

# Building Data Capacity in Gender-specific Settlement Services

## Case Study

In November 2022, the Calgary Immigrant Women's Association (CIWA) joined the Practitioner Data Initiative (PDI) with the aim of enhancing their digital transformation efforts, particularly through the implementation of dynamic dashboards and other technological advancements.

Their initial goal was securing funding for technology and software, which was not readily available through traditional funding sources. However, in working with Blueprint's data experts, their focus evolved into more than just acquiring new tools: it became about improving their practices, streamlining processes, and building in-house capacity to sustain these changes and drive future growth and innovation.

November 2024

This report was produced as part of a project funded by the Future Skills Centre (FSC), with financial support from the Government of Canada's Future Skills Program.

FSC is a forward-thinking centre for research and collaboration dedicated to preparing Canadians for employment success. We believe Canadians should feel confident about the skills they have to succeed in a changing workforce. As a pan-Canadian community, we are collaborating to rigorously identify, test, measure, and share innovative approaches to assessing and developing the skills Canadians need to thrive in the days and years ahead. The Future Skills Centre was founded by a consortium whose members are Toronto Metropolitan University, Blueprint ADE, and The Conference Board of Canada

The opinions and interpretations in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of the Future Skills Centre or the Government of Canada.



## About the Calgary Immigrant Women's Association

Founded in 1982, CIWA is a nonprofit organization dedicated to empowering immigrant women and their families in Canada. CIWA recognizes and responds to the unique needs of this demographic, offering a wide range of programs and services that utilize a holistic approach to support clients in areas such as settlement and integration, language training, employment support, family violence prevention, and community development. Through personalized support and a deep understanding of the unique challenges faced by immigrant women, CIWA helps individuals achieve their personal and professional goals.

25,577

clients served

200

staff members

591

volunteers

59

programs  
and services

365

community and  
business partners

Harnessing program data is key to designing, delivering, and improving these integrated services. The tools and technology acquired through initiatives like PDI empower CIWA to integrate data across the organization and foster collaboration, enhance data literacy, and transform raw data into actionable insights. By leveraging these insights, CIWA continues to ensure that the right services are provided to the right people at the right time, fostering a greater sense of belonging and resilience among newcomers.

## What is the Practitioner Data Initiative?

**PDI is a pan-Canadian initiative that combines Blueprint's expert consultation and strategic support with a one-time financial investment of \$100-200K from the Future Skills Centre (FSC).**

PDI responds to the challenges nonprofits face in harnessing the power of their own data to improve their services and impact. As part of PDI, Blueprint marries financial investment with trusted and technology-neutral advice grounded in deep expertise with program data, technology solutions and nonprofit service delivery.

**Through a series of collaborative workshops and capacity-building activities, PDI:**

- Articulates an organization's goals for data storytelling and how their data collection is tied to outcomes and impact
- Assesses an organization's current data capacity, with a review of processes, technologies and skills, culminating in a roadmap for improving data capacity
- Provides ongoing coaching and support as the implementation of the roadmap begins

PDI engagements last 12-24 months with opportunities to participate in peer learning events with other PDI partners.

"PDI became more than securing funds to acquire the technology and software needed to support our organizational digital transformation efforts. In addition to the tools, coaching, strategic thinking and learning opportunities that elevated our ability to efficiently synthesize data and showcase our impact, PDI brought critical thought partners to this digital ecosystem, and this collaborative effort supported us throughout this discovery-driven transformation."

**– Eva Szasz-Redmond;  
Chief Operating Officer**



## Challenges

When CIWA joined PDI, they were encountering challenges that are common in the nonprofit sector, particularly in organizations striving for digital transformation and data integration. These challenges were rooted in their existing data management practices and access to technology that were restricted by funding eligibility requirements, which limited operational efficiencies.

- **Siloed and Reactive Data Usage:** Some of CIWA's data was fragmented across business units and primarily used for reporting on past activities. This made it difficult to access and analyze data cohesively across the organization for strategic decision-making. The additional time, labour and technology required to reconcile data sources further delayed reporting processes and increased operational costs
- **Data Governance and Processes:** Limited data governance practices led to challenges with data quality. With a limited governance framework, CIWA's data management processes were cumbersome, which delayed the implementation of new projects or programs.
- **Funding Constraints for Technology:** CIWA faced challenges in securing funding for technology and software, as these were not typically prioritized by their traditional funders, corporate funders, or donors. This lack of funding restricted their ability to invest in necessary tools and systems for digital transformation.

As a response, CIWA was striving for digital transformation and data integration, and saw the funding and technical support offered through PDI as a pivotal opportunity.

“The PDI project has been a transformative experience for our organization, offering critical financial, technical, and strategic support that enabled us to accelerate our digital transformation journey. Their partnership was key to the successful implementation of our HRIS, laying a strong foundation for our Digital Transformation Plan. With PDI's guidance, we are now better equipped to drive innovation, efficiency, and future growth.”

– **Nathalie Reyes;**  
**Business Solutions Manager of Data,**  
**Evaluation, Reporting & Compliance**

## Impact of PDI

### Transformation of Data Culture and Technological Infrastructure

With the flexible funding and strategic support provided by PDI, CIWA was able to make significant investments in capacity building and technological infrastructure. These investments catalyzed a transformation in their data management practices, leading to substantial improvements in operational efficiency, decision-making, and service delivery.

- **Creation of the DERC Team:** One of the most pivotal changes was the establishment of the DERC (Data, Evaluation, Reporting, and Compliance) team to lead the organization's digital transformation. This team was formed to lead CIWA's data initiatives, ensuring that data management practices and technology were aligned with the organization's strategic priorities. The DERC team was and continues to be instrumental in driving the integration of data into CIWA's daily operations, fostering a culture where data-driven decision-making became central to the organization's approach. By embedding data considerations into each role within the organization, the DERC team ensured that staff at all levels were empowered to future use data to inform their work.
- **Implementation of Dynamic Dashboards and Data Integration:** The implementation of dynamic dashboards transformed CIWA's approach to monitoring and measuring program outcomes. These dashboards provided real-time insights into client interactions, program performance, and organizational goals, enabling swift and informed decision-making. The implementation of the Human Resource Information System (HRIS) and the CIWA Client Management System (CIWA CMS) streamlined data management, enhancing operational efficiency and ensuring that accurate, comprehensive data was readily accessible.





## Enhanced Knowledge Mobilization and Strategic Planning

In addition to transforming its data culture, CIWA leveraged its enhanced data capacity to improve knowledge mobilization and strategic planning. These advancements allowed CIWA to better serve its clients and the broader community by making data a central component of decision-making and program development, in line with the 2022-2027 Strategic Plan.

- **Data-Driven Strategic Planning:** CIWA was able to consolidate data across various sources, which facilitated a more comprehensive view of organizational needs. CIWA's focus on data-driven strategy execution was supported by the integration of data considerations into performance agreements across the organization. These performance agreements are formal documents outlining individual staff responsibilities, goals, and expectations, ensuring that all staff are aligned with the organization's objectives. By incorporating data-related tasks and goals into these agreements, CIWA ensured that staff could use data to inform their work, ultimately strengthening CIWA's ability to advocate for their clients effectively.
- **Improved Program Evaluation and Impact Measurement:** CIWA's ability to evaluate and measure the impact of its programs was significantly improved through the integration of advanced data systems and analytical tools. For instance, the implementation of dynamic dashboards enabled real-time tracking of program metrics, such as client interactions and service delivery timelines. These dashboards allowed CIWA to quickly identify areas for improvement and make necessary adjustments to enhance program effectiveness. For example, CIWA identified the need to streamline the approval process for client services, which led to a more efficient workflow and reduced delays in service delivery.

## What's Next?

With the establishment of the DERC team, CIWA plans to stabilize and evaluate recently implemented systems, such as the HRIS and CMS, to ensure smooth operation and identify areas for further refinement. This period of evaluation will allow CIWA to fine-tune these systems, ensuring they continue to meet the organization's evolving needs.

CIWA also intends to expand their data consolidation efforts by exploring ways to connect and leverage data across different business units, including the integration of financial information with program data. By integrating financial data with program data, CIWA can gain a holistic view of resource allocation and program costs, enabling them to make more informed decisions. This integration will help CIWA better understand the financial impact of their programs, optimize resource distribution, and ensure that funds are directed towards areas with the greatest need, ultimately enhancing their ability to respond to the complex needs of their clients.

## Sustainability

CIWA is confident in their ability to sustain the data management enhancements and initiatives developed through their partnership with Blueprint. By integrating data integrity and utilization into performance agreements, CIWA has made data management an integral part of every employee's role, contributing to the long-term sustainability of these practices. As the groundwork is laid for robust data management, CIWA now has the evidence and language to articulate the benefits of enhanced data practices, strengthening their case for future funding opportunities.

As a consortium partner of the Future Skills Centre, Blueprint works with partners and stakeholders to collaboratively generate and use evidence to help solve pressing future skills challenges. To learn more about how Blueprint is helping to build data capacity among frontline nonprofits across Canada, visit: [www.blueprint-ade.ca](http://www.blueprint-ade.ca). To learn more about the Future Skills Centre, a forward-thinking centre for research and collaboration dedicated to driving innovation in skills development, visit [www.fsc-ccf.ca](http://www.fsc-ccf.ca).