



Employment and
Social Development Canada

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ESDC – Service Research Priorities

**Presentation to the Public Sector Service
Delivery Council (PSSDC)**

September 29th 2022

Presentation Outline

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1. Objectives

- Inform PSSDC members of ESDC's service research priorities
- Highlight Selected Research Projects and Activities from the Service Research Division and from other Service Research Areas of EDSC
- Identify Potential Research Areas for Collaboration



2. Service Research Themes

Impact

Optimize service delivery outcomes

Covering all service channels, it includes research that contributes to departmental knowledge on characteristics, evolving needs, and preferences of clients. Service frictions and barriers to access are also key topics addressed under this theme, which supports various strategic transformation initiatives, including *Reaching all Canadians* and digital transformation.

Innovation

Innovate service delivery and design

In alignment with *ESDC's Benefits Delivery Modernization* and other strategic transformation initiatives, this theme includes research that explores innovative approaches across service channels, digital transformation, and the use of AI and automated processes, to facilitate safe and easy-to-use, world class quality, services.

Risk and Opportunities

Anticipate & effectively manage risks & opportunities to service delivery

Research under this theme looks at existing and emerging risks to service delivery faced by our Department and by our clients (e.g. fraudulent activities, security issues). It also examines trends associated with societal changes and service transformation and explores possible impacts and opportunities related to service delivery (e.g. foresight studies).



3. Identified Research Themes, Priorities and Alignment to ESDC’s Four Transformation Goals

Service Research Themes and Priorities		Transformation Goals			
Service Research Themes	2022-23 Identified Research Priorities	1. Seamless Digital Experience <i>Provide responsive and digitally-enabled services to clients and recipients through the channel of their choice</i>	2. Service Accessibility <i>Improve service access for all clients and recipients, develop partnerships and proactively include all communities</i>	3. Empowering Ways of Working <i>Further empower employees with better tools, technological platforms, and ways of working</i>	4. Aligning Policy and Service Design to Maximize Results <i>Deliver better results/outcomes by embedding policy and service considerations at the beginning of the design process</i>
Optimize Service Delivery Outcomes Research projects covering all service channels and contributing to departmental knowledge on the characteristics, evolving needs and preferences of clients	Barriers to Service Access	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Digital Transformation and Services	✓	✓		
	Diverse and Inclusive Service Design and Delivery	✓	✓		✓
	Policy-to-Service Continuum: The Role of Research and Data	✓	✓		✓
Innovate in Service Delivery and Design Research exploring innovative approaches across service channels, digitalization, and automated processes enabling service delivery	Service Design and Delivery in Virtual and Hybrid Work Environments	✓	✓	✓	
Anticipate & Effectively Manage Risk & Opportunities to Service Delivery Research exploring risks to service delivery and trends related to societal changes and service transformation and impacts and opportunities	Future of Service Delivery	✓	✓	✓	✓

4. Planned Service Research Division Projects

Research Priorities	Project Title	Project Description
Barriers to Service Access	Program Participation: Adapting to Reach Eligible Populations That Do Not Receive Benefits	In line with the departmental transformation goal of service accessibility, this project will support the Canada Child Benefit (CCB) Working Group’s activities aimed at increasing CCB participation by on-reserve First Nations populations. The project will assist with results measurement and capturing lessons learned of pilot projects undertaken. In addition, this project aims to provide the Outreach Services Division of the Citizen Services Branch (CSB) and other partners with an enhanced understanding of potential client populations and trends in program recipients. This expanded knowledge will support planning and implementation of outreach services across benefit programs, and can inform improvements to service delivery by enabling more targeted interventions.
	The Lived Experiences of People in Vulnerable Situations: Moving Towards Client-Centric Service Delivery	Building on other departmental initiatives focused on understanding and reducing service barriers, this project aims to add a lived-experience perspective to the existing knowledge base by engaging directly with individuals experiencing vulnerabilities and the community organizations that support them. In addition, it will explore why and how some individuals do not access programs, benefits and services even if they are eligible and may be among those who need the most help. This research project will consider a diversity of research methods (e.g. focus groups, in-depth interviews, case studies and storytelling).



4. Planned Service Research Division Projects

Research Priorities	Project Title	Project Description
Barriers to Service Access	Systemic Barriers to Inclusive Service in the Atlantic Service Canada Region	Developed in collaboration with Service Canada Atlantic Region, this project aims to define and identify systemic barriers to services within the region and provide advice on how they can be mitigated to support improved, inclusive and client-centric outreach service delivery in line with the department's goal of service accessibility. This includes an exploration of the client population profile (geo-demographic segmentation) as well as the lived experiences of service barriers by clients, stakeholders, and staff. In particular, the project will identify cultural competency frameworks, staff education models, and associated best practices relevant to the Atlantic Region.
Digital Transformation and Services	Marginalized and Under-served Populations in the Digital Context: A Quantitative Exploration	The purpose of this project is develop detailed profiles of marginalized and underserved populations, with a particular focus on their access to and utilization of benefits and programs delivered by ESDC. Adopting a geographic community perspective, the project focuses on various sub-groups of the population (e.g. seniors, people in low-income, e-vulnerable, etc.) and considers specific programs and benefits (e.g. Guaranteed Income Supplement) Exploiting a diversity of data sources, the project supports departmental efforts related to the Marginalized and Underserved Populations and the Reaching all Canadians initiatives.



4. Planned Service Research Division Projects

Research Priority	Project Title	Project Description
Policy-to-Service Continuum: The Role of Research and Data	Policy-to-Service Continuum: The role of research and data in supporting evidence-based service policy	ESDC’s Policy to Service Continuum Initiative aims to help align policy, program and service delivery to improve how the different functional areas work together, driven by clients' service delivery needs and expectations. A component of the initiative is to develop a Policy to Service Guide in support of a clear departmental approach to working across the continuum. Through a series of case studies, this project will aim to examine past policy development processes across the continuum through a document/literature review and interviews. The findings from these case studies will inform the content of the Policy to Service Guide by identifying best practices and lessons learned.
Service Design and Delivery in Virtual and Hybrid Work Environments	Opportunities and Challenges to Service Design and Delivery in Virtual and Hybrid Work Environments	This project will produce a high-level overview of opportunities, challenges, and lessons learned for designing and delivering services through virtual/hybrid work models. The research paper will include a literature review and insights obtained through interviews with selected subject matter experts. The research will aim to capture both the client and employee experience while receiving/delivering services using virtual/hybrid work models. This research project could inform future research areas for the department.



5. Other Service Research Division Activities

Research Priorities	Project Title	Project Description
Future of Service Delivery	Foresight Studies in Service Priority Areas	Capacity building initiative that will seek to develop options for how the Strategic and Service Policy Branch could build foresight analytical capacity to enable the integration of a foresight lens to priority areas of interest (e.g., digital ID, emerging technology such as extended reality, service integration/partnerships, clients of the future).



6. Questions and Contacts

➤ Questions / Comments?

➤ Contacts:

- Stephane Gascon, Manager Strategic Policy, stephane.gascon@hrsdc-rhdcc.gc.ca
- Anna Engman, Manager Strategic Policy, anna.engman@hrsdc-rhdcc.gc.ca



Annex A:

Ongoing/Recent Strategic and Service Policy Branch's (SSPB)

Service Research Projects



Annex A: Ongoing/Recent Service Research Projects

SSPB Ongoing Research Projects	Description/Status
The E-Vulnerability Index: Revised Methodology and Update	<p>The E-Vulnerability Index (EVI) is a measure of the extent to which individuals or areas are at risk of being at a digital service disadvantage. In a context of increased digitalization of services, the EVI can be used by Service Canada and others to prepare or initiate new ways to share information and also deliver services to people facing significant digital barriers, as those will be less likely to use e-government channels.</p> <p>Currently in its final stage, the project involves an update of the Index using more recent data and an improvement in its underlying methodology. One technical and four analytical regional reports have been disseminated internally while a summary of the findings is available on the Research reports section of the ESDC website. A forthcoming and final report in the series explores in more details each component of the index (access, comfortability, competency), and will be completed in Fall 2022. The next update of the EVI is planned for 2023-24 when the most recent microdata need for its construction will be available.</p>
Service Delivery to Canada's Black Populations	<p>The objective of this project is to document service barriers, lessons learned, and best practices in the delivery of services that are responsive to Black populations' needs and expectations. These topics will be explored through a literature review. This research will also provide a portrait of Canada's Black populations to help identify intersecting factors that may increase service access barriers.</p> <p>A paper on terminology has been completed and disseminated in 2020/21. The literature review and portrait will be completed in the fall of 2022/23.</p>



Note : All projects are included in the 2022-23 Departmental Research Plan (DRP), except those marked with an asterisk which were part of the 2021-22 DRP.

Annex A: Ongoing/Recent Service Research Projects

SSPB Ongoing Research Projects	Description/Status
Understanding Organisations that Apply to ESDC Grants and Contributions—Programs Targeting Seniors, PWD, and Youth	<p>This multi-year and multi-phase project examines the extent to which populations and communities meant to benefit from programs delivered by Grants and Contributions actually take advantage of them. The project also seeks to improve our understanding of the factors influencing the success or failure of applicant organisations in securing Gs&Cs funding and to learn about unfunded applicant organizations experiences and narrations about their unsuccessful applications. The focus of the project is on three broad program areas: Seniors, persons with disabilities (PWD) and youth.</p> <p>Reports on quantitative and qualitative findings pertaining to programs targeting seniors and PWD are completed and were disseminated internally in 2020 and 2021. Quantitative analysis and reports on youth-related programs are expected to be completed in the Summer of 2022 while qualitative analysis and reports on these programs will be completed in early 2023.</p>
Innovative Technologies in the Service World: The Promises and Challenges of the Use of Biometrics*	<p>The purpose of this project is to explain biometric technology and provide an overview of its benefits and drawbacks in the context of government service delivery through a literature review. SRD engaged with internal stakeholders to obtain insights and feedback. This work was completed in early 2022.</p>



Note : All projects are included in the 2022-23 Departmental Research Plan (DRP), except those marked with an asterisk which were part of the 2021-22 DRP.

Annex A: Ongoing/Recent Service Research Projects

SSPB Planned Research Projects	Description/Status
Adopting the vulnerability lens in the crisis response: A COVID-19 case study*	Using COVID-19 as a case study, this two-phase project aims at filling existing gaps in departmental knowledge regarding the circumstances, service needs and challenges faced by individuals experiencing vulnerability in a crisis context. The project also includes a more conceptual dimension through the exploration of how the notion of vulnerability is conceptualized and operationalized in the public policy context. Literature reviews and analytical reports developed in the context of this project have been disseminated internally. Final reports will be completed by October 2022.
Developing a Service Inclusive Community Indicator Framework to Improve Service Design and Delivery	<p>This project aims at developing a formal statistical indicator framework composed of key dimensions related to service access vulnerabilities and other socioeconomic forms of vulnerabilities relevant to service policy and design. The framework will identify and characterise communities where populations tend to experience a concentration of self-reinforcing vulnerabilities and factors affecting their service needs and access to programs and benefits. The project adopts an intersectional lens and relies on methodologies inspired by international best practices in the area of indicator development. It supports various Service Canada broad transformation initiatives, including Reaching All Canadians.</p> <p>Analysis of best practices in indicator development and related methodologies were initiated in early 2022 and will be completed soon. Identification of relevant dimensions and their suite of indicators and sub-indicators is ongoing and should be finalized in early 2023. Populating the framework with available data and formally testing it will take place later in the next year. The framework will be regularly updated when updated data become available.</p>



Annex B: Service Research Projects and Knowledge Development in Other Service Canada Branches and Regions



Annex B: Service Research Projects and Knowledge Development in Other Service Canada Branches and Regions

Program Operations Branch	Description
Grants and Contributions Client Experience Research Project	Program Operations Branch's Grants and Contributions (Gs&Cs) Client Experience (CX) Research is a five-year project that offers essential business intelligence to inform and improve Gs&Cs design and service delivery. This work helps us ensure that our programs and services consider and accommodate the expectations and experiences of applicant organizations. It plays a key role in supporting the use of CX insights in core government operations while also supporting effective service delivery as set out by TBS's Policy on Service and Digital.
Understanding Systemic Biases in Grants and Contributions	This project builds on research completed in 2021-22 in collaboration with the Chief Data Office which sought to identify systemic biases in the New Horizons for Seniors Program (NHSP). Results from Phase 1-3, the Risk Based Audit Plan – Seniors, NHSP Evaluation and other research will be consolidated. A deep-dive through an understanding of lived experiences of certain organizations or population segments served by NHSP. Best practices to foster Equity, Diversity and Inclusion in service design and delivery could also be examined.
Diversity and Inclusion Research Project – Phase II	Building off of the initial research project that applied an Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Access lens to the assessment tools of Program Operations Branch grants and contribution programs, POB will broaden the project to review the full experience of an applicant in order to ensure that equity-deserving groups have fair, transparent, and barrier-free access to ESDC services and increased likelihood of success.
Benefits and Integrated Services Branch	Description
Artificial Intelligence Primer	The goal of the Artificial Intelligence (AI) Primer is to guide non-experts in their exploration of AI. The Primer introduces readers to what AI is and what it is not; it provides an overview of the government's policies and directives framing its implementation; and highlights the conditions under which to integrate successfully AI into business processes.

Note : All projects are included in the 2022-23 Departmental Research Plan.

Annex B: Service Research Projects and Knowledge Development in Other Service Canada Branches and Regions

Transformation Management Branch	Description
Product Management (PM)	This purpose of this initiative is to define product management in a government context, build awareness and understanding of product management within ESDC, and assess the viability of adopting this approach as a transformative business practice enterprise-wide.
Service Canada – Ontario Region	Description
Labour Shortages in Ontario	The research currently underway will strengthen the analytical base of LMI National Work Plan products and support Service Canada's program and service delivery. The focus on the research is on the supply side of labour shortages and considerations related to barriers to the labour market.
Labour Market and Socio-economic Outcomes/Issues Affecting Racialized Groups in Ontario	The research will strengthen the analytical base of the LMI National Work Plan products and support Service Canada's program and service delivery. It includes analysis and research on each of the 10 visible minority groups in Ontario and its communities, synthesizing labour market challenges, key stakeholders, and current public conversations.
Service Canada – Western and Territories Region	Description
Digital Divide in the W-T Region	Expand existing analysis of labour force and socio-economic outcomes among rural, marginalized, and underserved populations in Manitoba caused by unequal access to high-speed internet.



Note : All projects are included in the 2022-23 Departmental Research Plan.

Annex B: Service Research Projects and Knowledge Development in Other Service Canada Branches and Regions

Integrity Services Branch	Description
Assessing TransUnion Canada's IDX Platform	This project will test and assess the feasibility of using TransUnion Canada's IDX platform for preventative fraud detection in the Employment Insurance system. Samples of known fraud will be provided to see how well it matches to that of IDX and whether there are any new instances of fraud the department didn't know about.
Labour – Policy, Dispute Resolution and International Affairs	Description
Accelerating digital service transformation and web renewal	The Labour Program is utilising a client-centric approach to improve its service experience, with initial focus on its website (Canada.ca). The Innovation Unit is engaging users through interviews and workshops to better understand their needs and challenges (or pain points) regarding the current service experience. Findings will include insights on who the clients are and their expectations, blueprints of the main tasks they may need to accomplish, and opportunities for improvements of the Labour Program service channels.
Strategic and Service Policy Branch – Strategy and Horizontal Policy	Description
Official Language Minority Communities' access to Employment and Social Development Canada's youth programs	The organizations representing LPOLMCs and working for their development have been reporting their difficulties in accessing grant and contribution programs for several years. However, the Part VII Center of Expertise cannot say to what extent this is the case, if the barriers to access are generalized, or if some organizations suffer more than others. In collaboration with the Vulnerable Populations Initiative at the Program Operations Branch (POB), this first phase of the research, will focus on the little-known characteristics of the organizations representing OLMCs requesting funds in within the framework of youth programs. Note that for the purposes of the project, the expression "official language minority community" refers to English in Quebec and French elsewhere in Canada.

Note : All projects are included in the 2022-23 Departmental Research Plan.

Annex C: ESDC Research Planning and Governance



Annex C: ESDC Research Planning and Governance

- ESDC's Strategic Research Framework details the rigorous research planning, research methods, and oversight mechanisms within the organization
- Annually/bi-annually, the Departmental Research Plan is revised and approved by an Executive level committee
- Broad research themes are revised on a tri-annual basis to enable continued relevance and agility
- Research is decentralized across the organization, and coordinated through three thematic Portfolio Research Coordinating Committees:
 - **Service Delivery**
 - Income Security and Social Development
 - Employment, Learning and Working Conditions
- ESDC employs a collaborative approach to research, engaging within and beyond the organization as relevant, utilizing multidisciplinary teams, and employing innovative research methodologies



Annex D: SSPB Service Research Division Composition and Expertise



Annex D: Strategic and Service Policy Branch–Service Research Division Composition and Expertise

Within ESDC, the Service Research Division in the Strategic and Service Policy Branch is a multidisciplinary team of approximately 15 researchers organised in two units - the ***Service Analytics Unit*** and the ***Service Innovation Unit***.

Lead on service research planning and coordination

We conduct mixed-methods research in areas such as:

- Vulnerable, marginalized, and underserved populations
- Service barriers and program uptake
- Digitization of services and channel use
- Client Experience
- Innovative and efficient approaches to service delivery (e.g., emerging technologies)



Quantitative Methods

- Statistical analysis including descriptive, econometric modelling and other advanced statistical methods
- Geo-spatial analysis
- Machine learning
- Survey content development, collection, and analysis



Qualitative Methods

- Rigorous literature reviews, including best practices and environmental scans
- Interviews, focus groups, cases studies
- Content analysis, discourse analysis, comparative analysis
- Text mining

Envisioned new research capacities:

Service foresight analysis

Cost-benefit analysis