Services should thus be tailored to specific individuals and groups for greater effectiveness. Some public services are tailored to identities such as gender, sexuality, religion/spirituality, race or ability. However, **our findings call for tailoring services based on the ways through which the immigration and settlement experience intersects with the multiple identities of immigrants.**

*Inequality.* Findings also point to issues of unequal access to services since organizations operate in concentrated geographies or locations for newcomers. For instance, children gain additional targeted support when enrolled in K-12 schools with immigrant-specific services, compared with those enrolled in schools without such services.



*Ethnic-based organizations (EBOs) as untapped resources.* Out of all non-SPOs, EBOs have the greatest proportion of services (three out of four) targeting newcomers. Interview findings reveal that mainstream organizations have challenges in connecting with ethnocultural communities and developing deeper cultural understandings. EBOs could potentially fill this gap as community-based entities that have close connections with newcomer communities. Most EBOs examined in the web scan provide services for newcomers. While immigration status and ethnicity are not synonymous, they often overlap, since EBOs often share the same language and cultural background as newcomers. EBOs may also assist organizations with services and outreach initiatives that are effective as well as linguistically and culturally relevant for newcomers. Concurrently, findings regarding EBO services suggest their invisibility within the sector. While they may be recognized and utilized by newcomers, **EBOs are often dismissed as active players in the immigrant-serving sector.**

*Informal networks as invisible supports.* Friends, family, and social media are informal networks that provide crucial support for newcomers, according to findings. Despite the novelty of support through social media, digital connectivity heightened during the COVID-19 pandemic. Web scan results suggest Facebook as a dominant informal network, with many Facebook Groups solely aimed at newcomers in Calgary. The internet has become a fundamental source of information and communication for newcomers. However, **SPOs and other**

**conventional institutions seem yet to capitalize on informal networking, including through social media, as resource for immigrant services.**

**Services.** *Core services: employment, settlement, and culture-community services are highly prioritized areas by SPOs.* The first two areas jointly account for about three-fifths of all services provided by SPOs, according to both web scan and interview findings. This raises questions about the pre-eminence given to employment. While employment is key in the newcomer experience, it is related to other aspects of life such as health, mental health, and education, among others. The sector therefore needs a holistic approach that considers economic integration. Further, this also raises questions about duplicate services, particularly in these three domains.

*Peripheral services: health, mental health, and translation & interpretation services are the least prioritized areas by SPOs.* The least common service domain of SPOs were 'translation and interpretation' (2.5% of all services) and 'health and mental health' (3.1% of all services), according to both web scan and interview findings.

### **Core and Peripheral Relations: Complexity and Tensions**

Complexity, diversity, and relational tensions emerge as key findings about organizational relations. First, partnership and collaboration co-occur with competition, and power imbalances between larger and smaller organizations are pronounced. Second, formality co-occurs with informality concerning relations among organizations



(Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) and regulated initiatives as formal; vis-a-vis verbal agreements and daily interactions as informal). Third, the level of interactions among organizations varies, ranging from high to low. Fourth, relations with funders and the funding processes are fraught with contradictions and challenges that can stifle collaborations and impede rather than facilitate service provision.

### Conclusion

Power dynamics and complex relations can perhaps be expected, given that Calgary's immigrant-serving sector functions within a broader political economy. **In terms of socio-cultural aspects, immigration has also become a divisive and controversial issue in public discourse, and such complexities can stifle emerging collaborations and efficient service provision.**

Further, the overprioritizing of some services (particularly employment) may sacrifice service provision that is more holistic, strategic, sustainable, and therefore more effective. Calgary's immigrant-serving sector manifests with formal and informal collaborations, however opportunities for trust- and coalition-building are hindered when relationships are also wrought with competition, which then engenders insecurities and vulnerabilities in organizations and their services. In other words, the sector benefits from diversity in organizations and the desire for collaboration, but intentionality and support (both procedural and material) are needed to push the sector forward. ■

*\*The research team was led by Dr. Odessa Gonzalez Benson, Assistant Professor at the University of Michigan School of Social Work and Detroit School of Urban Studies*

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# ACADEMIC VIEW: SETTLEMENT OF SKILLED IMMIGRANTS IN CALGARY: LESSONS FOR IMMIGRANT-SERVING AGENCIES

**Vibha Kaushik**

## **Introduction**

Canada, well known for its immigrant-friendly policies, attracts numerous skilled immigrants annually. Among its major urban centers, Calgary consistently emerges as an attractive destination for skilled immigrants aspiring to build a better life for themselves and their families. However, the successful integration of skilled immigrants into Canadian society presents both opportunities and challenges. In my doctoral dissertation, titled *Settlement, and Integration Needs of Skilled Immigrants in Calgary: A Mixed Methods Study* (Kaushik, 2021), which was funded by Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, I delved deep into exploring this crucial topic. The research aimed at understanding the settlement and integration experiences of skilled immigrants in Calgary while also identifying any settlement needs that were not addressed by immigrant services in the city. The study invites policymakers, practitioners, and organizations to collaborate on developing programs to enhance the settlement experiences of the skilled immigrant and facilitate their successful integration into Canadian society. In this article, select highlights from the comprehensive dissertation study are presented.

## **Methodology**

In this study, a convergent parallel mixed methods approach (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011) was employed. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected concurrently and analyzed separately. Subsequently, the two data sets were merged to reach the conclusion. This methodology was chosen to integrate the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative research methods, ensuring a more comprehensive analysis of the subject. The qualitative component involved conducting in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 10 key informants from immigrant serving agencies in Calgary. The data was thematically analyzed (Braun & Clark, 2006) to achieve three objectives: (a) understanding skilled immigrants' settlement and integration needs; (b) exploring service providers' perspectives on the various dimensions of the needs, integration experiences, and the challenges faced by skilled immigrants; and (c) proposing modifications to the existing settlement support for skilled immigrants in the city.

At the same time, in the quantitative component, a survey was administered to 120 recent skilled immigrants in Calgary. The data was analyzed to identify

significant relationships between survey items and to generate descriptive statistics. After independently analyzing the quantitative and qualitative data for their respective research questions, the findings were compared and contrasted in specific content areas. This comparison included examining higher and lower relative frequencies in the survey data and identifying themes in the interview data. Similarities and differences between the two sets of findings were identified, summarized separately, and then interpreted considering each other to reach conclusion and provide final recommendations.

## Findings

The survey data highlighted that the primary settlement and integration needs of most skilled immigrants includes securing employment corresponding to their professional background and establishing professional networks. However, these needs were perceived as inadequately addressed by immigrant services in Calgary at the time of data collection. Notably, fair and timely accreditation of foreign credentials ranked among the top unmet needs. Survey respondents expressed frustration with a lack of settlement information and guidance, limited social and emotional support, absence of adequate mentorship programs, and insufficient soft skills training tailored for skilled immigrants. Additionally, key challenges faced by skilled immigrants in Calgary, included the non-recognition of foreign work experience, the lack of Canadian workexperience, and the absence of professional networks. Importantly, **most skilled immigrants expressed dissatisfaction with the city's immigrant**

**services, rating them as unhelpful. Thematic analysis of open-ended responses further emphasized skilled immigrants' discontent with existing services and underscored the need for a more streamlined system of service delivery. Immigrant services were perceived as "inadequate and inefficient" that failed to deliver "realistic" and "comprehensive" information. A lack of follow-up by the service providers after the initial intake of clients, a lack of timely access to information, and a lack of awareness about existing services were also observed.** The services were perceived as inadequate particularly for skilled immigrants with higher education and professional backgrounds. Discrimination, stereotyping, and disrespect from service providers were also reported.

The interview data, on the other hand, revealed that immigrant serving agencies in Calgary offered several services and programs for skilled immigrants. However, a rigorous screening process and long wait times limited access for most newcomers while benefiting only a fraction. Interviewees acknowledged the complexity of settlement and integration, as skilled immigrants vary greatly in their needs, skills, backgrounds, and goals. Nevertheless, interviewees stressed that the most critical needs revolve around professional integration, with services that enhance their career prospects taking precedence.

Interviewees discussed the challenges skilled immigrants face when settling in Calgary. The primary challenge for newcomers was understanding that integration is a gradual process that demands setting realistic goals. Agencies aim to alleviate these challenges, assisting immigrants overcome barriers

and improve their integration outcomes. The interviewees highlighted the financial constraints and gaps in services due to limited funding, including the pocket funding model; nevertheless, they emphasized that agencies are doing their best within their available resources to support skilled immigrants on their settlement and integration journey.

Interestingly, a recurring theme emerged in both the survey data, collected from skilled immigrants, and the interview data, gathered from service providers: the need for a centralized source of information. Service providers frequently reported that **the “biggest gap” was not “having a central place” where “all immigrants coming in” could receive information in a “consistent way”.** The efficiency and effectiveness of “central check-in” and a “central area” were also discussed along with the downsides of not having a “triage style central system” where all immigrants receive proper information and guidance as a “first step” in their settlement journey. The overall study findings highlighted a strong demand for a centralized service system in Calgary, ensuring consistent information, needs assessment, and tailored referrals for all incoming immigrants.

## Conclusion

There are four significant stages in the settlement and integration process for immigrants: pre-arrival, initial reception, intermediate, and long-term. Immigrant services are responsible for assisting immigrants in all four stages (Praznik & Shields, 2018). This study highlighted a critical issue, specifically the lack of appropriate information services during the pre-arrival and initial reception stages for skilled immigrants. The findings suggested that skilled immigrants do not receive timely, accurate, and up-to-date information during these stages, leading them to seek information from potentially unreliable sources and increasing their frustration during these critical transition periods. This lack of reliable information results in uninformed decisions about their professional lives and careers, ultimately hindering their settlement and delaying or preventing their professional integration.

This study offered two crucial recommendations. Firstly, to **expand and make pre-arrival services available to all prospective skilled immigrants selected to enter Canada as permanent residents.** Government agencies, immigrant service providers, policymakers, service developers,



and other stakeholders should collaborate to offer comprehensive pre-arrival services. Efforts should be made to increase awareness of these services among prospective immigrants, ensuring that they are informed about, and have access, to these programs as early as possible in the pre-arrival stage. Secondly, this study offers strong support for streamlining and improving information and guidance support for newly arrived skilled immigrants in Calgary and during

their initial reception stage. The study recommends a central source for consistent information, guidance, and referrals based on assessments of the career needs and professional backgrounds of the skilled immigrants, ensuring that their requirements are addressed efficiently and promptly. This central model would enhance the effectiveness of support for newly arrived skilled immigrants in Calgary and prevent them from missing out on essential services. ■

**Disclaimer:** *This research was concluded and successfully defended in October 2020, a full year prior to the official launch of Gateway. It is important to note that this study was conducted independently and did not receive any financial support from Immigrant Services Calgary, the operator of Gateway, or any of their associated funding sources. At the time of conducting this study, the researcher had no association with Immigrant Services Calgary and/or Gateway.*

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# ACADEMIC VIEW:

## IN CONVERSATION WITH DR. ELLEN PERRAULT, DEAN OF THE FACULTY OF SOCIAL WORK

### Ajwang' Warria and Don McSwiney

Dr. Ellen Perrault, Teaching Professor, and the Dean of the Faculty of Social Work at the University of Calgary, is gentle yet solid as a rock. Dr. Perrault has over 30 years of experience in education and organizational leadership, research, evaluation, and post-secondary educational development. With this, she leads the faculty with charisma, strives for organizational improvement, and is always looking to support and maximize people's potential. By focusing on strategic outcomes and building partnerships, Dr. Perrault has been instrumental in steering the faculty to greater heights. Dr. Ajwang' Warria, recently posed the following questions to Dr. Perrault:

**Warria:** Give us a memorable experience you've had with a newcomer in Calgary, Alberta?

**Perrault:** Recently, I had the pleasure of helping a newcomer arrive and settle into their new campus home. One challenge that day was finding the correct person to acquire their door key, which took several hours. They also needed immediate supplies for their children and cell phones, which we found around the neighbourhood shops. The family seemed so excited on that first day, even though they were very jetlagged!



**Warria:** How did the partnership between the Faculty of Social Work and ISC come about?

**Perrault:** ISC had the vision of improving the service system for newcomers, refugees, and immigrants. They had the vision of creating a place where a newcomer could come and get an effective referral for any settlement need,

they had. And if you created a place like that – how could we learn from it? How could we build new knowledge from those families' and individuals' experiences and the practitioners and share that knowledge across Canada? We envisioned a Knowledge Hub (K-Hub) with the University of Calgary that would collaboratively and effectively bring service providers together to collect newcomer's experiences. Studying their experiences – their data – would allow us to identify missing services and improve the whole system of support.

Of course, the goal is to make the transition easier for newcomers to Canada – like the family I just mentioned – and to better support the organizations who do such fantastic frontline work.

**Warria: What progress have you made?**

**Perrault:** Well, I think we're off to an amazing start. We're already building an excellent team of researchers and interns within ISC. Faculty of Social Work prof Dr. Ajwang' Warria is leading the University of Calgary side of the equation, with Dr. Vibha Kaushik, the Director, Research & Policy Development at ISC. We are also continuing to raise funds for the project. We were fortunate to jointly secure for a Mitacs Accelerate grant (up to CAD\$1.035 million), allowing us to hire and mentor the student researchers we need to bring the hub to life. In addition, we have recruited an experienced research advisory committee who will advise the K-Hub as we grow. So, we're off to a good start in making the K-Hub a reality.

**Warria: What are some challenges that you have noticed thus far?**

**Perrault:** Any time you're working with multiple partners in a collaborative way, it takes time. You need time to get to know and trust one another, and we need time to share and understand the vision broadly. The other important point is that collaboratively collecting personal data is a complex process, and we must take the time to ensure we do it correctly. Some of the information collected will be confidential, so how do we protect that confidentiality, and how do we respectfully ask people for their consent? These are some of the challenges we'll be working through together.

**Warria: What are people's reactions when you explain the K-Hub?**

**Perrault:** First, people are excited by the idea, and they can immediately see the value. **I think people are also interested, maybe even surprised, that UCalgary is so actively supporting a community agency to reach its valuable goals of improving practice and systems!**

Folks are also keen to learn more about data dashboards that the K-Hub will create. And we are eager to share our new insights to improve systems in other municipalities and even across Canada.

Thank you for sharing kind words with us and our readers. ■

# A CELEBRATION OF THE NEWCOMER KNOWLEDGE HUB'S RESEARCH ADVISORY GROUP

**Megan Gill and Ajwang' Warria**

This contribution is a celebration of the Newcomer Knowledge Hub's (K-Hub) Research Advisory Group. The group is comprised of professionals from the newcomer sector and academia. Among the practitioners are Susan Brooke, who serves as Vice President for Community Impact and Partnerships at the United Way of Calgary; Marisa Cooper holding the role of Research Social Planner within the Community Strategies division at City of Calgary; and Katerina Palova, who holds the position of Manager for Research & Program Development at The Immigrant Education Society (TIES). As for the academic representatives within the Advisory Group, they belong to the Faculty of Social Work (FSW) at the University of Calgary and include Dr. David Nicholas and Dr. Jackie Sieppert. It is essential to acknowledge the role played by Dr. Ellen Perrault who, as the Dean of the FSW, was instrumental in the inception of the K-Hub and the subsequent development of the Research Advisory Group. We also extend our recognition to Yared Belayneh for his valuable input on community development. The co-chairing responsibilities are shared by Dr. Vibha Kaushik from Immigrant Services Calgary (ISC) and Dr. Ajwang' Warria from the FSW at the University of Calgary. In addition, Deborah Anjorin and Onyinye Orekyeh have been instrumental in offering administrative support.



## What is a Research Advisory Group and how do they contribute to the K-Hub?

A research advisory body acts as a partner in providing guidance and counsel on research-related issues. Members are carefully selected based on their complementary fields of expertise and their relevance to the nature and planning of the research projects and implementation of the ideas brought forth. These bodies are important to the research process as the members offer expert insight and recommendations in specific domains within the research work (University of Waterloo, n.d.).

K-Hub is dedicated to the analysis of the de-identified newcomer data and serves as a platform for the dissemination of insights fostering continuous learning and sharing to improve the Gateway newcomer assessment and referral system. The K-Hub provides knowledge for Gateway program improvements and further evidence-based knowledge is shared with partners in the settlement

sector and beyond. The overall goal of the K-Hub is to establish a space and network dedicated to capturing, sharing, and exchanging experiences to accelerate newcomer services and be a thought leader in newcomer matters in Alberta, Canada and beyond.

The overarching vision of the K-Hub is to create new knowledge and use it to improve client service, practice, and societal systems. K-Hub's Research Advisory Group undertakes the crucial role of supporting its Co-Chairs, namely Vibha Kaushik and Ajwang' Warria, in determining and implementing K-Hub's visionary goals. The K-Hub team recognizes that this is a challenging undertaking but as Dr. Ellen Perrault puts it, the Advisory Group will do this by determining "**Vision: What will the future look like? Impact: What difference will we make? Problem: What problem will we solve? Solution: What solution will we need to develop? Challenges: What will we need to address? People: Who will we involve? [and] how will we communicate during the project?**" The process of selecting the Research Advisory Group was extensive and it involved the (i) development of a Terms of Reference outlining the expectations, (ii) identification of potential group members, and (iii) careful selection and invitation of potential advisors whose expertise aligned with the goals we had envisioned for the K-Hub. As the K-Hub continues to grow in the future, we anticipate the Research Advisory Group will also expand accordingly.





While each member of the Research Advisory Group possesses unique experiences and expertise, we must not underestimate the power of collective discussions and decision-making. When asked about their contributions to the Research Advisory Group and their aspirations for future contributions, we received diverse responses. **Susan Brooke** brings experience in collecting and analyzing data to evaluate Gateway's work; and in relationship building to establish partnerships that can work collaboratively to change systems for the better. **Marisa Cooper** has experience working in organizations that serve the public at both municipal and provincial levels and therefore understands these systems and can identify the impact of policy, community engagement efforts, and non-profit organization funding. **Katerina Palova** brings expertise in managing many diverse research projects for immigrant serving organizations; therefore, can offer practical ideas to create fair and objective services for newcomers. **Dr. Jackie Sieppert** holds wisdom based on three decades of being a researcher. He has based his career on working in the community and has definite perspectives on how academic research needs to shift to be useful in practice and truly ground research in the community. He believes that the use of data will be determined by the viewpoints and understandings the group develops together. Therefore, creating a common lens and language to use for the group's collaborative decision-making process is what is most important. **Dr. David Nicholas** has been involved in multiple community-based research projects and brings the perspective that ensuring equity, diversity, and inclusion in our community and society is an urgent priority. He believes in research that reveals and addresses barriers to improve supports and services that ultimately promote increased quality of life among newcomers to Canada. **Dr. Ellen Perrault** possesses an understanding of how organizations can work together to achieve success through strategies like establishing role clarity, developing effective relationships, and ensuring that policies and settlement practices are positively impacting newcomers.

### **Join us in celebrating the Research Advisory Group!**

As the government continues to emphasize the importance of increased immigration to strengthen the Canadian economy, now more than ever, it is the service providers' obligation to assess the efficacy of the settlement sector. This assessment is imperative, and avenues like K-Hub and centres of excellence play a pivotal role, with data serving as a valuable resource in helping practitioners, rights advocates, and policymakers in making informed decisions. Research becomes the driving force behind the development of improved interventions. It has now been more than one year since the Research Advisory Group assumed their roles. It's a good time to celebrate the achievements that we have earned together. What better way to commemorate the excellent work of the group and chart a relational way forward than this piece, which honours the lives of newcomers accessing services at ISC and their partner organizations within the Gateway network.

Having a Research Advisory Group comprised of individuals with such rich experiences and wisdom within research, academics, practice, and funding sectors is a gift to the K-Hub. It's a gift that keeps giving because their collective wisdom and how they constantly

contribute is irreplaceable. Each member's commitment and dedication to creating a collaborative space where everyone's knowledge can be utilized to better advance the K-Hub, and in turn newcomer's settlement process, is commendable. Groups like this guiding evidence-based research that can ultimately change systems for the better is an important aspect of any of human service. **The collective mission is simple, improve Canadian settlement processes and enhance the settlement experiences of newcomers. K-Hub, driven by the wise counsel and guidance from the Research Advisory Group, is well equipped and committed to achieving this goal.** With the Research Advisory Group by our side, we are ready to address the complex questions surrounding newcomers and their transition to Alberta with confidence and determination! ■

*We acknowledge the input of the Research Advisory Group in preparing this article. This short piece is dedicated to the loving memory of Dr. Cesar Suva, a Research Advisory Group member from TIES who supported us and showed immense dedication and passion to the K-Hub and newcomer issues generally. Cesar sadly passed away in December 2022. May his soul rest in love and peace.*

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# DYNAMIC COLLABORATIVE UPDATE: STANDARDIZING INFORMED CONSENT AND INFORMATION SHARING

**Nchedo Udobata, Jeff Halvorsen, and Ajwang' Warria**

*"Ugh", I sigh, exhausted as I slouch my shoulders after filling out my fifth intake form*  
– A common refrain of newcomer clients

Relocating to a new country to establish a new life can be daunting, and newcomers often encounter numerous barriers in the process. In the Canadian context, settlement agencies within the broader social service sector are tasked with providing essential assistance to newcomers. Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) estimates that approximately one million services are delivered to newcomers annually (Government of Canada, 2021). These programs help with settlement but navigating services and obligatory consenting processes can be barriers.

Gateway, a project of Immigrant Services Calgary (ISC), is designed as a central service intake. Supporting Gateway is the Newcomer Knowledge Hub (K-Hub), a collaborative project between ISC and the Faculty of Social Work at the University of Calgary. The K-Hub centers around using anonymized and aggregated immigrant, refugee, and settlement-related data and information to improve newcomer services with the goal of enhancing settlement experiences. In early 2023, settlement sector leaders were invited to participate in a *Dynamic Collaborative* working group to share perspectives on the development of a sector-wide newcomer-informed consent process.

## **The Dynamic Collaborative Initiative**

The K-Hub established the Dynamic Collaborative to: (i) generate new knowledge and advance best practices in the service sector, (ii) provide input, experience, and specialized knowledge to address specific gaps in the sector and to generate tangible actions such as policy recommendations, collective action initiatives, and new research directions, and (iii) to build newcomer-researcher-practitioner networks to

co- create solutions to newcomer problems. The inaugural workshop, held on April 22, 2023, brought together key stakeholders including funding organizations, settlement practitioners, policymakers, and researchers. The purpose was to discuss standardization of informed consent process with newcomers and to examine how the process could integrate best practices to respect service users' autonomy, privacy, and safety.

## Consent in the Settlement Services Sector

In the context of social services, the concept of consent refers to a voluntary agreement reached by service users to engage in specific programs. It is more than just obtaining a signature on a document – it is about ensuring that service users fully understand the purpose, benefits, and potential risks associated with their participation. McLaughlin and Alfaro-Velcamp (2015) emphasize that potential harm is relative to the client and their experiences.

In reflecting on agency practices, following gaps were identified:

- i)** The need to provide information in a manner that empowers newcomers to offer their informed consent for practice and research. Additionally, there should be clarity between granting consent for receiving services and sharing information for research purposes.
- ii)** How and when newcomers must be informed about their right to decline participation in a research project without any consequences to accessing and receiving services.
- iii)** Ensuring that consent is an ongoing process and one that takes into consideration the newcomers autonomy.
- iv)** Pursuing communal versus individual consent and the process of facilitating both.
- v)** Diversity in language/s and methods of pursuing the informed consent;
- vi)** Consenting processes for differently abled, persons, children, and youth.
- vii)** Consent processes for multiple programs when accessing services.
- viii)** (Existing) power and gender imbalances between the newcomer and the service provider or the person facilitating the consenting process.
- ix)** Complete anonymization of the data.



## Establishing Consent at a Sectoral Level

When agencies secure consent from newcomers to provide services, the consent does not automatically extend to any other purposes unless explicitly stated. The workshop participants identified a tangible opportunity within the social service sector to standardize the process of obtaining consent for both services and research objectives during the pre-service phase. **A standardized framework for collecting informed consent for research and evaluation will:** (i) facilitate aggregation of settlement data in a manner conducive to longitudinal analysis, (ii) enhance the potential for valuable information exchange for partnering agencies in gauging achievement of intended outcomes of services, (iii) offer a significant opportunity to increase the sector's knowledge of newcomer needs, service use, and long-term outcomes and (iv) the potential to integrate best practices in research and practice ethics for immigrants and newcomers who may have experienced varying levels of adversities and hardships in their lives – along the migration continuum.

## Consent and Data Sharing Agreements

When delving into the ethical considerations of data collection and sharing with newcomers, the foremost aspect to address is informed consent – specifically, how it is obtained and maintained over the course of service provision and the research project. Informed consent necessitates furnishing service users with all requisites culturally sensitive information for them to arrive at well-informed decisions. Drawing from the First Nations Information Governance (2023) ownership, control, access, and possession (OCAP) principles, it is noteworthy that while an individual might provide consent, ethical practice indicates that the researcher seeks community affirmation for the project and involves the community from the start of the research process (Marshall & Rossman, 2011), for instance, through advisory committees and

involving cultural brokers and mediators. Newcomers may face language barriers that complicate their understanding of consenting processes. Consent cannot be deemed ethically obtained if newcomers lack a functional understanding of the language used.

Other key issues include power relations, gender dynamics, and the timing of consent. Settlement agencies must contemplate the power and influence they wield when seeking consent from newcomers for service provision. Additionally, the timing of consent can potentially skew newcomer' responses. Therefore, consideration of ethical principles and ethics of care demands within the consenting process are undertaken when power imbalance is minimal, and at a time that removes any pressure of acquiescence by service users.

Collaborative research partnerships are crucial to mitigating excessive research burden on newcomers, especially refugees. Consequently, ISC's partnership with other service agencies aims to prevent the duplication of research efforts. Nevertheless, the exchange of data among these partners must adhere to methods that prioritize data safety and service users' privacy. It was noted that **while ethical regulations govern academic research involving human subjects, no established guidelines exist for organizations or private bodies engaged in research involving human participants other than privacy legislation and professional codes of ethics.** This can complicate partnerships among newcomers, settlement organizations and research units at institutions.



## Implications for the Sector

The current complex landscape of multiple consent procedures within the social service sector impedes collaboration and data sharing necessary to create the insights needed to improve sector level service delivery and which is the antithesis to the Dynamic Collaborative mission and objectives. Dynamic Collaborative participants observed that informed consent for both service and research activities hold significant policy implications for effectively serving newcomer populations. Standardizing the consent process across the sector provides a worthwhile opportunity to make the current information more useful and provide information on sector-wide questions and improve the experience of newcomers. It also offers an opportunity to systematically integrate best practices in collecting informed consent.

In response to these challenges and opportunities, participants lauded the Dynamic Collaborative initiative and proposed an expansion of its mission beyond information sharing to bridging policy gaps. This can be done through collective strategic planning and the formulation of recommendations that not only enhances Gateway services but also aligns with the broader objective of service integration and optimization. Other recommendations included adopting a community-centric approach i.e., acknowledging the pivotal role of grassroots organizations and newcomers with lived experience in facilitating community-centric consent and shaping inclusive policies. A community-centric

approach will underscore the initiative's mission, the organization's values, and the sector's commitment to community engagement, participation, and empowerment.

## Looking Ahead

The roundtable discussion concluded by examining the policy and practice implications for the sector. Collectively, the group confirmed that there is value in pursuing the objective of a standardized and streamlined consent process for the newcomer sector. However, the group advised that collecting informed consent would require a more nuanced understanding of the diverse situations newcomers face, the use of the information, and the politics of implementation in the settlement sector. The call to streamline and standardize consent procedures not only addresses immediate gaps in consenting processes but also expands collaboration among diverse service providers. Achieving a streamlined process can amplify client empowerment and increase agency adherence to ethical, legal, and practice requirements across the sector. ■





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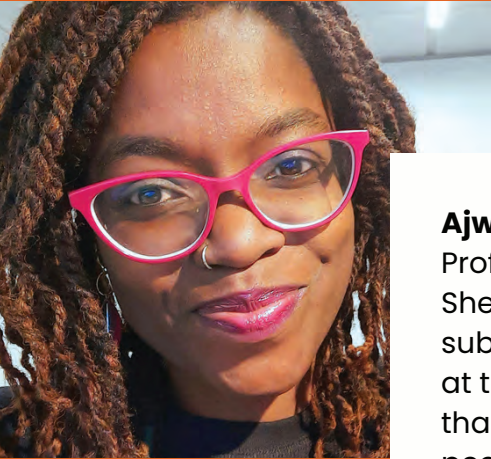
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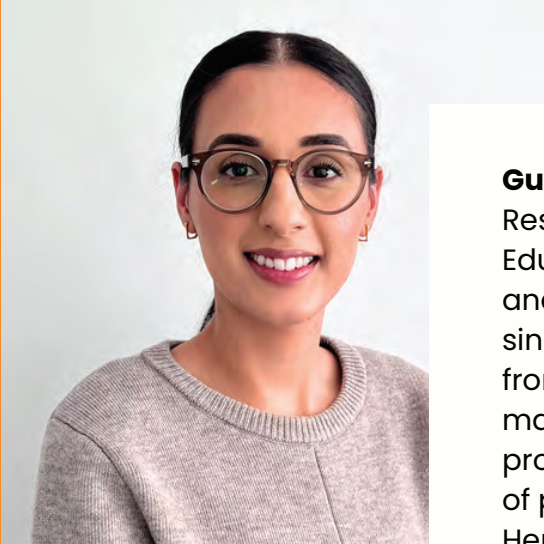


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