Filling the Data Gap: A Conversation on Coordinating and Using Program Data

1. Background

Since 2009, the Toronto Immigrant Employment Data Initiative (TIEDI) has sought to meet the data needs of non-profit organizations whose goals include the better integration of immigrants into Greater Toronto's workforce. The project has produced a range of reports, factsheets and updates; all are available on the project's website: www.yorku.ca/tiedi.

With further support from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), TIEDI initiated a public outreach program from October 2011 to April 2012 (http://www.yorku.ca/tiedi/events.html). The outreach program sought to engage key stakeholders in discussing the project's findings. The purpose was to explore the implications of data generated by TIEDI for program planning and policy-making. Topics were identified at a forum in October 2011, and then in January-April 2012, four roundtable discussions were held with leaders and frontline workers from settlement agencies, advocacy groups, labour and employer organizations and all levels of government.

This report is one of a series providing highlights from the discussions at these roundtables. It contains the primer material that was sent to roundtable participants, as well as key points that arose during discussions. Reports from other roundtables are available at: http://www.yorku.ca/tiedi/roundtable2012.html

2. The Issue

Official datasets on the labour market outcomes of immigrants, especially census-based ones, are often dated as soon as they are released. This contributes to frustrations often experienced by the settlement sector and by government officials in their attempts to design/implement, in a timely fashion, programs that can ease immigrants' transition into the Canadian labour market. The same applies to academics in their quest to understand the labour market dynamics and employment outcomes of immigrants in Canada.

Meanwhile, growing amounts of data are being collected/generated by community groups concerning the services they provide to immigrants, for both programming and activity tracking /reporting purposes, and by other organizations for policy analytical purposes. Access to and analysis of such data can be valuable for program/policy planning and evaluation, especially in light of recent changes in Statistics Canada's method of collecting census data and its implications on the availability of detailed data on immigrants and their settlement experiences.

The purpose of this roundtable was to explore possible partnerships between government

agencies, community organizations and academics in the collection and sharing of data pertaining to immigrants in the labour market.

3. Questions for Discussion

Participants in the roundtable were presented with the following questions for discussion:

1) What data/information do you have/collect in your organization? Who decides this?
2) What information do you want to gather and what do you want to do with it?
3) What type of support would you need to do a better job of collecting and analyzing useful data?

4. Key Points

Existing Data Sources

Two kinds of data were discussed in the meeting. One is on client demographics and program outcomes. Mandated by funders –federal or provincial, agencies collect data about their own programs for activity tracking and administrative reporting purposes.

The other is data generated by umbrella organizations. For example, when the Toronto Workforce Innovation Group (formerly Toronto Training Board) conducts research on issues that are challenging Toronto's labour problems by asking what problems exist in the employment sector and how these problems can be solved, it divides occupations into ten sectors and categorizes occupations based on skill levels in the hope that immigrants can find what they need in three clicks on their website which, in addition to job references/links, provides local labour market updates, research and publications, and newsletters. As well, the Labour Market Integration Unit of the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration collects information on the practices that work best according to volunteer respondents; the focus is on practice and how to make better programs. Generally speaking, this data can be used to advise clients and plan programs.

Participants expressed that data collected at the agency level is 'superficial'. Data collected by umbrella organizations are seen as more useful. A major concern, however, is that these data sets do not speak to each other.

Data Needed

1. Holistic Client Information

In order to ensure that clients get the best services, immigrant service providers (ISPs) would like a holistic account of the process of immigration and integration. For some ISPs, the CIC's

existing data entry system (through checking boxes of pre-determined questions) is superficial. ISPs' inability to update information and report on uncoded labour market categories is seen as one of the biggest frustrations. For example, those who drop out half-way through the program due to a successful job search are not labelled as a success because there is no space to provide an explanation in the system.

ISPs prefer a system that also allows the recording of qualitative information such as challenges that prevent clients from integrating not only to the labour market but their day to day life as well. For example, rather than gathering data on ethnicity and country of origin, social antecedents including questions of whether newcomers have been employed before coming to Canada, their attitudes towards working, how long they have been in Canada, and how many years it took them to get a job would be more practical. ISPs would like a broader understanding of their labour market experience, with emphasis on issues such as social capital, networks and effects of class. Success stories are particularly encouraging.

Longitudinal information on an individual's settlement trajectory would also be beneficial to ISPs. A case management model is an example of what a holistic approach would look like. ISPs would collect information about the personal goals of recent immigrants and continue to document their goals for a couple of years. They can ask clients of their status when entering the program, how their status changes over time. Questions such as these allow providers to determine whether immigrants have improved access to other things, such as health care and social networking, over time.

It's encouraging to hear that CIC is working on a better system, ICARE, which tries to integrate success stories into the system as part of data recording and to take qualitative stories into account for program delivery.

2. Information on Immigrants Not Using Services

One of the ways to improve programs is to compare clients being served to those landed but not being served. Such information would ensure that everyone can benefit from CIC-based programs. Currently, CIC has the information on clients that are not being served. Some data analysis needs to be done on this group.

3. Up-to-date Data

In order to provide their clients with up to date trends, front-line workers need access to timely data. Focus should therefore be placed on how to get real time data for analysis.

Government agencies recognize the challenge of labour market forecasting but it is extremely difficult to come up with a program that captures labour market needs. The problem government agencies face is a lack of time and resources. Data from ICAM takes a lot of time to clean up, especially with the amount of duplicate and missing data. A possible solution is a more dynamic data entry system such as ICARE which is being rolled out.

Type of Support Needed

1. Collaboration between Government Agencies and ISOs

In order to provide a holistic view of labour market needs and to enhance capacity building, there needs to be collaborative effort and regular communications between politicians, bureaucrats and service providers. Currently, ISPs are not engaged at the program planning phase, and government officials including those who work on data feel disconnected from the ISPs. Much time and money could be saved if funders ask settlement workers directly about the problems they encounter, and government officials are aware of community needs.

Participants recognized a problem with collaboration: competing priorities between governmental departments can make effective collaborative projects difficult.

2. Rolling up and Sharing Data

Governments are encouraged to give data back to agencies in a usable format. ISPs also like to share their data with each other so as to benefit all services the settlement sector provides. Currently, information is scattered everywhere. For example, data on childcare waiting lists, seasonal fluctuations, patterns of attendance are collected by individual agencies and not aggregated with those collected by other agencies or organizations. Multiple data bases make it difficult to search for the right information in an efficient manner.

In theory, combining several sources of data would provide useful comparative information across different scales, at the program, neighbourhood, municipal and provincial levels. Comparisons can be used to assess which agencies and what programs are the most efficient in enhancing job search for newcomers. It can answer whether the problem is program-based or due to the general labour market situation.

In practice, a number of factors need to be considered in rolling up data from all organizations. First, privacy policies prevent the possibility of a large-scale roll up. Privacy restrictions and strict licensing procedures prevent the distribution of certain types of data and when data can be released. Second, access to client information between service organizations is hindered by competition and fear of losing clients to other organizations. The current funding scheme fosters a competitive, non-collaborative environment as organizations have to compete for limited funds. Third, the lack of resources in most governmental and non-governmental organizations hampers the creation of a single data system. With government officials currently stressing prioritization and focusing on information pertinent to their needs, the types of information being collected by ISOs for accountability purpose may not be useful for learning and planning purposes. This raises the question whether the right type of information is being collected. Fourth, the types of information gathered by each organization are neither standardized nor consistent.

3. Creation of a Feedback Loop

Currently, funders and agencies do not communicate directly with each other regarding the data they collect, partly because they have different needs and priorities. Frontline workers have been persistent in informing funders about trends and needs, yet never see any of their comments reflected in the workplace. They feel a 'black hole' in their data input. There is an ongoing debate as to whether agencies and service providers have the right to see and analyze the data they collect. On the one hand, there are issues of confidentiality and proper use of information. On the other hand, access to the information they input could improve programs. A possible solution is to enable service workers to directly communicate to funders and agency managers the information they desire, such that the information they input into ICAM can at least be synthesized and returned as useful, aggregate information.

4. Training for Service Providers

Currently, there is a gap in data literacy especially among frontline workers that collect the data. Settlement agencies lack the capacity to coordinate, manage and analyze the data that frontline workers input. Workers do not have time to read and assess the data. Most do not have the training to manipulate a database and critically interact with numbers. One suggestion put forward is to put pressure on funding agencies to properly steward the data that are collected from settlement agencies and have TIEDI help interpret and present the data in a usable way. From an academic point of view, TIEDI is able to translate data and improve data literacy among frontline workers. Knowledge translation of existing data would make a huge difference in client outcomes and impact future planning and programming

5. Recommendations

We make four recommendations here. The first two pertain to program data collected by agencies, and the last two are about labour market data that agencies can use.

1) Funders, service agencies and umbrella organizations to collaborate on defining how resources are being used and what would be the most useful information to collect and hence questions to ask. This includes outlining what data agencies are collecting and what we need to add while distinguishing between the needs of frontline workers and the people that manage them. Frontline worker needs and administrative needs of organization are not always the same, and thus we need to distinguish what information is needed and for what purpose.

2) Focus on creating a space for qualitative information in existing databases to ensure that stories about challenges and needs are heard.

3) Open up communication between service providers and governments by linking workers with professional associations and data collecting agencies.

4) Increase the capability to get, interpret and disseminate data in a timely and comprehensible way. Though CIC has a lot of information in publicly accessible places, many organizations do not have the time or the expertise to turn them into useable knowledge. Through TIEDI's access to academics, it can provide service providers with statistical expertise and data analysis. TIEDI can be useful in providing a panoptic view of different data sets, what they are capable of providing and what is available.

6. Summary of Data Accessed by TIEDI

Census 2006
The Census of Canada provides very detailed information about: ethnic and racial background, place of birth, period of arrival, gender, education, skill levels, language use, labour force participation, unemployment rates, class of worker, earnings, occupation and industry of employment. During the course of this project we expect similar data to become available based on the 2006 census. Census data has been widely used in projects related to immigrant labour market access.

Ethnic Diversity Survey (EDS)
The 2002 Ethnic Diversity Survey included about 42,500 respondents aged 15 and over and provides information on how people's ethnic and racial backgrounds affect their participation in Canada's social, economic and cultural life. In addition to information about place of birth, visible minority status, educational qualifications and work experience at the time of the survey, the EDS provides some information about the ethnic composition of people's social networks, their experiences of discrimination in the workplace, the ethnic backgrounds of co-workers, and the languages spoken at work.

International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey (IALSS)
The 2003 IALSS is the Canadian component of the international Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey. The main purpose of the survey is to find out how well adults use printed information to function in society. Survey data include background information (demographic, immigrant status, education, language, labour force, occupation, income, etc.). Respondents are tested in four domains: prose and document literacy, numeracy and problem-solving. Data from the IALSS allow more reliable comparisons among respondents than when language skills are self-reported.

Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada (LSIC)
Initiated in 2001, LSIC is a comprehensive survey designed by Statistics Canada to study the process by which new immigrants adapt to Canadian society during the first four years of settlement. It provides exceptionally detailed information about educational qualifications and language fluency upon arrival in Canada, subsequent education, language/job training in Canada, accreditation experiences, and work history. Information can be linked to show how training,

work experience in Canada, and the accreditation process, influence employment outcomes. There is also information about use of settlement services that can be linked to employment outcomes. The number of respondents ranges from 12,000 for the first wave to 7,700 for the third wave.

Labour Force Survey (LFS)

The LFS provides up-to-date employment estimates by industry, occupation, public and private sector, hours worked and much more, all cross-classifiable by a variety of demographic characteristics such as age, gender, and marital status. For employees, wage rates, union status, job permanency and workplace size are also produced. Beginning in 2006, additional questions were added to the LFS in order to identify immigrants, recording where they were born, when they landed in Canada and the country in which they received their highest level of education. The LFS provides a large sample and rich information on individual and job characteristics. It can also be used to track individual trajectories in the labour market over a six-month period. The LFS surveyed more than 53,000 households across Canada, more than 15,000 of them in Ontario.

Permanent Resident Data System (PRDS)

The Permanent Resident Data System (PRDS) (formerly the **Landed Immigrant Data System, or LIDS**), is derived from an administrative dataset made available to researchers by Citizenship and Immigration Canada. It includes anonymous data from the landing cards of each immigrant arriving in Canada between 1980 and 2009. The PRDS database provides a very rich portrait of immigrants' characteristics, including: age, gender, marital status, education, skill level, intended occupation, country of birth, citizenship and last permanent residence, immigration category, and intended province and city of settlement. Furthermore, the dataset represents every immigrant – it is not a sample.

Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics (SLID)

The SLID is an ongoing longitudinal survey which interviews each individual over a six-year period. The longitudinal nature of the survey, as well as the extensive data content, provide important information concerning: employment and unemployment, wages, salaries and other earnings, employment insurance, social assistance and other transfers, non-wage benefits, labour mobility, turnover and work absences, unionization and industrial relations, hours of work and work arrangements, occupations, and pension plans and other retirement income programs. The survey includes questions identifying immigrant status, age at immigration, country of birth, year of immigration, mother tongue and visible minority group. It includes 30,000 households across Canada.

Workplace and Employee Survey (WES)

The WES is a file consisting of both employer and employee components and covering a broad range of topics from both the demand and supply side of the labour market. The WES was initiated in 1999 and lasted six years, with 6,322 business respondents and 23,540 employees. The survey contains detailed demographics and labour market information on individual workers, but also information on various workplace characteristics, business strategy, and human resource practices. These practices and strategies include compensation practices, the presence of joint labour-management committees, information sharing programs, use of new technology,

training and development, recruitment and selection, compensation and benefits, and labour relations. Employees are identified with immigration status and year, language used at home, and ethnic origin.

7. Data and Analysis Challenges experienced by TIEDI

1) Requests for analysis outside of TIEDI's mandate (e.g. non-labour market outcomes such as childcare needs, and health profile)

2) Outdated data (e.g. census data) or non-existing data (e.g. information on temporary residents)

3) Requests for neighbourhood-specific labour market outcomes of specific immigrants groups living inside or outside the Greater Toronto Area.

4) Limitations in gender- and immigrant group-specific analysis