

PROMOTING SETTLEMENT-SPONSOR COLLABORATION

BEST PRACTICES REPORT - APRIL 2019

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ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations are used throughout this report:

BVOR: Blended Visa Office-Referred Refugee*

IRCC: Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada

PSR: Privately Sponsored Refugee*

SAH: Sponsorship Agreement Holder

SPO: Service-provider organization

* When we refer to sponsored refugees below, we are referring to privately sponsored refugees, which for the purposes of this report also includes BVOR refugees.

ABOUT THE PROJECT

The Allies in Refugee Integration project seeks to increase and strengthen collaboration between settlement service providers and refugee sponsorship groups in Ontario and ultimately improve settlement outcomes of privately sponsored refugees. Led by **OCASI** in close partnership with **Refugee 613**, ARI is a three year IRCC-funded project that engages service providers, sponsors, formerly sponsored refugees and other stakeholders in Ontario to find ways to improve communication and collaboration.

The Allies in Refugee Integration Project is funded by Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC).

For more information on the project, visit: <http://ocasi.org/allies-refugee-integration>

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Funded by:

Immigration, Refugees
and Citizenship Canada

Financé par :

Immigration, Réfugiés
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Allies in Refugee Integration (ARI) project emerged out of a belief that there is too often a lack of understanding between two important players who assist in the settlement of Privately Sponsored Refugees (PSRs) or sponsored refugees: Private refugee sponsors and Service Provider Organizations (SPOs). They are common allies in supporting sponsored refugees in their first year in Canada, and each has an important role to play in their successful integration. However, sponsors and SPOs are not always working together efficiently. New tools are needed to improve settlement-sponsor teamwork in Ontario.

Based on the Canadian Federal Government's 2019-2021 immigration levels plan, there is a planned increase in sponsored refugees arriving in Ontario. Therefore, the need to improve understanding and collaboration between these two key stakeholders has never been greater. The ARI project, led by OCASI in close partnership with Refugee 613, is responding to this need through collaborative approaches.

The purpose of this report is to summarize the findings from ARI's Environmental Scan, conducted between July 2018 and February 2019. The results of the scan will form our baseline understanding of the current settlement-sponsor relationship. The project has three phases: an environmental scan of current and promising practices, followed by a co-design phase, and finally the piloting of selected tools to improve collaboration.

These findings will provide a direction and empirical grounding as ARI moves into the second phase of the project, bringing together stakeholders to collectively design tools that will improve settlement-sponsor collaboration in Ontario. ARI also hopes that the findings in this report will increase understanding in the sector and spark interest in SPOs and sponsors to consider how they can work better together in their communities. The ARI project seeks in all aspects of this project to keep the interests of sponsored refugees at the centre of all decisions, involving formerly sponsored refugees in research and decision-making throughout the project. The ARI project's central aim is to improve the settlement experience of privately sponsored refugees so that they have the right kind of settlement support they need in their first year in Canada.

For this environmental scan, we conducted focus groups, interviewed key stakeholders, completed two online surveys, and undertook a literature review. We consulted with more than 341 individuals and dozens of academic and grey literature to capture the diverse voices and perspectives of the settlement, sponsor, and PSR communities in Ontario. While there is no monolithic experience of the above stakeholders, we were able to identify common themes in the current state of collaboration, including both the challenges and opportunities for growth.

Our research found that there are indeed collaborations occurring between SPOs and private sponsors, but they are mostly sporadic or based on personal connections. There is strong support among all stakeholders for increased collaboration. This is based in large part on the recognition that sponsored refugees will benefit from better teamwork as both SPOs and sponsors bring different sets of strengths and tools to the settlement process. Results suggested a need for increased mutual understanding of

roles and responsibilities among sponsors and SPOs, and also an increased awareness of sponsored refugees and sponsors about what settlement services are available to them.

Our findings suggest that best practices for building collaborations in this context include:

- Improving information sharing and collaborative settlement planning right from the beginning of the sponsorship, even before the arrival of sponsored refugees
- More equitable programming for sponsored refugees at SPOs and considering community-wide and client-centred approaches to settlement programming could lead to greater interest in sponsored refugees and sponsors wishing to approach SPOs
- Building strong interpersonal connections based on common understandings the value-added of each player

Stakeholders identified a number of barriers to greater collaboration, including:

- A lack of understanding of mutual roles in PSR support
- Contradictory messaging about roles from various authorities, including IRCC itself, that can lead to confusion and a lack of interest in working together
- Constraints of sponsoring groups that are voluntary in nature and vary widely in experience, leading to inconsistent reaching out to SPOs
- Restrictions experienced by SPOs whose funding models or confidentiality policies make it difficult to work with sponsors, especially in the pre-arrival period

Moving beyond the challenges to possible solutions, stakeholders had a lot of ideas on how to improve collaboration in support of sponsored refugees. While some of the following ideas could be seen as resource-heavy interventions, we believe that they could also increase efficiencies, avoid duplication of services, avoid costly sponsorship breakdown. These tools have the capacity to enable all sponsored refugees to have access the settlement services that fit their needs, and sponsors and settlement workers could avoid burnout. Stakeholders suggested interventions that include:

- Creating opportunities for relationship-building between SPOs and sponsors concentrating on the value-added of each player
- Increased opportunities for information sharing, more frequent training for both sponsors and SPOs, and improved processes for connecting sponsors and SPOs
- An important moment for intervention in improving the relationship was found to be before the arrival of the PSR during the settlement planning process

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are common recommendations that were suggested by stakeholders for concrete interventions that could be piloted for improvement in settlement-sponsor collaboration.

Stakeholders suggested two main types of interventions, focusing on **connection** and **information**.

CONNECTION

The quality, frequency, and type of connection made between sponsors and SPOs sets the tone for all possible collaboration. These connections include:

- Opportunities for positive sharing and/or in-person meetings, as individual and personal connections are what successful collaborations are built upon.
- A mechanism for making more formal, routine connections between sponsors and settlement organizations is recommended.
- Connecting sponsors to settlement prior to arrival of the PSR and/or improving the settlement planning process.
- Leveraging previous relationships and promoting multi-stakeholder approaches to improve the quality of collaboration.

Examples of tools suggested in our research that target connection include:

- Increased outreach by SPOs to sponsors, with regular and in-person connection preferred. This could include innovative co-location models, or placing settlement workers in libraries, schools, or places of worship.
- IRCC to be more involved in intentionally connecting sponsors and SPOs through information sharing.
- Connecting sponsored refugees and sponsors directly to a case worker at a SPO and having regular check-ins as needed. This could be modelled on the current JAS program where sponsored refugees, sponsors, and settlement workers come together to create an agreement on settlement responsibilities and communication plans.
- Identifying one PSR specialist at a SPO as a contact for sponsors.
- Remove barriers to pre-arrival connections and encourage sponsors to involve SPOs in settlement planning, so that roles are clarified prior to the arrival of the refugee/s.

INFORMATION

The quality and accessibility of **information** matters. Increasing awareness amongst sponsors regarding settlement services and increasing PSR program information for settlement workers will lead to stronger collaboration. Information sharing and communication among all stakeholders is also an important piece. The information sharing includes:

- Increase training opportunities for both settlement workers and sponsors to increase awareness of settlement services available and information on the PSR program in general.
- Clarify messaging around settlement-sponsor roles and create opportunities for SPOs and sponsors to understand these roles in practice.
- Centralize information on PSR settlement (virtually or in a physical hub or designated person/body) and share widely.
- Enable better communication between SPOs and sponsors through sharing information about where sponsored refugees are settling and how to contact sponsors, in particular on G5 and family-linked cases.

Examples of tools suggested in our research that target information include:

- Regular orientation sessions by local settlement services where sponsors and sponsored refugees are strongly encouraged to attend.
- Orientation guide on how to work with each stakeholder (sponsor, SPO, PSR).
- Increased and targeted training for both sponsors and settlement workers, including through RSTP and elsewhere.
- Sponsor training could be connected to GAR-supportive volunteer training led by SPOs to maximize community resources in support of refugees.
- Ensure continuity in information on roles and expectations of sponsors/SPOs, including on IRCC forms such as the Settlement Plan.
- Create a centralized hub of information on the PSR program such as a website, physical location, or other method for all SPOs sponsors, and sponsored refugees.
- Centralized passport/checklist for sponsored refugees and sponsors of local settlement services.
- For all of the interventions above, recognize that the experiences of each stakeholder will be unique based on their backgrounds, experiences and the availability of services for newcomers. In particular, family-linked cases may need special service tailoring.

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

The Allies in Refugee Integration Project starts from the acknowledgement that settlement services are proven to have a positive effect on refugee settlement. Settlement workers provide information and advice, increase newcomers' support networks and help the newcomer navigate a new community through culturally sensitive programming. Sponsors also have an important role as they are volunteers who commit to providing financial, emotional and practical support to refugees for a year, and this will often entail collaboration with settlement professionals.

The lack of clear protocols, tools and of a shared understanding leaves many private sponsors and settlement service providers struggling to collaborate effectively. Close teamwork is not happening consistently, and confusion around roles and responsibilities hampers efforts to meet the needs of refugees in a coordinated and effective manner. This is the gap the ARI project aims to address.

The focus of ARI is to drive innovation at the intersection of the settlement sector and the private refugee sponsorship community, through identifying, developing and testing new tools and approaches for collaboration and teamwork. Sponsors and SPOs are motivated to work together for the sake of sponsored refugees, and this goal of improving the settlement experience for sponsored refugees is at the ultimate goal of the ARI project.

Throughout the first phase of our project, we explored questions fundamental to the improvement of the settlement-sponsor relationship, including:

- What is currently happening in terms of collaboration between sponsors and service providers across Ontario?
- How does each actor understand their role, and how are they working together, if at all?
- What best practices or successful examples have been identified in settlement-sponsor collaboration?
- What inspires collaboration between sponsors and settlement workers, and what are the benefits?
- What are the main challenges in collaborating?
- What supports/resources would need to be put in place to increase collaboration moving forward?
- What are some key factors or resources that have been identified that would promote successful collaboration?
- What are some solutions/pilots that have been suggested?

SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

Our research was conducted by the ARI Project Team over the months of September 2018 through February 2019. The research was largely confined to Ontario, and sought to capture the experience of three main groups: private refugee sponsors and sponsorship organizations, SPOs and settlement workers, and sponsored refugees recently sponsored to Ontario. The environmental scan comprised four methods: focus groups, key informant interviews, two surveys, and a literature review.



Total number of participants in the research:

260: Survey respondents
12: Advisory Group Members
11: In-depth key informant Interviews
10: Focus Groups
(with a total of 58 participants)
Total: **341 people**



This same information, broken down by affiliation:

39: Privately Sponsored Refugees
135: Sponsors or Sponsor-related groups
95: Settlement organizations
36: SAHs and SAH Council Members
36: Other affiliation

FOCUS GROUPS

Nine focus groups were completed in September and October, 2018 in Ottawa, Kitchener-Waterloo, and Toronto. Each city completed three focus groups with sponsors, settlement providers and former privately sponsored refugees. In addition, a virtual focus group was conducted in November, 2018 with members of the Sponsorship Agreement Holders Council. There were a total of 58 participants.

The 2-hour focus groups explored the research questions with each group. We also collected information on individual experiences including best practices, gaps, tensions between stakeholders and recommendations for improved collaboration and overall experience for each stakeholder.

KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS

In order to delve deeper into our research questions, we identified members in the community who represented different affiliations and backgrounds. Eleven key informant interviews were conducted, which included individuals from SPOs, researchers in the field of forced migration, formerly sponsored sponsored refugees, and other key organizations in the sector. Interviewees were located in Ottawa, Toronto, Kitchener-Waterloo, and Windsor. Participants were selected through identifying key actors in the sector, as well as snowball sampling, with an emphasis on finding diverse voices from multiple backgrounds: various geographic locations, work or volunteer affiliations, and lived experience.

SURVEY

An online, anonymous survey was distributed through Survey Monkey targeted at sponsored refugees, Sponsors, SAHs, and newcomer serving organizations in the province of Ontario. It was open for two weeks in December, 2018 and was promoted through multiple networks including SAH and PSR listservs, OCASI and Refugee 613's membership and social media channels, Advisory Group member networks, LIP networks, and more.

The survey was completed by 238 participants. The breakdown in affiliation of respondents includes (approximately): 29% newcomer-serving organizations, 11% SAHs, 44% private refugee sponsors, 3% sponsored refugees, and 13% other. The survey successfully captured many different experiences across diverse geographical areas as well as responses from newcomer serving organizations, SAHs, and sponsors.

There were some challenges in having representative responses in a few areas. We had a strong response from the Ottawa area (98 responses) which means experiences in other Ontario communities may not be as prevalent. Secondly, the response from sponsored refugees was very low (less than 3%), in part due to challenges in reaching PSR communities, and other linguistic and technical barriers to participation.

Due to this low response from sponsored refugees, we decided to undertake a second survey targeted specifically to sponsored refugees. The survey was distributed in English, French, Arabic and Tigrinya in February 2019 and was open for one and a half weeks. It was distributed via targeted outreach to PSR communities, as well as social media and listservs in the Ontario PSR community. We had a total of 22 respondents.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A literature review was conducted in order to broaden the baseline understanding of current settlement-sponsor collaboration to include academic and grey literature on the topic. Having consulted more than 40 sources, we concluded that the literature supports the importance of building collaborative relationships between sponsors and SPOs. While there were few examples of long-term, formalized collaborations in the literature, there were numerous informal examples from which we were able to draw a number of best practices in collaboration found in Ontario and beyond.

GAPS IN THIS REPORT

We wish to acknowledge a few gaps in our environmental scan, as well as opportunities for further research. One challenge we faced in our research was including the experiences of “family-linked” sponsorships, as well as Group of Five or Community Sponsor groups. Family-linked sponsorships are anecdotally very common and have unique complexities, and therefore are important to capture. In our original survey we did not include a question around family-linked sponsorships, which was a missed opportunity. However, we did include a question about family-linked sponsorship in our PSR-specific survey to capture whether respondents were sponsored by relatives, friends, or friends of relatives. However, that small data sample doesn't allow us to present conclusive results in this area. We recognize the importance of conducting more outreach to include family-linked cases experiences and voices on an ongoing basis.

This report is the first of its kind to study settlement-sponsor collaboration in Ontario, and further research is needed to fully understand this complex relationship. Areas that would benefit from further research include:

- Longitudinal studies on the impact of sponsors on the successful integration of sponsored refugees
- Specific examples of best practices in sponsor-settlement collaborations in Ontario over a long period of time and their impact on PSR integration
- Data regarding the degree to which sponsored refugees are accessing SPO services and their reasons for doing so
- The differences in collaboration opportunities and experiences in rural versus small urban areas, or large cities
- Since this research is Ontario-focused, it would be beneficial to make connections to what is happening across Canada and have national-level research available

KEY TERMS

This report, and indeed the ARI project, includes many concepts that merit some consideration.

The term “integration” is frequently used in the ARI project, however most sources recognize that it can be a fraught concept. Integration can be defined as a “mutual process between new home society and newcomers,” however in practice, some models of integration are more or less assimilationist (Hyndman, 2011). While the term integration is used in an attempt to avoid assimilation, it remains contentious. We use more often the term “settlement” as it is seen to be a more neutral term, however this term can also be seen to be assimilationist at its core.

Another term which requires some consideration in the context of the ARI project is how we understand the term “collaboration.” The way we defined collaboration for the purposes of this project is as follows: “Sponsors or sponsorship organizations and settlement organizations working together with the goal of supporting privately sponsored refugees.” Despite our definition, in our research we found that stakeholders had their own sometimes widely differing understanding of what collaboration could entail. They gave examples of collaboration at both the personal and organizational levels, including simply accessing settlement services, information sharing amongst stakeholders, creation of networks and pooling of resources, and more. For the purposes of our project, we have placed an emphasis on understanding more formalized collaborations between SPOs and sponsors. However, due to lack of research and common understanding, we have occasionally broadened the scope to draw conclusions.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

SECTION 1 - WHAT IS CURRENTLY HAPPENING IN SETTLEMENT-SPONSOR COLLABORATION?

We began our research by first creating a baseline description of the current sponsor, settlement, and PSR understanding and practice of collaboration. In other words, what is already happening in Ontario on this topic already?

Most respondents have their own understanding of **role definitions** of sponsors and settlement workers, although these definitions are not always in agreement. In general, private refugee sponsors are understood to be primarily responsible for the financial and informal settlement support of sponsored refugees. SPOs are seen to be supportive to sponsored refugees, offering professional and general advice and referrals. Despite the above identified role definitions, the research shows that there continues to be considerable overlap and confusion in the carrying out of responsibilities. Clarifying roles of sponsors and SPOs in PSR support is an essential foundation at the beginning of promoting teamwork.

Collaborations are indeed happening, although most examples of collaborations are more informal and mixed (not strictly private sponsors and SPOs), involving different actors, or based more on personal relationships between sponsors and a settlement worker. In the anonymous survey, 67% of respondents of the survey responded yes when asked, “Are you involved in or aware of any successful “collaborations” between private sponsors and settlement organizations?” Most collaborations identified by

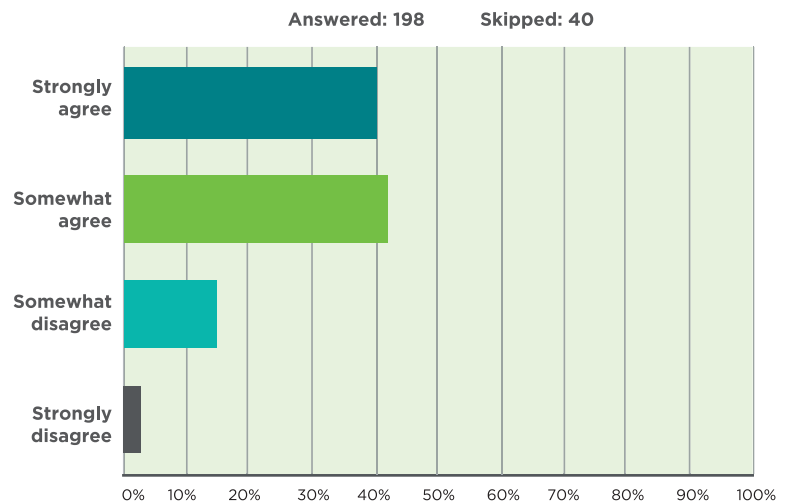
respondents focused on information sharing and expanding the resources available to sponsored refugees. These collaborations most often take the form of multi-sector collaborations, domain-specific collaborations, formalizing informal connections, training and capacity building initiatives.

Examples of successful collaborations identified in the research:

- Multicultural Council of Windsor and Essex County
- Refugee 613
- Helping Newcomers Work
- Local Immigration Partnerships (LIPs)
- The Waterloo Region Immigration Partnership

There is a growing awareness that **collaboration is important**, and strong support among all actors for the promotion of better communication and connection between SPOs and sponsors. In fact, in our survey we discovered that many respondents feel that in their community, sponsors and settlement are working fairly well together.

Q9 Private refugee sponsors and settlement service providers in my community collaborate efficiently to support privately sponsored refugees in their final year.



Above: 80% of respondents agree that private refugee sponsors and settlement services collaborate efficiently. Around 20% disagree that SPO-SP collaborate efficiently.

However, there was also an acknowledgement that current collaborations are mostly sporadic, and all actors are not always working as well together. Many collaborations are happening on a person-to-person basis, with individual sponsors and settlement workers working together well if there is a good personality match. Meanwhile a lower percentage of sponsored refugees (63%) agreed with this statement.

“There is no coordination between the two sides and the sponsor does not have information on settlement services.”

Former Privately Sponsored Refugee

There are indications that some sponsors and sponsored refugees are unaware of the settlement services available to them. The literature is in agreement that in general, sponsors and sponsored refugees should have more intentional orientation to the settlement supports available to them, and SPOs should conduct outreach and clarify what they offer to sponsored refugees. We know from preliminary research that a number of sponsored refugees and sponsors are indeed accessing settlement services and see the importance of their programs, but detailed data is not available. Our research shows that a high number of sponsors and sponsored refugees do access some type of settlement services,

with basic settlement information, language services, education, training and employment supports of the highest interest. 77% of respondents to the PSR survey agreed that accessing settlement services was helpful.

“Private sponsors are generally unaware of what settlement services exist, how they can support the successful integration of the newcomer/newcomer family, and at what point they should be accessed in the settlement journey.”

Private Refugee Sponsor

Despite the findings discussed above, it is important to acknowledge that the experience of each PSR in their settlement journey is unique, and the Settlement-Sponsor-PSR relationship will vary considerably. A few factors that can influence the settlement experience of sponsored refugees and sponsors can include geographic location, rural versus a small city centre or large city, availability of services for newcomers, language and cultural barriers to accessing services from SPOs. In addition, there is such a wide variety of sponsor types including family-linked sponsorships, faith-based organizations, Group of Five, Community Sponsors or through a SAH, and more — whose internal dynamics can have a major impact on how settlement and sponsorship relationship is approached.

SECTION 1 SUMMARY - LEARNINGS

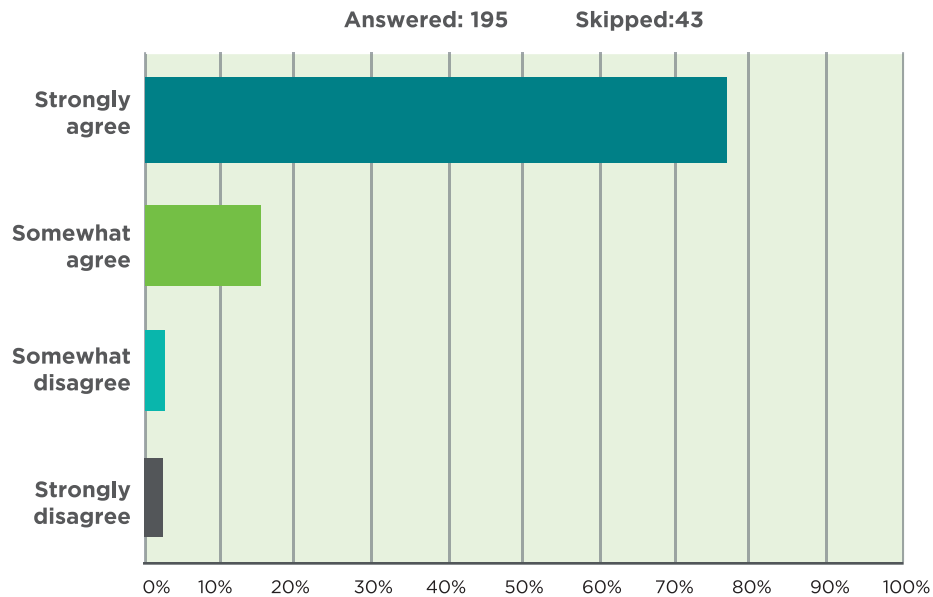
1. There is some confusion around the roles and responsibilities of SPOs and sponsors, and a need for increased mutual understanding.
2. There are collaborations already happening, and sponsors, settlement workers, and sponsored refugees alike generally see the importance of collaboration. However, most current collaborations are sporadic and based on personal connections.
3. While some sponsored refugees and sponsors do access settlement services, a number of sponsors and sponsored refugees are unaware of the settlement services or feel unwelcome in settlement agencies.
4. There is a wide variance in experiences and needs of sponsors and sponsored refugees in accessing settlement services.



SECTION 2 - WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS AND BEST PRACTICES OF COLLABORATION?

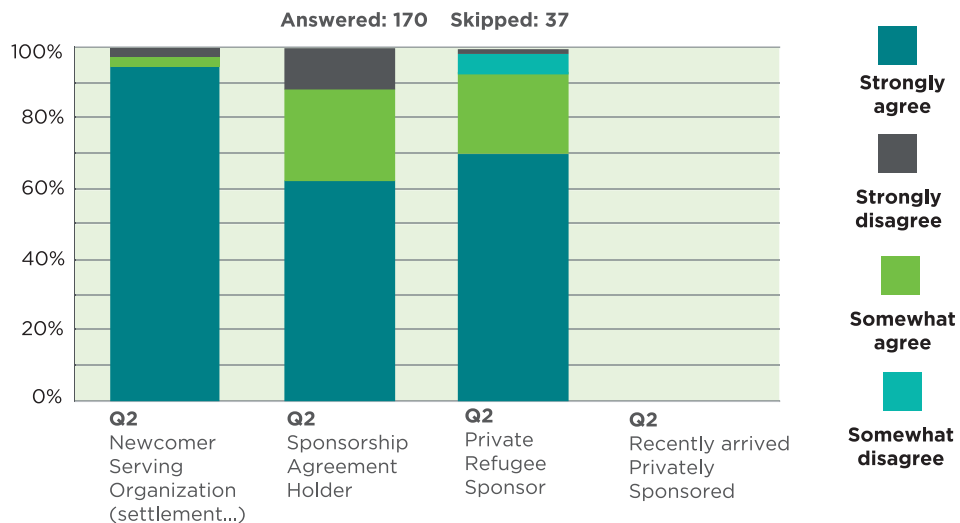
In promoting collaboration, stakeholders identified a number of best practices and recognized benefits of working together. First, we observed strong support among sponsored refugees, sponsors, and SPOs alike for the benefits of collaboration.

Q12 Collaboration between sponsors and settlement organizations is very important to the successful integration of privately sponsored refugees.



Above: 77% of respondents “strongly agree” that collaboration is very important to the successful integration of sponsored refugees. 19% somewhat agree, and 4% disagree.

Collaboration between sponsors and settlement organizations is very important to the successful integration of privately sponsored refugees.



Above: Newcomer serving agencies feel stronger about collaboration between sponsors and settlement organization as important to the successful integration of sponsored refugees. There is more disagreement from Sponsorship Agreement Holders.

In building support for collaboration, a best practice is to focus on the benefits it could bring to sponsored refugees, including supporting sponsored refugees who may otherwise fall through the cracks. The primary motivation found in our research is to expand the resources available to sponsored refugees. Secondly, collaboration secures support for refugees more broadly and can bring together common allies. When building support for collaboration, it is essential to consider the bigger picture benefits that can come from working together for stakeholders and for the sector in general. When both sponsors and settlement bring their expertise and resources, it can help to avoid burnout and strengthen support for refugees in the community.

“My sponsors were very good in helping me to get everything that benefits me, they would call [the settlement agency] and ask an expert if they were not sure about something and he would advise them of what should they do for me.”

 **Former Privately Sponsored Refugee**

It was also noted that is important to focus on the unique set of skills that sponsors and SPOs bring to the settlement of sponsored refugees. Sponsors can move quickly to respond to PSR needs, and bringing civil society into refugee settlement harnesses much previously untapped potential tin support of refugees. Settlement workers bring the settlement expertise and access to programs and resources for sponsored refugees. The importance of working together in order to avoid duplication and burnout was identified as a bonus of collaboration for the sake of sponsors and SPOs themselves.

Another successful practice in collaborative approaches identified in the research was the promotion of more innovative approaches to settlement and programming, such as client-centred or community-wide responses. In building support for sponsored refugees, it is important to consider a client-centred approach, looking to other sectors such as mental health for ideas of how to build responsive, flexible, and equitable settlement support. The settlement-sponsor dynamic is already unique in how it combines formal and informal supports of sponsored refugees. By bringing new members of the community into a community-wide support of refugees, everyone can benefit from reduced duplication of services and increased resources available to welcome newcomers.

“Stop focusing on numbers, but quality. You feel like [settlement workers] are looking down on you. They overload with information. Focus on the person, quality service.”

 **Former Privately Sponsored Refugee**

Another theme that emerged was focusing on improving the method and quality of the connection between sponsors and settlement workers. Regular meetings between sponsors and settlement workers pre-arrival of the sponsored refugees, formalizing the connection with SPOs and sponsored refugees, and regular and in-person meetings including sponsored refugees, their sponsors, and settlement workers were frequently cited as successful collaborative practices. This includes an emphasis on identifying willing allies and building trust, as collaborations are more likely to take place when there is a staff at a SPO, and/or a sponsor who are both passionate about teamwork and willing to reach out.

A successful collaboration requires the right information at the right time, including clarifying roles and ensuring sponsors are aware of available settlement services. While many sponsors identified that SPOs

need more information about the PSR program, many SPOs identified that sponsors need more information and guidance on boundaries and what settlement services can and cannot do for sponsored refugees and sponsors.

SECTION 2 SUMMARY - LEARNINGS

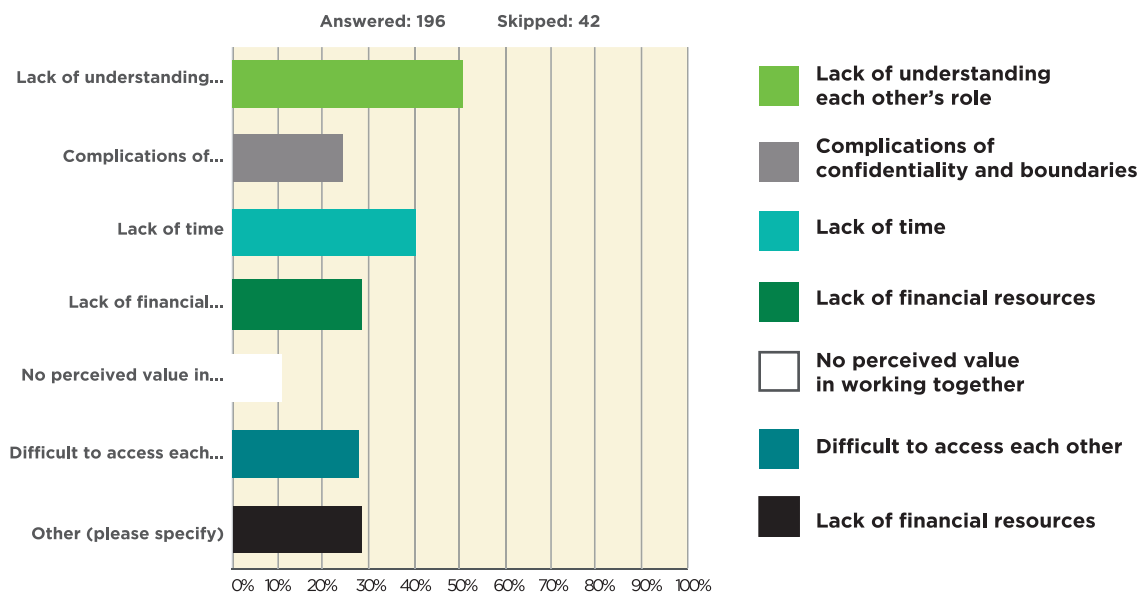
1. There is strong support for the importance of collaboration amongst all stakeholders.
2. The primary motivation of sponsors and SPOs to work more collaboratively together is to expand the resources available to sponsored refugees.
3. Best practices include innovative settlement and programming approaches, such as client-centred or community-wide responses to refugee settlement.
4. Successful collaboration relies upon interpersonal connections, and the method and quality of these connections has a big impact on the desire to work together.
5. Ensure players have the necessary information at the right time, and get the sponsorship off to a good start by understanding what SPOs and sponsors can do.

SECTION 3 - WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES AND HOW CAN WE OVERCOME THEM?

The most common challenges identified by stakeholders in our research is consistent with what

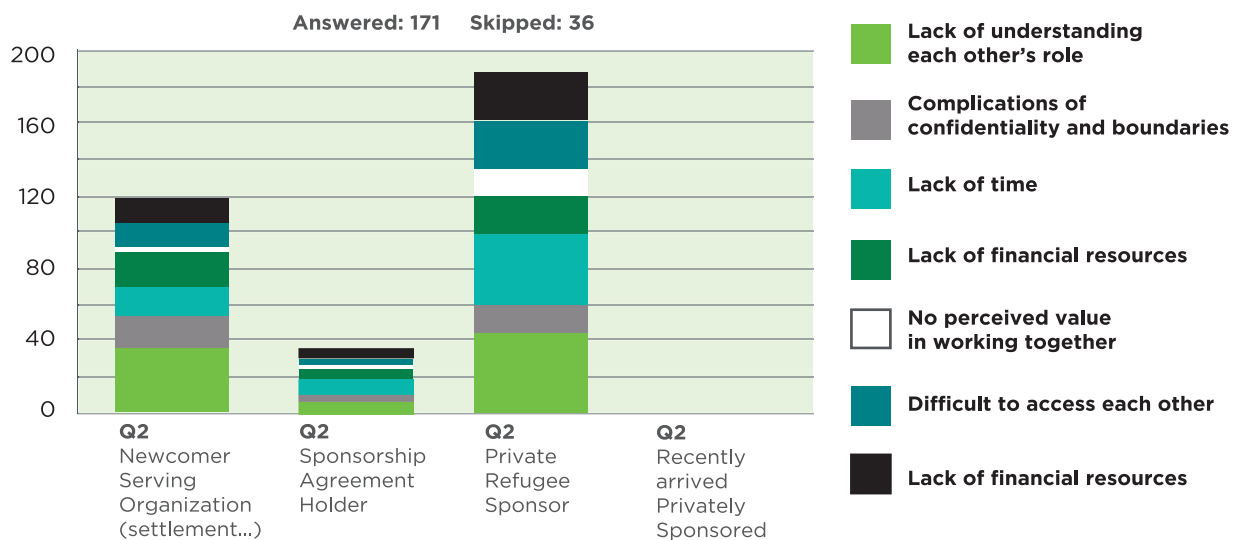
we've seen above: the lack of understanding of each other's roles and a lack of time and resources are the main reasons that SPOs and sponsors are not collaborating efficiently.

Q10 What are the main challenges in settlement service providers and sponsors working together? (Check all that apply)



Above: The most common reason for lack of collaboration is "Lack of understanding of each other's role" (51%), followed by "lack of time" (40%).

What are the main challenges in settlement service providers and sponsors working together? (Check all that apply)



Above: This data did not change significantly when disaggregated to show the responses for sponsors or settlement workers, meaning that the top barriers to collaboration are largely similar across stakeholders.

Messaging from IRCC itself — in the form of settlement planning forms or sponsorship guides — was identified as one of the sources of this role confusion. Sponsors and settlement workers identified resources that appeared to contradict each other on issues such as whether SPOs should work with sponsors or mediate in disputes, the financial responsibilities of sponsors, and more.

“I think there is sometimes some confusion about how to work together when sponsors have written settlement plans which indicate that they will take care of the settlement needs.”

Settlement Worker

There are internal dynamics within the PSR program itself that can make it challenging for sponsors to reach out to SPOs to work together. The PSR program relies on the goodwill of volunteers who have limited time and resources, therefore accessing

settlement services may not be their priority. The multitude of experiences and types of sponsor groups in itself can lead to a stark differences in the extent to which sponsoring groups believe in the value of SPOs to the settlement process. While some sponsor groups access SPOs without issue, other sponsor groups may be unaware of the services that SPOs can offer. More recently, in some cases the trust relationship has been broken through a belief among SAHs and/or sponsors that settlement workers are reporting them to IRCC as part of the new quality assurance program. Or, a negative experience with a particular SPO can lead sponsors to see it being easier to do settlement support themselves.

“The relationship is one of goodwill but seemed disorganized - due to lack of time and resources but also, too many players.”

BVOR Refugee Sponsor

Another challenge is that SPOs and other organizations cannot easily access information about sponsored refugees and sponsors in their community. As sponsored refugees and sponsors are not required to access settlement service organizations, the connection is mostly dependent on sponsors or sponsored refugees choosing to reach out. This sometimes doesn't happen until a crisis emerges, which is too late in the settlement process. The solution to this could be that SPOs do more outreach, however most do not have easy access to sponsored refugees. Data is lacking on how many sponsored refugees are settling in a given area and what their demographics are, meaning that it can be difficult for organizations like RSTP to plan their training or SPOs to create targeted programming for sponsored refugees.

There are also dynamics within SPOs that can prevent settlement workers or SPOs in general from reaching out to sponsored refugees and sponsors in their community. Many settlement workers expressed their frustration with a lack of cultural competency among sponsors, and a tendency to cross personal and ethical boundaries, adding to the already heavy workloads within SPOs. Our findings emphasized that funding should reflect the expected increase in sponsored refugees accessing settlement services, and in particular to enable SPOs to work with sponsors even before sponsored refugees have arrived. This would be a major shift for SPOs since it was clearly expressed in our research that SPOs believe they are not funded to work with sponsors, even though IRCC encourages sponsors to access settlement services. Confidentiality concerns around involving sponsors in the settlement process was also expressed by some settlement workers.

We also noticed a lack of consistency on how and when SPOs and sponsors engage. Frontline workers may be limited on working with sponsors based on strong restrictions from their management.

“The difficulty to access each other comes from the way these services are funded. Settlement workers do not get any credit for meeting with sponsors, but a pre-arrival meeting would be very helpful.”

 **Sponsorship Trainer**

Another commonly cited challenge to collaboration expressed primarily by sponsored refugees and sponsors is that they don't always feel welcome in SPOs, or don't feel the programs offered meet their needs. Some respondents shared that they did not always feel programming offered was equitable or accessible to them, in particular when there were programs only offered to certain nationalities. Sponsored refugees identified employment and language classes as the two most important services for them, and yet a number of sponsored refugees felt these services were lacking. Addressing these concerns may incentivise sponsors and sponsored refugees to approach SPOs with more interest. This issue may also be related to the above issue of role confusion, with some sponsored refugees and sponsors having unrealistic expectations of what SPOs can offer.

“No one from government or anyone is asking me how I am doing.”

 **Former Privately Sponsored Refugee**

SECTION 3 SUMMARY - LEARNINGS

1. The top challenges identified were lack of time and resources, as well as not understanding how sponsors and settlement can work together.
2. Some of the internal dynamics of sponsorship can prevent or delay sponsors from reaching out and collaborating with SPOs.
3. SPOs sometimes aren't given the tools and information they need to reach out effectively and target their services to local PSR needs.
4. SPOs ability to work with sponsors is limited by internal dynamics, such as confidentiality concerns or funding restrictions.
5. Some sponsors and sponsored refugees don't always feel welcome in SPOs or find programs meet their needs, leading to a lack of interest in working together.

SECTION 4 - PILOT IDEAS AND KEY FACTORS FOR SUCCESSFUL COLLABORATION

In our research, we found a strong appetite for change and many creative ideas for tools or points of intervention to improve the way in which settlement and sponsors work together. The importance of creating tools that are accessible and equitable for all sponsored refugees was emphasized as key to all the interventions identified below. For more on specific tools to be piloted, see the recommendations section on page five.

Before concrete tools could be implemented to improve collaboration, the hard work of building positive relationships and trust was identified as a first step. Sharing positive stories of collaboration, harnessing community-wide goodwill for refugees, and concentrating on the value-added that SPOs and sponsors bring to the settlement experience were emphasized. Meeting in-person was the overwhelming preference for interventions such as training and connection, in order to build understanding amongst SPOs and sponsors. Some respondents suggested

that protocols could be developed to guide settlement workers on how they could work with SAHs and/or sponsors when issues arise in a sponsorship, so as to avoid miscommunication or breakdown.

Many suggested interventions to improve collaboration focused on the need for more intentional or formal connection between sponsors and SPOs. This includes the idea of formally referring all sponsor groups to a settlement worker in advance of the sponsored refugees arrival, or matching sponsored refugees with a caseworker in a less intensive version of a case management system similar to Government Assisted Refugee (GAR) or Joint-Assistance Sponsorship (JAS) cases. Other suggestions included formalizing an in-person orientation meeting and occasional follow-up for all sponsored refugees with their sponsors with a SPO upon the sponsored refugees' arrival to Ontario.

“I think it would be more effective if the settlement support was on a regular basis; for example, the newcomer could visit every 1-2 months to monitor their progress.”

 **Former Privately Sponsored Refugee**

The importance of identifying key actors who could assist in bridging this connection was highlighted, including using organizations such as LIPs, Refugee 613, Sector Tables in Kitchener-Waterloo, or a point person on particular issues such as the Toronto Refugee Support Program for mediation.

Two main moments were suggested as key points of intervention to ensure connection is made. First, the settlement planning process when SPOs and sponsors can set up expectations and a plan together, and second, when the sponsored refugees arrive and can be involved in setting their own settlement goals collaboratively with a settlement worker and their sponsors. This could happen through a user-centred approach, using individualized checklists, wrap-around supports and strategic use of both formal and informal supports in the community.

“Orient sponsors with service providers available to them in the area and the specific services available to the sponsored refugees before their arrival.”

 **Settlement Worker**

Due to the highly complex nature of the PSR program and settlement service provision in Ontario, improved information sharing was suggested, using various tools. These include events such as info fairs for sponsors on local settlement services, a one-stop shop

or physical info hub for services so sponsored refugees and sponsors know where to access, an up-to-date website with comprehensive settlement information for sponsored refugees. It could even be as simple as bringing together stakeholders in a PSR-specific quarterly meeting to share updates and strategize together.

The importance of information sharing included a desire for more training both for sponsors and for settlement workers. Increased offering of workshops for sponsors on expectations and orientation to settlement supports, workshops for settlement workers on the PSR program, and better orientation for sponsored refugees prior to arrival were all strongly encouraged. This could also involve harnessing the knowledge and experience of more experienced sponsoring groups to assist new sponsors getting started. Once again, an emphasis was placed on training prior to the arrival of the sponsored refugees. One method suggested was connecting sponsor training to the community connections program that trains volunteers to work with newcomers, or to promote mentorship of new sponsors by experienced sponsors.

“Training - so so important! Needs to be well organized, detailed, continuous and mandatory.”

 **Sponsor Organization**

SECTION 4 SUMMARY - LEARNINGS

1. Create opportunities for relationship-building and trust between SPOs and sponsors.
2. Stakeholders seek a more intentional process for connecting sponsors and SPOs.
3. During the settlement planning process, and again upon arrival of the PSR are two key moments to build healthy connections between settlement and sponsors.
4. Stakeholders want improved methods for information sharing, and in particular training opportunities.

CONCLUSION

The ARI project's environmental scan, including extensive consultation with stakeholders and discussions of best practices in the sector, formed a baseline understanding of the benefits, challenges, and opportunities for collaboration. Our findings confirm the need for improvement in settlement-sponsor teamwork. Stakeholders see the value that collaboration can bring to the settlement of sponsored refugees, and made concrete suggestions for how to bring these natural allies closer together.

We hope that this research is not just useful for the ARI project, but can be a useful baseline for organizations across the country to have an evidence-based approach to strengthening collaboration. This research is valuable for the design and experience of private sponsorship, but could be relevant for those looking to promote new partnerships in support of newcomers, between faith organizations and settlement organizations, for volunteer programs that support GARs, and more. By engaging the community in the effort of welcoming refugees in a very tangible way, our communities are strengthened and our efforts to welcome newcomers are magnified. In order to give the best possible support to sponsored refugees in their settlement journey, we cannot afford to work in silos any more.

Our findings emphasized that no matter what kind of intervention is undertaken to improve settlement-sponsor teamwork, it is first important to remove the barriers to collaboration, and to centre the needs of the PSR in all decisions. Thanks to the generous and insightful input of hundreds of privately sponsored refugees, sponsors, and SPOs who shared their experiences, we now have a way to move forward together as allies in refugee integration.

“Better together sums it up, as we had the opportunity to leverage, help, and learn from each other, all in support of our refugee family.”

 *Private refugee sponsor*

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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BEST PRACTICES REPORT - APRIL 2019