

RESILIENCE AND THE IMMIGRANT
SETTLEMENT SECTOR: A CONSIDERATION OF
THE PLACE OF ACCOUNTABILITY AND
PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT-

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

RESEARCH REPORT

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Executive Summary

Resilience is about the ability to rebound and adapt to change, disruption, adversity and/or stress. It is concerned with the return to a state of stability or even prosperity or greater functionality. For immigrants and their families, resilience relates to their ability to settle, adapt and prosper in their new country with the aid of the settlement service system. The resilience of the immigrant settlement sector and the newcomers they serve is dependent on a number of factors. Among these, in terms of resilience, is an underappreciated component centered on accountability and performance measurement by funders. Funder accountability and performance measurement systems are not neutral tools. They have for example, been connected to excessive organizational operational structures and reporting burdens that shift nonprofits' accountability focus away from newcomer clients and immigrant communities toward an excessive emphasis on addressing funder accountability 'needs'.

This report examines the theory, research and measurement frameworks informing evaluation strategies in the nonprofit sector and considering their impact on resilience related to immigrant settlement in Canada. The complexity and heterogeneity of settlement services delivery and the current state of the IRCC's accountability and performance measurement system are investigated. Finally, we detail the opportunity to empower service providers, drive better performance assessments, improve newcomer outcomes and promote more equitable, inclusive, vibrant and resilient communities for all.

KEY FINDINGS

- Non-profit organizations (NPOs) apply evaluation to support social innovation, identify program improvements, motivate and engage staff, assess partnerships, build capacity, facilitate strategic decision-making, measure the impact of and/or inform the

evolution of their organization's mission and most frequently, as an instrument of accountability and legitimacy.

- Accountability can be described in terms of its relationships: *upward* in relation to funders; *downward* with respect to its obligations to clients and communities served; and, *internal* accountabilities to an NPOs mission, staff, volunteers, partners, and management boards. An important distinction exists between *instrumental accountability* relating to transactions between an NPO service provider and its clients, donors or suppliers and *expressive accountability* that concerns value driven accountabilities to the community and organizational mission (e.g., advocacy, advancing values and extending caring functions).
- Nonprofits operate in resource constrained environments and funding type has been shown to have a profound impact on how NPOs prioritize accountabilities and on the measurement, strategies pursued. Research illuminates the dominance of upward accountability requirements in public service contracting which privilege instrumental accountability and short-term burdensome control mechanisms at the expense of capacity building, deeper impact and the expressive mission-focused activities that drive long-term social change. Higher proportions of government funding have also been associated with an increase in using evaluations for symbolic purposes (i.e., obtaining a "seal"). Further research demonstrates how short-term program metrics, such as cost per client measures, can work in opposition to long-term client success. For example, in many human services domains, studies have demonstrated that approaches advancing client agency, self-esteem and independence may take longer and

result in non-linear paths; however, these client-led models are more effective, leading to

better, more sustainable client outcomes.

NPOs recognize the critical importance of nuanced staff judgements and the intangibles that drive results; however, these factors are largely ignored in the dominant funder logic models and measurement frameworks.

- Canada welcomes approximately 340,000 permanent residents each year and promotes newcomer settlement through policies such as multiculturalism and a dense network of government funded supports delivered primarily through non-profit service provider organizations. Despite Canada's focus on immigration and the critical skills and experience newcomers bring, newcomers face higher unemployment and underemployment rates and significant wage disparities persist. Structural barriers such as systemic discrimination, program barriers, the diversity of client experiences and needs, and the non-linear, multi-generational nature of settlement are instructive of the complexity of the settlement process and the challenges involved in defining meaningful measurement strategies.
- An evaluation of Canada's performance with respect to newcomer integration and settlement must address full and equitable participation, recognition and belonging, both economically and in all aspects of Canadian society. This represents the public interest. Measurement of this nature would appropriately describe the gaps in performance and highlight the place of government intervention, investment and scale of collaboration, innovation and partnership with NPOs required, in order to effectively support newcomer resilience.

- Regrettably, our analysis revealed the IRCC's approach to be transactional, onerous and challenging NPO capacity. In this critical sector, NPO capacity building is essential but funding is insufficient. The government's emphasis on instrumental accountability (e.g., contract management) at the expense of expressive, mission-focused accountability appears to be odds with the data and analysis required to address urgent settlement system needs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommend a more balanced measurement framework that:

1. reflects the critical public and newcomer interest of *full and equitable participation*;
2. acknowledges the level of government-NPO partnership required to work towards this mission critical objective and address systemic issues;
3. incorporates a balanced scorecard approach to reflect the mission, objectives and capacity building needed to deliver sustainable results;
4. leverages interpretivist SROI methodologies to illuminate the intangibles fundamental to achieving outcomes;
5. privileges a longitudinal view;
6. supplants micro-level expense management with a more flexible response;
7. allows for experimentation and collaboration;
8. provides appropriate funding; and
9. builds upon the IRCC's positive movement towards longer term funding models.

Such reforms would promote a healthier more resilient immigrant settlement system and help to enhance the resilience capacity of newcomers themselves.