Atlantic Immigration Pilot Meeting

Summary of Participant Recommendations

April 12-13, 2018

Halifax, NS

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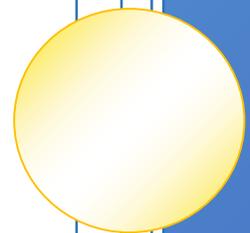
Atlantic Immigration Pilot (AIP) Meeting
April 12-13, 2018, Halifax NS

This summary report will help contribute to discussions at the forthcoming AIP Reference Group meeting to be held in Fredericton, NB from April 25-26th, 2018. It is hoped that the thoughtful contributions and recommendations of over thirty AIP stakeholders may inform the direction of the Atlantic Immigration Pilot.

1.0 Overview

On behalf of Immigration Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), the Atlantic Region Association of Immigrant Serving Agencies (ARAISA) hosted a one-day Atlantic Immigration Pilot meeting. The meeting was facilitated over two half days on the afternoon of April 12th, and morning of April 13th, 2018 in Halifax, NS. Participants from across the four Atlantic provinces were invited from Immigrant Service Provider Organizations (SPOs) designated as AIP service providers funded by IRCC, Provincial Governments representatives, and Federal Government representatives from IRCC and the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (ACOA) (see appendix for full list of attendees). A limited number of participants contributed to the proceedings via conference call-in. The meeting was conducted in both English and French through simultaneous interpretation services.

The Atlantic Immigration Pilot is a partnership project between the Government of Canada and the four Atlantic provinces: New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island. It helps employers in the Atlantic region hire skilled candidates who are not Canadian citizens or permanent residents. The candidates fill employment vacancies employers have had difficulty filling from the local labour pool. Should the candidate and employer meet the program requirements, the candidate obtains permanent resident status in Canada. The Atlantic Immigration Pilot is a part of the Atlantic Growth Strategy. It is a key initiative under the Skilled Workforce/Immigration pillar.

With the first year of the three-year pilot now complete, this meeting provided a valuable opportunity to consult with a number of AIP service delivery partners from across the region. Along with provincial and federal stakeholders, the pilot was examined to assess what is working well, and what areas of the AIP need further development and attention. Concrete recommendations are provided in this summary report. The goal and objectives of the meeting are found below. The agenda is attached as an appendix.

Workshop Goal: To identify key strengths, and areas requiring strengthening, to deliver an effective and sustainable Atlantic Immigration Pilot (AIP).

Workshop Learning Objectives:

1. To provide an overview of the current delivery of the Atlantic Immigration Pilot across the region.
2. To share significant stories of AIP learning and change that highlight both bright spots and pitfalls.
3. To discern what is inspiringly and realistically possible for the AIP.
4. To state key recommendations to assist stakeholders in delivering a strong and sustainable AIP.

2.0 Key Outcomes:

Attendees were provided with an overview and progress update on the AIP, presented by IRCC officials. Workshop participants identified five key areas requiring immediate attention. These are:

- Employer Engagement
- Evaluation
- Pre-Arrival Services
- Role of SPO's and Communication/Information
- Partner Roles and Responsibilities

Following the identification of the above areas, participants worked in small discussion groups to contribute to the prioritized topics. AIP strengths, as well as areas to strengthen, were stated for each topic and a final recommendation was presented. A summary of discussion outputs is found below. The complete data as recorded to flipchart and subsequently transcribed is available as an unattached appendix.

2.1 Employer Engagement

Key Recommendation: Employers can benefit greatly from an increased understanding of the value of integrating cultural competency into employment practices and the overall workplace. Government partners could play a more direct role in promoting the importance of cultural competency, and supporting SPOs to find new ways to encourage employers (particularly Small and Medium-sized Enterprises [SMEs]) to recognize the necessity of creating welcoming environments for newcomers. SPOs understand that culturally competent employers contribute to client retention and therefore efforts in this area should be seen as a positive return on investment.

How to respond? It is recognized that SPOs are well positioned and experienced to offer cultural competency training. However, the SPO outreach and messaging capacity to raise awareness of the value of cultural competency requires attention.

Additional suggestions include: crafting and delivering a cultural competency value-added proposition statement (the idea that a culturally competent workplace is just sound business sense); sharing success stories of cultural competence and employer/client satisfaction; and, re-branding the concept of cultural competence as fitting to the AIP.

2.2 AIP Evaluation Process

Key Recommendation: "Sooner, rather than later!" is the key message following discussions of the strengths, and areas to strengthen, in the AIP program evaluation. There is an immediate call to bring key stakeholders and evaluation experts to the table to work together in the design of an evaluation strategy. This strategy needs to evaluate not only data such as client outcomes and retention, but also the process itself. An innovative and complex pilot such as the AIP lends itself to an evaluation approach that is more developmental in nature. While still needing to be evidence-based and provide accountability, it is important to develop a design that is emergent, collaborative, and focused on learning. The lessons learned can then be applied to strengthen the achievement of results.

Though it is understood that a full evaluation strategy focused on broader employment, retention, and settlement outcomes has already been developed, SPOs seemed to indicate an interest in participating in an evaluation of the rollout and implementation of the AIP that is specific to the settlement component. To date, it would seem that primarily informal data and anecdotal evidence has been used to inform opinion. There is little clarity on what will be specifically evaluated and/or what data is being collected on behalf of the AIP. There is also a concern that qualitative data ~ actual stories of real life impacts, is not being collected.

How to respond? Bring key stakeholders and evaluation experts to the table to participate in the design of an evaluation strategy. Key stakeholders include clients and employers. Define the purpose of the evaluation strategy. What happens to the data collected? Who owns it? Who has access to it? What methodologies and collection tools are to be used? How to standardize collection templates? It has been suggested that stories of impact and change should be captured and made available in digital format.

IRCC has shared that the full evaluation strategy will use data from multiple sources, including iCARE, immigration data (Global Case Management System), Settlement Program Client Outcome Survey (survey of settlement clients and non-clients, including AIP participants) and provincial reports based on a quarterly and semi-annual reporting schedule. Knowing this, it will be important to engage SPOs in those areas of targeted outcomes where they have some influence.

2.3 Pre-Arrival Services

Key Recommendation: There are diverse approaches among the five Pre-Arrival SPO's. Regardless of approach, in all cases, pre-arrival settlement plans should not be overly generic, but rather should be informed by knowledgeable local SPOs from across the Atlantic Region.

They must provide direct linkages to services at the Endorsee's destination. The current delivery method must be adjusted to ensure clients receive the best information available. Also consider:

- ✓ Expanding access to other pre-arrival programming, beyond needs assessment and settlement plans, to not only include the principal applicant, but also spouses and dependents.
- ✓ Renewed focus on addressing needs through client-centered pre-arrival service delivery.

How to respond? There are several identified issues that need to be addressed, and suggestions to follow to strengthen pre-arrival services.

- ✓ Settlement plans are not being shared with local SPOs. Are they supposed to be shared? If not, why not?
- ✓ The French/English language of service may need to be navigated, depending upon the operating language of the employer and the language of the client. The language match between clients and employers needs to be considered and facilitated. For example, an employer working in English may not be inclined to reach out to a SPO offering services in French, even if this may be the preference of the employee/client.
- ✓ Facilitate a dialogue between pre-arrival providers and local SPOs to ensure clear, accurate and appropriate local information is provided to endorsed employees.
- ✓ The pre-arrival approach should be standardized.
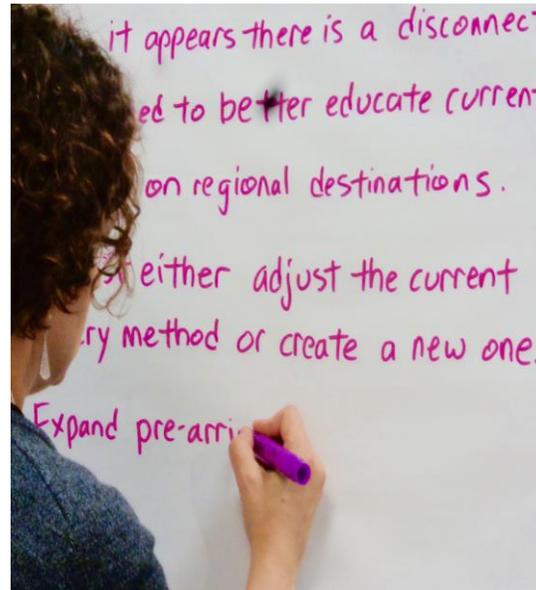
2.4 Service Provider Organizations (Raise Value and Awareness of Service Provider Organizations among Employers)

Key Recommendation: Formalizing the role of, and making SPOs a key partner early on in the AIP, is a definitive strength. Employer information sessions offered across the region have been an excellent opportunity to raise the profile of SPOs. However, there is room for improved mechanisms for employers to understand the diverse benefits of settlement services for the clients, as well as for employers themselves. Improving mechanisms for SPOs to be able to connect with designated employers is strongly recommended.

How to respond? Several suggestions were made to raise the value and awareness of SPOs:
- ✓ Permit SPOs to reach out to designated employers (rather than the reverse). Be proactive vs reactive. (#unlockthelist).
- ✓ Quantify the value of SPO involvement to employers with data on 'retention'.
- ✓ Link employers who have experienced positive outcomes with newly designated employers.
- ✓ Collect and share client success stories.

## 2.5 Clarification of Partner Roles and Responsibilities

Key Recommendation: During the workshop, it became apparent that clarifying not only the roles and responsibilities, but also the areas and levels of decision-making, of the multiple partners invested in the AIP, would be highly beneficial. There is a lingering question of "Whose baby is the AIP?". Roles and responsibilities clarification is recommended.

2.6 Additional areas for further discussion were also raised through the conversation, and these include:

- ✓ What happens when AIP does not work for the client? (What is the ethical exit strategy?)
- ✓ Where is current data? Who holds what data? When might provincial data arrive?
- ✓ SPOs know potential employers and potential candidates ~ how can this be linked and shared?
- ✓ Employers and clients need to be at the next meeting table.
- ✓ Rural and remote needs are distinct and must be addressed.
- ✓ Employers (particularly SMEs) can have difficulty moving through the mechanics of the AIP process. [The Dedicated Service Channel (DSC) and Employer Liaison Network (ELN) were noted by IRCC as two available means of support].

3.0 Evaluative Feedback

The written feedback evaluation forms completed at the conclusion of the meeting, indicate participants were highly satisfied with the content and process of the workshop meeting.
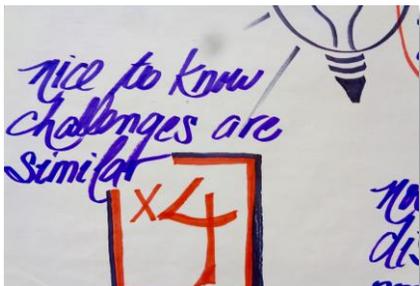
Feedback states stakeholders are eager to continue this type of dialogue and engagement. Participants indicated it would be important to expand the voices at the table to also include employers, clients, and stronger provincial representation. Included amongst the most useful aspects of the evaluative commentary was:

...the opportunity to engage with new partners, learn and share experience, and find solutions to gaps.

4.0 Next Steps

- ARAISA will make this report available in both English and French, and share with meeting participants.
- IRCC will share additional information on "Who's who" related to the AIP, and what their roles are.
- IRCC will work with provinces to identify opportunities to share data and other types of information with SPOs.
- IRCC is proposing to develop a 1-page info sheet to encourage individuals to complete language testing and educational credential assessments in order to avoid delays with their permanent resident application.
- IRCC has a summary of the most recent Reference Group meeting that could be circulated. Participants are also interested in the list of representatives.
- Service provider organizations identified that they would like additional opportunities to contribute and to participate in future AIP discussions.

5.0 Closing Remarks

In closing, representatives from IRCC addressed the question of 'Who owns the AIP?'. As an innovative pilot program whose success depends upon multiple partners working together, this is not an easy question to answer. While the involvement of all stakeholders is a definite strength, it is obvious that there needs to be an emphasis on the importance of communication for all players.

Also expressed was a commitment on the part of IRCC to evaluate the Pilot, both in terms of the shorter-term implementation and the longer-term assessment of outcomes and retention. The first evaluation of the Pilot is currently scheduled for fall 2018 to assess the early stages of the AIP implementation. It is recognized that this plan needs to be shared early on in the development process in order to gather feedback from all stakeholders.

It was acknowledged that there are challenges that exist in the area of pre-arrival services. The work that lays ahead is to figure out how to best align pre-arrival services with those that exist locally so that the best of both are utilized.

This meeting was an initial response to an identified need to bring partners from the settlement sector to the table to discuss early implementation of the AIP. It was felt that the feedback generated will help inform future approaches and actions, and has also helped identify some 'quick wins' that might be addressed sooner rather than later. It was agreed that future meetings

of this nature need to include other key players, and additional thought should be given to length, frequency, support, and structure.

Representatives from both IRCC and ARAISA shared their appreciation for the richness and honesty of feedback provided by all participants, and the continued commitment and efforts of all towards supporting a successful program. ARAISA is interested in continuing to play a regional role to convene important, valuable and needed conversations among stakeholders to facilitate this dialogue.

> *"The willingness of everyone to work together is obvious. There's a sense from the room that everyone wants to pull in the same direction – everyone wants clients to succeed; they want the AIP to succeed."* – Tim Foran, IRCC

6.0 Background on ARAISA

Atlantic Region Association of Immigrant Serving Agencies (ARAISA) was formed in 1994 as a regional body to represent the needs of settlement-integration agencies throughout the Atlantic Provinces. ARAISA currently has member agencies from Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and New Brunswick. ARAISA is a regional umbrella association that serves as a collective voice and regional forum for members committed to settlement and integration of immigrants in the Atlantic region.

ARAISA's mandate is to identify and to address the needs and concerns of immigrants and immigrant service providers and agencies in the Atlantic Region. Some of ARAISA's objectives include: to facilitate an information exchange process among immigrant serving agencies; to act as a collective voice representing the interests of newcomers, service providers, and service organizations; and to assist government in the formulation and implementation of policies and programs.

ARAISA welcomes, and values the opportunity to work with stakeholders from across the region to bring forth important immigration and settlement issues.

7.0 Appendices:

7.1 Participant list

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7.2 Agenda

The Atlantic Immigration Pilot: Discover, Dream and Deliver at Strength

An ARAISA Hosted Dialogue

Date: 13:00 – 16:30 HRS, Thursday, April 12th and 08:30 HRS – 12:00 HRS, Friday, April 13th

Location: Ceremony Room, IRCC office, 1741 Brunswick Street, Halifax, NS

Goal: To identify key strengths, and areas requiring strengthening, to deliver an effective and sustainable Atlantic Immigration Pilot (AIP).

Learning Objectives:

1. To provide an overview of the current delivery of the Atlantic Immigration Pilot across the region.
2. To share significant stories of AIP learning and change that highlight both bright spots and pitfalls.
3. To discern what is inspiringly and realistically possible for the AIP.
4. To state key recommendations to assist stakeholders in delivering a strong and sustainable AIPP.

Agenda:

Thursday, April 12th		Friday, April 13th	
13:00	Welcome and Orientation Collaboration for Learning and Change	08:30	Review Insights /Preview Foresights
13:45	The Atlantic Immigration Pilot: Reviewing what it is all about	09:00	Emergence: Exploring what is possible with AIPP
		10:30	Break
14:15	Sharing Significant Stories of AIP Learning and Change	10:45	Key recommendations
15:00	Break	11:45	Closing Appreciations and Evaluation
15:15	Mapping Significant Stories of AIP Learning and Change	12:00	Stop
16:15	Monitoring Learning of the Day!		
16:30	Stop		

8.0 Available upon Request:

8.1 Transcribed flip-charted outputs from participants during workshop.

8.2 Compiled evaluative feedback.