

Needs and Assets Assessment and Referral Services (NAARS) TRANSFORMATION

Frequently Asked Questions

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Immigration, Refugees
and Citizenship Canada

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1. Purpose and Rationale for NAARS Transformation

Q: What is IRCC hoping to achieve with the transformation of NAARS delivery?

A: The NAARS Transformation Initiative is meant to make NAARS services more nationally consistent and coherent, while still allowing flexibility to respond to local realities. The focus is on putting clients' needs first. This includes reducing the differences in how NAARS services are delivered among Service Provider Organizations (SPOs) by using common tools, better supporting clients if they move from one community to another, making referrals better aligned with client needs, and improving overall efficiency. NAARS Transformation also clarifies the responsibilities of SPOs, encourages more consistent ways of working across SPOs and IRCC, and makes better use of data. Together, these changes are expected to lead to better outcomes for clients – such as helping them make informed decisions, improve their official language skills, and prepare for employment – and create a more coordinated settlement system. The goal is to provide smoother, more efficient supports from pre-arrival services to language training, employment assistance, and community integration.

Q: What are the issues or problems IRCC wants to address by changing how NAARS is delivered?

A: NAARS is often a client's first step in accessing settlement services, and IRCC is making changes to ensure clients receive consistent, high-quality support from the outset. Through discussions with the settlement sector, several challenges were identified that can impact the client experience, including inconsistent assessment practices, limited use of digital tools, high levels of self-referrals that may limit clients' access to the most appropriate services, significant variations in cost per client, uneven service quality across regions, duplication of effort and difficulties measuring client outcomes consistently.

The NAARS Transformation Initiative aims to strengthen how clients are supported by making assessments more consistent, improving how needs are identified, and helping ensure clients are more effectively connected to the right services. Key changes include the introduction of a National Standardized Assessment Template (NSAT), more portable and consistent settlement plans, and enhanced coordination among service providers to better respond to client needs across the system.

Q: What evidence does IRCC have to support changing how NAARS is delivered?

A: IRCC's decision to move forward with the NAARS Transformation Initiative is based on several sources of evidence. This includes results from previous funding cycles, analysis of NAARS data in iCARE,

lessons learned from pilot projects in the PNT Region, and ongoing discussions with settlement sector partners.

Across all these sources, the evidence pointed to the same issues: uneven and sometimes duplicative service delivery, high rates of SPO self-referrals, limited use of standardization and digital tools, and difficulties measuring client outcomes - especially across Regions.

Taken together, this showed a clear need for a more consistent, coordinated, and data-driven approach to NAARS delivery. The goal is to improve the quality of referrals so clients are better connected to the services they require.

2. Balancing Consistency and Flexibility

Q: How does IRCC envision balancing the need for consistency across Canada with the flexibility needed to address unique local Settlement challenges?

A: The NAARS Transformation Initiative is designed to create a consistent national approach that supports fairness and quality across Canada, while still allowing room to respond to local needs. SPOs will have the flexibility to adapt the elements of NAARS Transformation to reflect the realities of their communities.

IRCC will provide the broad parameters and provide standardized tools for delivering NAARS services, but SPOs will use their local knowledge and expertise to decide how best to deliver services on the ground. Communities of Practice (CoPs) will support this approach by giving Regions and SPOs a way to share insights and ensure that local perspectives shape how services are designed and delivered.

3. DNS Model Design and Implementation

Q: How does an organization become a Dedicated NAARS Service Provider (DNS)?

A: SPOs that are interested in becoming a DNS should start by talking with their local CoP. With support from the CoP, they can decide whether to apply through a formal Call for Proposals (CFP).

IRCC plans to fully implement the DNS model in the next CFP. If a specific geographic zone would like to introduce the model sooner, SPOs should discuss this with their Program Officer.

Q: How will the DNS model be implemented?

A: Where it is introduced, the DNS model will be rolled out gradually and tailored to each Region. The approach will reflect local service delivery needs and readiness.

IRCC will decide whether a DNS is appropriate in a community based on factors like the size of the community and the number of clients served. IRCC will support implementation through clear communication, ongoing engagement, and regional coordination to ensure a smooth transition and minimal disruption for clients.

Q: Does IRCC envision implementing a DNS across all communities?

A: No. The DNS model will not be introduced in every community. It is not expected to be used in smaller communities or in Francophone Minority Communities, unless there is a demonstrated need.

The model will only be implemented in places where it makes sense based on local conditions and service delivery realities – most likely larger urban centres with enough client volume to support it.

Q: When do you anticipate that the DNS model will be fully implemented?

A: The DNS model is expected to be fully implemented by the start of the next funding cycle.

Q: What happens if we can't identify a DNS? In such cases, will IRCC select a DNS for us?

A: IRCC expects Service Provider Organizations (SPOs) to work together through Communities of Practice (CoPs) to identify the organization best suited to serve as the DNS, drawing on their expertise and knowledge of local contexts.

Regardless of whether the CoP reaches consensus, IRCC will assess applications from interested SPOs during the next Call for Proposals. This decision will be guided by regional input and established Departmental criteria. Any recommendation from the CoP will be considered as an important indication that the local community has provided input into identifying the most appropriate DNS.

This approach ensures a DNS can be identified when needed while maintaining continuity of services and minimizing disruption for clients.

Q: Under the DNS model, would a SPO that becomes a DNS still be able to provide other frontline services, or would it be required to stop doing so?

A: As per CFP 2024 Funding Guidelines, a SPO selected as a DNS can only deliver NAARS as direct services. The only exception is Language Assessments, which DNS providers are also allowed to deliver. Language Assessments are considered a natural fit with the DNS model because they are closely linked to assessment functions.

Q: Who will determine geographic zones, IRCC or SPOs?

A: In areas where zones have not yet been established, IRCC will work collaboratively with Sector stakeholders to determine appropriate boundaries and how the model should be implemented.

Q: Will the DNS model also provide follow up with clients?

A: Yes. DNS providers will have the same responsibilities as other NAARS service providers, including conducting formal follow-ups as required.

4. Service Delivery Implications of DNS for SPOs and Clients

Q: Under the DNS model, can non-DNS SPOs provide Settlement services to clients if they haven't completed a NAARS assessment yet?

A: Yes. Clients can still receive urgent Settlement services even if they have not yet completed a NAARS assessment. In these cases, SPOs should address immediate needs first and then arrange a NAARS assessment as soon as possible. This ensures that any underlying issues can be identified and resolved through tailored services. All clients should be offered a NAARS as part of their broader Settlement journey, at a DNS where one exists, or at another SPO that delivers NAARS assessments.

Q: When the DNS model is implemented, will clients have the ability to choose which SPO they want to receive services from?

A: Under the DNS model, the NAARS service provider will make referrals based on a range of factors to ensure clients are connected to the appropriate and available services. Where possible, client preferences will also be taken into account.

Referrals are intended to match client's needs with the most appropriate service(s) while balancing client choice with factors such as service availability, location, proximity, and fairness across SPOs.

Q: How will IRCC ensure that the transition to the DNS model doesn't disrupt current client services or create gaps in support?

A: IRCC is committed to working closely with SPOs throughout the transition to reduce the risk of disservice disruptions or gaps. The goal is to ensure continuity of services and a smooth implementation.

This includes ongoing engagement through the NAARS National Advisory Table (NAT), CoPs, and continued feedback and consultations with the settlement sector to help identify issues early and address them as the model is rolled out. This also includes providing regular updates to the governance tables.

5. Program Specific Considerations (SWIS, Community Connections, etc.)

Q: Can IRCC clarify whether full NAARS delivery is expected within SWIS-TEE, or whether SWIS-TEE is meant to screen and refer rather than complete the full NAARS process?

A: NAARS is **not** part of SWIS-TEE programming. SWIS-TEE workers use their own intake process to assess newcomer students' and parents' needs related specifically to schools and the education system.

When IRCC-eligible families need broader Settlement supports beyond school-related issues, they should be referred to a NAARS provider for a full NAARS assessment. In some communities, a SWIS-TEE service provider may also be funded to deliver NAARS, but these are separate activities with different purposes.

In simple terms:

- **SWIS-TEE intake** focuses on school and education needs.
- **NAARS** looks at a client's broader Settlement needs and helps plan their overall Settlement journey.

Q: For programs like Community Connections that focus on group-based or short-term interventions, is IRCC's expectation that NAARS be completed in full, or that NAARS primarily informs referral pathways and connection to appropriate services?

A: A full NAARS assessment is recommended when a client has multiple Settlement needs and would benefit from referrals to different services.

If a client only wants to access one short-term or group-based service and chooses not to complete a NAARS assessment, they are not required to do so. However, all clients should be offered a NAARS assessment as part of their broader Settlement journey as this ensures that any underlying issues can be identified and resolved through tailored services.

6. Coordination, Communication and Communities of Practice (CoP)

Q: What guidance will IRCC provide on CoPs?

A: IRCC developed clear parameters for Communities of Practice (CoPs) and shared them with Program Officers, who in turn shared them with service providers. These parameters explain the purpose and role of CoPs and are designed to be flexible so they can be adapted to local contexts.

IRCC will continue to provide clarification through regional channels. SPOs can connect with their Program Officers if they would like another copy of the CoP parameters document.

Q: Who is responsible for convening the CoP?

A: Across Regions, CoPs will be integrated into regional strategies and led in ways that reflect local context and capacity. For example, in some Regions, Local Immigration Partnerships (LIPs) are helping launch CoPs. Francophone participation may be supported through the Réseaux en immigration francophone (RIFs) and bilingual approaches, depending on regional needs.

Q: When are the CoPs anticipated to start?

A: Significant progress has been made across all Regions to establish CoPs. In many cases, potential CoP leads, such as LIPs, have been identified, and Regions have already begun taking steps to set up CoPs. Some CoPs are already up and running, while others are expected to launch in the near future, depending on regional readiness and local context.

7. Transition, Resources and Change Management

Q: Will IRCC be providing SPOs with clear transition guidance so they can plan staffing, workflows, and client pathways well in advance?

A: Yes. IRCC is committed to supporting the settlement sector throughout NAARS Transformation. The Department will continue to share information and seek feedback through existing tables and committees, such as SPOs via the NAT, the Settlement and Integration Policy and Program Committee (SIPPC), and the Settlement and Integration Service Delivery Committee (SISDC), as well as through Program Officers.

This ongoing engagement is intended to help SPOs plan staffing, workflows, and client pathways in advance.

Q: Will IRCC provide any additional funding or resources to support SPOs in adapting to changes introduced as part of NAARS Transformation?

A: At this time, no additional funding has been committed. However, limited resources may be available to support certain logistical needs for SPOs leading the CoPs, such as translation and printing costs, and this should be discussed with the Program Officer.

All other activities related to the transition and implementation have been factored into the initial funding and are outlined in the Contribution Agreements (CAs).

8. Privacy, Confidentiality and Information Management

Q: How is privacy and confidentiality being handled with common tools and practices being implemented in NAARS Transformation?

A: SPOs are required to ensure the protection and confidentiality of client information in accordance with Section 7.4 of their CA. In general, SPOs have robust processes and tools to ensure client confidentiality, which is paramount. As we move forward, IRCC will balance strong privacy protections with the goal of reducing the need for clients to repeat their stories multiple times.

9. National Standardized Assessment Template (NSAT)

Q: Is the use of the NSAT mandatory?

A: Yes. The NSAT must be used for all NAARS assessments. If a SPO already has a system in place for recording NAARS assessments, they must integrate the NSAT questions into that assessment.

The use of standardized forms and processes across SPOs ensures that newcomers receive consistent, equitable, and high-quality service regardless of the point of entry into the Settlement Program or SPO.

Q: Do clients' responses to NSAT questions need to be recorded?

A: Yes. Completed NAARS assessments and Settlement Plans must be kept in client files, either digitally or on paper. This supports follow-ups and potential updates to the Settlement Plan.

Q: How long should it take to complete the NSAT questions, considering the fact that the current form is lengthier than previous versions?

A: The length of time required to complete a NAARS assessment varies depending on the client's situation. Factors such as interpretation needs or family size may affect the duration, but based on data from the first year of use of the NSAT shows that an assessment takes about 60-90 minutes. Flexibility is key to ensuring a client-centered approach.

Q: Where can we find the NSAT template?

A: The NSAT template can be found here:

<https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/ircc/documents/pdf/english/corporate/partners-service-providers/funding/settlement-funding-2024/national-standardized-assessment-template-for-naars-en.pdf>. Fillable and non-fillable versions were sent to SPOs and Program Officers via a Functional Guidance Release. SPOs are encouraged to contact their Program Officer should they require another copy.

10. Settlement Plans

Q: How will standardized settlement plans be developed?

A: IRCC will work collaboratively with the settlement sector to develop a standardized settlement plan. This work will build on existing engagement forums, such as the NAARS National Advisory Table (NAT), to make sure Sector input is reflected.

The goal is to create a settlement plan that is consistent across Canada, while still flexible enough to reflect local realities and day-to-day service delivery needs.

Q : When do you foresee the standardized settlement plan template being made available?

A: The standardized settlement plan template is expected to be available before the start of the next funding cycle.

11. NAARS National Advisory Table (NAT)

Q: How were the members of the NAT chosen?

A: NAT members were chosen based on criteria developed with significant input from regional IRCC staff. The focus was on identifying IRCC-funded NAARS SPOs with the knowledge, expertise, and capacity to actively participate and provide meaningful advice.

The final group was chosen to reflect:

- geographic diversity across Canada;
- a mix of small, medium, and large municipalities; and,
- representation from Francophone organizations.

Q: What is the forward agenda for the NAT or what are the topics to be discussed?

A: As an advisory body, the NAT will focus on supporting the implementation of NAARS Transformation. This includes advancing key pieces like the standardized settlement plan. NAT agendas will remain flexible and will be shaped over time based on emerging priorities, implementation needs, and feedback from the settlement sector. Meetings will be held as needed.

Q: What support will IRCC provide to the NAT?

A: IRCC will provide administrative, logistical, and program policy support through a Secretariat. This includes:

- preparing meeting agendas;
- circulating documents;
- organizing meetings; and,
- inviting subject-matter experts as needed.

Q: How long is the NAT expected to operate?

A: There is currently no fixed end date for the NAT. However, IRCC plans a review of membership after two years to ensure it continues to reflect the diversity of NAARS SPOs across the settlement sector.

IRCC will work with current members to confirm continued participation and will fill any vacancies that arise following this review.

12. Francophone Lens

Q: Will francophone service providers (SPOs) be able to participate in French during a virtual or in-person Community of Practice (CoP) meeting? Will related documents be available in French before or after the meeting?

A: Francophone SPOs may participate in CoP meetings, whether online or in person, in the official language of their choice. They may also obtain copies of the materials presented, either before or after the meetings.

Q: Could a francophone CoP be established?

A: Francophone SPOs in a given region may form a francophone CoP when circumstances allow. For more information, please contact your Regional office.

Q: Will francophone SPOs have their own CoP, or will they need to work alongside anglophone CoPs?

A: Yes, if there are enough SPOs—for example, in Eastern Ontario—a francophone CoP could be created. According to the CoP parameters, it would still be expected to maintain regular follow-ups with an anglophone CoP in its region, where applicable.

Q: Will there be dedicated NAARS service provider organizations (DNS) for francophone NAARS across the country? If not, could a francophone DNS SPO be considered for this role in large and small centres?

A: It is expected that any anglophone NAARS providers will collaborate closely, through CoPs, with francophone SPOs in their community. They must also ensure that francophone clients receive services adapted to their language and cultural realities.

In large centres, this ongoing collaboration aims, among other things, to assess whether it would be possible for a francophone SPO to become a DNS by the end of the 2024 CFP cycle. In such a case, the DNS that provides services in French would offer only NAARS services, except for language assessments, as defined. To date, no DNS has been selected to offer services in both French and English in a large centre.

Q: Can francophone NAARS providers adapt the National Standardized Assessment Template (NSAT) to reflect the needs of francophone clients?

A: All NSAT questions marked with an asterisk must be completed in order to meet IRCC's reporting requirements. The other questions are mainly intended to give SPOs a clear idea of the type of information expected from a department-funded SPO, while helping them use consistent terminology for the most frequently discussed topics.

SPOs may also add questions to better reflect the realities of francophone clients. The use of such forms and processes helps provide newcomers with consistent, equitable, and high-quality services, regardless of their point of entry, and contributes to a successful settlement experience.