

# **SUPPORT NETWORK FOR RURAL NEWCOMERS**

**MEETING #1 BRIEF**

**NOVEMBER 2022**



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## LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

AAISA acknowledges Treaty 7 territory—the traditional and ancestral territory of the Blackfoot Confederacy: Kainai, Piikani and Siksika as well as the Tsuu T’ina Nation and Stoney Nakoda First Nation. We acknowledge that this territory is home to the Métis Nation of Alberta, Region 3 within the historical Northwest Métis Homeland. We acknowledge the many First Nations, Métis and Inuit who have lived in and cared for these lands for generations. We are grateful for the traditional Knowledge Keepers and Elders who are still with us today and those who have gone before us. We make this acknowledgement as an act of reconciliation and gratitude to those whose territory we reside on or are visiting.

## INTRODUCTION

Through existing engagement initiatives and collaboration with the settlement and integration sector, AAISA has identified a gap within rural municipalities to network with one another to enhance their capacity to provide settlement services for newcomers. Funded by the Government of Alberta through the Settlement, Integration and Language Projects grants, AAISA began hosting a series of networking meetings titled *Support Network for Rural Newcomers Meetings*. This series of 7 quarterly meetings from Fall 2022 – Winter 2024 connect municipal representatives such as economic development officers, family and community social services workers and local settlement service providing agencies to connect and collaborate to meet the needs of newcomers. These meetings convene 24 participants representing municipalities with populations of <10,000 across Alberta.

The purpose of this introductory meeting was to facilitate ongoing collaboration among stakeholders from Alberta's rural municipalities, with a goal of leveraging collective resources to support newcomers across the province. The key theme that emerged was the need to strengthen the collective voice surrounding settlement in rural areas. Participants discussed bridging municipalities with resources, sharing success stories, and advocating effectively for services and funding, primarily through AAISA.

## KEY THEMES AND TRENDS

### RURAL RENEWAL STREAM

The Rural Renewal Stream was developed by the Government of Alberta to increase migration to rural communities, supporting local economic development and population growth. It allows communities to recruit foreign nationals to live, work and settle in their regions. Interested communities must apply through the Alberta Advantage Immigration Program, after meeting eligibility criteria such as:

- The community directly recruits temporary foreign workers to meet labour needs and provides an Endorsement of Candidate letter to selected candidates.
- The community completes Alberta's Economic Mobility Pathways Pilot (EMPP) referral process to recruit refugees. An EMPP referral partner organization works with the community and employer to assist in finding a refugee for the respective labour need.

The Rural Renewal Stream was a popular topic for meeting participants as municipalities identified challenges completing their applications. Some communities do not have designated settlement agencies in the municipality, preventing them from successfully applying to the stream.

## CHALLENGES

Many communities expressed challenges local employers were having with newcomer hires specifically on temporary work visas. Many newcomers are attempting to relocate to smaller, rural communities in search of employment, but with limited housing options in the area, newcomers are left in precarious living situations.

### Settlement services

Small rural communities may have partnerships with regional settlement and integration service centres based off a hub and spoke model, but often these service providers are few and far in between. Being physically spread out by hundreds of kilometers is an enormous barrier for newcomers to access settlement services. Settlement services can provide supports such as language training, community integration, education pathways, counselling, orientation to life in Canada, employment supports, translation and interpretation services, which can dramatically increase the likelihood of a newcomer residing long term in the rural community.

### Employment

Newcomers are finding difficulty obtaining employment in areas where employers have little cooperation with settlement organizations to create a job-specific training or job-shadowing opportunities for newcomers to obtain employment faster. Many in-demand jobs require specific credentials, upskilling and training that newcomers are seldom equipped with prior to entering the workforce in rural centres. Communication and partnerships between employers and settlement organizations is needed to bridge the gap for newcomers to upskill. The stronger the relationship between rural employers and settlement organizations, the quicker rural communities can fill their labour shortages.

### Newcomer retention

With the rising cost of living in urban centers, newcomers are migrating towards rural centres. Retention is a challenge for many rural communities with a fear of municipalities undergoing extensive application processes through the Rural Renewal Stream just for newcomers to leave the community shortly, leaving the labour market gaps to be filled once again.

## NEXT STEPS

Participants of the *Support Network for Rural Newcomers* meetings have been invited to participate in individual interviews with AAISA to assess and determine the unique nuances that specific municipalities have with providing newcomers settlement services. These interviews are guided by responses of the needs and assets survey that was conducted to broadly understand the availability of settlement supports in rural centres across Alberta. This survey served to provide foundational knowledge to interpret the barriers to facilitate settlement services for newcomers in rural regions.

The next meeting will be hosted on February 9, 2023.