Future Skills Centre   **Centre des Compétences futures**

Project Insights Report

TIMES 2.0

PARTNERS
Yonge Street Mission

LOCATIONS
Ontario

INVESTMENT
$661,178.00

PUBLISHED
November 2023

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Executive Summary

This project was carried out by Yonge Street Mission (YSM) to improve their workforce development strategy using a data tool called TIMES™ (Transformation Integrated Measurement and Evaluation System). The tool collects and analyzes data on barriers and supports that affect job readiness for their clients, such as food, housing, relationships, education, skills and health. The project aimed to migrate the tool from a narrow and rigid platform to a more robust and flexible online platform (Salesforce) that helps…which would facilitate ease of use, collaboration, reporting and onboarding of external partners.

The project faced some challenges including time constraints, staff capacity and system harmonization, but was successful in improving user experience, data quality and knowledge transfer.

Tools like TIMES™ can provide insights about the complex network of supports required to move those experiencing chronic poverty to be job ready. The insights generated by data-driven systems can also set realistic expectations on the time it takes for high-barrier job seekers to achieve success. An essential "basket of supports" is beginning to emerge, wherein basic needs (e.g. food, housing, relationships) have an impact on job readiness and employment status. Organizations supporting job seekers facing barriers should consider what additional supports will lead to participants' success.

KEY INSIGHTS

1 Organizations implementing new systems run into common challenges related to staff capacity (for implementation and adoption); system harmonization (within and outside of the organization, starting with common definitions); and system-level impact assessment.

2 Strong data platforms and capacity to use data to generate insights is a key foundation to addressing the complex needs of those furthest from the labour market.

3 Early analysis of data from TIMES™ suggests that improvements in relationships plays a critical role in progress towards job readiness.

▶ The Issue

Yonge Street Mission's vision is to end chronic poverty in Toronto. To do so, it provides populations furthest from the labour market — and therefore shut out of the new economy — access to good jobs through customized, wraparound supports and relevant skills training. YSM works with street-involved youth estranged from their families with limited social networks; adults who have been on social assistance for many years, and even multiple generations; new Canadians who need specialized supports to access good jobs and build their careers; single parents with limited childcare supports; and many more.

In 2016, YSM established TIMES™ (Transformation Integrated Measurement and Evaluation System), a tool that incorporates many data points to better understand the full complement of supports required to move someone from chronic poverty to job readiness. Its ambition was to eventually expand the use of TIMES™ across the sector, adding additional data to further refine the best strategies of support, and ultimately influence policy.

In its first four years, TIMES™ has provided statistical data on the systemic barriers that keep many people out of the labour market, but the reporting functionality of TIMES was limited and the platform itself was too rigid to allow expansion to other organizations.

🔧 What We Investigated

This project (TIMES™ 2.0) aimed to scale the use of TIMES™ by migrating it to a more robust cloud-based platform to facilitate easier data analysis, better adoption within the organization and increase the ability to scale with other partners.

The project had two phases:

Phase I focused on the migration of the database and documentation, including:

- Building new instance of the TIMES™ database in Salesforce
- Data migration and testing
- On boarding and training of staff
- Full internal adoption
- Testing and refinement

Phase II: once the core structure of TIMES™ was tested internally, the aim was to extend it to accommodate external partners by:

- Building new instance of TIMES™ database for partners and community
- Developing an onboarding strategy and package for new partners
- Onboarding and training external partners
- Full external adoption

In addition to the activities above, the project took advantage of <u>FSC's Accelerator</u> to test the value of incorporating third-party data from external sources into the platform to determine if this would generate new insights to improve client outcomes.

✔ What We're Learning

Building, implementing and sharing platforms requires contingency planning and longer implementation times
Despite efforts to extend timelines, implementation took far longer than anticipated, in part because YSM had limited in-house expertise and staff to take on the design of the new system and the data migration. Therefore, the project was only able to achieve some of its objectives for Phase I: building a new instance of the TIMES™ database in Salesforce, data migration and testing, and on boarding and training of staff. The migration from ETO to Salesforce was generally successful with more than 90% of all requirements fulfilled once the migration was complete.

Change management must be employed to **bring staff on board**
Implementation of this project highlighted that training and ongoing support is critical for capacity building and change management for technology-focused initiatives. Staff need to see the relevance and added value to their day-to-day work of data being collected. This will increase the likelihood of staff taking ownership and embracing the new tool. While early adoption had only 65% of staff using TIMES™, efforts to increase adoption are ongoing, with more staff logging onto the system monthly.

Data systems lead to insights
Despite the challenges, migrating to Salesforce improved analysis and reporting, helping to identify trends in service use. This included identifying the correlation between improved relationships and job readiness, and the essential role of wrap-round supports to address mental health challenges, housing and food insecurity, in order to improve employment outcomes. There are not many examples of multiple organizations aggregating their data in order to drive insights to improve client outcomes. TIMES™ is one tool that may facilitate this in the future.

TIMES™ can help generate new insights to better support clients
Through prototyping what third-party data integration (especially from government databases) could look like as part of the FSC Accelerator, the YSM team discovered the data they already collected was sufficient to address client needs and, in some cases, more comprehensive than the data stored in other sources.

★ Why It Matters

The transition from chronic poverty to job readiness is complex. Designing and implementing data systems to map this complexity to better design programs, services and policy to ease this transition is important to achieve inclusive prosperity going forward.
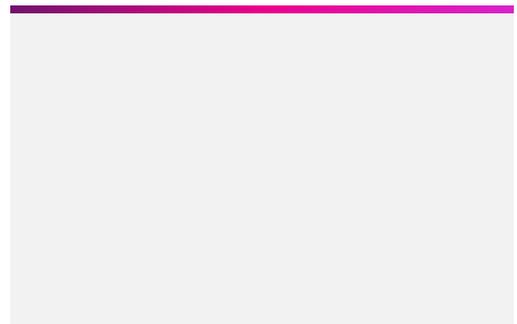
This project has learnings for organizations in the skills ecosystem interested in improving their capacity to collect and use data to inform decision making, and the funders of these organizations that are making increasing demands for evidence-informed practice and quantifiable impacts. The project calls on all stakeholders to set realistic timelines for developing and integrating data-management systems, and to see the impact of those systems on program and service decision making. These projects take years, not months, especially for organizations that need to build the technological skills their staff.

The project is also useful to sector-actors looking for a platform and framework that could support data sharing across organizations to yield even stronger insights.

Despite the challenges in implementation, for practitioners in the workforce development ecosystem, a tool like TIMES™can enable insights about the complex network of supports required to move those experiencing chronic poverty to be job ready. The insights also set realistic expectations on the length of time it takes for high-barrier job seekers to achieve success. An essential 'basket of supports' has emerged, wherein basic needs (e.g. food, housing, relationships) have an impact on job readiness and employment status. Organizations supporting job seekers, as well as those providing funding, should seek to offer wraparound supports to improve participant success.

**State of Skills:
Resilient by Design: The Skills Canadians Need Now and for the Future**

To build a resilient workforce that is able to respond to and adapt to changing labour markets, whether due to unpredictable disruptions or longer-term transitions, we need a range of training and upskilling pathways that equip people with the skills they need to enter, advance, transition and return to dynamic labour markets.

Read Thematic Report

▶▶ What's Next

YSM's objective is that by 2026 TIMES™ will be a leading tool enabling the sector to successfully employ those from the most marginalized populations. Ultimately, YSM hopes to reach new population groups or different geographies with TIMES™ as organizations adopt the system and contribute to the database and pattern recognition.

YSM has begun to share its data with others, including a webinar series, blog posts and articles, as well as how YSM is beginning to apply those learnings in their work.

YSM is also continuing to develop internal capacity to maximize TIMES™ by:

- Adding team members who have the right skills (e.g. user experience, adult learning and technical skills in Salesforce) that will be beneficial as YSM's usage of TIMES™ and Salesforce matures.
- Developing a formal training manual and a learning management system.

The project has attracted additional funding from other funders that are interested in supporting social service organizations transform to be more data-driven.

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

How to Cite This Report
Noumi, C. (2023) Project Insight Report: Times 2.0. Toronto: Future Skills Centre. https://fsc-ccf.ca/projects/times-20/