

# Community Priorities in Ottawa

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Over the past year, community priorities have evolved significantly. The changes reflect the impact of the pandemic, priorities and needs of the partners, and evolving policy & programming context across sectors. Drawing extensive partner engagements, observations, and analysis, OLIP compiled the following list of priorities for IRCC, as a guide for organizations to design programs and services that support the settlement and integration of immigrants in a changing context.

## COMMUNITY-BASED PLANNING CAPACITY, LED BY OLIP

### 1. Alignments with Post-COVID Planning Frameworks

Key institutions in the city are planning improvements in how they address the needs of immigrants and racialized populations, to address major inequities revealed by the COVID pandemic. Alignment of the planning frameworks and priorities of these institutions will create an enabling environment for collaborations across sectors and greater collective impact. More capacity is needed at OLIP to pursue increasing alignment opportunities.

### 2. Data Capacity Development

There is an on-going need to improve program planning capacity. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed systemic inequities that demand new capacity of organizations to access, collect and use disaggregated data to detect the sources of inequities and evaluate the effectiveness of programs implemented. Building on a data capacity development collaboration with IRCC and recent developments in the context of COVID, OLIP will need more capacity to manage a large amount of newly acquired data and to create narratives that contextualize the data. The narratives will be co-created with OLIP partners and community stakeholders. New capacity is also needed at OLIP to leverage on-going improvements in data availability and greater commitment by partners to plan for equitable results.

#### **Progress in Data Capacity Development**

Building on Data Capacity Development Collaboration with IRCC, OLIP

- Hosted six consultations with partners to establish measurement frameworks
- Expanded the data collaboration partnership, which now includes IRCC, the City of Ottawa, Ottawa Public Health, Labour Market Information Council, and the Ottawa Health Team
- Secured new funding from the Community Foundation of Ottawa and the City of Ottawa (up to March 2022)
- Established an OLIP Data Strategy & Plan

### 3. Fostering Welcoming Atmosphere & Improving Social Connections – COVID has exacerbated feelings of isolation amid COVID-related hardships for many newcomer families. Public health measures,

limited access to space, and closing of in-person services have combined to create family pressures and greater risks of experiencing mental health challenges. In this regard, OLIP is very eager to resume and strengthen the Welcoming Ottawa Week activities to demonstrate that Ottawa values immigrants, and most importantly to foster social connections so critical to integrate in a new community. Organizations may need increased community connections investments to establish and strengthen client engagement channels and to further leverage the WOW platform.

4. Alignment of settlement services with IRCC immigration streams:

Working with IRCC-funded organizations to ensure that changes to IRCC immigration streams are reflected in services being offered to ensure evolving needs are adequately reflected in service offerings. This entails building alignments with the City of Ottawa and other key organizations and developing targeted cross-sectoral collaborations to address different clients' needs through client-centric approaches that include currently ineligible populations.

5. Addressing the Neighborhood Dimension of Newcomer Settlement & Integration

Current patterns of economic integration and access to affordable housing determine the neighborhood choices available to newcomers. Neighborhoods are not equal in terms of available support services, quality of schools, access to recreation, access to nutritious foods, and many other dimensions of life. This means that the needs of newcomers living in low-income neighborhoods thus tends to be higher. In this regards, geographic mapping of settlement supports available in under-served neighborhoods and alignment of settlement service planning to the needs of newcomers in low-income neighborhoods is necessary. One time investment in a special project to establish framework and process to support a new approach for targeting settlement services to designated neighborhoods is needed.

6. Newcomers and Reconciliation - OLIP has identified the need to orient newcomers to the Canadian history of indigenous populations, largely through education and awareness opportunities, and through the promotion of initiatives such as updating the Citizenship oath.

The Government of Canada continues to work on the citizenship study guide, associated study materials, and the new citizenship test. Updates to the guide are in response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commissions call to better reflect the perspectives and history of Indigenous peoples of Canada. IRCC has engaged a wide range of stakeholders, including with Indigenous peoples, minority populations, women, Francophones, and Canadians with disabilities to update the citizenship study guide. A launch date for the revised guide will be announced.

On June 21, 2021, Bill C-8, An Act to amend the Citizenship Act (Truth and Reconciliation Commission Call to Action number 94) received Royal Assent. The bill responds to Call to Action #94 of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and amends the Oath of Citizenship to include the recognition and affirmation of the rights of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples.

7. Cultivating Equitable & Inclusive Organizations

There is an on-going need for facilitating and supporting local organizations to build internal capacity for equity and inclusion. Investments that complement and complete current work in this area is needed, including anti-racism campaign; "how-to" tools and resource to support change trajectories organizations are taking.

## SETTLEMENT SERVICES & DELIVERY CAPACITY

### 1. Hybrid Service Delivery Capacity Building & Digital Literacy

Settlement SPOs had to shift settlement service delivery too quickly. And as the pandemic evolves, it is expected that hybrid digital/in-person approaches will be used going forward. Resources would be needed for planning on a new model of service delivery both in terms of how clients receive the services and where the workforces are located. This includes:

- a) The development and implementation of new processes, policies and systems and a review of pathways that will require scale-ups of the technological infrastructure and investments in change management to implement each agencies' individual vision.
- b) Operationalization of LASI portal: funds for maintenance, updating and usage of the customized settlement service delivery platform initiated with SDI funding.
- c) Technology & remote resources: technology audits and road mapping to assess needs; provide infrastructure and equipment (servers, routers, mobile devices, software), increase systems' security, network capacity and internet bandwidth and hiring of specialized IT staff for maintenance and cyber-security.
- d) Service digitization: redesign of existing learning content to adjust for online delivery in virtual platforms.
- e) Digital literacy: resources to train clients navigate the platforms used for virtual service delivery.
- f) Identification and evaluation of new roles: resources for the identification and evaluation of new and modified roles that emerged during the pandemic to support future digital service delivery, beyond IT technicians, that will work as facilitators bridging the new needs.

***Service providers can speak to their officers about additional supports required to improve the organization's capacity to deliver online or hybrid services.***

### 2. Professional Development for Settlement Workers

There is an on-going need for professional development for settlement workers. This should include tools for case management as well as evolving resources for orientation and referrals, to keep up with changes in other housing, social, health, and education services. Furthermore, investments in technology would need to be paired with **digital literacy training** to increase the capacities of settlement counsellors to orient clients in the use of digital tools and new model of service delivery.

- ***Service providers have a professional development line in their agreement, they can speak to their officer regarding the possibility of additional professional development.***

### 3. More Settlement Workers in Schools

COVID has exacerbated the adaptation challenges typically experienced by newcomer students. Digital inequities and fewer supports meant that many students are falling behind. Furthermore, the number of newcomer students joining schools is increasing because of the TR-PR transitions. More settlement workers in schools may be needed.

- ***Service providers who deliver TEE, SWIS can approach officer for an amendment.***

4. Youth Settlement Supports, Beyond Settlement Workers in Schools

There is a significant gap in newcomer youth services and engagement in Ottawa, especially in neighborhoods with high concentration of immigrant families. Investments in youth settlement support capacity in the supports provided by settlement SPOs may be necessary.

- *This includes before and after school programming, home-work clubs, group sessions, summer camps, etc.*

5. Mental Health & Crisis Counselling – There is a growing need for culturally appropriate mental health counselling for newcomers. This support may be needed as a standard settlement support to ensure newcomers are afforded psychological support as they navigate the challenges of integration. *Additional resources (including HR) are needed to **support the mental health of Settlement SPOs'** employees to address over-burden and experiences of trauma caused by high pressure and extreme client hardships during the COVID-19 pandemic.*

- ***Short-term crisis counselling, case management, and information and orientation sessions focusing on mental health are all eligible activities and expenses.***

6. Economic integration & Employment Services

Post-COVID Economic Recovery Plan provides an opportunity to shape Ottawa's Talent Strategy and facilitate collaborative action initiatives, such as: creation of special employment pathways; improved access to trades opportunities, improvements to the hiring of internationally trained health professionals, and improvements to youth employment. Expansion of employment programming within settlement service may be needed to create collaboration capacity with other economic development entities in the city to advance these goals, and to reflect changing environment and client needs. Investment is specifically needed for the following:

- a) Youth Employment Supports: increased access to devices and digital literacy that will enable them access to online employment and language assessments tools.
- b) Resources for employer engagement to impact the labor market integration.
- c) Redevelopment of the Job Search Workshop: to update the 20-year-old JSW curriculum to integrate essential skills and current pre-employment initiatives to enable newcomers' access to commensurate employment. Resources that may be required to this effect are staffing, training in essential skills, access to assessment tools and platforms to implement self-directed online learning.

7. Gender-Based Violence Prevention

A national survey found that during the height of the COVID-19 lockdown in Canada gender-based violence was more severe and more frequent, with abusers' tactics becoming more violent, and frequently deadly. Additional resources may be required by Settlement SPO's not only to handle additional cases of immigrant women reaching out for support on violence related issues but to pursue preventive measures such as neighbourhood outreach for awareness and prevention of violence against women.

8. Seniors' support services

To address the isolation and burden that COVID-19 public health measures and digitization of services has placed on senior immigrants, Settlement SPO's might need additional resources to enhance their services on social outreach and connection, digital literacy and address language barriers; including hiring additional personnel to cover clients' needs beyond traditional office hours.

## SUPPORTS FOR COVID CRISES RESPONSE AND BEYOND

### 1. Health Equity and Navigation

Settlement SPO's have provided additional supports to their clients to enable them access to COVID-19 preventive and protective measures, such as testing, isolation, and vaccination. According to Ottawa Public Health statistics 63% of people infected by COVID-19 are racialized, and among these 80% are immigrants. This means that additional resources are needed by Settlement SPO's to continue providing services to clients that will enable them access to safe, culturally sensitive and language appropriate services both to access vaccination and services within the COVID-19 context and beyond. This includes:

- Providing COVID related information to newcomer clients
- Facilitating vaccine clinic access: staff for client appointment bookings, registration and assistance at vaccination clinics
- Collaborating with community health organizations to set up vaccine clinics for high-risk newcomer populations or neighbourhoods
- Support services such as childcare, transportation, translation, interpretation and supports for newcomers with disabilities
- Additional in person-supports for case-managed clients. ***This may include establishing coordination with OPH COVID case management and accepting referrals for wrap-around settlement supports.***

### 2. Food Security

The ravaging effects of COVID-19 in the Canadian economy meant that many immigrants lost their jobs, while some newcomers might not have been eligible to access federal support programs like Canada Emergency Response Benefit due to lacking eligibility criteria such as a required minimum income from the precedent year. As a result, food security became a pressing need for immigrant families who requested supports from Settlement SPO's. Additional resources may be required to continue their work on food security, as the need might continue even beyond COVID-19.