

Project Insights Report

Innovation for Better Integration



PARTNERS

KEYS Employment and Newcomer
Services
City of Kingston



LOCATIONS

Ontario



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Executive Summary

The Innovation for Better Integration Project, which was conducted in Kingston, Ontario, aimed to address the challenges faced by newcomers in accessing services. The goal of the project was to collaboratively develop a new service provision model that would address the unique challenges of implementing traditional service approaches. The project, led by KEYS Employment and Newcomer Services, sought to develop a more inclusive, equitable and accessible service delivery model that would go beyond employment to include education, health and social services. The collaborative project aimed to combine sectoral representatives' inputs and newcomers' first-hand experiences to build an inclusive service model for better access to services and integration of newcomers into the Kingston community.

This initiative—a response to the limitations of the earlier Workplace Inclusion Charter—involved collaboration with 14 local organizations. This pilot initiative was a component of the Incubation Network, a collaboration of seven organizations. Each organization focused on its own pilot projects aimed at improving newcomer integration through skill-sharing, collaboration and innovation. KEYS developed 11 new partnerships with community, social and health organizations as a result of the project.

The investigation focused on identifying gaps in current services and integrating innovative practices into existing models. A significant outcome was the development of a prototype app designed to enhance service delivery, which was refined through continuous feedback from partners and target users. The project underscored the importance of its community-led approach, which directly engaged newcomers in the design process to ensure the services met their specific needs. Key gaps included language barriers, underdeveloped intercultural sensitivity among staff, and information inaccessibility.

This pilot project is crucial, as it provides a blueprint for other regions and sectors, emphasizing the need for frameworks that incorporate direct community input. The insights advocate for participatory models that could influence broader policy changes, ensuring services are culturally sensitive and responsive. The success of this project in fostering inclusive service design models highlights the potential for similar approaches to enhance the integration experiences of newcomers across Canada, advocating for a systemic shift toward more inclusive, equitable and community-focused practices.

KEY INSIGHTS

- 1** The Innovation for Better Integration Project successfully engaged 14 service-providing organizations in Kingston, Ontario that are committed to developing a more inclusive service delivery model for newcomers.
- 2** Adopting a community-led approach, which emphasizes listening directly to newcomers, has proven effective for service providers in understanding and addressing barriers more efficiently. This strategy highlights the importance of integrating direct feedback into the design of service models.
- 3** North Forge, one of the participating organizations, successfully broadened its recruitment strategy to address a wider range of needs among newcomers. Initially focused on participants in the federal Start-up Visa Program, North Forge extended its outreach to include highly educated newcomers who were facing challenges securing employment in their fields. This strategic shift not only allowed North Forge to exceed its recruitment targets but also demonstrated the adaptability and responsiveness of service providers in meeting the evolving needs of newcomers.

The Issue

In recent years, Kingston, Ontario has seen a notable increase in its population of newcomers from various global regions including Syria, Iran, Afghanistan, Ukraine, Somalia, Ethiopia and Eritrea. This situation has introduced unique challenges in providing services that are culturally sensitive, equitable and accessible to all. Service providers in Kingston have found it difficult to adjust their models to meet the needs of this diversifying population, revealing gaps in the frameworks designed to integrate these newcomers into the community.

In response to these challenges, KEYS Employment and Newcomer Services, in partnership with the City of Kingston, launched the Workplace Inclusion Charter in 2019. The charter was designed to enhance employment practices across different sectors by promoting more inclusive work environments. It successfully engaged over 53 organizations to improve their employment practices. However, it soon became clear that addressing employment issues alone was insufficient. Service providers were still encountering obstacles in areas unrelated to employment, such as overcoming language barriers, ensuring universal access to services, and training staff to manage cultural differences effectively.

The limitations of the Workplace Inclusion Charter, which focused primarily on employment, highlighted the need for a broader approach. A more innovative model was evidently needed—one that would extend beyond employment to include education, health and social services. The ongoing challenges faced by service providers and the direct feedback from newcomers emphasized the need for a service provision model that would be not only inclusive but also flexible enough to adapt to the changing demographics of the Kingston community.



What We Investigated

In Kingston, Ontario, KEYS Employment and Newcomer Services spearheaded the Innovation for Better Integration Project, a project aimed at enhancing service delivery for newcomers. The primary research questions centred on how to make service delivery more inclusive, equitable and accessible, and which innovative practices could be adopted to improve newcomer integration.

The pilot involved a collaboration between KEYS Employment and Newcomer Services and a diverse range of 11 partner organizations from sectors including education, health, mental health, hospitality and tourism, resettlement and employment services, and social services. These organizations were integral during the outreach and ideation stages of the project.

The project's goals included identifying existing service gaps for newcomers, brainstorming innovative approaches with service providers in Kingston, selecting and prioritizing two to three new practices, and developing and finalizing a prototype for implementation in at least one participating organization. To achieve these objectives, the project engaged 14 service providers and organized numerous meetings and focus groups to gather data and refine the new service model.

The research was completed in two main phases. After that, coordinators obtained ethics review approval for later stages that would involve direct participation from newcomers. The initial outreach phase focused on recruiting partner organizations and assessing current service gaps. The subsequent ideation phase involved regular brainstorming sessions with a core working group of three to five organizations to tackle the identified challenges.

This strategic approach was designed to ensure a thorough understanding of the existing challenges and opportunities in newcomer service provision, thereby facilitating the development of an informed, innovative and inclusive service model.

What We're Learning

For the Innovation for Better Integration Project, KEYS Employment and Newcomer Services engaged 14 service-providing organizations in Kingston, Ontario. These organizations collaborated to address the integration challenges faced by newcomers, focusing on creating a more inclusive service delivery model.

A significant achievement of the project was the development of a prototype app designed to improve service delivery. This app, which is still in the testing phase, was refined through feedback from both partners and target users, demonstrating a proactive approach to iterative development based on stakeholder input.

One of the key learnings from the project was the importance of adopting a community-led approach. This approach emphasized listening to newcomers directly, which helped service providers understand and address the barriers these individuals face more effectively. The project highlighted that newcomers are eager to share their experiences, which in turn motivates service providers to adapt and improve their services.

Another important outcome was the identification of three main gaps in current service delivery models: language barriers, underdeveloped intercultural sensitivity among staff, and a general lack of information. These gaps are not unique to Kingston but are common across various Canadian regions, suggesting that the insights gained could have broader applicability.

The project also facilitated a shift in recruitment focus for North Forge, one of the participating organizations in the Incubation Network project. Originally concentrating on newcomers in the Start-up Visa Program, North Forge expanded its scope to include highly educated newcomers struggling to find employment in their fields. This shift not only helped North Forge surpass its recruitment goals but also underscored the flexibility and responsiveness of service providers to adapt to the nuanced needs of newcomers.

The collaborative efforts also fostered a shared learning environment among the participating organizations. For instance, the network meetings and breakout sessions provided a platform for discussing project challenges and exchanging ideas. This set-up proved beneficial for KEYS, as received substantial support and fresh perspectives from other network members. This interaction inspired KEYS to transition from attempting to develop a universal service model to crafting a set of adaptable principles tailored to meet diverse community needs.

Overall, the project's phased approach allowed for continuous feedback and adaptation, which was crucial in refining the service delivery model. The engagement of a wide range of service providers and the direct involvement of newcomers in the design process were instrumental in ensuring the relevance and effectiveness of the proposed solutions.

★ Why It Matters

The insights gleaned from the collaborative efforts in Kingston, Ontario underscore the importance of adopting a community-led approach to service provision, particularly for newcomers and underrepresented populations. This approach not only enhances the inclusivity and accessibility of services but also ensures that these services are culturally sensitive and responsive to the unique needs of diverse communities. Such findings are crucial for policymakers and practitioners across various sectors, as they highlight the need for frameworks that prioritize direct input and active participation from the communities they aim to serve.

The project's success in identifying key gaps in service delivery provides a valuable blueprint for other regions and sectors. These insights advocate for the adoption of similar participatory models in different contexts, potentially influencing broader policy changes that could mandate the inclusion of beneficiary voices in the planning and implementation phases of service delivery. This could lead to more effective policies that are finely tuned to the actual needs of the population, thereby increasing the efficacy and reach of public and private services.

Moreover, the project's ability to engage a significant number of service providers and foster a commitment to inclusivity could serve as a compelling argument for revising funding models for social services. Funding agencies might consider criteria that emphasize collaborative and inclusive practices as prerequisites for financial support. This shift could encourage organizations to adopt similar models, thereby standardizing inclusive practices across various sectors.



State of Skills: What Works for Newcomer Integration

Despite the overall success of Canada's immigration system, a number of challenges persist. When compared to other nations, labour market mobility for newcomers in Canada is not as strong as other dimensions of migrant integration.

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The application of a design-thinking framework in this project also presents a case for its broader use in policy development and service design. By focusing on human-centred design principles, organizations and policymakers can more effectively address complex social issues, such as integration and service accessibility. This could lead to innovations in service delivery that are not only more efficient but also more adaptable to the changing demographics and needs of populations across Canada.

In conclusion, the project's outcomes serve as a testament to the potential of collaborative, inclusive service design models in enhancing the integration experiences of newcomers. The lessons learned here should inform future policies and practices, and support advocacy for a systemic shift toward more inclusive, equitable and community-focused approaches. This could ultimately lead to a more cohesive and supportive society where all members, regardless of their background, have access to the services they need to thrive.

Have questions about our work? Do you need access to a report in English or French? Please contact communications@fsc-ccf.ca.

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