BUILDING SYSTEM RESILIENCE:

LEARNING FROM LOCAL IMMIGRATION PARTNERSHIPS' ENVIRONMENTAL SCANS AND SERVICE INVENTORIES

POLICY PREVIEW

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Environmental scans of local resources and services are useful for developing inventories of services for newcomers.

In April, 2019, representatives from three Local Immigration Partnerships (LIP); Sara Wayland (Hamilton Immigration Partnership Council), Tara Bedard (Waterloo Region Immigration Partnership), and Irmtraud Hutfless (Toronto East Quadrant Local Immigration Partnership) spoke about their organizations' experiences creating and disseminating inventories of services for newcomers. This document summarizes their comments about the benefits and challenges of creating inventories.

The speakers agreed that inventories provide invaluable local information that is essential for service planning. Doing environmental scans and developing and updating inventories may also promote collaboration among service providers. The presenters emphasized that environmental scans and compiling inventories can only be undertaken with the collaboration of newcomers and the providers serving them.

As Tara Bedard from the Waterloo Region Immigration Partnership noted "*We take direction from the community - if the community identifies it as a need, we will try to fill it.*"

At the same time, environmental scans can be time-consuming, so any collaboration must ensure the engagement of service providers and take account of their capacity to engage in an environmental scan.

In addition to being essential for producing a useable and useful inventory and increasing local knowledge, the collaboration required to compile inventories is often productive in itself with sometimes unexpected benefits. For example:

- In the Toronto East Quadrant, the process of updating the inventory to include services for francophones and LGBTQ newcomers led to improvements in services including:
  - A francophone provider network that acts as a bridge to Anglophone service providers
  - A LGBTQ newcomer initiative.

- In Hamilton, the inventory of informal services revealed strong links between providers of formal services and providers of informal services. In many instances, people working with community centres, ethnic associations, faith organizations, and other providers of informal services worked for government-funded providers. The inventory also revealed that workers paid to provide settlement services also learn about informal services from their clients.
- Even with these benefits, the LIPs encountered challenges when creating and maintaining inventories of services for newcomers. Although each LIP had challenges unique to its local area, the common issues are discussed here. The issues are presented as a checklist of questions that service providers consider before undertaking environmental scans and developing inventories.

AUDIENCES FOR INVENTORIES

All speakers emphasized the need to identify the audience for service information. Since inventories are used by different audiences with different needs and different capacities to access and use information, crucial questions about the audience for an inventory include:

1. *Will the audience be service users or service providers?*
If the audience is service users, additional questions come to mind:
- *What languages do users speak and read?*
- *How long have they been in Canada? Information organized in terms of length of*

residence, e.g., Week 1, Month 1, and Year 1 may be appropriate.

- *Do users have specific information needs?*

Speakers mentioned the information needs of LGBTQ2S newcomers, francophones settling in English-speaking locations, and seniors among other specific groups of newcomers. For example, Toronto East Quadrant collaborated with University of Toronto Scarborough to evaluate needs for information and to update their inventory. The exercise of contacting service providers identified two populations with specialized information needs; francophone immigrants and LGBTQ newcomers.

In a second example, the Waterloo Region LIP identified specific neighbourhoods where additional information about services and supports was needed.

- *Does the scope of the inventory need to change in places where the majority of the population is immigrants or migrants on temporary visas?*
  If the audience is service providers,

  - *What is the purpose of the inventory?*
    Inventories that are used for referrals may contain different information than those used to inform newcomers. For example, the Toronto East Quadrant maintains an inventory of services that is updated regularly to ensure service providers can make referrals, but a list of resources targeted to newcomers is updated irregularly.

SCOPE OF INVENTORIES

The services and supports that should be considered in environmental scans is a second crucial decision. IRCC-funded services account for only some of the services and supports relevant to newcomers, so a decision needs to be made about what services and supports will be included.

Relevant questions about the scope of inventories include:

1. What is the purpose of the inventory?

While inventories are always completed to provide lists of services and supports, the purpose of the list needs to be clear from the beginning. The purpose will dictate the variety of services to be documented, the clients under consideration, and the geographical area for which services are being listed. For example:
- In Waterloo Region, an inventory and mapping of all IRCC-funded services was completed to counter fragmentation in the settlement sector. The inventory identified IRCC-funded services that were missing for some groups and places as well as duplicate services in a few instances. This baseline information was used by all service providers to plan service improvements.
- Waterloo Region also examined in detail the system of service provision and the roles of different providers in the system.

2. What kinds of services are included in the inventory?
Everyone agrees that newcomers and service providers need comprehensive information about services and supports. There is also a consensus that this information should include many more services than IRCC-funded services. In response, the LIPs have developed inventories with different components:
- In Hamilton, HIPC recognized that newcomers rely most on friends and families for settlement supports, so they studied informal settlement services, those not funded by government.
- The Toronto East Quadrant wanted to update an existing list of service providers and check that it served new groups of clients.
- Waterloo Region maintains an Immigration Portal that includes services well beyond the IRCC-funded providers. It includes information about the broader public sector, e.g., school boards, hospitals, and employment offices. The

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goal is to map out everything the newcomer needs to know, not just IRCC-funded settlement services. In some ways, it is a local version of the information available through www.settlement.org

PRESENTATION OF INVENTORIES

The format for inventories is a vexing issue. Inventories are used only if service providers and newcomers are aware of them and can use them. As one audience member noted, "The promotion of product is just as important as having the right product." There are several issues:

1. *How to present information to diverse groups with varied facility with online information, different levels of English fluency, and sometimes physical and mental challenges?*
- In Hamilton, HIPC found that adding information to Google maps was insufficient and confusing for many newcomers.

2. *How to promote awareness of inventories among diverse users?*
- The Toronto East Quadrat LIP worked with advisory groups representing francophone and LGBTQ newcomers in their local area

USE OF INVENTORIES

There are several ongoing issues about the use of inventories including:

1. *How are inventories being used?*
- Presenters want to know much more about how current inventories are being used. On-line systems report the number of users, but the systems say little about users' assessment of the information.
- There are concerns that the intended audience may not be aware of resources such as inventories. Presenters would like to know who is using an inventory and for what purpose.

2. *How do we describe the ecosystem of inventories?*
- Given the existence of multiple inventories in many urban areas, e.g., Waterloo Region, how do we inform users about the relationships among inventories and the current ecosystem of inventories?
- How do we tell different users with different needs how to navigate the ecosystem of inventories?

UPDATING INVENTORIES

Keeping inventories up-to-date is expensive and time-consuming. The resource requirements raise several questions:
1. *How often should information be updated?*
- Presenters agreed that updates should be strategic, focusing on areas where the information will be most beneficial. How do we establish which updates are most beneficial?

2. *How to involve community organizations and service providers?*
- Everyone agrees that the engagement of community organizations and service providers is key to maintaining a relevant and up-to-date inventory, however; many of these institutions often have limited capacity to engage in environmental scans. What resources are needed to encourage their engagement?

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