

Promoting the full socioeconomic potential of newcomers

A preliminary report on the
program at Collège Boréal's
Windsor campus

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RECHERCHE & INNOVATION **BORÉAL**

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Executive Summary

Given today's labour shortages and declining rates of birth, newcomers to Canada are an essential part of the Canadian economy, and their successful socio economic integration carries benefits at individual, regional, and national levels. Collège Boréal of Ontario (Canada) offers an extensive and unique socio economic integration program in service of these goals. Informed by scholarly research

on barriers to integration, the College's programming emphasizes three social accelerators — **language skills, education, and Canadian work experience** — and connects newcomers with "socio economic navigators" who support them through needs assessment, goal-setting, referrals, and progress monitoring.

In this paper, we describe a preliminary evaluation of the program. Community partners, college personnel and researchers collaborated to develop and analyze surveys with **45 program participants**.

Key findings

1.

Few obstacles to program accessibility

were identified regarding meeting booking, reliability, length, or frequency

≥ 80% of participants reported **positively** on these dimensions

2.

Evaluations of socio-economic navigators indicated **high levels of competence, trust, and productivity.**

≥ 90% of participants agreed with statements to that effect

3.

The socio-economic integration program was viewed as **impactful** for **nearly all outcomes of interest.**

Over 70% of participants reported moderate to major outcomes in relation to their language skill development (73% of participants), educational paths (82% of participants), integration into the work market (76% of participants), and well-being (88% of participants).

4.

The greatest program impacts were associated with **language skill, educational paths, and well-being.**

Between 50 to 70% of respondents perceived a **major impact.**

5.

Perceptions of program **impact** were lowest in terms of the participants' **financial situations**

33% of participants reported the socio-economic program as having a moderate to major impact and 46% did not think that the program had had **any impact** on their financial situation.

6.

Participants perceived **the program as having a significant impact on their socio-economic integration**

95% of participants reported a major (62%) or moderate impact (33%) on their pursuit of socio-economic goals.

Taken together, these findings highlight a story of program success from the perspective of the participants.

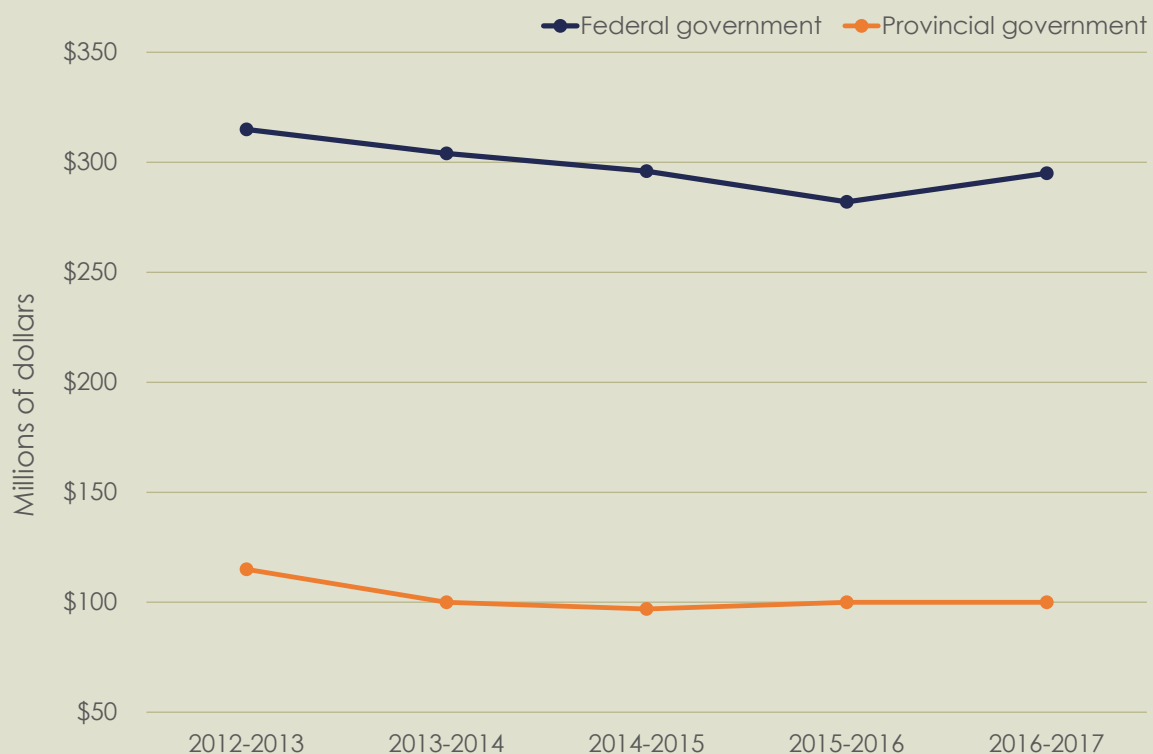
In the future, longitudinal, open-ended and comparative research could help to parse out the program's causal role, long-term impacts and specific mechanisms that are facilitating successful outcomes.

Introduction

At a November 1, 2017, news conference on Canada's Immigration Plan for 2018, the federal government announced its ambitious three-year immigration plan. This plan stated that Canada could welcome up to 360,000 immigrants annually by 2020, making it the first time in over a century that the immigration rate would represent 1% of our population (Government of Canada, 2017). According to the Government of Canada, newcomers are important players in the innovation and economic growth sectors, and one of the main levers for mitigating the impacts of the labour shortage, population aging and widespread decline in birth rates (Boyd & Albiom 2012; Fortin, 2016; Picot & Rollins, 2019; Sidney, 2014; Toussou, 2002).

To meet the diverse needs of these newcomers, the government has invested heavily in settlement and integration services. These essential services promote socio economic integration. While many immigrants come to Canada educated and ready to integrate into the work market, their opportunities for entry and mobility are limited compared to Canadians who have been here since birth (Kouyé & Soulière, 2018). Though these gaps have narrowed over time, the challenges of language training, credential recognition, social networking, work experience, and racialization persist (Al Mallees, 2022; Karky, 2018; Kouyé & Soulière, 2018; Melançon et al., 2022).

Figure 1. Funding for newcomer settlement services in Canada and Ontario, in millions of dollars (Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration, as cited in Office of the Auditor General of Ontario, 2021).



In 2016–17, settlement funding for newcomers was \$295 million federally and \$100 million provincially in Ontario. Such services are provided through contracted services, which may be delivered by schools, universities, colleges, and/or non-profit organizations.

Our research on newcomer service provision is warranted both for academic and practical reasons. Immigrants are increasingly moving to mid-sized cities, creating a growing need for settlement services there (Alexander et al., 2012), but there is very little research on the settlement services in small or mid-sized cities (Kitchen et al., 2015; Teixeira & Drolet, 2018). Likewise, academic research on immigration often focuses on key socio economic challenges and needs, with few studies evaluating or comparing the effectiveness of actual programs or interventions (Kaushik & Drolet, 2018). Francophone minorities, who may have unique challenges and programming needs, constitute a third gap in the literature on newcomers to Canada (Maddibo, 2016; Melançon et al., 2022).

At a broader level, many have argued for newcomer programs to be more robustly and consistently evaluated in order to ensure effective use and distribution of government funding (Alexander et al., 2012; Office of the Auditor General of Ontario, 2021). Currently, programs tend to be evaluated on participation rather than outcomes, and important performance indicators are frequently omitted (Office of the Auditor General of Ontario, 2021). Even at the organizational level, some have pointed out that programs are largely limited to short-term needs, without necessarily including any strategic plan for long-term and sustainable socioeconomic integration; these programs themselves need improvement, with greater responsiveness to long-term needs, clearer milestones to aim for, more assessments of progress, and higher standards for evaluating cost effectiveness (Office of the Auditor General of Ontario, 2021).

As an immigration service provider with multiple points of service and data points dating from 2007, we have come to similar conclusions and raised similar overarching questions about this sector. In this project, we are responding to the comments summarized above. We aim to research socio economic integration in a mid-sized city context, where attention has been drawn to the need for research and where there may be relatively greater challenges in service provision. We also are aiming to conduct a multi-phase research project to trace and evaluate the impacts of the College's socio economic integration programming. This report, which draws on the first stage of data collection, is the first report in that project. In this report, we seek to move past the identification of well established barriers to socio economic integration, by exploring potential program successes. We first review the literature on socio economic integration of newcomers, before providing to a brief description of the College's services and our study methodology.

We then outline our current findings followed by a discussion comparing our research and the literature. Finally, we discuss limitations of our study and directions for future research.

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Literature Review

Past research attests to the many barriers newcomers face along the path to successful, long lasting socio economic integration. In this section, we will review some of these challenges, as well as a few data points regarding programs or interventions that can serve as comparison points for our own program. We will focus on literature from the Canadian context and, wherever possible, on mid-sized cities, Francophone minorities, and/or communities in the province of Ontario.

Program Delivery & Navigator Effectiveness

A key limitation of existing programming tends to be its short-term focus. Programs frequently centre on acute needs, neglecting long-term and sustainable plans for socio economic mobility (Alexander et al., 2012). Given this, one area we were interested in examining was success in implementing plans and follow-up meetings with socio economic navigators. Kalman (2017) conducted a study of a Victoria-based wraparound settlement services program and found that 70% of their study participants (28 participants) had a wraparound plan while 30% (12) did not. Kalman (2017) also noted that 50% (20) of participants tracked their progress during wraparound meetings, whereas 50% (20) of participants did not record their progress often or held a neutral opinion.

Global ratings of settlement services tend to be very encouraging, at least based on reported findings. Kalman (2017) found that 82.5% (34) of that program's participants believed that their wraparound plan was going to help them settle into Greater Victoria. Likewise, 89% of clients in settlement services in Ontario reported being better able to make informed decisions after receiving settlement services (Office of the Auditor General of Ontario, 2021), and the Immigrant Employment Council of BC (2021) reported average 95% program satisfaction rate in 2020–2021 (averaged across the multiple programs they were running).

Previous research also attests to the importance of program staff. Newcomers have reported appreciating information and personal guidance tailored to their circumstances (Interquest Consulting, 2006; Melançon et al., 2022). Some have also stated that it is importance that navigators get to know them and their histories; they want information to be customized to suit their circumstances (Melançon et al., 2022).

Trust is paramount for openness: it supports newcomers in seeking and using information from others and motivates them to participate in activities or events organized for them (Caidi et al., 2008; Melançon et al., 2022). In some cases, and perhaps most often for youth, workers who become trusted confidantes may even be referred to as being “like” family (Selimos & George, 2018). With regard to specific numerical evaluations of program navigators, 85% of participants in Kalman’s (2017) study agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that they were happy with their Wraparound Team and 65% (26) of participants disagreed with the statement that they felt misunderstood by their Wraparound Team. We were unable to find assessments outside this study.

Language Skills

~86% of Canada’s permanent residents have a mother tongue other than English or French, and this figure is increasing (Picot, 2008).

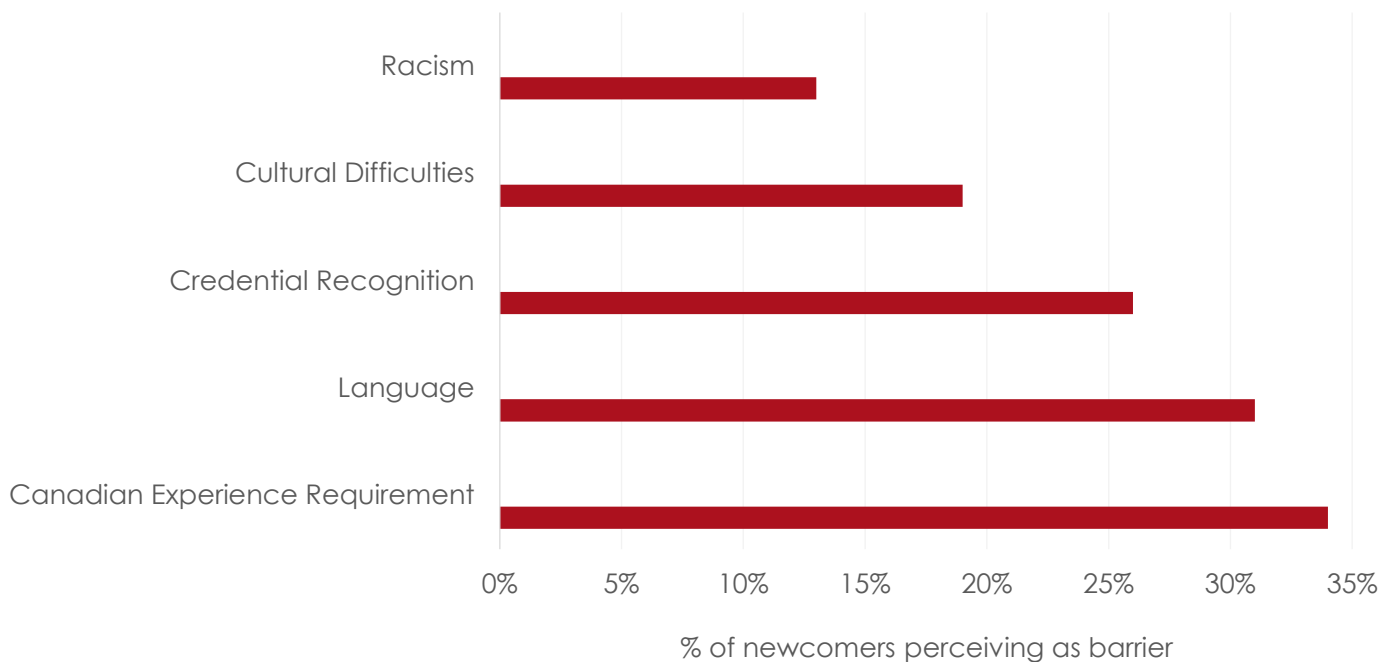
Countries of origin are changing over time, with immigrants now more likely to come from South, East, and West Asia, Africa, and Eastern Europe (Picot, 2008). For Francophone populations in majority English regions, there can be unique challenges in developing language skills. Immigrants who come to Ottawa have reported that speaking French is not as beneficial as they were led to believe prior to their arrival and that not speaking English is a barrier, especially for gaining employment and accessing services (Kouyé & Soulière, 2022).

Moreover, English language training is challenging for Francophone immigrants to access (Interquest Consulting, 2006). Additionally, there are fewer offerings for language skill development outside of larger centres, especially for French learners. A recent landscape analysis of Ontario showed that French as a second language courses were rare outside of Toronto (which offered 12 courses): Ottawa had 11, London had 2, and Hamilton had 2 (Karky, 2018). While Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) courses appear to generate clear benefits for reading and writing, they do not always improve speaking and listening skills compared to newcomers who have not taken such courses (Citizenship & Immigration Canada, 2010). Still, once students reach 1,000 hours in LINC courses, the benefits of LINC are more robust compared to newcomers who have not taken such courses (Citizenship & Immigration Canada, 2010). Economic immigrants tend to have the highest rates of language proficiency, with refugees and dependent economic immigrants having less (Adamuti-Trache, 2013).

Work & Education

Employment is the greatest priority for almost all newcomers, especially getting a good job and having their credentials recognized (Interquest Consulting, 2006). Expectations for getting a job in their field and/or timelines for finding work, however, are often overly optimistic; there is a gap between expectations and reality, and therefore a need to manage expectations prior to arriving (Interquest Consulting, 2006). Non-recognition of past professional work experience and education poses obstacles for newcomers (Kouyé & Soulière, 2022), and even when newcomers have the same levels of education as native-born Canadians, they often experience more difficulties gaining employment due to racialization, lack of social capital, or other factors (Liu, 2019; Majerski, 2019; Reitz, 2013). The figure below, taken from Alexander et al. (2012), shows the most common barriers to labour force participation.

Recent Imigrant' Perceptions of Barriers to Entry into the Workforce, Toronto 2003-06 (Alexander et al., 2012)



Whereas 62% of Canadian-born adults work in the regulated occupation for which they are trained, only 24% of immigrants do the same; these national rates are paralleled in the province of Ontario (Zietsma, 2010). The unemployment rate for immigrants who arrived less than five years ago was 9.8%, compared to 7.5% for the general adult population (Statistics Canada, 2022). Regarding specific program evaluations, Immigrant Employment Council of BC (2021) found 83% of newcomers who were unemployed or underemployed felt that an employment readiness program helped them secure a new and better job.

Finances

Achieving financial security is another well-documented challenge for newcomers, and one that arises in part from obstacles to attaining secure employment. Newcomers in Canada earn a median income 18% lower than that of the general population (Al Mallees, 2022). The earnings gap is important, including because Canada competes with countries like the USA and Australia to attract and retain skilled workers (Picot, 2008). Kalman (2017) reported that 20% of the participants in the program studied did not earn enough money to support themselves, with 33% reporting they did not earn enough income to support their families.

Psychosocial Well-being

While our focus was on socio economic factors, we also examined psychosocial well being, as it is associated with socio economic integration. Notably, employment and homeownership have both been associated with a positive sense of belonging (George et al., 2012; Kitchen et al., 2015). Social networks not only provide a sense of belonging but also have implications (positive and negative) for networking and job opportunities. Indeed, many newcomers move from mid sized cities to larger urban centres because they have more established minority culture communities; this is sometimes referred to as “secondary migration” (Panel on Employment Challenges of New Canadians, 2015). These moves can provide benefits for social connection, but sometimes mean settling for survival jobs or precarious employment (Panel on Employment Challenges of New Canadians, 2015). In many studies, newcomer immigrants report challenges building relationships (Interquest Consulting, 2006; Kouyé & Soulière, 2022). Intimate and trusting relationships are especially challenging to form (Melançon et al., 2022) as are relationships with others outside of immigrant communities (Selimos & George, 2018). Still, it is worth noting that immigrants who have been in Canada longer tend to rate their sense of belonging higher than those who have arrived more recently (Kitchen et al., 2015).

Looking at global evaluations of psychosocial well-being, two publications emerge as points of reference. First, George et al.’s (2012) survey of largely under employed, internationally trained engineers (a majority of them from Ontario) found that less than a third of participants (31.1%) were dissatisfied with life in Canada, with a similar number having a neutral attitude, and just over a third reporting that they were satisfied with life in Canada. In terms of social belonging, a report from Kitchen et al. (2015) finds 74% of immigrants in small and medium-sized Canadian settings rated their sense of community as somewhat strong or very strong.

Program Description

In considering the number of challenges for socio economic integration of newcomers and the landscape of the immigration sector, Collège Boréal Windsor campus reviewed its service offerings to ensure that each newcomer could achieve their full potential for a successful and accelerated social and economic integration to Canada. In speaking of “socio economic” integration, we refer to the interaction between social and economic factors, and more specifically, their mutual influence on one another. For example, family income influences neighbourhood of residence, which determines the choices of schools. A school in a wealthier and more financially advantaged neighbourhood, for example, influences the quality of education received—a factor that partially determines a child’s future socio economic status. This example points to a systemic inequity in access to quality education and to the fact that an individual’s or family’s socio economic status is intergenerational.

A person who is socio economically integrated beyond being able to meet their basic needs has found a balance where their economic situation allows them to flourish socially and vice versa in a sustainable way, positively impacting all aspects of life in the long term.

Since 2018, services for newcomers at Collège Boréal in Windsor have been largely based on socio-economic integration navigators, who are at the heart of socio-economic integration planning. Importantly, these services respond to calls for programming to be “needs-based,” “goal-oriented,” and based on a “pathway approach” as well as tailored to the individual (Interquest Consulting, 2006, pp. 17-18). Navigators accompany their clients as they receive the various services offered by Collège Boréal and/or their partners (according to the integration plan). This plan must take into account the institution’s short term needs while, in collaboration with the newcomer, developing a plan for socio economic integration that capitalizes on their human potential and accelerates their full contribution to their host society. Our observations and data showed that the integrated service model in place in Windsor, in conjunction with the contribution of navigators in socio-economic integration with newcomers, accelerates the process of successful socio-economic integration.

Informed by a wealth of research on systemic barriers that negatively impact the socio-economic integration of newcomers, socio-economic integration navigators focus their long-term planning on **three key accelerators: language, education and the Canadian experience.**



Language

Improving levels of proficiency in Canada's official languages, English and/or French, depending on the client's current level, their objectives (training, career) and their region of settlement.



Education

Adapting technical knowledge to the Canadian context by following a Canadian institution's training program (post-secondary program, apprenticeship program, literacy/career access study, bridge training program, micro-credit, continuing education, etc.) that aligns with the client's career goals.



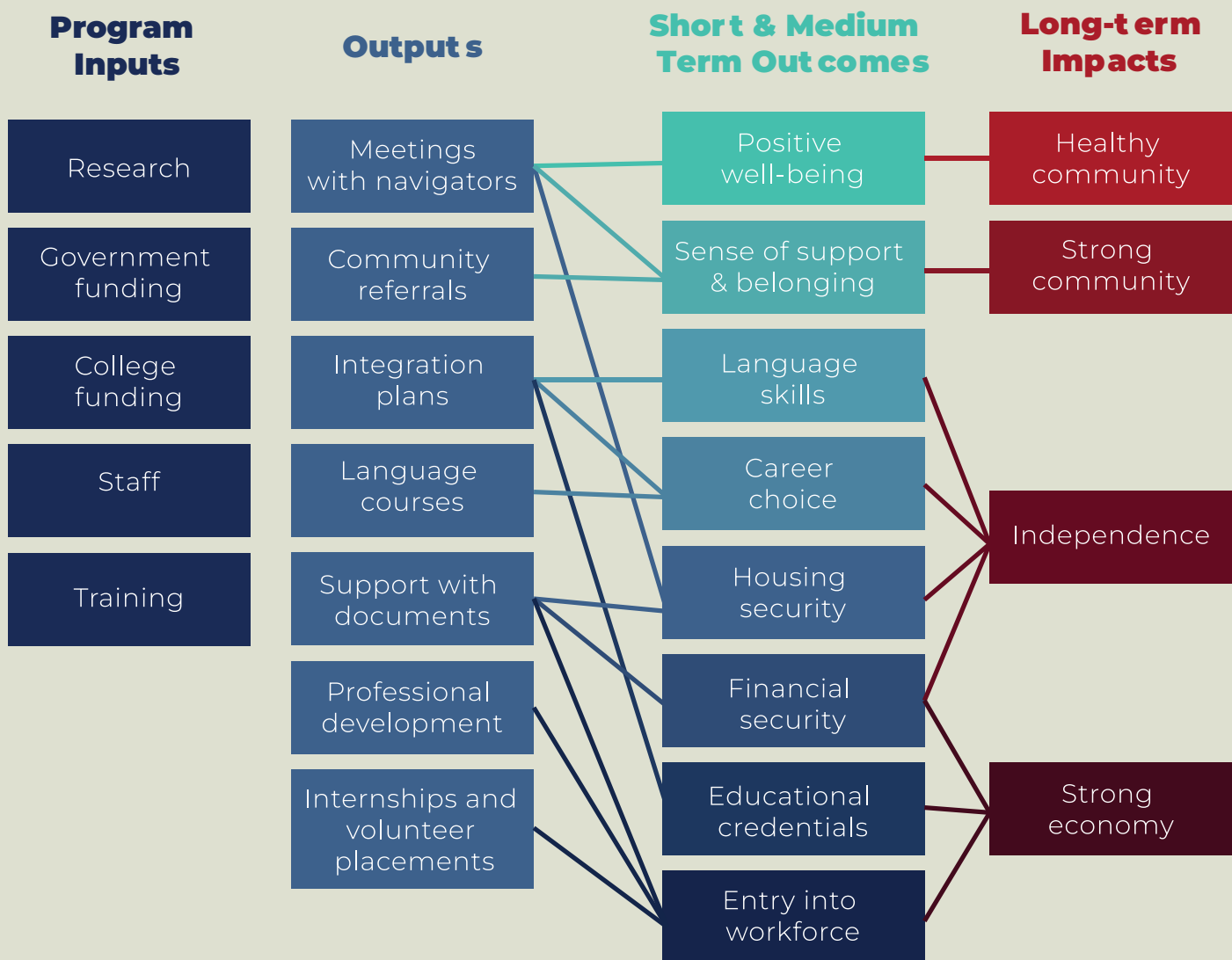
Canadian work experience

Gaining on-the-job experience through work experience, paid work, volunteering, etc. with a Canadian organization or company to familiarize themselves with the expectations and cultural context of the Canadian workplace, in line with the client's career goals.

Collège Boréal encourages clients to improve their language skills, access training and education tailored to the Canadian context, and gain Canadian work experience.

In collaboration with the newcomers as well as our partners, including the Sociocultural Association of the Rwandan Community of Windsor and the Congolese Community of Windsor-Essex, our ongoing research project aims to evaluate, improve, and innovate this model of service delivery to newcomers. Such investment in newcomers' success is crucial because it will lead to significant improvement in their individual and social well-being while reducing their unemployment rate, level of poverty and dependence on social services and financial support programs.

Figure 2. Program Logic Model



The Current Study

Research Questions

- How commonly do individuals encounter barriers to using the College's services and what are those barriers?
- What do participants perceive as most useful about these services?
- How do participants evaluate the skills & character of socio economic navigators?
- How do participants evaluate the impact of these services on key social accelerators of language proficiency, educational attainment, and work experience?
- How do participants evaluate the impact of these services on their psychological and financial wellness?
- Are there statistically significant relationships between time in the program and status of key social accelerators?

Research Methods

Instrument development: The survey was developed through an iterative and collaborative process involving researchers and key stakeholders. Survey questions were developed by a research team that included integration program coordinators, a research specialist, and student research assistants. Background knowledge of the three social accelerators consciously informed question development. Once a draft version of the survey was built, it was shared with 2 cultural associations in Windsor for their input and questions. Modifications were then made and the questionnaire was piloted (in both English and French) with five individuals who had been participants in the socio economic integration program but were ineligible for study participation (as they had become citizens). Following this piloting stage, further improvements were made to the survey.

Sample: Participation in the survey was open to any individual using the college's integration services (i.e., convenience sampling). All program participants were permanent residents of Canada. No individuals were excluded on the basis of their country of origin. A balance of Francophones and Anglophones was sought, though in the end 75% of the surveys were completed in English and 25% in French.

Recruitment: To recruit participants, socio economic navigators at the college emailed an invitation to their clients. After that, interested individuals contacted an administrative assistant who worked with them to coordinate survey completion either online or over the phone. Although the socio economic navigators were involved in distributing recruitment materials, none were directly involved with recruiting, nor did any of them know the identities of the individuals who did or did not participate. In addition to this recruitment method, a post-secondary manager visited several language training classes to inform them about the project and invite them to participate. Any interested students likewise contacted the administrative assistant, who set them up to complete the survey.

Data collection: To remove barriers to survey understanding and completion, participants were given the option to do the survey either over the phone or online. As a token of gratitude, participants received a \$25 gift card. Data was collected from 45 participants between September 22, 2021, and November 30, 2021.

Sample description: Table 1 gives a demographic summary. Most participants (over 80%) were between the ages of 25 and 44. Participants had been in Canada for an average of three years, with a minimum of three months and the maximum of seven years. The majority of participants were women. Participants had a diverse set of language backgrounds, with English spoken by nearly all (98%) and French spoken by just over half (53%).

Table 1. Sample breakdown

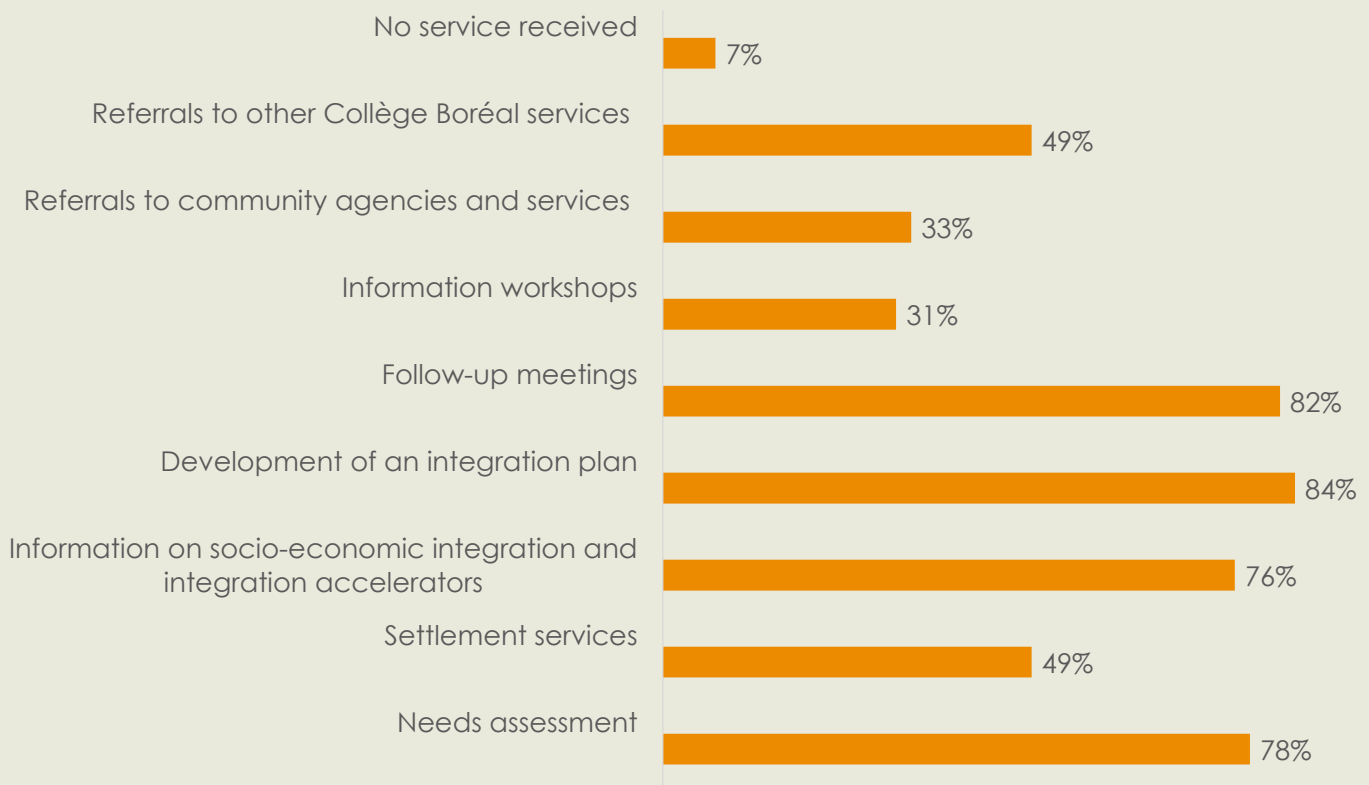
| Demographic category | Sub-category | % of sample (n = 45) |
|--|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Gender | Men | 24 % |
| | Women | 76 % |
| Age | 18 to 24 | 9 % |
| | 25 to 34 | 29 % |
| | 35 to 44 | 51 % |
| | 45 to 54 | 9 % |
| | 55 + | 2 % |
| Education before coming to Canada | Elementary school | 98 % |
| | High school diploma | 87 % |
| | College diploma | 42 % |
| | Some university | 11 % |
| | Bachelor's degree | 44 % |
| | Some post-graduate training | 22 % |
| Time Spent in Canada | Under 2 years | 24 % |
| | Between 2 and 4 years | 47 % |
| | 4 or more years | 29 % |
| Immigration Category | Economic immigrant | 27 % |
| | Refugee | 31 % |
| | Family sponsorship | 27 % |
| | Unspecified | 13 % |
| | Other | 2 % |
| Employment status | Not working | 67 % |
| | Working part-time | 18 % |
| | Working full-time | 16 % |
| Household income | Less than \$5,000 | 11 % |
| | \$5000 to \$19,999 | 18 % |
| | \$20,000 to \$49,999 | 27 % |
| | \$50,000 to \$79,999 | 6 % |
| | More than \$80,000 | 6 % |
| | Don't know / Unsure | 23 % |
| | Prefer not to answer | 11 % |

Research Findings

Program Use: Meetings, Integration Plans, and Accelerators as Priorities

Participants in the study used a variety of socio economic integration services. The most commonly accessed services were development of an integration plan (84% of participants), follow-up meetings (82%), needs assessment (78%), and information about integration and integration accelerators (76%). Less commonly, the participants attended information workshops or received referrals to community agencies and services (with roughly one-third of participants using these services). These rates of use appear in keeping with the program's emphasis on integration as a holistic process that requires identifying needs, developing a plan, and monitoring progress according to that plan.

Figure 3. Percentage of participants using each service.



Examining Barriers to Service Provision: Few Challenges Reported

Participants reported very few barriers to participating in the socio economic navigation program. As shown below, respondents generally agreed that it was easy to book an appointment (96%), that navigators showed up on time for appointments (89%), that the length of the meetings was appropriate (93%), that the frequency of the meetings was appropriate (93%), and that the frequency of follow-up meetings was appropriate (80%) (figure 4).

These findings indicate that the structure of one-on-one meetings themselves work well for program participants, at least from their perspective. There may be some room for improvement in terms of spacing the frequency of follow-ups, though further research is needed to determine whether there is a need for more or less frequent follow-up meetings.

91% of participants indicated they encountered no challenges attempting to access services.

Barriers reported related to childcare, scheduling around existing obligations, health situations, or waiting a long time for a social insurance number (each of which was reported by one participant).

The Role of Socioeconomic Navigators: Positive Evaluations in all Areas

As with the service structure evaluations, participants' evaluations of the socio economic navigators were extremely positive (figure 5).

A very high proportion (above 90% in every case) felt that they understood the role of their navigator and could trust them, open up to them, and work with them to achieve their goals. On top of that, 93% stated that they would recommend their navigator and the services to someone else. These positive assessments suggest that navigators have conveyed their roles clearly and that they are able to develop productive and compassionate relationships with their clients.

Figure 4. Participants' level of agreement regarding their structure of service provision.

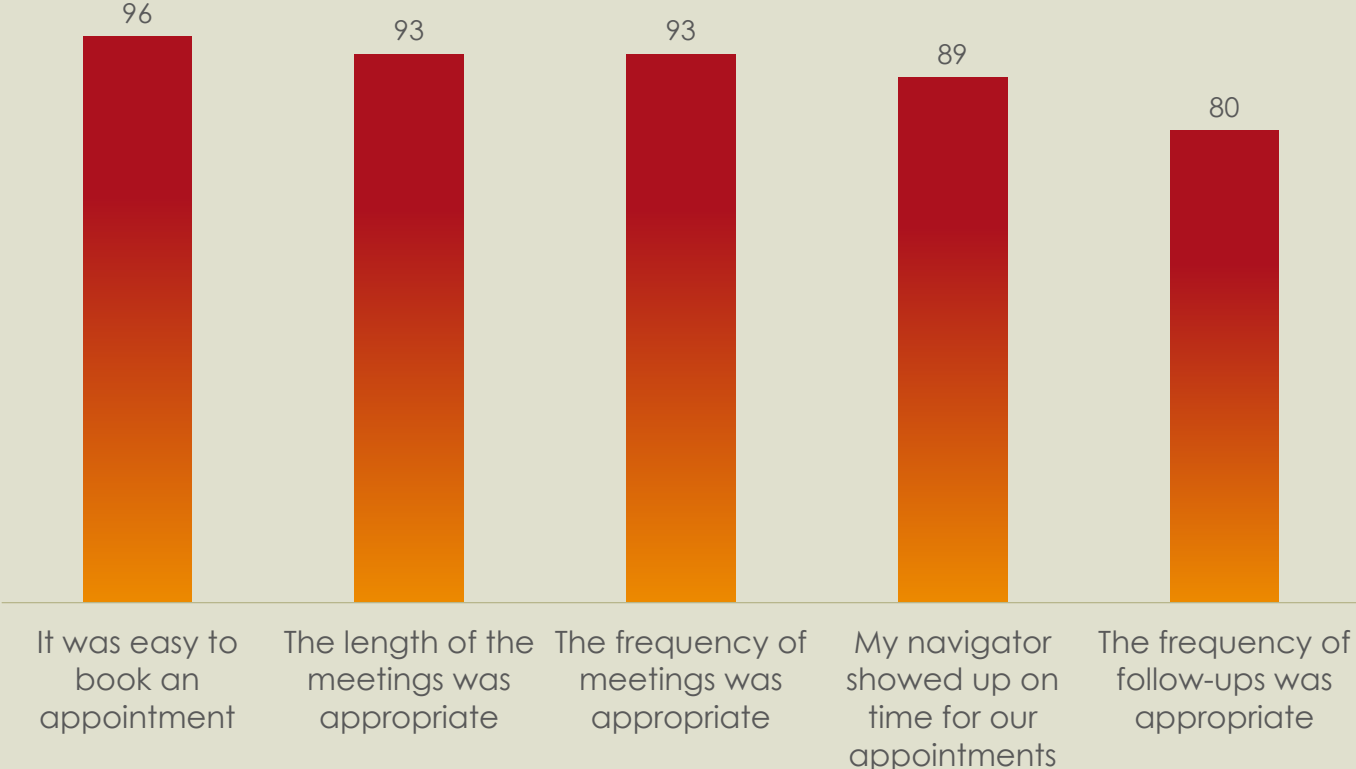
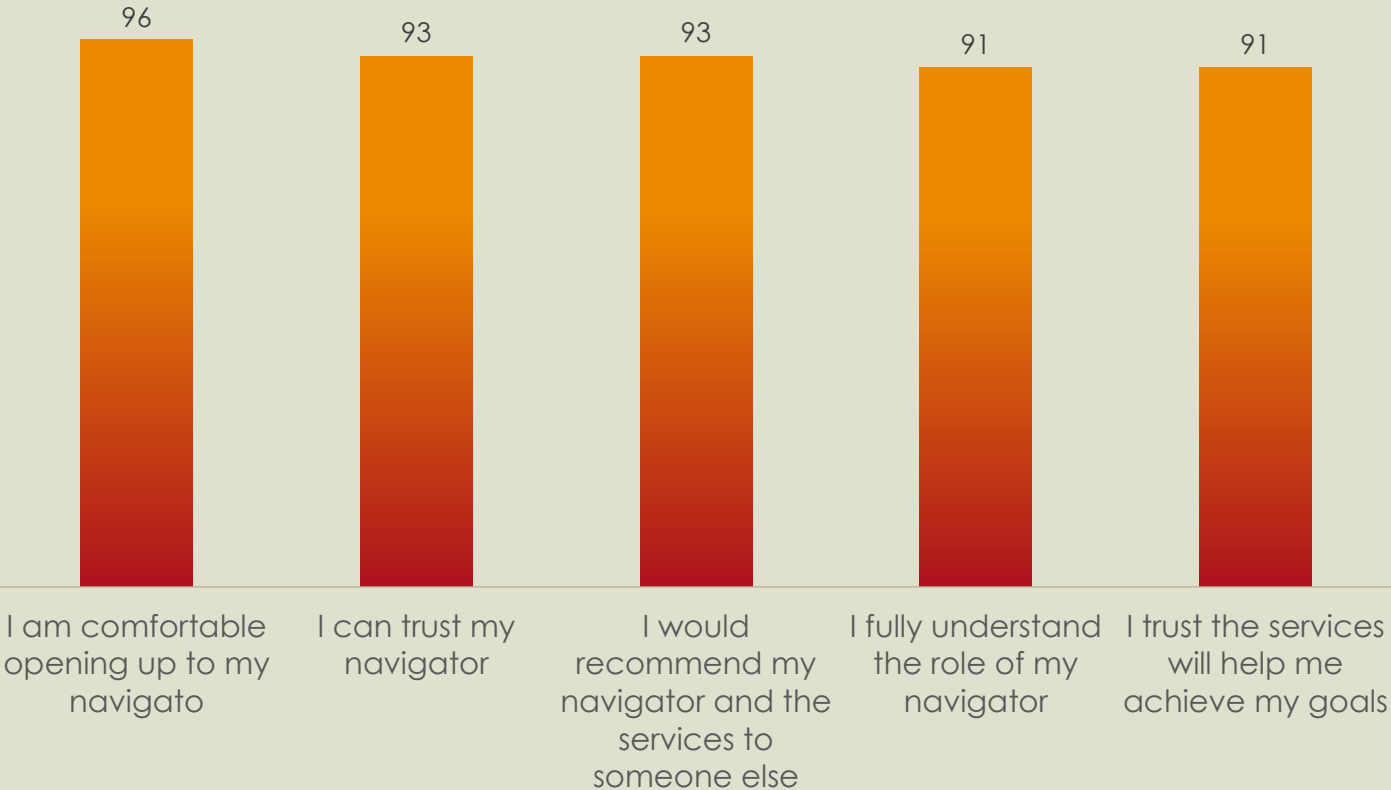
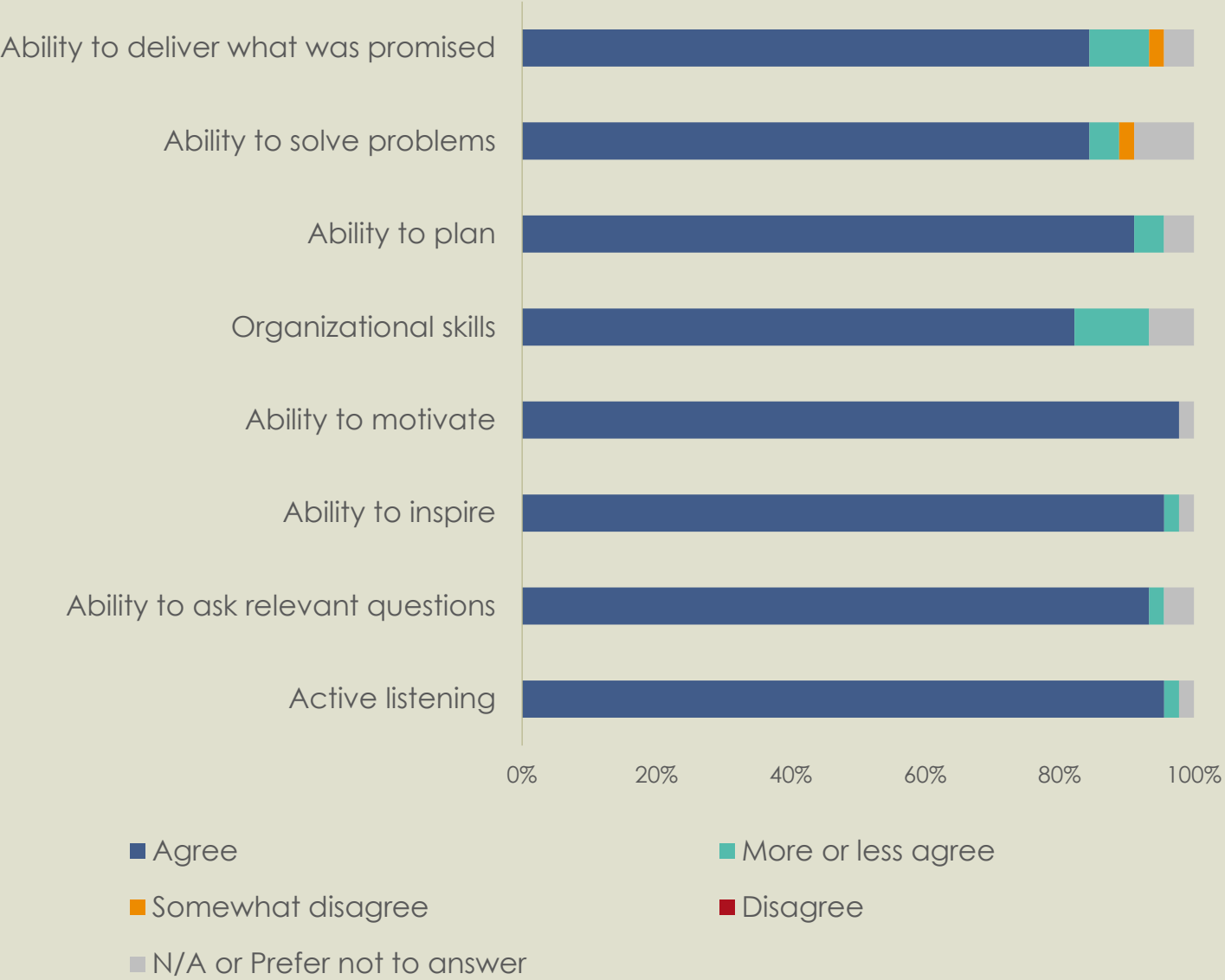


Figure 5. Participants' level of agreement regarding their navigators' character & value



Assessments of navigators’ specific role competencies were also overwhelmingly positive. There was nearly unanimous agreement (95%+) about socio economic navigators’ skills in active listening and in inspiring and motivating clients. Rated only slightly lower were socio economic navigators’ skills in asking relevant questions (93%) and making plans (91%). The skills that socio economic navigators did not demonstrate as clearly were their organizational skills, problem solving, and ability to deliver what was promised. Nonetheless, over 80% of participants agreed that navigators demonstrated those skills, highlighting their abilities as well-rounded professionals. Such positive evaluations stand as a strong accomplishment, especially given that this role is unique within colleges and other newcomer agencies (figure 6).

Figure 6. Participants’ level of agreement that navigators could demonstrate skills.



A Positive Self-Reported Impact on Language Skills

Whereas 80% to 90% of participants rated their English language skills (speaking, writing, reading, and listening) between average and very strong, French language skills reflected a bimodal pattern, with roughly 40% of participants reporting very strong skills in speaking, writing, reading, and listening and another subset (approximately one-third) reporting very weak skills. The remainder of participants preferred not to answer this question or indicated it was not applicable to them. Nearly all participants (91%) indicated that they had received language training, with the highest participation rates in Language Instruction for Newcomer to Canada (LINC) courses, at 66%, and in English as a Second Language (ESL) courses, at 22%.

As part of the integration plan, a large proportion of participants set goals for language instruction, with most aiming to complete LINC courses. The majority of participants had previously completed or were aiming to complete LINC Level 4 (51% of participants), Level 5 (61%), and/or Level 6 (75%). By contrast, few participants aimed for Levels 1, 2, or 3 or for more advanced certifications, such as ESL, FSL English as a Second Language (ESL), Français langue seconde (French as a second language, or FSL), Occupation-Specific Language Training (OSLT), International English Language Testing System (IELTS), Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), or English Language International Program (ELIP) courses and certifications.

Significantly, a large majority of participants who had not yet completed these goals affirmed that they felt it was “likely” or “very likely” that they would achieve them, with only one or two participants for each level of proficiency stating that they thought it unlikely that they would achieve their goal. Participants saw the College’s services as having a positive impact on their language proficiency.

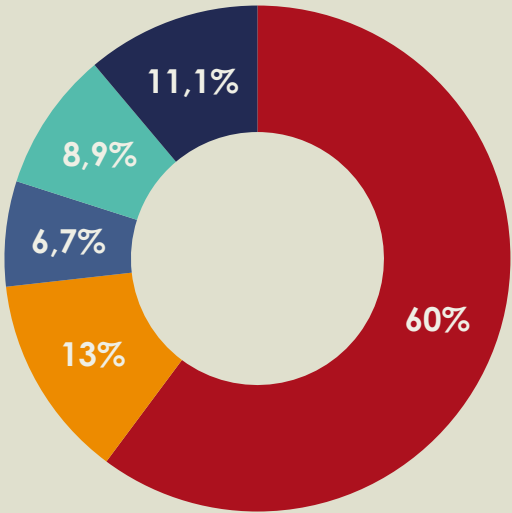
60% of participants reported that the socioeconomic integration services had a major impact on their language skills

The remainder of participants reported that these services had somewhat of an impact (13%), a minor impact (7%) or no impact (9%) (figure 7).

This study’s sample size (n=45) means that its power to detect statistical significance was limited. Nevertheless, we ran analyses to look for any observable correlations between reported language proficiency and participants’ duration (in months) in the socio economic navigation program.

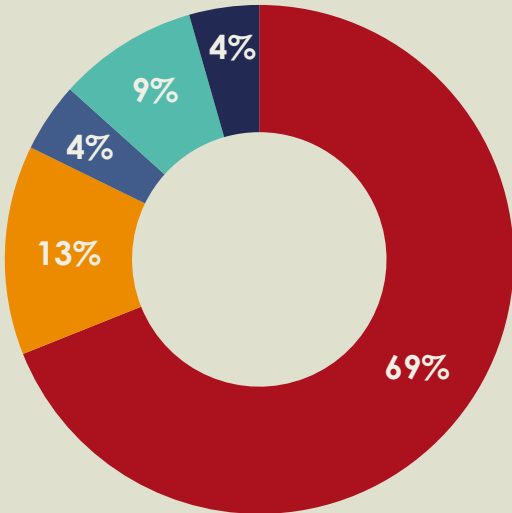
No statistically significant correlations were found between duration in the program and speaking, listening, reading, or writing skills in French or English ($p > .05$), nor were there significant correlations between global skill levels and duration in the program. With larger sample sizes, such correlations might be observable (though even in that case causation could not be inferred). Certainly, future research should explore this possibility.

Figure 7. Impact of socioeconomic integration services on language skill.



■ Major impact
■ No impact

Figure 8. Impact of socioeconomic integration program on educational path



■ Somewhat of an impact
■ Minor impact
■ N/A or Prefer not to Answer

Education: Post-Secondary Goals, Optimism, and Considerable Program Impact

The majority of participants reported educational goals. The most common goals were starting a college program (82%), getting a college certificate (75%), and getting the pre-requisites to start post-secondary training (74%). Nearly all participants (90%+) felt it was likely or very likely they would achieve these goals. Participants also reported goals of starting a university program (53%); getting a university degree, certificate or diploma (50%); starting another educational program (48%); and getting another certification (57%).

Here again, all participants who reported these goals felt it was likely or very likely they would achieve them. Finally, there was a substantial subset of participants who aimed to obtain the equivalents of diplomas they had completed abroad (39%) and all of them perceived their success as likely or very likely. Participants' perceptions of the program's impact on their education were highly positive: 69% of participants reported the program having a major effect on their educational path and 13% reported it having somewhat of an effect (figure 8).

In summary, most of the participants were very optimistic about completing their educational goals and a significant majority felt that the program had had a major impact on the course of their educational path.

Work: Experiences of Occupational Shifts, Hopes for Dream Jobs, and Moderate Program Impacts

Participants commonly reported goals regarding work experience. Notably, 96% of participants felt that reflecting on their career was itself an important goal. Getting a "dream job" was another key aim reported by 98% of respondents. Other employment goals reported by over 80% of the participants were volunteering, working part time, and working full time. Respondents' expected probability of reaching these goals varied. Interestingly, participants were much more likely to view themselves as "likely" or "very likely" to reflect on their career choices (88%) or get a dream job (93%) than to find full-time work (67%; the rest of the participants did not answer this question or selected "prefer not to answer"). This finding aligns with the program's emphasis on personal reflection, investment in training, and the pursuit of personally meaningful work – an approach that contrasts to one emphasizing a rapid transition into full-time work of any kind.

We should note that two-thirds of the respondents had worked since arriving in Canada and that one-third were currently working. Many participants were working in fields other than those they had worked in prior to arriving (see Figure 9). Most noticeably, individuals who had worked in management, business, finance, and administration were much less likely to be in those fields. Nearly a third of participants (31%, 14 participants) indicated that they had attempted to get their educational or professional credentials recognized in Canada, with the rest stating either that they had not attempted this (40%) or that the question did not apply to them (29%). Among those that had attempted to get their credentials recognized, 5 were successful, 6 were in the process, and the other 3 had mixed responses.

Figure 9. Work fields prior to arriving in Canada and after arriving, by # of participants.

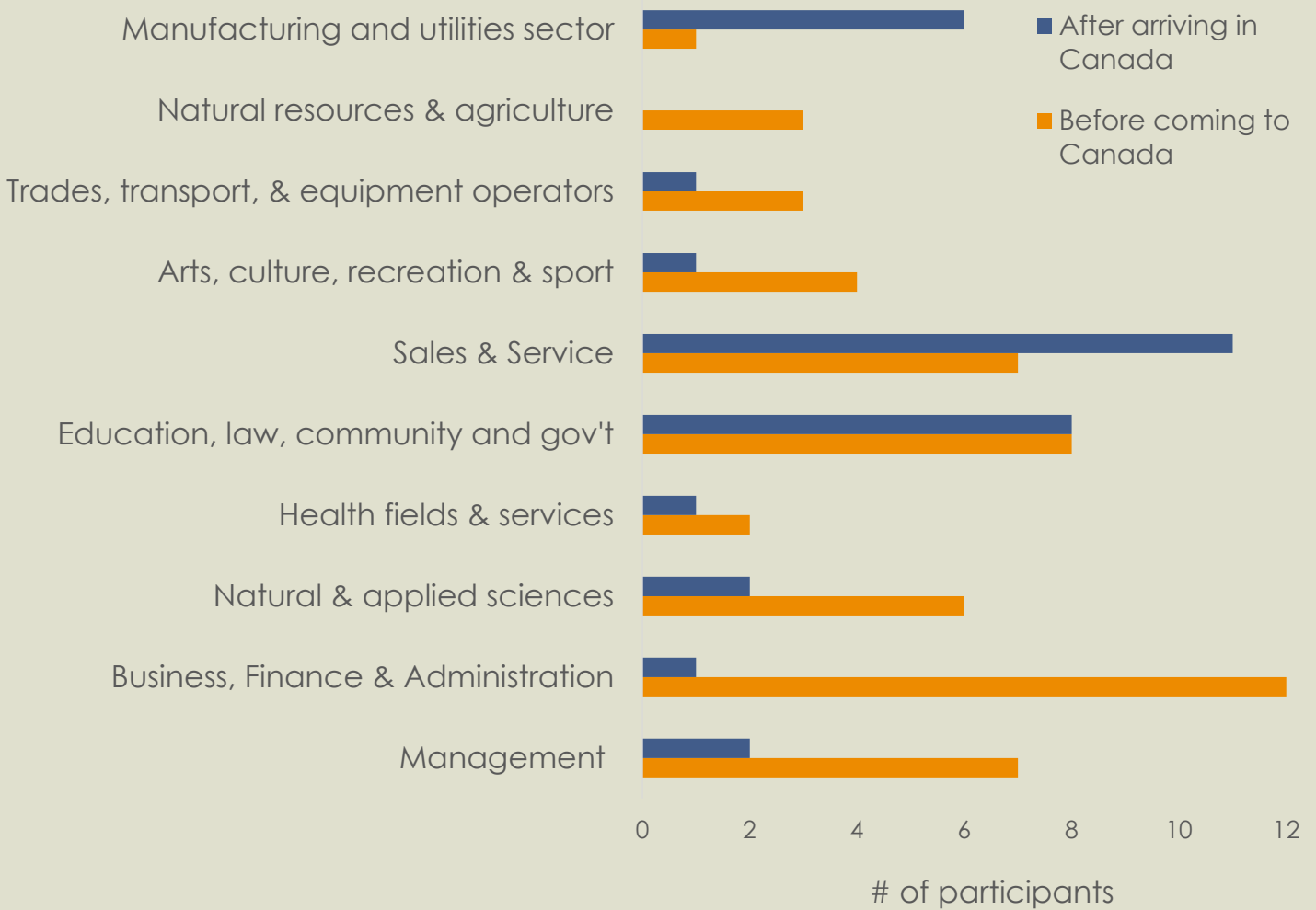
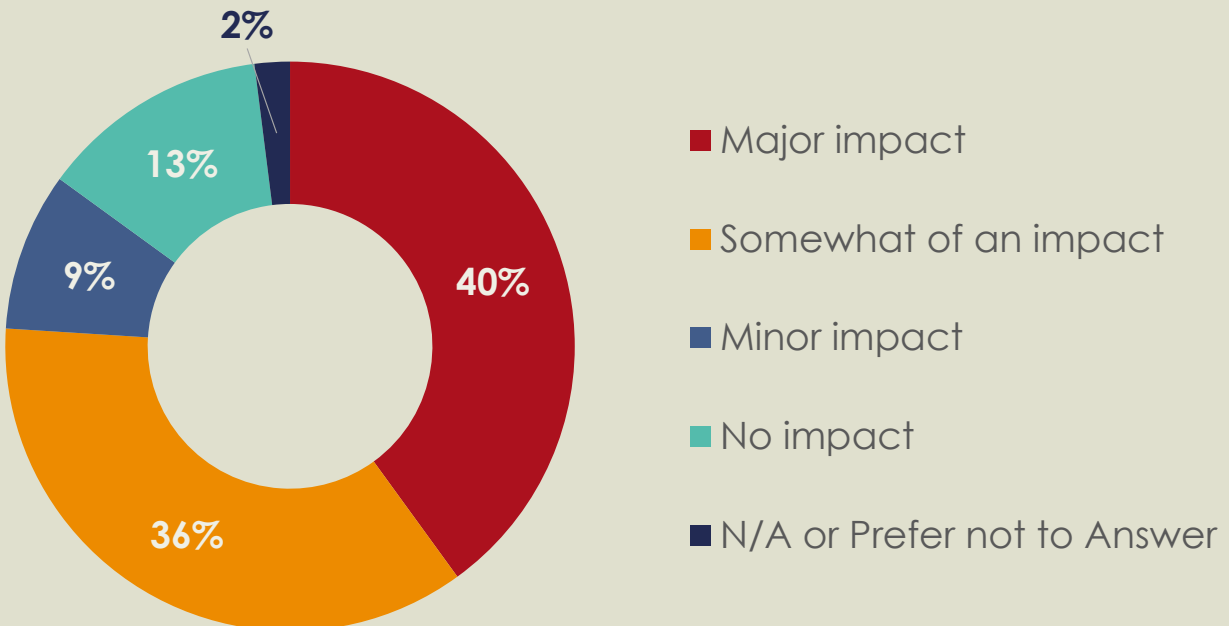


Figure 10. Impact of socioeconomic integration program on integration into the job market.



Rounding out our understanding of participants' work experiences, we found that nearly 70% had been searching for work in Canada over the past six months and 63% had encountered challenges while doing so. The most common challenges were literacy skills (17 participants), transportation challenges (6), COVID-19 (4), and children or other dependents (2).

Finally, when asked about the impact of the socio economic program on their integration into the Canadian job market, most participants felt it had had a major impact (40%) or somewhat of an impact (36%). The percentage who reported a "major impact" in this area is significantly smaller than the percentage reporting major impacts on their language skill (60%) or educational path (69%) (figure 10). While the College could explore opportunities to effect change more directly in this domain, it should also be recognized that the program is intentionally aimed at a more deliberate and reflective transition into work—one that requires a greater up-front investment but that may reap more sustainable and personally gratifying employment outcomes.

Finances: A Weaker Program Impact

In the section on employment, we noted that participants seemed to be less confident about gaining the hours of employment they hoped than about accessing their ideal type of work. This may suggest a lack of confidence in job security. Participants also seemed to have less confidence about the financial impacts of their efforts, including their involvement in the socio economic integration program. This was the area where participants reported the least impact; only 21% perceived the program as having a major impact on their finances and, in fact, nearly half of participants (46%) perceived it as having no impact (figure 11). This is not surprising, given that returns on investment for training and education are more likely to be seen over a longer time period (Wilkinson et al., 2006).

In terms of participants' current financial positions, a large subset of participants were unsure of their personal employment income (22%), preferred not to report it (11%), or did not respond to the question on personal employment income (16%). Among the roughly half of participants who did respond, half reported a personal income less than \$5,000 and half reported an income between \$10,000 and \$40,000. In future research, it would be advisable to reduce any concerns participants might have about reporting their income, given the low response rates to this question. It might also be helpful to provide more precision on the types of financial outcomes that the program attempts to address (especially given that program participants are occupied full-time as students). Rather than asking about "financial situation" broadly, it may be advisable to parse out questions about budgeting, saving, managing debt, or handling finances as a family, especially if these are areas that are covered within the socio economic integration program.

Figure 11. Perceived impact of the socio economic integration program on finances.

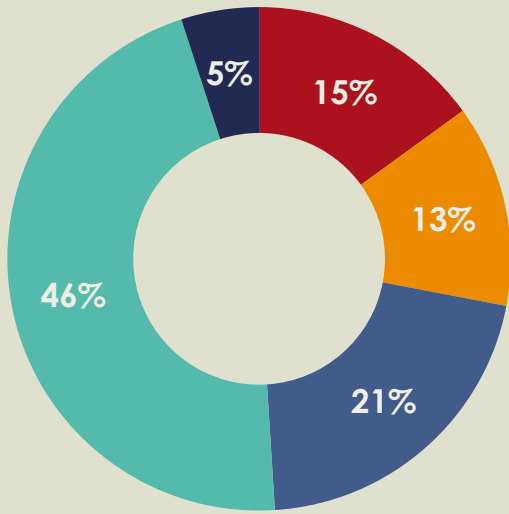
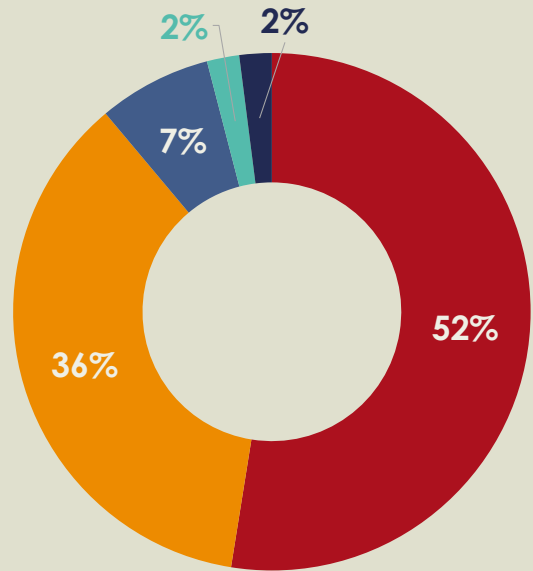
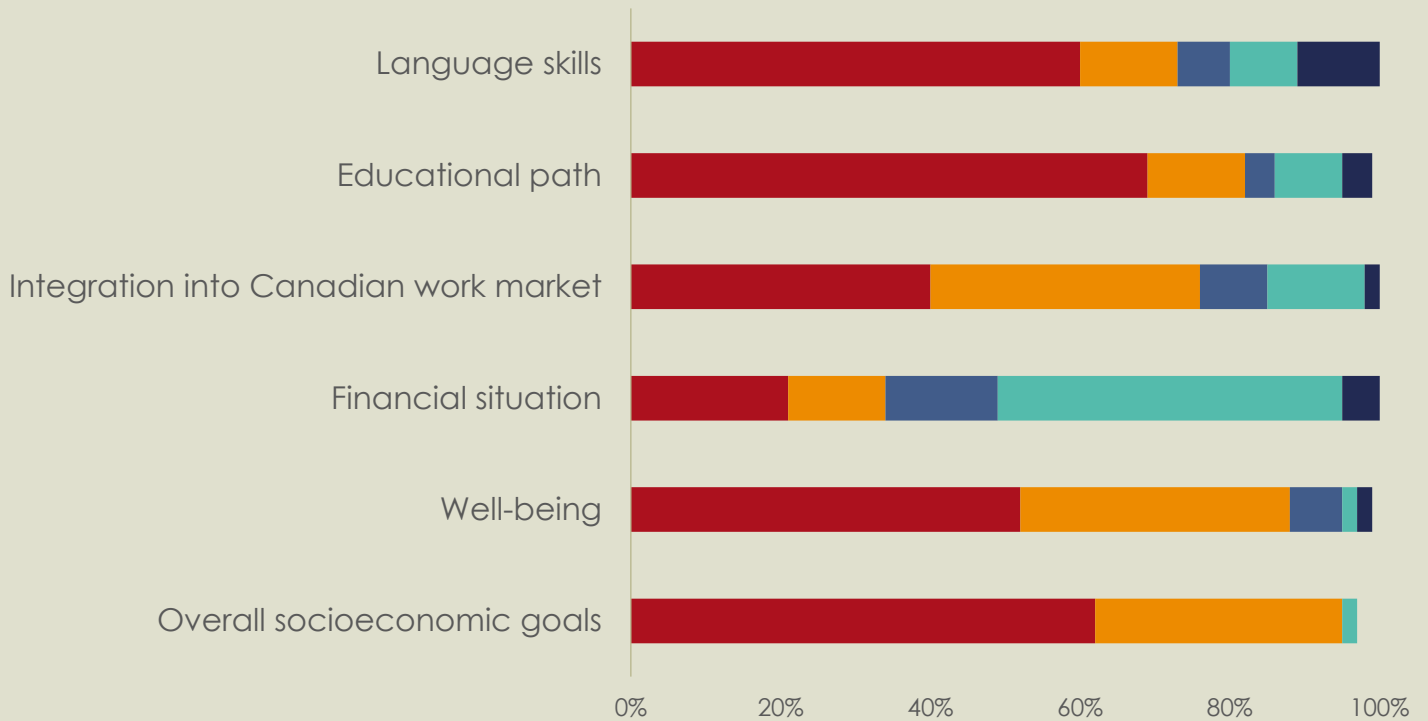


Figure 12. Impact of socioeconomic integration program on well-being.



- Major impact
- Somewhat of an impact
- Minor impact
- No impact
- N/A or Prefer not to Answer

Figure 13. Perceived program outcomes across domains and overall.



Psychosocial Well-being: A Moderate Program Impact

At the time of the survey, participants reported very high levels of satisfaction and positive self-perceptions on a range of measures.

>90% of participants agreed that they were confident, independent, determined, resilient, and aspiring to goals and careers.

Between 80% and 90% agreed that they had others they could count on in times of need, a supportive environment for carrying out career aspirations, a sense of accomplishment, and satisfaction with their lives.

These high ratings of purpose, meaningfulness, and life satisfaction are encouraging. On the other hand, the impact of the program on this outcome was relatively weaker than on other outcomes examined in the study. 52% of participants felt that the socioeconomic integration program had a major impact on their well-being, with a further 36% reporting somewhat of an impact. Still, that means a combined 88% perceive the program as having some impact, which is on the whole a positive sign (figure 12).

Global Program Evaluation: 95% Perceive an Impact on their Pursuit of Socioeconomic Integration

Examining each of the different outcomes yields clear evidence that – at least from participants’ perspectives – these socio economic integration services are highly valuable, with a majority of participants reporting major impacts for all key accelerators except their financial situations.

In considering the program’s impact on their overall socio economic goals, 62% perceived a major impact and 33% perceived somewhat of an impact, with just two participants reporting zero or no impact. See Figure 13 for a global summary of program impact findings.

95% of respondents felt the program had an impact on their pursuit of their socioeconomic potential.

Discussion

In this section, we discuss our findings in relation to findings in previous literature on the socio economic integration of newcomers. Where possible, we have attempted to draw comparisons between our program impacts and those of others; however, these comparisons should be taken with some degree of caution, given the variability in the regional challenges to integration studied, participant profiles, researchers' recruitment strategies, and study measures used. Nevertheless, we believe that this discussion provides valuable contextualization for our findings, primarily by situating them in relation to the state of knowledge on barriers to socio economic integration among newcomers. Taking a reflexive approach to our research, and viewing this project as one part of a series we hope to conduct, we follow this discussion with some reflections on study limitations and future directions.

Global Program Impact on Pursuit of Socioeconomic Integration

Previous literature documents positive global evaluations of settlement services. Kalman (2017) found 82.5% (34) of their program participants believed that their wraparound plan would help them settle into Greater Victoria. Likewise, 89% of clients in settlement services in Ontario reported being better able to make informed decisions after receiving settlement services (Office of the Auditor General of Ontario, 2021) and the Immigrant Employment Council of BC (2021) reported an average 95% program satisfaction rate in 2020–2021 (averaged across the multiple programs they were running). In our study, the College's shows similarly high self-reported effectiveness. A full 95% of respondents felt the program had an impact on their pursuit of their socio economic potential, with 62% perceiving a major impact and 33% perceiving some impact. This finding seems to us to be highly encouraging.



Program Delivery & Navigator Effectiveness

Generally, our findings provide evidence that the College's navigation services are being delivered thoughtfully, effectively, and with follow-through. Compared to the program reviewed by Kalman (2017), where 70% of participants had a wraparound plan and 50% of participants had tracked their progress during wraparound meetings, our study found that 84% of participants had an integration plan, 82% had follow-up meetings, and 84% referred to the integration plan often or always during work sessions with navigators.

In past research, reports of program satisfaction have been very positive. In Kalman's study (2017), 85% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that they were happy with their Wraparound Team; the Immigrant Employment Council of BC (2021) reported average 95% program satisfaction rate in 2020–2021 (averaged across the multiple programs they were running); and 89% of clients in settlement services in Ontario reported being better able to make informed decisions after receiving settlement services (Office of the Auditor General of Ontario, 2021). Similarly, 93% of our participants agreed that they would recommend their navigator or navigator services to others and 95% perceived somewhat of an impact or a major impact on their overall socio economic goals.

In Kalman's study, 65% (26) of participants disagreed that they felt misunderstood by their Wraparound Team. Here again, our participants' reports are encouraging, with over 90% stating they were comfortable opening up to their navigator and felt they could trust them. In brief, these findings point to an absolute and relative level of success in program structure and delivery—success levels that notably mitigate reported challenges of a lack of long-term follow-up (Melançon et al., 2022; Selimos & George, 2018; Simich et al., 2005) and leverage current knowledge about the importance of trust and tailored guidance (Caidi et al., 2008; Interquest Consulting, 2006; Melançon et al., 2022).

Language Skills

Past research has found that acquisition of language skills is a barrier for newcomers, especially for French language courses outside of major cities (Karky, 2018; Interquest Consulting, 2006). Most participants in this study (80 to 90%) rated their English language skills between average and very strong, whereas about 40% of participants rated their French skills very strong and roughly one-third reported very weak French language skills.

Research indicates that economic immigrants tend to have the highest rates of language proficiency, with refugees and dependent economic immigrants having lower rates (Adamuti-Trache, 2013). Due to the design of our questions about LINC levels, we were unable to examine the distribution of participants across course levels achieved or determine differences across immigrant categories. Addressing both of these issues will be important for future follow-up studies, so that we can have a more accurate sense of participants' language levels and the backgrounds that inform them.

Some research has found that participation in LINC courses mainly improves skills in reading and writing (Citizenship & Immigration Canada, 2010). Our research showed no correlation between time in the socio economic navigation program and specific or global language skill competences. Still, we must recognize the limitations of our data in its ability to detect such statistical effects. Participants generally felt the navigation program impacted their language skills, with only 16% of participants feeling it had a minor impact or no impact. Given the discrepancies between different language skills (listening and speaking vs. reading and writing), we may benefit from asking participants about impacts on specific language skills in the future.

Work & Education

As past literature has shown (Interquest Consulting, 2006; Kalman, 2017; Picot), getting a dream job was a goal for virtually every participant. Likewise, we saw that in immigrating to Canada, many participants had shifted their fields of employment, with many of them having management, business, and science-related experience prior to arriving in Canada, then shifting into more sales, service, and manufacturing roles. Again, this fits with past literature regarding barriers for newcomers to Canada (Kouyé & Soulière, 2022; Reitz, 2013; Zietsma, 2010). The unemployment rate of newcomers in Canada has been hovering at 10%, whereas two-thirds of the participants were currently unemployed.

Knowing that the program's clients take 20 hours of language training in addition to full-time courses and coursework, we do not interpret this contrast negatively; on the contrary, it is a testimony to the diverse activities that newcomers carry out simultaneously in pursuit of long-term career goals.

Our review found that 83% of participants in a BC employment readiness program reported that it helped them get a new and better job (Immigrant Employment Council of BC, 2021). In comparison, when asked about the impact of the socio economic program on their integration into the Canadian job market, most of the participants in the current study felt it had had a major impact (40%) or somewhat of an impact (36%). Finally, research has shown the challenges for having one's educational and work experience recognized formally (Kouyé & Soulière, 2022; Reitz, 2013). Of our participants, 14 of 45 had attempted to get their credentials recognized, with 5 being successful and 6 making progress toward this goal. Altogether, our findings are comparable with previous findings on challenges and potential interventions related to work.

Finances

Newcomers commonly experience wage gaps compared to non-immigrants (Al Mallees, 2022) with a significant proportion unable to earn enough money to support themselves or their families (Kalman, 2017). Almost half of participants were unsure of their personal employment income (22%), preferred not to report it (11%), or did not respond to the question on personal employment income (16%). Among the roughly half of participants who did respond, half reported a personal income less than \$5,000 and half reported an income between \$10,000 and \$40,000. With such limitations in our data, we cannot draw meaningful conclusions about the financial statuses of our participants. Recognizing these limitations, we hope to provide more reassurance to future participants as well as alternative measures of financial status, such that findings can become more interpretable. Moreover, it may be valuable to examine a comparison group of non-newcomers, so that conclusions about wage gaps can be drawn.

In terms of evaluating the College's program, finances were the area where participants witnessed the least impact, with 21% viewing the program as having a major impact on their finances and in fact nearly half of participants (46%) viewing it as having no impact. Given that many participants are investing in training to earn a higher wage later on, it may be that the financial impacts of the program would be less direct and observable only after a longer period of time. For that reason, we will continue to conduct follow-up research with these participants.

Psychosocial Well-being

Previous research has identified many psychosocial challenges for newcomers, including challenges establishing connections (not only with established immigrants but also outside of the immigrant community) and building trusting relationships, as well as experiences of loneliness and depression (Interquest Consulting, 2006; Kouyé & Soulière, 2022; Melançon et al., 2022; Selimos & George, 2018).



Still, absolute ratings of belonging show the majority of immigrants experiencing a somewhat or very strong sense of community, at least according to research by Kitchen et al. (2015), who found 74% of their participants in this scenario. Our research testifies to a strong sense of community among participants, with 100% of participants agreeing (84%) or somewhat agreeing (16%) that they had people they could count on in times of need.

On the topic of life satisfaction, previous research on a largely under-employed internationally trained group of engineers (the majority from Ontario) found that 31% of the engineer participants were dissatisfied with life in Canada, 33% neutral about life in Canada, and 36% satisfied with life in Canada (George et al., 2012). In addition, Statistics Canada reports that in 2018, Asian immigrants rated their life satisfaction an 8 out of a possible 10, but that two years later, during the pandemic, this had declined by 1.82 points (Helliwell et al., 2020). In our study (with data taking place in the fall of 2021), participants seemed to have a high level of satisfaction, with 89% agreeing and 11% somewhat agreeing that they were satisfied with their life.

Finally, 52% of participants felt that the socio economic integration program had a major impact on their well-being, and a further 36% felt it had somewhat of an impact. We were unable to find literature to which we could compare these findings, though we can comment that the program impact in this area was relatively weaker compared to that perceived in other areas—a finding that aligns with the program's emphasis on promoting socioeconomic outcomes.

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Study Limitations

Our study has some noteworthy limitations:

- 1.** Without a comparison group being examined, our claims about the causal role of the program are limited. In future research, a comparative approach with another group of participants not receiving College services could provide more insight into how the College's program uniquely informs the socio economic integration of newcomers in Ontario.
- 2.** Since this is the first point of data collection, long-term program impacts and participant experiences could not be ascertained. Our follow-up research may shed light on financial outcomes that were not possible to observe here.
- 3.** Participants in this study were volunteers who were currently receiving the College's newcomer navigation services. These participants may possibly have been uniquely motivated to provide positive evaluations of the program. This report, for example, does not capture the views of participants who stopped receiving services or dropped out of College Boreal. Exit interviews with these types of individuals could potentially provide valuable information about program shortcomings and limitations.
- 4.** Our multiple-choice questions regarding goal acquisition and fulfillment at times included response options that were not mutually exclusive. When combined with low response rates for some topics (e.g., financial status) or highly distributed response patterns (e.g., LINC levels), this data could not be used to draw meaningful conclusions. These items have been flagged for refinement in future studies.
- 5.** Finally, this research was conducted in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is difficult to say how this may have impacted participants' views, but it may be that College programming was viewed more positively than otherwise, since many students and newcomers reported social isolation during the pandemic (Appleby et al., 2022; Nakhaie et al., 2022). On the other hand, services may have been evaluated more negatively, considering researchers' observations of expanded digital divides and challenges building social networks during the COVID-19 pandemic (Barker, 2021; Nardon et al., 2021).

Future Directions

This work gives us several points of departure for future research. First, we hope to refine some of our measures. There is room for more precision with respect to financial statuses and experiences, uptake in community referrals, and practical implications of language skills. Additionally, future research could employ widely used or standardized measures that would ensure greater comparability between our findings and existing literature (e.g., regarding life satisfaction or mental health). Finally, we would like to improve some of our scales to ensure the response exclusivity.

As a second point of departure, we hope to conduct future waves of research to capture changes to socio economic outcomes across time. Capturing pre-intervention or “baseline” levels in our outcome metrics would be highly valuable for comparing with post-intervention or “post-test” levels. It may be valuable to collect some of this data in an ongoing way, provided that students give informed consent. Ideally, program participants who stop receiving services for whatever reason could also be interviewed or surveyed to understand their reasons for exiting the program, (accessibility issues, time constraints, lack of perceived value, etc.).

As a third avenue for future research, alternative forms of data collection and analysis could complement this survey research to build a more robust understanding and evaluation of College Boreal’s newcomer integration services. To this end, interviews, diary studies, participant observation, and community-based research might shed light on the specific mechanisms at play that support or detract from program effectiveness. Open-ended and exploratory research about services that were desired but not provided could also be valuable for informing future programming. Likewise, there may be a benefit in tracing distinct patterns among different types of newcomers, given that prior research has found variations between economic immigrants, family-sponsored immigrants, and refugees.

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