

Prototyping New Approaches to Improve Newcomer Settlement Experience

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Organisation: Vandenbergunn

Country: Canada

Level of government: Central government

Sector: General public services

Type: Methods

Launched in: 2014

Overall development time: 2 year(s) 6 month(s)

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Description

Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada is using prototyping to test emerging tools and innovative ways of delivering services to continue to improve the settlement and integration experience of immigrants and refugees in Canada. Small-scale prototypes help test the effectiveness and efficiency of “non-traditional” settlement services before devoting significant funding to new approaches.

Why the innovation was developed

- Primarily through Resettlement and Settlement programming that operates in all provinces/territories outside of Quebec, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) already supports the economic and social integration of newcomers to Canada, including refugees.
 - Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) funds services that help newcomers settle and adapt to life in Canada, as funded through Contribution Agreements and delivered by external organizations.
 - For over two years, through its Integration and Foreign Credentials Referral Office, IRCC has been applying social innovation approaches within the Settlement Program to address the more complex problems faced by newcomers such as underemployment, social isolation, and information asymmetry.
 - Prototype projects have provided a low-risk, low-cost mechanism to learn how the program delivery can be adjusted or enhanced by testing new innovative tools and techniques, new ways of delivering services and expanded partnerships.
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Objectives

Develop staff capacity, Improve access, Improve effectiveness, Improve efficiency, Improve service quality, Improve user satisfaction, Support economic growth

Main beneficiaries

Civil Society, Ethnic or racial minorities, Government staff, High-risk populations, Low-income groups, Other

- immigrants and refugees in Canada

Results

Efficiency

- By testing new innovative approaches at a smaller scale, the prototype projects allow for delivery organizations to learn within a short time frame (typically a month or two) how to improve program delivery.
 - The prototyping is not the same as a longer term more robust test or randomized control trials of an intervention, however as a 'light touch' test it provides valuable information in a more efficient way.
 - In addition, the small scale, rapid, low-cost characteristics of the prototype projects are efficient uses of time and resources to learn quickly.
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Effectiveness

- By testing new innovative approaches to supporting newcomer integration, results and information are gained to inform future, more effective programming.
 - In addition, new partnerships and collaborations, at the community level, have been developed as a result of these prototype projects, which lend themselves to more dynamic future programming and efforts.
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Other improvements

- Learning
- The hands-on approach allows for the Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship to learn directly about the work of traditional delivery organizations, and of the ways in which new partners can be valuable to future delivery of settlement programming.
- Valuable insights have been gained into how programming can be enhanced, and we have also learned through honest feedback on what does work as well.

Development

Design

The idea was generated out of small budget scope and rooted in design thinking methodology. When faced with a small budget to try new innovative practices, the policy innovation team, within a larger program policy group, implemented this opportunity and provided funding to external organization to try new ideas at a very small scale. Many of the innovative intervention ideas were generated by the service delivery organizations. Design time: 6 month(s)

Testing

- IRCC has implemented roughly 60 small-scale prototypes since 2013. Over first two trial years, the prototyping approach has become somewhat more formalized.
- Plans for the current (third year) include an experimental design for at least one prototype project to test different ideas against one another and in comparison to a control group.
- These first three years will represent "testing" of prototyping and experimenting with new approaches.

Testing time: 2 year(s)

Challenges and solutions

- The funding mechanism used is through contracting. Working with the contracting group has proved to be very important, as a common understanding was required that prototyping was a form of research versus a form of service delivery which would traditionally be funded through a different funding mechanism (a Contribution Agreement).
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Partnerships

Various Organizations

Civil Society, Private sector

For design and delivery of each of the prototype projects, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada worked with community based service delivery organizations who were selected based on the proposals they submitted. These organizations included delivery organizations already funded through existing. Programming, and delivery organizations that had not received funding and new to the newcomer settlement area, but brought expertise, such as technology knowledge, to the project. Most organizations delivering prototype projects in the past have been not-for-profit organizations, but several were from the private sector. Policy analysts worked directly with delivery organizations to collaborate on design and delivery details of the prototype projects. Open dialogues were held at every step of the way, and this was reflected in the feedback reports. Delivery organizations commented on how helpful it was to have a directly link to the policy team and to co-design the innovative intervention in a collaborative process.

Lessons Learned

Lessons Learned

- Piloting new approaches at a very small scale can be valuable.
 - The flexibility of the approach has been a key success factor and care should be given to not formalizing the process too much.
 - Short-term feedback loops can be very helpful in adjusting thinking and direction within our department.
 - We recommend that to implement others should be open to adjusting the approach on each iteration and to inviting others to shape it in a collaboration (both internally and externally).
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Conditions for success

- In light of accountability regimes that govern contract spending, internal collaboration with financial and program teams is very important to ensure both the need for flexibility and the accountability regime requirements can be met.
 - Early buy-in on the structure and content of the prototyping process has been very important for smooth delivery.
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Other information

The prototyping approach has impacted how programming is designed and delivered and the Department's ability to experiment with new approaches immediately. Other positive impacts have included:

- Positive feedback from existing stakeholders (organizations funded through the Settlement Program) that the prototype funds have provided a low-risk opportunity to test new ideas;
- New collaborations created around the prototype project that have been sustained post-implementation;
- New partners in the newcomer settlement space who have contributed unusual approaches to solutions for complex problems; and
- Immediacy to test potentially solutions to complex solutions help to guide longer-term directions and investments (e.g. exploring text messaging services for refugees).

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