Needs and Assets Assessment and Referral Services (NAARS) —

Parameters for the Creation of the Communities of Practice (CoPs)

Guidance for Settlement Recipients delivering NAARS

This guidance document outlines important considerations, and community members are encouraged to tailor them to their specific context and needs, while staying within the parameters described below.

NAARS TRANSFORMATION INITIATIVE

IRCC and the Sector are engaged in an exercise to increase consistency and coherence nationally in the delivery of NAARS with the aim to use more standardized delivery models in the future. In order to streamline efficiency and improve consistency within NAARS, the NAARS Transformation Initiative was created.

New elements which encompass the NAARS Transformation Initiative are:

- the deployment of the National Standardized Assessment Template (NSAT) for NAARS and the NAARS for Government-Assisted Refugees (GARs) template;
- the creation of a new NAARS National Advisory Table (NAT);
- the portability and standardization of settlement plans;
- the creation of Communities of Practice (CoPs) to support the effective and consistent delivery of NAARS;
- the adoption of a Dedicated NAARS Service Provider (DNS) model in appropriate communities, where applicable.

COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE (CoPs)

WHAT IS THE NAARS CoP?

A CoP represents all organizations with a vested interest in ensuring that newcomers have adequate access to NAARS as it pertains to connecting eligible clients to (re)settlement services in their community or their zone. This can include Recipients funded to deliver NAARS, IRCC-funded and non-IRCC funded service providers, Local Immigration Partnerships (LIPs), Réseaux en immigration francophone (RIFs), Francophone Recipients, Resettlement Recipients, SWIS-TEE Recipients, as well as local partners from such sectors as settlement, health, education as well as social, community and language services, and representatives of the private sector. In certain cases, it may make sense to

use an existing body or committee to act as the CoP, while in other instances a new organizational body may be created.

The purpose of the CoPs is to share knowledge, information, and promising practices to facilitate adequate access to NAARS for newcomers, and enable connections to settlement services in the community, while supporting the broader transition towards a new NAARS delivery model and broader (Re)Settlement Program objectives.

CoPs combine the structured, task-oriented approach of a working group with the collaborative, knowledge-sharing environment of a community of stakeholders. This setup enables stakeholders within each geographic zone (see below) to convene—not only to collectively advance NAARS Transformation—but also to support the ongoing delivery of NAARS. CoPs foster an atmosphere of continuous collaboration and learning, providing a forum for sharing best practices, addressing emerging challenges, and strengthening service delivery across the sector.

ZONES

In the context of NAARS, "zones" refer to a geographic area with a flexible boundary that is to be determined by IRCC through internal and external consultations. The zone encapsulates the infrastructure and services that eligible clients may seek to access to help them on their settlement journey in Canada within a: city, town, village, community, or other localized area with a population of < 50,000 people; a Census Metropolitan Area (CMA) or Province with a medium-sized population between 50,000 and 500,000 people; or, a subdivision of a large CMA of 500,000+ people.

There is no prescribed timeline for zone determination and the establishment of CoPs; these activities may occur prior to, following, or concurrently with one another, depending on operational needs and context.

CoPs bring together organizations within a given geographic area or "zone" with a view of enhancing client experience and improving the quality of NAARS and the exchange of knowledge and experience in the delivery of NAARS.

PARTICIPANTS

Participants in the CoPs will comprise organizations with a vested interest in ensuring newcomers have adequate access to NAARS and are referred to services in their community that best meets their settlement and integration needs.

IRCC-funded NAARS Recipients, as specified in the Contribution Agreement (CA), are required to participate in a CoP.

Other IRCC-funded participants could include:

- Recipients who are receiving referrals from NAARS providers
- Resettlement Recipients
- Francophone Recipients
- SWIS-TEE Recipients
- Recipients located in remote and rural communities
- LIPs and RIFs
- Umbrellas

Non-IRCC funded organizations and local partners from the following sectors would be encouraged to participate on a voluntary basis, including but not limited to:

- Settlement
- Health
- Education
- Social and community services
- Language services

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

At the outset, participating IRCC Recipients will convene to designate a Recipient to lead and oversee their CoP within the respective zone. The responsibility for identifying the lead Recipient for a given CoP rests with the SPOs, as they possess a deeper understanding of the regional priorities and community-specific needs. This particular Recipient will serve as the leading organization behind the CoP, guiding efforts and ensuring progress. Additionally, organizations may choose an approach that best suits their collective needs to effectively advance the work of their specific CoP.

All CoPs must provide the tools and support needed to include zone Recipients, including Francophone Recipients. This would mean, for instance, offering resource and reference materials developed by the CoP and holding sessions in both official languages (English and French).

The Recipient responsible for coordination and administration assumes some level of additional activities beyond those outlined in the CA. Dependent on available funding, as well as the size and scope of the CoP, some related expenses might be compensated. Recipients should discuss further with their Program Officers.

The main responsibilities of the selected Recipient will include, but are not limited to:

- Convening to plan and discuss actions necessary to meet/achieve the CoP objectives
- Proposing priorities and direction for consideration and decision by community members
- Sharing promising practices as well as resources

- Consulting with community members and developing and seeking approval of above resources and materials
- Ensuring that discussions and work remain focused on advancing community objectives
- Recruiting participants to help with specific initiatives that advance community objectives
- Discussing online platforms and/or tools for client management and portability of Settlement Plans
- Collecting, organizing and sharing data and knowledge to benefit all participants

If an existing body is used, such as a LIP/RIF table meeting, it would be expected to conduct these types of tasks within their own structure/processes.

The Department will continue to maintain an active presence in the CoPs; however, in recognition of the necessary arm's-length relationship with service providers, its participation will remain limited in scope.

While the CoPs are still developing, IRCC will support their activities, which may include providing remarks at meetings or making efforts to support this new way of collaborating among service providers. The Department will also provide strategic advice and answer questions as needed.

PRIORITIES AND OBJECTIVES

Throughout the course of the CoP, it is expected that the following priorities are met. These will be measured through regular reporting methods (narrative reporting, activity monitoring, etc.).

- Work together to implement the NAARS Transformation Initiative:
  - Promoting the use of the NSAT
  - Sharing best or promising practices pertaining to NAARS
  - Increasing awareness of services to support referrals (including those non-IRCC funded and that may cover the entire community)
  - Validating and/or creating zones (if applicable)
  - Developing partnerships across the various sectors which form part of the CoPs
  - Determining a consistent method for delivering NAARS that fits the unique needs of the zone/community/Region
  - Signing Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) with members of the CoP to ensure portability of settlement plans
    - Recipients will be required to develop their own MOU template

- Collectively determine a path forward for the selection of and transition to a DNS (where applicable):

- o Assisting in defining and establishing the boundaries of their respective zones
- o Nominating a DNS within their zone (if an organization in an applicable zone does not come forth)
- o Promoting unbiased referrals that fit the unique needs of the community
- o Signing a MOU that describes how service providers will make referrals in an unbiased, equitable and fair manner, including to Francophone organizations whenever appropriate
- o Conducting outreach activities to promote the shift to the DNS model among service providers within a zone

- Promote strong connections among (re)settlement, social and health services in the community to facilitate referrals within a zone:
  - o Working with the Department, as necessary, in identifying where all IRCC-funded and non-IRCC funded service providers are located
  - o Signing MOUs to facilitate the sharing of settlement plans while protecting client information
  - o Strengthening interdepartmental collaboration between the Resettlement and Settlement streams of the NAARS program to facilitate a seamless transition for GARs entering settlement services

- Share knowledge with participants to help newcomers access quality NAARS:
  - o Sharing resources that may be helpful in the delivery of NAARS
  - o Attempting, in good faith and using reasonable efforts, to amicably resolve all disputes arising from or in relation to the CoP
  - o Exploring how to make better use of newcomer assets to help newcomers on their settlement journey

DEDICATED NAARS SERVICE PROVIDER (DNS) MODEL

A Dedicated NAARS Service Provider (DNS) is a single, independent Recipient that solely provides NAARS *or* NAARS and language assessments within a designated zone. Once a CoP has agreed to geographic zones, the CoP is recommended to form a DNS working group. This group will present their proposed approach to implement the DNS model within their designated zone to IRCC, via their CoP. Once approved, zones can begin their transition towards the DNS model, establishing a consistent and efficient approach to service delivery.

Acting as an intermediary between newcomers and service providers within a zone, the DNS provider facilitates referrals to both IRCC-funded and non-IRCC-funded services offered by organizations, while considering fairness, eligibility, organizational mandates, and the clients' unique needs. In instances where a zone lacks a service provider that might benefit a specific type of client, a DNS may refer clients to neighbouring communities/zones or online alternative service providers who can meet those needs.

For the DNS working group, in municipalities where a DNS is not yet established, and where no other organization has expressed interest in taking on this role, umbrella or LIP organizations could manage, oversee and administer the working group until a DNS is established.

DNS TIMELINE

Recipients funded by IRCC will work to ensure a smooth and effective transition to the DNS model by delivering NAARS and forming a DNS working group within their respective zones. This group will collaborate to determine the most effective approach to implementing the DNS model in their community. Applicable DNS models should be ready to begin operating at the start of the next funding cycle. If operationally feasible, Recipients can also choose to start the transition in the current funding cycle. Discussions should take place with regional management prior to this.

EXPECTED DELIVERABLES OF A CoP

Through participation in their CoP, Recipients are expected to achieve the following:

- Establish zones across the country in all regions
- Identify the scope of service providers when reflecting upon the creation of zones
- Foster greater coherence between those involved in NAARS, and other organizations, such as umbrellas and LIPs, as necessary in the context of NAARS delivery
- Nominate a DNS for each zone, if applicable
- Consider other provisions to facilitate greater efficiency and effectiveness, when the DNS model is not applicable
- DNS model is adopted by Recipients in their zone with minimal disruption to their operations and their clients
- DNSs consistently provide an increased number of referrals and/or higher-quality referrals to both IRCC-funded and non-IRCC-funded Recipients
- CoP members actively promote their services, exchange knowledge about each other's offerings, and establish strong collaborative relationships within the CoP
- Recipients and stakeholders regularly access and apply shared knowledge, expertise, resources, tools, and templates available through their CoP

COMMUNICATION AND COLLABORATION

Community members are encouraged to communicate regularly in order to facilitate ongoing participation. If financially feasible, in-person meetings can be scheduled to build stronger connections. However, IRCC is currently not in a position to provide additional funds beyond those already outlined within CAs for in-person meetings. It is strongly recommended to use existing spaces within organizations (that are free or of minimal cost) and is also a way to foster greater networking and awareness of available services.

A dedicated online space for collaboration, sharing of content and reflections, storing documentation and sharing resources is also advised to support the work of the community.

While there is no formal directive mandating regular communication between the NAT and the CoPs, it is expected that the NAT will proactively share relevant information with the CoPs, particularly in relation to document review and the dissemination of pertinent updates. Although the CoPs are not required to report to the NAT in a formal capacity, they are encouraged to engage with the national forum (via their Program Officer) to raise concerns or share information that may prevent the escalation of issues. The Department anticipates a collaborative and coordinated relationship between the NAT and the CoPs to support the successful implementation of the NAARS Transformation Initiative.

WHAT ARE SOME EXAMPLES OF A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE (CoP)?

Existing Community Tables

One example of a CoP can be found in existing community tables that are already in place. These may include regular meetings organized by LIPs or other community leadership groups. In many cases, these ongoing gatherings already fulfill the essential functions and objectives of a CoP, such as knowledge sharing, collaboration, and collective problem-solving. Therefore, if the community feels that these existing structures are effective and meet their needs, there may be no requirement to establish a new, stand-alone CoP within that zone/community.

In situations where a zone or community is facing challenges in identifying a CoP lead or establishing a new CoP table, leveraging these existing community tables can be recommended as a valid and eligible alternative.

CoPs and Francophone Partnerships

Ongoing efforts at IRCC have been made through the approaches of "la lentille francophone" and "le principe du pour et par les Francophones".

These efforts should be extended to the CoP model(s) to ensure an overall Francophone representation within the Sector, including NAARS service delivery.

Having Francophone Recipients participate in CoP meetings and discussions should follow the principles of inclusion and respect for capacity while meeting the Department's obligations under the *Official Languages Act* to provide equal quality services and to support minority language communities. The CoPs must adhere to the requirements of clause 5.4 of the CA which state, among others, that all documentation must be accessible in English and French as appropriate, consultations must take place with the Francophone community and all necessary measures must be taken to communicate in English and in

French as the case may require. Point 4 under the "Requirements in Support of the Francophone Integration Pathway" section found in Schedule 4 of the CA states that Recipients must develop and maintain partnerships with Francophone Recipients and Francophone community organizations.

CoP models should be flexible, especially in certain Regions. This could take the form of bilingual or separate Francophone CoPs, and leverage existing interpretation resources, such as Zoom simultaneous translation services, to ensure the Department's official language obligations are met. For separate Francophone CoPs, the Francophone Recipients are encouraged to participate in the non-Francophone CoPs to share knowledge and expertise, foster problem-solving and innovation, and promote personal and professional growth through collaboration and networking.

Regional spaces for collaboration among Francophone Recipients, at the level of umbrella organizations, and through the RIFs also exist. All existing and future spaces, including CoPs, should consider the importance of critical mass, equitable funding, and provision of space to share promising practices and discuss issues and challenges, without language barriers, in the official language of a participant's choice.

Given the above, approval should be sought out for Francophone CoPs to be formed if critical mass of Francophone Recipients exists in a specific region or zone. If it does not, meetings should be bilingually facilitated and materials be made available in both official languages. Periodic follow-ups should be conducted to assess compliance with official language obligations.

Further content and considerations for Francophone impacts is under development.