

Economic Immigration Lab



Year 2 Summary Report

Fall 2019



[@nou_lab](https://twitter.com/nou_lab)

economicimmigrationlab.org

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Numbers

100+

NouLAB staff hours supporting prototype teams

30+

Spin offs (subsequent smaller projects)

16

Prototypes

100s

of new relationships

68

Participants

49

Unique organizations

2

Positions created

\$22,192

Invested to support prototype testing and development

100%

Post-lab interviewees that have adopted prototyping, systems thinking and a multi-stakeholder approach into their work



Two Years of Innovating

In September, 2017 a diverse group of 34 stakeholders from the settlement sector, the private sector, newcomers, all levels of government, and academia, set out to discover innovative solutions to the economic and population growth challenges of NB.

Since then, there has been iterations on the facilitation process, new teams formed, prototypes tested, prototypes dropped, many new relationships and policy changes. Throughout the lab information has been flowing from participants to NouLAB coaches and to the leadership council. Strong networks have formed and new relationships fostered, all in the pursuit of a better immigration process for New Brunswick.



Context

The initial spark for the Economic Immigration Lab happened during NouLAB's Academy program, an introductory workshop on social innovation labs. At this workshop, Alex LeBlanc, Executive Director of the New Brunswick Multicultural Association and Adrienne O'Pray, CEO of the New Brunswick Business Council found themselves talking about the dire need for immigration to the province, and a new approach to solving this challenge. Alex, Adrienne, and the NouLAB team became the convening team, and started the planning of the Economic Immigration Lab. The first step was to bring major stakeholders to the table. An

advisory group known as the Leadership Council was formed, with a purpose of making connections, fundraising, and help shape the lab's objectives. Funding and willpower was committed from Post-secondary Education Training and Labour (PETL), Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (ACOA), McCain, and Imperial Manufacturing and the stage was set for the first year of a 3 year lab on economic immigration. The plan was to have two "cycles" of the lab per year - a cycle being one cohort of lab participants going through the lab process to develop prototypes.

Through discussions with the Leadership Council the problem was scoped and focused with the guiding question: **How might we become leaders at attracting, welcoming and retaining newcomers to contribute to the economy of New Brunswick?** It was from this initial question that conversations and work flowed. The value of having such an open question is that it allowed participants to think big, step back, and select an issue that their areas of expertise and interests could effectively tackle.

How might we become leaders at attracting, welcoming and retaining newcomers to contribute to the economy of New Brunswick?

Why a Social Innovation Lab?

“We need to keep the idea that employers are a key piece of the puzzle at the centre. If we could find a way to expand that, it would make a big shift.”

**- Elisabeth Stronach,
Director, Digital Journey
Transformation, Immigration,
Refugee and Citizenship
Canada**

The challenges facing New Brunswick’s economy are multifaceted and complex. According to New Brunswick’s former chief economist, David Campbell, the province’s declining population is the biggest public policy challenge of our time. The labour market is in structural decline and there is a dire need for workers to grow existing businesses. The combined out-migration of working-age New Brunswickers with a higher than national average median age is putting serious pressure on the labour market’s ability to supply workers to grow and support business in the province.

Tackling this pressing issue requires planning and action. The Social Innovation Lab format requires the right amount of both, bringing the experts together and building small projects or prototypes to test ideas to move things forward allows valuable insights to be gained from the immigration system.



How has the lab evolved?

The first lab convening was held over four months between September and December 2017, with two or three day convenings every month with fieldwork in between. It started with an open call for experts working in immigration and we secured involvement from 34 people who then organized into eight prototype teams. Five of these teams continued the development of these prototypes in the 'real world' and received NouLAB support and funding through the following year. How long NouLAB tracks and supports a project is determined by the amount of support from the team to keep the project running. The goal of prototyping is to test ideas and if they don't work, either adjust them or leave them.

After assessing the outcomes from the first round, the NouLAB team and the leadership council decided to use an accelerated model in order to go deeper. Instead of an open call for individuals, there was a call for people to come with specific topics and challenges that had been identified by the leadership council as

important to immigration in New Brunswick. Two new, more specific calling questions were developed:

How might we help newcomers to find meaningful employment and feel part of the New Brunswick community?

How might we help employers find talent to grow their businesses?

In April 2018, three teams convened for a one-week process designed by the team at NouLAB modelled after Google's Sprint methodology. The teams focused on:

Diversity and inclusion in the Parkton community of Moncton where many refugees live;

How to bring more Internationally Educated Nurses (IENs) to the province; and

Streamlining the process of immigration for employers in New Brunswick.

Involvement from major employers and the federal government were highlights of this round. The three teams that went through this week all continued to work at varying levels on their challenge by evolving the prototype developed during the sprint. To continue to offer support and invest in further innovation and prototype iteration, a NouLAB team member became a partner and coach to all active EIL teams. This blend of coaching, prototype design skills, and implementation support was found to significantly hasten progress. The continued convening support that NouLAB offered functioned to keep teams active and in a prototype mindset, as well as, keep the leadership council informed on any significant hurdles, which they might be able to help teams surmount.

A unique and essential element of the Economic Immigration Lab is the connections facilitated between government and other sectors. Because these longer-term working relationships are somewhat of a new phenomenon, NouLAB has found it important to continue convening partners. The feedback we have had thus far is that this process has been extremely valuable because of NouLAB's neutrality as a convener. We are bringing stakeholders together for the betterment of immigration on all fronts. Although our leadership consists of the New Brunswick Business Council, the New Brunswick Multicultural Council and the government of New Brunswick, no one partner is in charge, dictating how the findings of lab are used. The organic relationship development serves all parties involved equally.



“There is more collaboration in the immigration space - there are still silos but we are doing better.”

**- Alex Leblanc,
Executive Director,
NBMC**

Evaluation Interviews

At the two year mark, NouLAB's evaluation team conducted a series of interviews with past and current participants as well as the leadership council to get a pulse on the lab's progress. The answers provided important insight to where we have come and where we are going on the issue of immigration in New Brunswick.

This section provides a glimpse into some of the perceptions and learnings from the evaluation process.

When participants were asked **if they agreed the lab provided an innovative process** for addressing the immigration challenge in New Brunswick, **100% of the respondents agreed.**

When asked about **what resources were gained through participating in the lab** the majority of respondents answered with something related to **human capital**; new networks, people they now are connected with, and teams they are now a part of.

A stand-out answer from a leadership council member was: "We were able to leverage the dedicated service channel because we invited them [Immigration Refugee and Citizenship Canada (IRCC)] in. A lot of networks and relationships built through IRCC."

When asked **what resources are still missing**, some of the answers were:

"The funding and support for the prototype went a little sideways. Reason was that resources needed to go other places."

"We have a solid community of practice now, we just need to be able to fund this work."

"You need systems approach with each community and they all require different things."

When asked **what theories people are using to explain why the problem still exists** some of the answers were:

"Employers still have a hard time changing."

"We don't have the technical capacity to deliver the experience people expect."

"I think what I'm facing is the balance of how much we give to newcomers and some still have the misconception that newcomers are given money or access to education."

"We are some how deficient in our ability to retain people, if we were more welcoming we would be doing better."

When asked **what should we keep doing**, some of the answers were:

"The learning has been incredible, we have more and more people that understand the full process."

"If you build capacity there will be successes in 5-10 years. The next generations are going to have it, it is built in the culture now."

"The monthly meeting of (IEN) stakeholders because they need to keep talking."

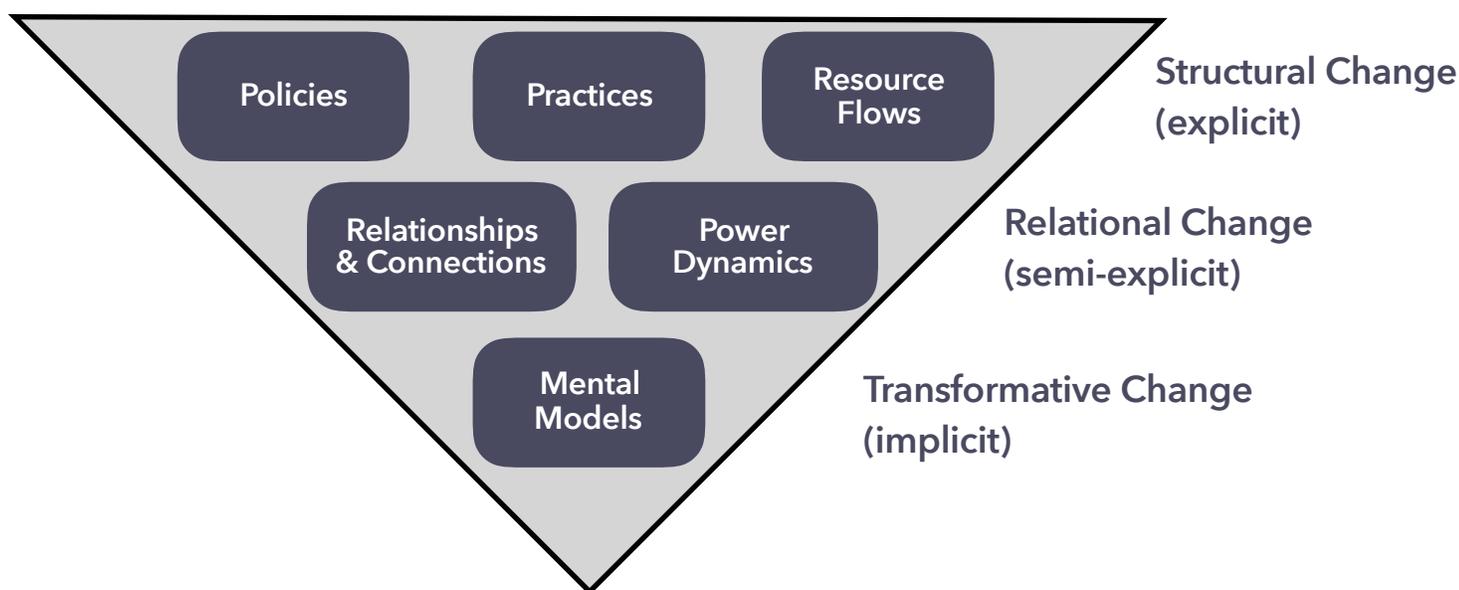
"The AIP [Atlantic Immigration Pilot] is tied to a position and the family that is coming too needs to be plugged into the workforce. Those partners could be highly-skilled and need support."

Systems Change?

The Economic Immigration Lab is designed to approach the topic in a systemic way. To help understand how the lab is making an impact on the systems level, this section looks at the results through a framework developed by FSG (Foundation Strategy Group) - a leading mission-driven consulting group.

These results are still a snapshot in time at the time of writing (September 2019) and are subject to change as the prototypes develop.

Six Conditions of Systems Change¹



Policies

- The EIL informed changes to the Atlantic Immigration Pilot including:
 - Adjustment to the work permit requirement for internationally educated nurses to allow them to work at support workers in care homes while they do their credentialing to become Registered Nurses.
 - Extension of work permit following graduation for Post-secondary international students from 1 year to 2 years.
- Ability for spouses of applicants to apply for work permit upon arrival to Canada.
- Position created in the provincial government to navigate internationally educated nurses through the immigration and registration process.
- The focus on the end-user in the AIP has been highlighted by the lab with influence on the process going up the federal immigration level at IRCC.

¹ Framework from https://www.fsg.org/publications/water_of_systems_change

Systems Change cont'd

Policies Con't

- The one-stop-shop for newcomers at the Fredericton Multicultural Association was inspired by conversations and connections in the lab.
- The silos within government for working on this issue are being removed.
- In the Internationally Educated Nurses program, there is more openness for change from the regulators, they have been motivated and enabled to take bolder action.
- A detailed population growth strategy has been named as a prerequisite for municipalities to receive money from the province.

Practices

- The siloed approach is no longer sufficient. IRCC is in direct contact with the provincial level of population growth.
- All interview respondents replied YES to using the prototyping approach in their work since being in the lab.

Resource Flows

- So far \$22,192 has been directed toward teams testing prototypes.
- The Capacity for Courage prototype was able to leverage multiple financial streams to provide its first year of funding.
- Full-time position hired as a part of the nursing workforce strategy.
- Employment and Social Development Canada hired a full-time staff to support

the Employer Support prototype - data was collected to inform what employers need in the immigration process for hiring international recruits.

Relationships and Connections

- The new relationships formed between employers and government have created new insights and knowledge flows to better provide service for immigration processing.
- The bonds that exist amongst the lab participants have served to inform programs and avoid duplication of efforts.

Power Dynamics

- Bringing the human to the heart of the issue has been central to this work, this has meant designing services that respond to the practical difficulties in the immigration process.
- A finding from the Employer Process team was that a bottleneck in the hiring process was the paperwork so a dedicated position was created to support both employees and employers through this process.

Mental Models

- The connected nature of immigration in New Brunswick requires a multi-faceted approach. The variety of prototypes hitting on neighbourhood, community, governmental, education and business levels has functioned to support newcomers at all levels of immigration, from application to arrival to making long-term community ties.

Prototype Spotlights

Community Engagement

Hosting community events to bridge newcomer communities and settled communities

Team Members: Sebastián Salazar- City of Fredericton, Diluckshnie Jayawardena - Sitel

This team has been active since the beginning of the lab. The original idea was to help newcomer spouses find community and new connections through culturally sensitive activities at gatherings. After testing their toolkit at a number of gatherings, the team decided to offer purpose-built gatherings in Fredericton to bring locals and newcomers together. The resulting offerings are the **Conversation Café** and **Living Library**.

Living Library: In service of making new connections and hearing diverse stories, a group of newcomers volunteer as 'living books' that library goers can borrow for 20 minute stories. There have been two of these gatherings at the Fredericton Public Library.

Conversation Café: Semi-informal regular gatherings where newcomers and locals can meet, have coffee and share stories. There were 10 events held last winter and they have started up this fall again with an event on September 19th.

In May 2019 Sebastián teamed up with Anita Punamiya, a diversity and inclusion consultant, to take a deeper look at potential barriers for newcomers to make connections with locals. After a series of engagements they produced a report called Widening the Circle that provides recommendations about how connections between newcomers and locals can be strengthened through events.

The contribution of this team holds importance to gaining further insights into how newcomers and locals can connect in meaningful and sustainable ways.



[Link to Widening the Circle Report](#)

[Link to Conversation Café FB page](#)

Capacity for Courage

Support for educators including: package of resources, train the trainer programming, grant program, and community of practice

Team Members: Kathy Whynot - Department of Education and Early Childhood Development , Heather Keats - PETL

Kathy and Heather's team came in and asked bold questions right off the bat, wanting to tackle the systemic racism that exists in the province. Through the lab process, they came to look at the system in which racism exists and where the most effective place to take action would be. They came to the conclusion that working with the youth of the province would provide for the greatest leverage for the culture change required in this province to improve understanding cultural diversity. They also took the prototyping mindset to heart, starting with a small group of teachers who applied for funding and participated in a summer lab to scope and connect their projects. 28 projects received funding, more than 50 teachers were involved and 100s of students directly involved in the programs with 1000s made aware of the issue.

Their project was made possible by being able to leverage four pools of money - Education and Early Childhood Development; Post-secondary Education Training and Labour; Population Growth Division; and Pond-Deshpande Centre. This unique funding structure allowed for participation and influence from all involved departments on a project that is aiming at the social structure of the province.

[Link to project list](#)

Through the Capacity for Courage (C4C) funding and support program, educators and students:

- Led dynamic change in increasingly diverse schools;
- Supported the development of cultural vibrancy in schools;
- Took action toward the vision of a culturally inclusive school and community.

Educators and students in 23 schools, across the province, and across levels (elementary, middle, high), led 25 unique projects during the 2018-2019 school year. Though each project had goals unique to the school context, there were some common themes: fostering integration and cultural inclusion for newcomers, committing to an increased sense of belonging for all in the school community, creating increased understanding and knowledge of culture and identity, and cultivating an increased connection to family and community.

All projects, no matter how seemingly big or small on the surface, were meaningful. All projects were carefully designed to be 'just right' for the school context in which they were enacted. All projects required courageous conversation and action, perhaps even more than originally imagined.

Students and educators of all cultural backgrounds worked together to increase the sense of belonging for all. The subsequent inclusion of empowered, diverse voices enriches all classrooms, schools and communities.

[Link to videos](#)

Internationally Educated Nurses

Supporting Internationally Educated Nurses navigate the journey from pre-arrival to practicing as a licensed nurse in New Brunswick; helping to clarify what the next steps are, what is needed to proceed, and who to contact.

Team Members: Mark Wies - Assistant Deputy Minister - Health; Rob Kelly - Assistant Deputy Minister - Atlantic Immigration Pilot (Agency), Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour; Jake Arbuckle - Director - Health Workforce Planning (Branch), Health; Odette Comeau Lavoie - Principal Nursing Advisor, Health; Robb Parker - Consultant - Health Workforce Planning (Branch), Health

The nursing shortage in New Brunswick is a priority issue for the government. With not enough nurses being educated to meet the current and upcoming retirements, the situation requires immediate action. The team represents the major stakeholders who can gain traction and move forward on making improvements to the process and experience of internationally educated nurses (IENs) coming to work in the province as registered nurses (RNs).

The approach that NouLAB took with this prototype was to have one of our staff work closely with the team to research, convene and develop a strategy to help all stakeholders come to agreement on what actions are needed. Part of the team's initial prototype involved changing the requirement for work permits to allow Internationally Educated Nurses to come to Canada and work as a nursing home support worker while they go through the process of credentialing to

become a registered nurse. This change was made through IRCC and the AIP within months of their recommendation.

Included in the team's prototype is a navigator position that has been taken on by Robb Parker, a consultant with Health Workforce Planning, who at the time of writing has engaged with 100 individuals interested in coming to New Brunswick to work as an RN. Throughout the past year and a half since the prototype was launched, the depth of research and testing has been extensive. From looking Internationally Educated Nurse experience across the country to interviewing and collecting experiences from IENs, the insights gained have helped to build a clear understanding of the costs and timelines associated with credentialing an IEN to become an RN. Interviews also highlighted the emotional labour of becoming an RN, inspiring specific design efforts to increase transparency of process and convey respect for prior experience while ensuring regulatory checks and balances continue.

This prototype has benefitted from a highly engaged working group representing: the Nurses Association of New Brunswick; Association of New Brunswick's Licensed Practical Nurses; New Brunswick Association of Nursing Homes; Horizon Health, Vitalité, New Brunswick Multicultural Council, the Department of Health, and Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training, and Labour. Together with the navigator, they have identified and acted on opportunities to make changes at the individual, organisational, policy, and system levels. Potential changes being considered included removing bottlenecks, and providing opportunities to gain experience and build networks in the Canadian healthcare sector.

What's next?

At NouLAB we believe in importance of being guided by feedback. Looking to the data received through the evaluation interviews a few themes emerged. There was a theme of differing opinions on the importance of retention versus selecting the right candidates at before they arrive in Canada. Another theme was the lack of public support for immigration as detrimental to the promise of newcomers helping New Brunswick's economy. Taking these themes and determining potential actions for the stakeholders in the lab will help guide strategic choices going forward.



In May 2019, three new teams came through NouLAB's five day sprint. Their focuses were:

- Information, Technology and Communication employment for immigrants;
- Making Miramichi a welcoming and inclusion community for newcomers; and
- Foreign Qualification Recognition - making the process smoother and faster.

The NouLAB team is working closely with the teams to implement and test their first version prototypes and will gather on November 27th at the Woo Centre in Fredericton to present initial findings. The teams will have a chance to go deeper on other innovation tools to further their skillsets in tackling these complex issues. More to come on their findings and impact.

The Economic Immigration Lab is funded until March of 2020 at which time a fuller report will be compiled on where this journey has led the stakeholders and all participants.





'If we're not changing our relationships, we'll stay stuck in the same patterns'





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