



Developing Criteria for Best Practices
in Settlement Services:
A Report

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Background and Rationale

In its March 2010 report titled *Best Practices in Settlement Services*, the House of Commons Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration (2010, p. 12) recommended that

“... the Government of Canada develop a proposal for an interactive website on best practices in settlement services. The aim of the proposal should be to have an operational website in fiscal year 2011-2012.”¹

The Government of Canada (2010) responded to this recommendation favourably as evidenced in the following quote:

“The Government agrees with this recommendation and welcomes the opportunity to engage in additional interactive media in order to engage stakeholders and better service clients. CIC [Citizenship and Immigration Canada] supports enhancing existing on-line resources in order to be more responsive to the needs of clients and stakeholders, engage new partners, share lessons learned and fuel innovative settlement and resettlement programming. The sharing of best practices and lessons learned are integral to fostering innovation and shaping future settlement initiatives.”

CIC subsequently acted on the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration recommendation by presenting a “best practices in settlement website” concept to the Settlement and Integration Joint Policy and Program Council (SIJPPC), a pan-Canadian body composed of representatives from the settlement sector and the federal and provincial/territorial government departments responsible for immigration and settlement issues. The proposed website, which is not to duplicate but complement existing settlement and integration websites such as *Settlement.Org / Settlement.Org at Work* and *Integration-Net for the settlement community*, received a positive feedback from the SIJPPC.

Technical work for website architecture is already underway. In the meantime, CIC has retained the services of the Centre for International Migration and Settlement Studies at Carleton University to:

- 1) Develop a set of criteria for best practices in settlement services;
- 2) Validate them with a panel of key experts in the area of settlement and integration from across Canada;
- 3) Gather accordingly an initial list of best practices in settlement services with the widest representation possible from
 - a) federal and provincial / territorial jurisdictions,

¹ In May 2010, only two months after the release of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration report, a study commissioned by the Canadian Immigrant Settlement Sector Alliance similarly highlighted the need for an analysis and dissemination of “best practice information” in the settlement sector (Burstein 2010, pp. 2-3).

- b) expected result categories of CIC's integrated Settlement Program, and
- c) services tailored to different newcomer populations; and
- 4) Provide a profile of the sampled best practices in a standard form to
 - a) populate the website at the outset and
 - b) set the stage for the growth of content by submissions from service providers and other stakeholders in newcomer settlement and integration.

This report aims to take the first step in this four-step process.

A Review of Existing Work on Best Practices in Settlement

In its ongoing drive for capacity building and professionalization, the Canadian settlement sector has produced a significant body of work on organizational and professional norms (values, principles or guidelines, and standards) to better serve immigrants and refugees (see Türegün 2006 for an overview). Defining what we interchangeably call “best,” “good,” or “promising” practices is part - if only a small part - of this body of work. If we are to move forward successfully in our attempt to define and identify these practices, we need to build on the collective memory of the sector and also expand our horizons to encompass the mainstream organizations and institutions that are also increasingly engaged in settlement (Burstein 2010).

From the perspective of immigrant-serving agencies, a milestone was marked in this field with the publication in 1998 of the Canadian Council for Refugees' document titled *Best Settlement Practices: Settlement Services for Refugees and Immigrants in Canada* (CCR 1998). This document was the culmination of a project financially supported by CIC and other funders and implemented under the guidance of a steering committee consisting of settlement community representatives from across the country. At the outset, the document makes a distinction between standards and best practices. *Standards* are “generally agreed upon minimum norms for programs” whereas *best practices* are “those that have proven their worth and deserve to be emulated.” Accordingly, best practices “differ from standards ... in that best practices constitute an ideal to which an organization can strive.”

The document then goes on to compile a list of “core values” from which best practice guidelines emanate:

- Access
- Inclusion
- Client empowerment
- User-defined services
- Holistic approach
- Respect for the individual
- Cultural sensitivity

- Community development
- Collaboration
- Accountability
- Orientation towards positive change
- Reliability

Thus, 12 best practice guidelines are established. Given the formative character of this document, it is worth quoting the guidelines, along with their applications, in their entirety:

1. Services are accessible to all who need them. Access is assured by:

- providing a welcoming environment
- offering services in the client's own language, where possible and appropriate
- offering culturally appropriate services
- undertaking outreach, so that services are known to those who might benefit
- communicating effectively about the organization and its services
- where possible, offering services irrespective of immigration status or other criteria of eligibility
- providing an environment where women feel comfortable
- offering childcare, where appropriate
- having a geographically accessible site and/or addressing clients' need for transportation
- having a physically accessible site
- listening to and responding to concerns about accessibility

2. Services are offered in an inclusive manner, respectful of, and sensitive to, diversity.

Inclusion is assured by:

- recognizing the diversity of needs and experiences (e.g. young, old, highly educated, those without education, singles, families)
- offering anti-racist services
- providing a non-sexist environment
- enforcing a policy of non-discrimination
- offering non-judgmental services
- respecting different perspectives within newcomer communities

3. Clients are empowered by services. Client empowerment is assured by:

- fostering independence in clients
- meaningful membership and participation of clients in the Board
- encouraging client involvement in all areas of the organization
- involving clients as volunteers
- recognizing, affirming and building on the resources, experiences, skills and wisdom of newcomers
- providing information and education to allow clients to make their own informed decisions
- offering programs and services leading to employment and career advancement

- offering a supportive environment (especially to those who are traumatized)
 - supporting the clients' right to choose from among service providers the approach that best meets their needs
4. Services respond to needs as defined by users. User-defined services are assured by:
- undertaking an individual assessment for each client of needs, expectations, goals and priorities
 - assessment of the needs and priorities of newcomer communities and the host society
 - involving newcomers in needs assessments
 - ongoing assessment of whether services continue to meet needs
 - listening to clients and communities served
 - responding to the particular needs of refugees (recognition of differences, changing needs)
 - offering flexibility in services
 - incorporating flexibility into programs, in order to allow them to adapt to changing needs
 - involving users in the planning, implementation and evaluation of services
 - offering users maximum control over programs
5. Services take account of the complex, multifaceted, interrelated dimensions of settlement and integration. A holistic approach is assured by:
- recognizing the diversity of an individual's needs (physical, social, psychological, political, spiritual)
 - responding wherever possible to a variety of needs at once
 - providing a range of services in one location ("one-stop")
 - recognizing that integration is a long-term process
 - avoiding compartmentalization
 - taking into account the effects of policy decisions on individuals and communities and responding through advocacy
 - recognizing the importance of the family in the lives of individuals
 - providing opportunities for relaxation and fun
6. Services are delivered in a manner that fully respects the rights and dignity of the individual. Respect for the individual is assured by:
- confidentiality
 - services free of racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination
 - respecting the fundamental rights of each participant
 - compliance with a Code of Ethics
 - offering a professional quality of services
 - recognizing the uniqueness of each person
 - giving full and accurate information
 - making human contact
 - good monitoring, selection and training of volunteers

7. Services are delivered in a manner that is culturally sensitive. Culturally sensitive services are assured by:
- having staff and volunteers from the same background as the clients served
 - ensuring that service providers are knowledgeable about the culture of those being served
 - offering services in a culturally appropriate manner
 - developing and implementing policies on cultural competency and anti-racism
 - showing respect for different cultures
8. Services promote the development of newcomer communities and newcomer participation in the wider community, and develop communities that are welcoming of newcomers. Community development is assured by:
- giving priority to community building
 - investing in the development of newcomer communities
 - developing community leadership
 - building bridges between communities
 - eliminating barriers to newcomer participation in the community
 - familiarity with the resources in the local community
 - working towards changes in public attitude towards newcomers
 - working through the organizations of newcomer communities
 - involving volunteers in services delivered
9. Services are delivered in a spirit of collaboration. Collaboration is assured by:
- promoting partnerships between organizations that build on strengths of each
 - good working relationships
 - team-building
 - communicating regularly with others and sharing information
 - referral services
 - coalition-building
 - providing opportunities for community problem-solving
 - taking account of available resources and experiences
10. Service delivery is made accountable to the communities served. Accountability is assured by:
- the organization's Board
 - evaluation, involving the participants
 - ongoing monitoring
 - performance appraisals
 - policy and procedure manuals (for financial management, administration and personnel)
 - close connection with immigrant and refugee communities
 - fiscal responsibility
 - development of goals and specific measurable, realistic outcomes

11. Services are oriented towards promoting positive change in the lives of newcomer and in the capacity of society to offer equality of opportunity for all. An orientation towards positive change is assured by:

- advocating for improvements in policy
- recognizing and building on the possibility of change in the lives of newcomers and in society
- developing new programs and new service models
- improving services through training and research
- celebrating successes

12. Services are based on reliable, up-to-date information. Reliability is assured by:

- keeping information up-to-date
- using social research
- exchanging information

Two years later, another CCR document, *Canadian National Settlement Service Standards Framework*, reaffirmed the 12 core values (CCR 2000). It also added an element of measurability to the definition of standards: “For example, a statement that a partner has to provide language training to all newcomers up to a certain level of competency would be a standard” (CCR 2000, p. 29). A discussion paper (*National Settlement Service and Standards Framework*) developed for the Second National Settlement Conference in Calgary (particularly, for the National Voluntary Sector Initiative Working Group IV on Settlement Standards, Professionalization, and Accountability) came up with a definition of standards similar to that of the two CCR documents (Tam 2003):

“Standards are generally agreed-upon norms that form a basis of judgement or comparison. ...

- Program standards relate to settlement services that are provided to newcomers. These are minimum acceptable quality standards that services should attain for a minimum acceptable level of service to clients, government funders or professional bodies” (p. 6).

“Program standards are minimum acceptable standards of quality that settlement services should attain to ensure a minimum acceptable level of service to clients, funders or professional bodies. These services should contribute to settlement outcomes for clients” (p. 17).

Moreover, the 2003 National Settlement Conference discussion paper condensed the 12 core values and best settlement practice guidelines spelled out in the 1998 CCR document into six “Values and Guiding Principles of the Settlement Service Sector” (Tam 2003, p. 11):

- Client-centred: In the design and provision of services, the unique background of individual clients – including ethnicity, sex, language, migration experience, and

specific needs are taken into consideration, within the mandate and resources of the agency.

- Empowering: Services foster the independence of clients in the new environment by facilitating and supporting their learning and decision-making through provision of information, and by recognizing and mobilizing their internal resources, experiences and skills.
- Holistic: Services are provided in a manner that simultaneously recognizes the multi-dimensionality of client needs – physical, social, psychological, spiritual, political and other – and aspirations to avoid compartmentalization of those needs. In addition, services include community development and promoting positive changes at the societal level to create a more welcoming environment for clients.
- Accessible: Culturally appropriate services are available in a safe environment to all individuals who meet the service provider’s eligibility criteria, and are provided in the client’s language where necessary and feasible; service locations are accessible geographically, and wheelchair-accessible whenever possible.
- Equitable and Respectful: Services are provided in a manner that respects the rights and dignity of clients, and without any form of discrimination based on a client’s background.
- Accountable: Information is gathered on an ongoing basis so that it is accurate and current; programs and services are monitored and evaluated regularly to improve effectiveness and efficiency; accountability is also ensured by having an appropriate and transparent governance body and practices, appropriate infrastructure, responsible management, and openness to scrutiny by membership and funders.

A significant amount of work has also been done at the provincial level. In 1999, the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants in collaboration with COSTI conducted a project under the guidance of an advisory committee. The resulting discussion document (*The Development of Services and Sectoral Standards for the Immigrant Services Sector*) identified six “Intrinsic Values for the Sector” (OCASI and COSTI 1999, p. 12; see also OCASI 2001):

- social justice, equality and equity
We believe that every immigrant and refugee is entitled to equal access and opportunities to fully participate in the social, economic, political and cultural life of society. We trust that the anti-racist approach of the sector and the spirit of equality established by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms as public policy can strengthen our resolve to eliminate barriers to equity which face immigrants and refugees.
- accountability
As publicly funded organizations we are committed to using our funds as efficiently and effectively as possible, and to being open to clients and public scrutiny.
- excellence

The programs, services, management and governance of the sector endeavour to achieve the highest possible standards to meet the needs and expectations of the immigrant and refugee communities.

- diversity
We respect differences among people and believe that every immigrant and refugee offers unique and irreplaceable contributions to our society.
- partnership and collaboration
We believe in partnership and cooperative working relationships with other community organizations and groups with similar interest and shared values that build on the strengths of each other.
- innovation and creativity
We encourage innovative ideas and creative approaches that are responsive to the changing needs and expectations of the community and the overall environment which take into account new resources such as access to technology.

Similarly, the Multilateral Task Force on Training, Career Pathing and Labour Mobility in the Community Social Service Sector in British Columbia developed an *Occupational Competencies Framework for the Immigrant and Multicultural Services Sector* in 1998. Ten years later, in 2008, this framework was revised in consultation with the British Columbia Settlement and Adaptation Program Joint Training Committee (Susan Simosko Associates 2008). Prepared for the Settlement and Multicultural Division of the British Columbia Ministry of Attorney General, the revised framework (*Occupational Competencies Framework for Staff Providing Services to Immigrant and Multicultural Populations*) established five principles of services and support (Susan Simosko Associates 2008, p. 14):

“We seek to ensure that the services and support we provide:

- Are flexible, adaptable, client centered, and accessible
- Promote equality of opportunity for people of all cultural, social and economic backgrounds
- Empower clients and enable them to make sound decisions
- Honour and respect clients’ decisions
- Foster the integration of all clients into Canadian society.”

A guide prepared for Manitoba Labour and Immigration in 2008 (*Developing Immigrant Settlement Services: A Guide for Communities*) defined best practices in settlement services as follows (Prairie Global Management 2008, p. 13):

“Best practices are the ways and means that have proven their worth and deserve to be emulated as an ideal to which an organization or community can strive. They are a current understanding. They are not ‘carved in stone,’ but require updating as methods and practices are honed through the experience of your community as well as other communities and organizations involved in immigration.”

The guide then went on to quote the 12 best practice guidelines of the 1998 CCR document (Prairie Global Management 2008, pp. 16-19).

There are also efforts to establish best practice guidelines in specific program or service areas. For instance, in a document prepared for the CIC Ontario Region LINC Advisory Committee (*Best Practice Features of Quality LINC Programs*), 14 best practice guidelines are identified (MWB Educational Consultants n.d., pp. 2-3; see also ATESL 2004 and 2009):

“The fourteen best practices [guidelines] identified are:

1. Learners understand clearly the expected learning outcome of the program at the beginning of their involvement in it.
2. Learners participate in all aspects of the curriculum from the choice of subject matter to appropriate approaches to teaching/learning.
3. Learners are expected to make an appropriate commitment of time and energy to the program with consideration for individual circumstances.
4. Each learner’s original placement and progression through the curriculum represent deliberate decisions based on measurable criteria.
5. The teaching/learning materials available to the learners are adequate and appropriate.
6. The characteristics of the class are conducive to language learning.
7. All program personnel who interact with learners have appropriate qualifications and skills.
8. The LINC Curriculum Guidelines, drafted under the auspices of Employment and Immigration Canada (now Citizenship and Immigration) Ontario Region, form the basis of the program’s curriculum.
9. The program uses the resources of the community in which it is located *in* serving the needs of its learners and invites the involvement of the community.
10. The program facilitates practical language learning through encouraging and enabling learners to practice in a ‘real world’ situation.
11. Formative evaluation, of value to the learners, takes place on a regular basis in all skill areas of language.
12. A formal system of outcome-based summative evaluation, of value to learners, is in place in the program.
13. A formal system of regular evaluation of the program and instruction by program participants, including learners, is in place in the program.
14. The Canadian Language Benchmarks, produced through Citizenship and Immigration Canada, are the bases for determining learners’ achievement levels.”

Criteria and Guidelines for Best Practices: A Synthesis

As it became clear during the conference call with the Panel of Experts on Best Practices Criteria in Settlement Services (2011), the more criteria one works with, the more difficult it will get to identify and “measure” a service (or program / practice) as a best practice. In line with this diagnosis, we would like to come up with a manageable list of criteria. We do so by:

- 1) Comparing four key documents mentioned above – namely, CCR 1998, Tam 2003, OCASI and COSTI 1999, and Susan Simosko Associates 2008 – which actually put forward core service values or principles in all of settlement; and
- 2) Operationalizing the selected items as best practices criteria.

Table 1 presents the relevant content of these documents:

Table 1. Core Service Values or Principles

	<i>Document</i>			
	CCR 1998	Tam 2003	OCASI and COSTI 1999	Susan Simosko Associates 2008
<i>Value or Principle</i>	Access	Accessible	Social justice, equality and equity	Accessible
	Inclusion	Equitable and respectful	Social justice, equality and equity	Equality of opportunity
	Client empowerment	Empowering	X	Empower clients
	User-defined services	Client-centred	Excellence	Client-centred
	Holistic approach	Holistic	X	X
	Respect for the individual	Equitable and respectful	Diversity	Honour and respect clients' decisions
	Cultural sensitivity	Accessible	X	X
	Community development	Holistic	X	X
	Collaboration	X	Partnership and collaboration	X
	Accountability	Accountable	Accountability	X
	Orientation towards positive change	Holistic	Social justice, equality and equity	Foster the integration of all clients
	Reliability	Accountable	Innovation and creativity	X

Certain rows in Table 1 can be combined. The idea of *accessibility* by and large captures all of the values or principles in the first two rows. Here we refer to the accessibility of a service to its specific target population and not necessarily to the general newcomer population – let alone the general public. We must, however, be clear that this means all

eligible newcomers in the catchment area of the service, not only those who visit a settlement service provider. In short, it must speak to the uptake question.

- Does a service reach the broadest client base in this sense?

Likewise, the values or principles listed in the next two rows (third and fourth rows) can be grouped under the rubric of *client involvement*. By this, we mean the involvement of targeted clientele both in the conception of a service and in its delivery. Once again we must be clear that we mean a cross-section of those eligible for the service, not only those who have previously been clients of the agency delivering the service. In short, we must be able to defend against the charge of “funded intimacy.”

- Are the clientele genuinely involved in the conception and delivery of a service?

A holistic approach (fifth row) may be necessary for serving certain newcomer groups, such as high needs immigrants and refugees, but not all newcomer groups. When client involvement and accessibility are achieved, respect for the individual client and cultural sensitivity (sixth and seventh rows) become a matter of service provider (practitioner) competency rather than service value or principle. Community development (eighth row) is in and of itself a program area.

The ninth row refers to a key service value or principle, that is, *stakeholder collaboration*, by which we mean the collaboration of stakeholders (service provider, policy maker / funder, and various other third parties) in the design and implementation of a given program or service. While clients may also be considered a stakeholder, our focus here is mainly on the collaboration between the service provider(s) and the third parties who have a stake in the outcome of the service, including mainstream institutions that provide similar services to the general population.

- Does the program or service build on, and cultivate, collaboration between its stakeholders?

The concept of *accountability* (10th row) has fiscal and procedural dimensions. The fiscal dimension concerns accountability to the funder (public, private, or both) whereas the procedural dimension has to do with accountability to the target population and the general public.

- Is the service fully accountable to its funder(s) and direct recipients and indirect beneficiaries?

Orientation towards positive change (11th row) can be specified to refer to *positive outcome* for the newcomer population served. Ideally, we would like to see the long-term positive effect (or impact) of a service on its clients. However, in the context of immigrant and refugee settlement, measuring the long-term effect of a service is particularly difficult since the service is only one of the many factors determining newcomer success or failure.

The short to medium range effect (or outcome) is easier to isolate and thus measure. Perhaps even ascertaining an improvement in the situation of the newcomer, while the ideal end state remains a challenge, would be sufficient to indicate successful programming.

- Has the service had a positive outcome for the settlement, adaptation, or integration of its recipients?

The principles or values listed in the last row are rather instruments in achieving a service standard.

One key principle or value missing in Table 1 is *transferability*. However, transferability does not necessarily mean applicability. A “best” practice produced in a particular context may not be applicable to – or in – another particular context. Such a practice may still be transferrable if we take into account the conditions under which it was produced and thus those under which it will be reproduced.

- Is a service transferable to, reproducible in, other local, regional, or even national contexts?

If so, it has the potential to benefit all stakeholders in corresponding communities. This is borne out by the *Canadian Best Practices Portal* (Public Health Agency of Canada 2006, p. http://cbpp-pcpe.phac-aspc.gc.ca/glossary/all_terms-eng.html), *Cities of Migration* (Maytree Foundation 2008, p. <http://citiesofmigration.ca/good-ideas-in-integration/what-is-a-good-idea-in-integration/lang/en/>), and *The Good Practice Guide on Integration of Refugees in the European Union: Introduction* (ECRE 1999, p. 8).

Operationalized as such, these six core values or principles can be considered best practices criteria. If we list them in a chronological order, we have the following sequence:

- *Accessibility*
- *Client Involvement*
- *Stakeholder Collaboration*
- *Accountability*
- *Positive Outcome*
- *Transferability*

Before proceeding any further, we have to recognize two different groups in this list.

The first four criteria – accessibility, client involvement, stakeholder collaboration, and accountability – are criteria against which a service can be measured in the process of conception and delivery (input and output). As *processual* (or process-related) criteria, they are the necessary conditions of a best or good practice. In other words, no best practice can be produced in a context where these conditions are missing. However, the presence of them will not be sufficient for a best or good practice to emerge. For that to

happen, we also need conditions which relate to the *end result* of the practice for its immediate and potential clients. This is where the fifth and sixth criteria – positive outcome and transferability – figure prominently.

In this context, we also need to make an important distinction between best or good practices and promising practices for terminological clarity. When a program, service, or practice meets all of the six criteria at the highest level possible, we will call it a “best practice.” In cases where only the processual criteria are met (even at the highest level possible) and where there is no sufficient accumulation of experience to apply the result-based criteria, we will use the concept of promising practices.

In conclusion, the following guidelines for best practices in settlement services are established.

Programs, services, and practices in settlement:

- 1) Are *accessible* to their specific target (client) populations to the maximum extent possible;
- 2) Get their clients *involved* in both conception and delivery stages;
- 3) Build on, and cultivate, *collaboration* between their stakeholders (service provider and various third parties) during both design and implementation;
- 4) Are *accountable* to their funders and target populations as well as to the general public;
- 5) Have a measurable positive *outcome* for the newcomer populations targeted; and
- 6) Are *transferable* to other geographical and jurisdictional contexts – of course, with the necessary adaptation resulting from the particularities of each context.

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