

Globally Competitive Service Excellence

**An Immigration System
for Canada's Future**

STRENGTHENING OUR COMMUNITIES



Immigration, Refugees
and Citizenship Canada

Immigration, Réfugiés
et Citoyenneté Canada

Canada



Globally Competitive Service Excellence

Issue

To position Canada's future immigration system as internationally competitive and welcoming to newcomers, client experience needs to be on par with or exceed global standards in a rapidly evolving digital age. A high-level of ambition is critical for supporting Canada's goals of attracting top talent, facilitating a supportive migration journey for immigrants – particularly for refugees and persons who are in vulnerable situations, and promoting Canada as a welcoming and attractive destination for aspiring Canadians, workers, as well as visitors and students.

Context

I. Service Excellence

Service excellence, in a broad sense, refers to the ability to consistently meet or exceed client expectations in their service experience. This is often measured by a user's level of satisfaction with the service they received. Some characteristics of service excellence include: predictability, timely service, service with respect, accessibility, consistent support, convenience, clear and responsive communication, and understanding and delivering on client needs.


The Treasury Board Policy on Service and Digital¹, guides federal government departments in managing service delivery in the digital era by focusing on the client, ensuring proactive consideration at the design stage and establishing an enterprise-wide, integrated approach to governance, planning and management. These functions are guided by a commitment to certain principles and best practices, including: design with users; iterate and improve frequently; work in the open by default; address security and privacy risks; build in accessible from the start; and empower staff to deliver better services.

II. Approach to Service Delivery in the Context of Immigration

IRCC's current approach to service delivery for applicants takes on a mixed approach – consisting of services offered by phone, digital platforms, and sometimes in-person. In-Canada client enquiries are primarily addressed through the Client Support Centre (CSC) via phone calls and online forms. Outside of Canada, enquiries can be directed to visa offices, while in-person application support services are available via contracted Visa Application Centres (VAC). In-person interactions with IRCC are generally secured through appointments.

IRCC has taken ongoing steps to support the continuous improvement and modernization of Canada's immigration system. The Digital Platform Modernization (DPM) Programme, announced in the 2021 Federal Budget, is working to redesign programs and services, and to deliver a modern technology platform that will provide

¹ <https://www.tbs-sct.canada.ca/pol/doc-eng.aspx?id=32603>



end-to-end digital processes, support more agile policy implementation, improve program integrity, and deliver a world-class user experience.

Canada has a global reputation for being a destination of choice for students, workers, and those looking to start a new life with their families. For economic immigration in particular, Canada is in competition for top talent with many other countries around the world. Other governments are also reviewing their immigration systems, including looking at improvements to processing times and pathways, and other client service elements, to help with attraction and retention. It will be important for Canada to remain globally competitive. There are opportunities for Canada to leverage international best practices in its own immigration system.

III. Current Issues and Challenges

Providing *predictable, fast and efficient services* is a current and growing expectation.


- The ability to continue to meet demands for predictable, fast and efficient services in an increasingly complex and digital world is critical. In many industries and some government departments, advanced analytics (including machine learning) and artificial intelligence tools are increasingly used to streamline and reduce service times. More than ever before, individuals readily have access to information and services on their cellphones – from tracking packages in real-time to reviewing their own personal health records.
- In recent years, the influx of global disruptions (COVID pandemic, geopolitical tensions, increased levels of humanitarian crises) has drawn even greater attention to the need for more agile and responsive systems with greater resiliency planning.
- In the context of immigration, one of IRCC’s key departmental priorities is to deliver consistent and timely services; and this will be particularly crucial given the record levels of immigration targets set for 2023-25.
- Stakeholders have shared that they would like to see an immigration system with faster decision-making timeframes; as well as greater responsiveness, operational transparency, and predictability.

Access to *pertinent information on a timely basis and in plain language*² is another essential element of service excellence³.

- In today’s digital age, there are heightening expectations when it comes to readily available access to information and transparency; and artificial intelligence is becoming widely used for responding to enquiries online or by phone.

² As an example, the CRA found that even for newcomers who speak an official language, they often still require assistance to interpret communications from the CRA. (CRA, August 2019. [Ethnography of vulnerable newcomers’ experiences with taxes and benefits.](#))

³ Some values that guide digital government services include: improving administrative efficiency, improving ethical behavior and professionalism, improving trust and confidence in government, and improving social value and well-being. (Twizeyimana, J. D. and Andersson, A. (2019). [The public value of E-Government – a literature review.](#))

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- For newcomers, navigating a foreign immigration system with multiple streams and pathways primarily via a virtual format, and in a language that is not their native language, can add complexity.
 - Immigrants are also looking for timely access to meaningful application status information across all lines of businesses; easier, more intuitive navigation of websites; and more readily accessible information on settlement services.

Considerations

In envisioning an immigration system with globally competitive service excellence, the following are some key areas for consideration:

- **Holistic lens with human-centric approach:** Settlement and integration are life-changing journeys. The immigration system requires a holistic and human-centric approach that puts newcomers and their families at the centre of service programming. A holistic approach may examine how programs and services are coordinated – including any potential intersections, synergies, or inconsistencies. This includes striking a balance between an immigration system that is streamlined and simple to navigate, and one tailored to the unique needs of diverse demographics, regions, and industries.
- **End-to-end service:** Given the many players in the immigration system, an integrated and whole-of-society approach is key in helping ensure the continuum of service during the critical initial settlement period (accessing service across jurisdictions) and beyond. Coordination among levels of governments and service providers is crucial, as it contributes to system efficiencies, in addition to service excellence.
- **Corporate culture and internal governance:** Research suggests that strong senior leadership and organizational culture are key essential elements to delivering service excellence. In many organizations, “hierarchical management structures, siloed information sources, and low levels of training and inadequate career development” are diagnosed as attributes that often lead to subpar client experiences⁴. To improve service excellence, literature suggests adopting a corporate culture that rewards empathy and commitment to excellence, and training across all ranks to support the delivery of superior client experience⁵.
- **Balancing digital and human touch points:** Client experience is at the intersection of the digital, physical, and social realms⁶. Digital tools are essential to a modern immigration system; and advanced technology can unlock new efficiencies. However, consideration needs to be given to “automation ceilings” (need for blended approach between human decision-making and efficiencies from automation), preferences for human interactions, limits to digital solutions (only as good as their designs), and accessibility challenges for applicants with less digital literacy or access.

⁴ Harvard Business Review, 2023. [Executives Need to Invest in Understanding the Customer Service Experience.](#)

⁵ Harvard Business Review, 2023. [Executives Need to Invest in Understanding the Customer Service Experience.](#)

⁶ Bolton et al, 2018. <https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/JOSM-04-2018-0113/full/html>



Questions for considerations

- How should we define “service excellence”? What are its key features and how will we know when we’ve been successful?
- How can governments at all levels can work together to provide a seamless end-to-end experience for clients (from application, to arrival to temporary or permanent settlement)?
- How can we better demonstrate to clients our commitment to service excellence? What is the best way to hold ourselves accountable?
- Recognizing that long-term integration outcomes are improved by a robust family reunification system, how can Canada place the needs of newcomers and their families at the forefront of service and programming design, across their immigration and integration journey?
- Digital tools are only as good as their design. How should Canada ensure that a client-centered approach is front and centre when leveraging technology and digital tools to deliver programs and services? Which services are best delivered through an online channel; what types of interactions are best suited for human assisted channels; and which are best offered across multiple platforms to meet diverse client needs?
- In your organization, what are some concrete strategies or practices when it comes to service excellence? What has worked? What has not worked?