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Project Insights Report

Digital Transformation of Employment Programming

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PARTNERS
Alberta Association of
Immigrant Serving Agencies

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LOCATIONS
Alberta

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INVESTMENT
$165,172

📅
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▶ The Issue

The Alberta Association of Immigrant Serving Agencies (AAISA) is a non-profit umbrella organization that represents agencies providing settlement and integration services to newcomers in the province. The clients served by agencies include immigrants, refugees and racialized people seeking stable, professional employment in Canada but who may be hindered from realizing that potential by a lack of access to professional development opportunities. Member agencies offer employment programming to clients as a means of addressing these issues. This programming comes in the form of courses on workplace, language and communication skills that help advance the newcomer's ability to integrate into a Canadian work environment.

As with any service delivery organization (or group of organizations) whose coverage extends over a large jurisdiction, like Alberta, there are differences in the quality of services accessible in urban centres versus more remote, rural areas; and while the pandemic was a emergency that disrupted services for a time, AAISA members nonetheless treated it as an opportunity to grow and make lasting improvements to the services available across underserved parts of the province.

KEY INSIGHTS

1 With adequate support, it is possible to digitize the immigrant-serving sector's employment programming courses and modules.

2 Digitizing programming through AAISA was more cost effective for member organizations than it would have been for each to do it on its own, as it saved each organization roughly $36,000.

3 AAISA's member organizations are strongly interested in digitization: 34 agencies (60%) indicated interest in digitizing their employment programming.

🔧 What We Investigated

This project was funded to explore how to maintain the capacity of the immigrant-serving sector in the midst of the pandemic period.

The project tested digital infrastructure for online employment programming consisting of professional development/employment training content delivered through e-learning courses. In so doing, the project created space for AAISA to, in the future, test whether digital delivery of key programs and services helps AAISA members serve a broader client population, including those in rural and remote areas, and how the sector can build digital literacy among the staff of member agencies to implement the online tool.

The digitization opportunity was piloted with a limited number of AAISA member agencies (4 out of 54 agencies). The project concluded while digital courses were still at an early stage of implementation.

The project nonetheless served as a useful real-world illustration of what digital transformation would look like in practice for some organizations within the immigrant-serving sector.

✔️ What We're Learning

The key learnings from this project are that it is possible to digitize employment programming, and that having umbrella organizations like AAISA develop and implement digitization of existing services for member agencies can be cost effective.

Observations from AAISA on what could have been done better (or how future efforts at digitization could be improved) are as follows:

- Hire a project manager, given the complexities of the project and the context of the pandemic.
- Allocate time and resources for dedicated curriculum development.
- Invest in evaluation capacity — defined as the ability to measure and assess the progress, functionality, and outcomes of the digital program — to allow for tracking individual progress through the digital program to better understand its functionality and outcomes.

Unfortunately, the project finished just as its online platform came into operation, leaving unanswered questions about the platform's impact on newcomer clients, servicing those in remote areas, cultivating digital capability within member agencies, etc.
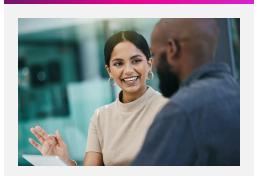
⭐ Why It Matters

In the context of disruptions arising from COVID-19, the project provided the technical resources that allowed for the immigrant-serving sector's employment programs to continue operating at a time when in-person services were shut down.

Beyond this, the project sought to increase the reach of the organization's current services, reaching clients in remote settings and increasing digital proficiency within AAISA member agencies. However, these goals were more long-term in scope and somewhat aspirational; the immediate output of the project (i.e., the objective to be realized within the project's lifespan) was limited to the establishment of the online delivery systems.

Even given its limited scope, the project is useful as an illustration of what digital transformation involves for the immigrant-serving sector and could be used as an example for other social service organizations considering a move to more virtual services.

**State of Skills:
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Industry-specific, employer-driven initiatives have been successful in accelerating and enhancing the employment prospects of newcomers.

Read Thematic Report

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