

Example of a Successful Nomination

1. **Name of host organization:** MakeWay Charitable Society - Together Project
2. **Phone number of host organization:** XXX-XXX-XXXX
3. **Website of host organization:** www.togetherproject.ca
4. **Name of practice:** Remote Social Support for Government-Assisted Refugees and Refugee Claimants
5. **Location of practice:**
 - a. **Province/territory (check all that apply):**

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Newfoundland and Labrador | <input type="checkbox"/> Saskatchewan |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prince Edward Island | <input type="checkbox"/> Alberta |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Nova Scotia | <input type="checkbox"/> British Columbia |
| <input type="checkbox"/> New Brunswick | <input type="checkbox"/> Yukon Territory |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Quebec | <input type="checkbox"/> Northwest Territories |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Ontario | <input type="checkbox"/> Nunavut |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Manitoba | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify): _____ |

b. City/Town: Toronto / Greater Toronto Area (including Mississauga)

6. **Area(s) of practice:**
 - Providing settlement services online
 - Providing information to newcomers during the pandemic
 - Collaboration among service providers during the pandemic
 - Pandemic supports provided by LIPs and RIFs
 - Addressing digital equity
7. **Briefly describe the promising practice (maximum 1,500 characters):**

‘Remote Social Support for Government-Assisted Refugees and Refugee Claimants’ is an adaptation of Together Project’s successful Welcome Group model, and provides safe and effective social support to Government Assisted Refugee (GAR) and refugee claimant newcomer households by leveraging technology to allow for community engagement in refugee newcomer integration.

Remote social support is a means to provide social connections to vulnerable newcomers by matching them with ‘Welcome Groups’ of volunteers that are trained to address newcomers’ specific integration priorities over a period of at least 6 months. These volunteers are recruited, vetted, and trained through online platforms. Similarly, newcomer participants are referred and onboarded into the program remotely.

Once matched, volunteers and newcomers are introduced virtually, and build their relationships over the course of their match across a variety of communications platforms (e.g., video and phone calls, instant messaging, etc.). Together Project provides support to volunteers in the form of regular monitoring, supervision, and guidance by staff, as well as constantly updated resources and information that reflect emergent learning and best practices. Together Project also developed new channels to share information about the pandemic, service updates, and new resources, namely a dedicated and regularly updated web page and a monthly volunteer mailer.

8. Why do you consider this to be a promising practice (maximum 1,500 characters)?

‘Remote Social Support’ is a promising practice because it reflects a meaningful avenue for greater community engagement in refugee newcomer integration, during the pandemic and beyond.

The practice is innovative in the sense that it is engaging a rarely tapped pool of virtual volunteers, overcoming geographic barriers that might otherwise prevent a potential volunteer living in downtown Toronto from being able to meaningfully connect with a newcomer family in the suburbs. Additionally, rather than providing a virtual volunteering opportunity that solely focuses on one integration priority, like language or employment, it can act as a form of wraparound support with the added benefit of forming a social bridge between those receiving and those providing the support, especially difficult-to-reach populations like single mother households.

Feedback from program participants speaks to the effectiveness of remote social support. Newcomers have reported feeling more welcome in their communities, better connected to services and resources, and lower levels of social isolation after participating in the program.

By finding effective ways for volunteers to contribute support towards the specific integration priorities of newcomer households and removing barriers to do so, remote social support opens the door to greater community involvement, improved channels to provide information to those who need it most, and more opportunities for the sector to coordinate its efforts.

9. What was the impetus for developing the promising practice?

Together Project's Welcome Group Program has connected volunteers with newcomers for social support since 2017. The basis of most of this social support took the form of regular in-person meetings and activities. When the COVID-19 pandemic struck and lockdown measures were put in place, in-person interaction was no longer possible. While elements of remote social support have always been part of the Welcome Group Program - e.g., the primary mode of coordination between program participants has always been instant messaging - Together Project's pandemic response required a significant pivot that reflected the reality of social distancing and other lockdown measures.

This reality set in at a precise moment in which social support was more important than ever - newcomers were even more socially isolated and susceptible to misinformation about the

pandemic and changing services. Additionally, Together Project was just launching a pilot program matching refugee claimants, which had unique priorities to address. Following a needs assessment of both newcomer program participants and volunteers, Together Project generated a concept for 'remote social support', leaning into technology and communications platforms that could help ensure that the community could remain engaged in supporting its most vulnerable members, based on existing best practices for online interaction, as well as close collaboration with newcomers and volunteers to develop the practice's first iterations.

10. Approximate length of time that the practice has been in existence:

- Less than 1 year
- 1-2 years
- 3-5 years
- 6-10 years
- More than 10 years

11. Funder(s) of this practice:

- IRCC
- Other federal government department
- Provincial government
- Municipal government
- Other (please specify): McConnell Foundation, TD Bank Group, Ontario Trillium Foundation, Community Foundations Canada, Toronto Foundation, COGECO Communications

12. If the practice is implemented with one or more partner organizations, please list these partners:

COSTI Immigrant Services, Crossroads Refugee Clinic at Women's College Hospital

Definition of a promising practice: A promising practice is an innovative practice that has an objective basis for claiming effectiveness in achieving its stated aims and that has the potential for replication. Thus, a promising practice is defined in terms of its innovation and effectiveness, which can be empirically measured as successful outcomes of the practice.

13. Does the practice have the following features?

Features	Yes	No
a. Effective: accomplishes or produces the intended purpose or result	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. Efficient: performs in the best possible way with the best use of time, resources, and effort	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. Relevant: meets the intended needs of an identifiable group of people	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. Sustainable: has the capacity to endure or be sustained	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e. Transferable: can easily be incorporated in or replicated by other organizations or related areas of practice	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
f. Innovative and forward thinking: has unique or novel features that contribute to its success	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
g. Differs in definable ways from other similar practices	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
h. High client uptake	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
i. High client retention (where applicable)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
j. Strong evidence of successful outcomes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
k. Managed based on outcomes and indicators of success	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

14. Have the outcomes of the practice been monitored or assessed? This can be through either an external evaluations or within-organization measurement of outcomes.

- yes
- no

15. Briefly describe how you track the progress and outcomes of the practice:

As 'Remote Social Support for Government-Assisted Refugees and Refugee Claimants' is an adaptation of Together Project's Welcome Group Program rather than a stand-alone program, we have incorporated our monitoring and assessment of its success based on the outcomes we use to assess the impact of our other programs.

In terms of monitoring, the Welcome Group Program's delivery is under constant supervision by Together Project staff. Every match between newcomers and volunteers has a dedicated staff

person who can regularly check-in and provide course correction for both newcomers and volunteers. This provides an important lever to ensure, to the best of our ability, that the program is making progress towards desired outcomes.

Separately, Together Project also evaluates the impact of its programs using a before versus after evaluation design, surveying program participants before and after their match. These surveys are administered online and, if necessary, through the use of an interpreter. Our most recent round of evaluation, at the end of 2020, evaluated the impact of remote social support via the Welcome Group Program on refugee claimants, using the Social Provisions Scale. In 2021, we hope to incorporate all Together Project volunteers and newcomers into our impact evaluation design as we continue to learn and adapt the program.

16. Where would the assessments described in questions 14 and 15 be available (e.g., website URL; you would be able to send it; or who can be contacted to obtain it):

We have shared some of the results of our surveys online at <https://togetherproject.ca/blogpost/reducing-social-isolation-through-the-welcome-groups-for-refugee-claimants-pilot-program/> and are currently developing our Impact page (<https://togetherproject.ca/impact/>) to better communicate these results. In the meantime, anyone interested in program assessment and evaluation is welcome to email Andrew Luszyk at andrew@togetherproject.ca for further information.