



Briefing Note:

Program Re-Set: Future Directions and Contribution Agreement (CA) Negotiations

As we turn our attention towards CA negotiations and moving forward with re-set discussions, the Settlement sector, represented by all CISSA-ACSEI members and OCASI, would like to share some thoughts.

Settlement agencies by the nature of our respective missions and mandates are adept to change. Our ability to be responsive and flexible has been proven and tested numerous times over the past several decades. More recently, Operation Syrian Refugee highlighted our capacity and expertise in welcoming and supporting 25,000 Syrian Government Assisted Refugees within less than a 6-month period. If not for our leadership and concerted efforts, the outcome of the in-Canada operation and public opinion would have been significantly different. We value the ability to engage with IRCC NHQ in a collaborative partnership that strengthens national policy, program development and newcomer outcomes. Recent developments in some IRCC regions have given us pause to question this partnership.

We appreciate and understand the importance of change in response to new and emerging needs, client volumes, etc. We are a sector that has led and continues to lead in adaptation and innovation. This is the essence of our respective operations but what concerns us, is the sense that change driven by a top-down approach without stating the context or rationale, is resulting in heightened stress and anxiety among agencies. To be clear, we are not against change but what alarms us is that we have no understanding of what is driving new program directions.

As an example, it appears that the Prairie Region wants to introduce a new centralized and standardized needs assessment and case management system. The Settlement Sector has not had time to review the implications of this proposed new case management approach but we do have several process concerns at this time. Local agencies have not been consulted on the proposed new model, have no insight into the research that may support this change or understand what



the problem is that IRCC is trying to solve. This has alarmed our membership in other regions of the country leading to questioning the underlying notion and guiding principles of our collaborative partnership. Besides the lack of consultation on the ground, within these circumstances, how do regional priorities and significant system changes reflect the notion of comparable services and national standards? NSIC, as a venue, allows us to have informed discussions on program and system changes that directly impact newcomers and the Settlement sector. What is currently taking place on the ground seems very far from the intent and purpose of NSIC.

We have engaged with IRCC over many years in shaping the evolution of settlement services in this country ensuring that the program remains driven by research findings, client needs, service gaps, innovation, program evaluation and outcomes. This is the essence of what drives us as we strive for service excellence, ensuring that immigrants and refugees can successfully settle and integrate into Canadian society.

As we embark on upcoming Contribution Agreement (CA) negotiations and our ongoing 're-set' discussions, we would like IRCC NHQ to consider the following guiding principles/points:

- Explain the context, rationale and provide sufficient time to embark on significant new program directions that allows current agencies to adequately plan and manage change transitions; What is the role of existing agencies in regard to possible significant system changes eg new customized case management services?
- We are still waiting for the list of recently approved new service providers to consider their possible membership within our respective umbrella association governance structures as well as to better understand the context of what needs new providers are addressing;
- We want greater flexibility in addressing employee compensation so that it is reflective of employer salary administrative structures and collective agreements while supporting, on a national basis, the need for health, dental and retirement benefit standards. Some member agencies learnt prior to the election writ that IRCC Program Officers was stipulating that agencies would only receive a maximum wage contributions of 2% annually. This is not helpful and perpetuates the current compensation inadequacies across the country;



- Remember that significant program changes need time to implement. We need to risk manage unfunded employer liabilities including lease agreements and staffing resources so if necessary, allow us to build contingency plans or longer roll out periods. Do not expect new program changes to commence April 1, 2020 if we do not have signed CA's in place until March. We cannot turn around that fast;
- There continues to be serious concerns related to how IRCC defines eligible budgetary items within the 15% maximum administrative fee provision. One example to illustrate is the placement of program delivery staff telephones into administrative budgets. Although this example may seem insignificant, every program delivery item, as we define, that is moved to the administrative fee of each CA creates serious challenges to most providers. In short, this prevents us from containing administrative costs within the 15% maximum allowable. We need greater flexibility on such expenses and, as an example, believe that program delivery costs such as staff telephones should remain within program delivery budget category;
- With increase use of technology to deliver services and maintaining accountability and reporting requirements, we hope that IRCC will consider capital cost replacements, ensuring that agencies can replace aging equipment including computers. It is not always clear to the sector that IRCC is committed to contributing to such program related costs;
- While we recognize and support recent changes and pilots related to CA's eg slippage carry-over, increase flexibility to move funds around, we must move forward within our 're-set' discussions in reducing the financial reporting burdens that directly hamper our ability to enhance settlement outcomes, service responsiveness and innovation. We are in agreement that we must provide appropriate levels of accountability. However, it is not clear to us why after negotiating a CA and agreeing on a budget and corresponding proposed activities and outputs that we continue to need to provide the current level of financial oversight. Do we need cash flow projections when we have agreed on a stated funding amount? Does it matter which quarter we allocate and spend funding during the year as long as they are directly related to agreed upon service activities and targets? Why is it important to report when we overspent or underspent within a particular



financial statement period thus potentially triggering the necessity for a revised cash flow and CA amendment if the funding and service activities and targets remain the same?

- How many FTE's within IRCC and the Settlement sector could be redirected to service delivery and outcomes if we were able to significantly lessen the financial reporting preoccupation while still providing an appropriate level of accountability? This is an area of significant importance to us that we hope we can work collaboratively to address over the next year; and,
- Negotiations with our respective IRCC Program Officers must be consistent within the regional offices and with national directives. Too often we are informing our Program Officers about messages that we are hearing nationally that they have yet to learn about. While we can appreciate the complexity of the national settlement network structure, we do not always realize the results of our national deliberations at the regional level. This can create tension between agencies and their respective Program Officers. It would be helpful, as an example, if IRCC shared national CA negotiation guidelines with the Settlement sector.

We value our collaborative working relationship that has grown and deepened over time. This partnership is unique within the federal government. It is our hope that we can continue to work together defining our collective successes and impact within a context of greater interest and importance of our work within Canadian society.