

# **MUNICIPAL APPROACHES AND SETTLEMENT SYTEM DEVELOPMENT IN SMALL COMMUNITIES: REPORT**

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

As we collectively strive to understand the historic and ongoing relationship between settlement and the land on which we are located, AAISA respectfully acknowledges that the province of Alberta is comprised of Treaty 6, Treaty 7, and Treaty 8 territories, and is the traditional lands of First Nations and Métis peoples. This project engaged interview participants from Treaty 1, Treaty 6, Treaty 7, and Treaty 8 territories.

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This research was conducted by Leslie Cramer, MA a Research Consultant on behalf of the Alberta Association of Immigrant Serving Agencies.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

Though newcomer attraction to small population centres and rural areas has been traditionally limited, demographic trends and shifts in immigration policy have entailed that increasingly, newcomer attraction and retention in small communities are found on the agenda across different levels of government (Khan and Labute, N.D.; Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2001; Caldwell et al., 2017; Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2021a). Through greater focus on regionalization in immigration policy, approaches to facilitate immigration to smaller communities have grown at the federal levels and within the priorities of different Provincial Nominee Programs (CIC, 2001; Sorensen, 2007; Government of Manitoba, 2019, Government of Ontario, 2019; Government of British Columbia, 2021; IRCC, 2021a). In this context, where small communities can begin to more directly leverage immigration, considerations related to the development of settlement systems are pertinent to ensure both newcomers and small communities can benefit. This research seeks to identify different approaches that have emerged in relation to the settlement system in small communities and identify how different actors can support its development.

The Alberta Association of Immigrant Serving Agencies (AAISA) commissioned this research based on its interest in understanding how the settlement systems in small communities with limited settlement support are positioned to settle and integrate newcomers. To explore this topic, this research aims to learn about different municipal contexts and support comparison in order to identify different approaches to system development adopted in these contexts. In describing the settlement process or settlement systems, a holistic approach is applied that considers the stages of attraction, settlement, and integration. These stages encompass the processes to facilitate the arrival of newcomers in small communities, establish them in the community, and support their relational and participatory integration in community life (Khan and Labute, N.D.; Sampedro and Camarero, 2018). This is intended to provide insight into how different facets of the settlement system may develop and how municipal roles may vary between these different stages. This allowed for exploration of how economic immigration strategies may impact the development of settlement and integration processes, as well as the role of regional partnerships to promote settlement service provision. Additionally, the findings arising from a comparison of these contexts are used to formulate templates (Appendix 1 and 2) that can support actors looking to engage in settlement system development and recommendations for AAISA.

To explore the context of small communities and compare different approaches to develop settlement processes, interviews were conducted with representatives from ten municipalities in Alberta and Manitoba. Municipalities with a population between 1,000 and 10,000 people, where there was a sizable number of recent immigrants and some indication that there was a

consideration of newcomers at the municipal level, were considered for inclusion in the study. Representatives from municipal governments were selected as participants for interviews based on emerging literature highlighting the increased role of municipal governments as actors in the development of settlement systems, as well as for their proximity to local issues and connection to the systems and actors in their community. This was considered to be an effective entry point to learn about contexts where AAISA had no pre-existing relationships and where, in some cases, experience with newcomers was limited.

Throughout this report, the term newcomer is employed to describe all new immigrants to Canada, regardless of status, including permanent residents, temporary residents, and undocumented persons. The term newcomer is used to maintain consistency with AAISA's application of the definition in its existing body of work and messaging. However, it is important to note that in many small communities the term newcomer is applied to any new resident, including persons relocating from other parts of the province or country. In this report, the use of the term resident will be applied to denote the general population, which includes both immigrant and non-immigrant populations. Beyond this report, further engagement with actors in small communities and rural areas should be approached with consideration of the terminology used to effectively communicate the focus on immigrant populations.

This report proceeds by first providing a brief review of the literature to provide some context related to the increasing role of municipalities in settlement systems, including trends related to regionalization and decentralization of immigration policy and considerations for the settlement process in small communities. It then outlines the research methodology, including a framework for assessing the different approaches taken by municipal governments in settlement systems. This includes an assessment of municipal role types, whether a lead/facilitator, proactive service provider, or passive role, as well as the normative foundations adopted by municipalities as they consider the different facets of the settlement process. Subsequently, the findings of the research are discussed, through comparing different municipal approaches and their contexts of attracting, settling, and integrating newcomers. A discussion of the implications of these findings follows, before the report is concluded and key recommendations are outlined.

Through this research, different approaches adopted by municipalities related to settlement system development are assessed, as well as how different aspects of the settlement system have grown in each context. From this, it is possible to develop strategies and tactics that can support the development of settlement systems in small communities, as well as to inform how different types of municipalities can be engaged by actors seeking to foster these development processes. This can support municipalities and other actors in small communities to take advantage of emerging opportunities to attract newcomers, through regionalization and decentralization of immigration

policy, while also ensuring that newcomers and communities mutually benefit from these processes.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to understand the development of settlement systems in small communities, this section first reviews the context that has developed in Canada that has seen increased focus on rural immigration and an expanding role in newcomer attraction and retention at the local level. Then, some of the features that promote the attraction and retention of newcomers are explored, alongside their implications for small communities and in accordance with a changing role for municipal governments. This brief exploration of context provides a foundation on which to explore how different approaches to newcomer attraction, settlement, and integration can be characterized in the municipalities examined through this study, as well as what can be learned about the development of the settlement system in these contexts.

### 2.1 IMMIGRATION POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND THE GROWING ROLE OF SMALL COMMUNITIES

While immigration policy has primarily been the domain of the federal government in Canada, the role of sub-national levels of government in the attraction, settlement, and integration of newcomers has been growing. This stems from trends towards regionalization, decentralization, and the growing prioritization of a market-based approach emphasizing economic immigration streams as means for economic development (Khan and Labute, N.D.; Schmidtke, 2014; Fourot, 2015). These developments in immigration policy have been cited as responses to both demographic trends in rural areas, including both an aging population and depopulation, and the strain on the large urban centres that have historically received the highest volume of newcomers (CIC, 2001; Khan and Labute, N.D.; Caldwell et al., 2017). These trends have the effect of both opening up opportunities for provincial and municipal governments to play a greater role in different facets of immigration and to foster community growth and development.

The connection between immigration as one possible strategy for economic development at the local level has been advanced by the federal government and coincides with efforts to promote a more balanced distribution of immigrants across the country, while giving provincial governments more power in selecting economic immigrants through Provincial Nominee Programs (Khan and Labute, N.D.; CIC, 2001; Schmidtke, 2014). While initial regionalization efforts focused on promoting large and mid-sized urban centres as destinations for immigration over Vancouver, Toronto, and Montreal, there is now growing interest in regionalization for smaller municipal contexts (CIC, 2001; Rose and Desmarais, 2007; IRCC, 2021a). This is evidenced by the growing research on these contexts, as well as federal and provincial immigration programs focused on regionalization and rural immigration. Federal programs including the Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot (RNIP) and the Atlantic Immigration Program focus on skilled worker

pathways to specific communities and provinces (IRCC, 2021b; IRCC, 2022). Provincial pilot programs are also developing approaches to regionalization and rural immigration, for example with the Entrepreneur Immigration Regional Pilot in British Columbia and a rural immigration pilot under the Ontario Immigrant Nominee Program (Government of Ontario, 2019; Government of British Columbia, 2021). Small communities in Manitoba have been cited as effectively leveraging partnerships with the provincial government through the Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program, to facilitate municipally-driven immigration and integration in their communities (CIC, 2001; Sorensen, 2007; Government of Manitoba, 2019).

The potential benefits of attracting and retaining newcomers to a rural community is often related to countering the challenges of declining populations, including the reduction of the tax base and labour shortages (Khan and Labute, N.D.; Boese and Phillips, 2017; Sampedro and Camarero, 2018; Caldwell et al., 2017). This trend is not unique to Canada, with countries including Australia and Spain serving as examples where immigration has been applied to also counter these trends in rural areas (Boese and Phillips, 2017; Sampedro and Camarero, 2018). Connecting rural population dynamics to economic development and growth reflects the market-based approach to immigration that further bolsters local level interest in this policy area. This has seen businesses become influential in driving newcomer-related policy development at the municipal level, based on skills and labour shortages (Fourot, 2015). Khan and Labute (N.D.) tie developments characterizing the decentralization, regionalization, and marketization of immigration policy to the increasing role for municipalities in all aspects of the newcomer immigration process. They conclude that, “As a result of [these policy dynamics], the onus falls on municipalities to promote their community, attract the talent they need, help them settle into the region, and facilitate processes of integration so that immigrants can contribute in meaningful ways.” (Khan and Labute, N.D., p. 21).

The effect of these trends on different municipal contexts is varied, as is each community’s history with immigration, population dynamics, and the labour market context. For one, decentralization measures have been unequal across Canada, with Provincial Nominee Programs varying across provincial and territorial context (Schmidtke, 2014). Another facet of this relates to the preferences of newcomers themselves and the features of communities that contribute to their attraction and retention. The Canadian immigration model can influence newcomers’ choices on destination but must maintain their autonomy, as the right of newcomers to determine their movements is enshrined in the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (Rose and Desmarais, 2007). Therefore, for small towns and rural areas that wish to benefit from immigration, it becomes important to understand their role in developing the features of their communities that can attract newcomers and support their retention and integration over the long-term.



## 2.2 CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE SETTLEMENT PROCESS IN SMALL COMMUNITIES

If as Khan and Labute (N.D.) argue, there is an impetus for municipalities to play a role in attracting newcomers, helping their settlement, and facilitating the integration process, consideration should be given to what this role entails and where efforts should be focused. This includes considering the role of local governments in facilitating community readiness within the context of regionalization (Rose and Desmarais, 2007). The understanding of how community context, settlement, and integration support the attraction and retention of newcomers in small centres has been developed through the literature. Factors influencing newcomers' decisions to move or stay in a small community include the economic opportunity available, the existence of an established ethnocultural community or kinship network, a welcoming community and social interaction, and a preference for the quality of life in small communities (CIC, 2001; Bruce, 2007; Sorensen, 2007; Rose and Desmarais, 2007). Through the lens of these features, we next explore the context of small communities and how municipalities may engage in their development.

Employment opportunities and the presence of ethnocultural communities are considered to be of greatest influence in newcomer attraction and retention (CIC, 2001; Bruce, 2007), each of which has dimensions relevant for the context of small communities. For both newcomers and the general Canadian population, the presence of economic opportunity was found to be of greater influence over attracting people to a community than its population density (CIC, 2001). This entails that smaller communities can be attractive to newcomers, given that they have economic opportunities available to them. Extrapolating on the importance of kinship networks, consideration of the opportunities available for the spouses and families of these newcomers also matter for retention.

These factors can be related to community readiness and the number of newcomers that can be effectively settled and integrated. The number of jobs available and their type have been correlated with the idea that there is a set number of newcomers that a community can effectively settle (Agrawal and Sangapala, 2021). Further, a Citizenship and Immigration Canada (2001, p. 7) report argues that, "A region's success at generating economic growth ultimately determines the effect of efforts to attract and retain newcomers, not the other way around." In this regard, those small communities experiencing sustained labour shortages may be better positioned in attracting and retaining newcomers than those where the labour supply is more aligned with the number of jobs available.

The presence of a strong ethnocultural community can play a role in orienting newcomers to their new community and the services available to them (Bruce, 2007). However, this can coincide with

the difficulty of building connections between newcomer groups with the broader community (ibid.). Therefore, an integrative community is one which fosters the development of connections between newcomers and established community members, while actively addressing barriers to social integration (Caldwell et al., 2017). More encompassing strategies are required at the community level, rather than relying on the presence of those who have immigrated previously or ethnocultural community members.

The capacity of a community to integrate newcomers is multifaceted, involving relational and participatory aspects of community life, along with systemic integration in the labour market and with public institutions (Sampedro and Camarero, 2018). These aspects of integration foster a sense of belonging and the ability to contribute to the community (Khan and Labute, N.D.). While the relational and participatory aspects of integration rely on the receptiveness of the community to newcomers and the engagement of newcomers themselves, municipalities also play a role by developing supportive systems for integration and for shaping discourse and dialogue in relation to integration and anti-discrimination (Khan and Labute, N.D.; Fourot, 2015; Coalition for Inclusive Municipalities, 2021). These support systems can include activities related to engaging in education efforts with community members or leaders about cultural diversity, facilitating the development of coalitions, and providing newcomers with opportunities for participation and dialogue (Bruce, 2007, Caldwell et al., 2017; CIM, 2021). Further internal collaboration between different municipal departments, such as economic development, planning, social services, and tourism, have been found to contribute to the development of welcoming communities (Caldwell et al., 2017).

Regionalization additionally raises questions related to investment and development of settlement service systems and the role of alternative service delivery options (Rose and Desmarais, 2007). Access to settlement services is another critical facet of newcomer attraction and retention, which are often lacking in small communities (Rose and Desmarais, 2007; Ashton, Pettigrew, and Galatsanou, 2016; CIM, 2021; IRCC, 2021a). The system of service providers in a community are essential players in meeting emerging newcomer needs and developing a community's integrative capacity, though they require collaboration with municipal government (Bruce, 2007; Fourot, 2015; Sampedro and Camarero, 2018). One of the main advantages that smaller communities and service systems have over larger urban contexts is the close connections between both individuals and organizations (Agrawal and Sangapala, 2021; CIM, 2021). This supports a 'no-wrong-door' approach, that entails that service providers and community organizations collaborate to ensure that newcomers are assisted, regardless of which organization they first contact (Caldwell et al., 2017). While features service delivery in small communities can be of advantage, addressing the limited availability of specialized settlement services in these contexts is still critical to ensure the success of newcomers as well as their retention.

One study found that having the number of newcomers matched to the service system capacity is more important for settling and integrating newcomers than is the size of the community (Agrawal and Sangapala, 2021). Therefore, there is a need for municipalities interested in pursuing the attraction and retention of newcomers to consider the services available and how support may be developed. One of the challenges that may be experienced relates to the correlation between depopulation and the reduction in services (Khan and Labute, N.D.). Further, the current model for funding settlement services by Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada in the Prairies and Northern Territory region relies on landing numbers to determine the suite of services eligible for funding in a community (IRCC, 2018). While a newcomer's need for specialized services to support their settlement does not change between a small town or a larger city, the availability of services can vary significantly (Dennler, 2022). This highlights that the policy objectives of regionalization can be discordant with the settlement funding model for small communities (Dennler, 2022).

Small and rural municipalities have an advantage in their proximity to local issues and the close connections that they have with other actors in the community (CIM, 2021). This knowledge and relational capacity can be leveraged in efforts to develop immigration strategies, settlement systems, and facilitate inclusion. This can be achieved through leveraging existing service systems and community groups, utilizing community or business leaders, involving newcomers in existing processes, and emphasizing capacity building and collaboration (Caldwell et al., 2017). Finding a municipal role in economic development, investment in social and economic infrastructure, and inclusion and integration efforts will contribute to creating the conditions that support newcomers to come to small communities and settle for the long-term (Bruce, 2007).

This discussion has sought to highlight some of the considerations related to newcomer attraction and retention in small towns and rural areas, and areas where municipal governments may find a possible role for themselves in light of the regionalization and decentralization of immigration policy. While there is more that can be said about newcomers' specific needs and experiences in small towns and rural areas, the purpose here is to provide a sense of where municipal approaches to newcomer attraction and retention can be focused. Having established that there is a role small and rural municipalities can play in processes for the attraction, settlement, and integration, this report now turns to the research that was conducted on ten municipalities in Alberta and Manitoba.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

With the purpose of learning about how settlement systems in small communities can develop, this research sought to explore different municipal contexts to identify and compare different approaches to these systems. An exploratory approach was taken and qualitative interviews were applied to learn about ten municipal contexts, which considered how the municipal level of government responds and engages with the attraction, settlement, and integration of newcomers. The municipal level of government was selected for consideration, based on the understanding that municipalities in small communities are more recent actors within settlement systems, through processes of regionalization and decentralization in immigration policy (Khan and Labute, N.D.; Fourot, 2015; IRCC, 2021a). Additionally, as this research focused on municipal contexts where AAISA had no pre-existing relationships or prior experience, representatives from municipalities were selected as interview participants based on the assumption that they would have an understanding of the context of their community at a system level, as well as familiarity with a range of local issues and actors.

Data was gathered through ten semi-structured interviews that were conducted virtually over Zoom between October and December 2021. Based on AAISA's interest in learning about how settlement systems can evolve in contexts with limited settlement support, the selection of municipalities to participate in the study was determined through the consideration of population size and evidence of a consideration of newcomers at the municipal level. Municipalities outside of Alberta were considered for inclusion in the study to garner insight from different provincial contexts and the experiences of more developed municipal settlement systems. Municipalities with a population of between 1,000 and 10,000 persons were considered for inclusion in the study.

The demographic features of these communities were then considered, using Statistics Canada 2016 Census data for the number of recent immigrants and visible minorities. Areas with higher percentages related to recent immigrants were prioritized based on the assumption that this segment of the total immigrant population is most in need of settlement services and integration support. While newcomers are only one group among a visible minority population, this was taken as a proxy for a diverse community where dialogue and initiatives related to diversity and inclusion initiatives may be found. Data on permanent resident admissions by intended communities was assessed alongside corresponding designation on the Community Typology model used in IRCC's PNT region (IRCC, 2018). From this data, a comparison of the projected number of permanent residents and corresponding level of services that could be considered eligible for funding through IRCC's settlement program (IRCC, 2018). This allowed for the prioritization of communities that lacked settlement support despite having potential eligibility for these services, as well as an assessment of the services available in the community overall.

Lastly, the information available on municipal websites was assessed to identify whether there were any services, strategies, or basic information related to newcomers in the community, welcoming new residents, or promoting diversity and inclusion. This included publicly available agendas and minutes from council proceedings; municipal strategic plans and community plans; community service department and Family and Community Support Services (FCSS) programs, annual reports, and resources; economic development plans and program information; community resource directories; web pages to welcome newcomers or new residents on municipal websites; and any other relevant publicly available information.

From this information base, a shortlist of municipalities were identified to participate in interviews as part of the study. From this shortlist, ten interviews were conducted. Those who agreed to participate included representatives from seven municipalities in Alberta and two municipalities from Manitoba: Altona, Claresholm, Drayton Valley, Drumheller, Hanna, Hinton, Lac La Biche County, Morden, Slave Lake, and Wainwright. This resulted in a sample where the majority of participating municipalities were towns, with one county and one city represented. All the municipalities interviewed had a total population under 10,000, according to the most recently available Census (Statistics Canada, 2016). The smallest municipality had a population of 2,332 in the 2016 Census, while the largest had a population of 9,882 (Statistics Canada, 2016).

One key variation across the municipalities included in the sample was the position of the interview participants in their respective organizational structure. Informants ranged from elected officials and senior administrative leadership to staff of different levels within specific municipal departments, such as managers and officers. This resulted from the approach to invite informants by email, either where contacts agreed to an interview or where the request for interview was referred to another department. There was variation between municipalities on where responsibility for newcomer issues was centralized, as well as instances where responsibility was distributed across departments. Four interview participants were situated in economic development departments, while four others were situated in community service of FCSS departments. The remaining two were an elected representative and senior leader in the municipal administration. Based on this, the semi-structured interview protocol allowed interviews to be adapted based on variations in responsibilities as well as in the local context.

This study utilized a framework analysis to organize themes found in the interview transcripts. A hybrid approach was applied, both drawing themes from the interview data and applying those from the literature to analysis. The primary themes that emerged related to the community context, municipal approaches, and service systems and actors. In assessing municipal approaches, theoretical perspectives from the literature were applied, namely a typology of municipal roles

from Boese and Phillips (2017) and considerations related to normative approach from Tossutti (2012). These typologies were informative and supported a structure to support comparison across municipalities. This typology and how it was applied to the municipalities in this research is detailed in the following section. Municipal approach also considered through the themes emerging from the data on approaches to the attraction, settlement, and integration and specific constraints, advantages, and approaches to emergent issues in communities.

Based on the sample size for the study and the limited time frame, the approach employed by this study sought to provide a preliminary snapshot of settlement approaches in small communities that can be further developed through further research and AAISA programming. Based on the sample size and interview method, this research cannot lead to conclusive results about settlement systems in small communities across Canada or in the provinces considered. Rather, the approaches and models identified through the research identify just some of the ways settlement systems can be approached and how some municipal actors can conceive of their role. Additionally, because interviews were conducted with one representative from each municipality, there may be additional informants both within and outside the municipal government with perspectives on strategies, initiatives, and processes within the community that are not represented. This is also affected by the active processes underway in many of the contexts that were explored through this study. In these cases, developing projects and partnerships have the potential to directly affect the context of settlement and integration. Based on the dynamic nature of these systems, future engagement with small communities in relation to the settlement process can build on the results of this research. Having described the methodology adopted for this study, the typology applied to the sample of municipalities is first outlined, before the findings of this research are presented in Part 4.

### **3.1 TYPOLOGY: FACTORS FRAMING MUNICIPAL APPROACHES TO SETTLEMENT SYSTEMS**

To assess municipal approaches, the role that municipalities play and the normative foundation that inform strategy and service provision are first considered. This relies on the typologies provided by Boese and Phillips (2017) and Tossutti (2012). From their research on the practices of local government in newcomer settlement in rural Australia, Boese and Phillips (2017) identify three broad categories of municipal government roles, including passive, proactive service providers, and lead/facilitators. Passive municipalities are defined as those that are uninvolved in settlement issues or who follow them on a wait-and-see basis without immediate concern or engagement in their development (Boese and Phillips, 2017). These municipalities often allow other actors in the community to take the lead or can fall into a passive role when other actors step forward (Boese and Phillips, 2017). With this level of engagement, Boese and Phillips (2017)

highlight that passive municipalities can be unprepared for an increase in arrivals and for the long-term settlement and integration of newcomers.

Municipalities are considered to be a lead actor and facilitator when: immigration and newcomer integration are included in the municipal agenda; there are specific programs or initiatives related to immigration or integration at the municipal level; and/or municipal staff play a leadership and advocacy role in these areas (Boese and Phillips, 2017). This classification does require some element of newcomer specificity in municipal approaches, rather than a blanket approach to economic or population growth. In this study, evidence that there is some consideration of newcomer-specific issues and initiatives on the municipal agenda is enough to constitute a municipality that takes on this role, regardless of the level of priority it is assigned in relation to other issues.

Those municipalities classified as taking on a proactive service provider role are considered to be actively involved in the direct provision of services to newcomers (Boese and Phillips, 2017). While Boese and Phillips (2017) relate this category to the rare instance of local governments as direct providers of settlement services in their study, the definition used here has been expanded in relation to the service delivery models found through the research. Here, a proactive service provider role includes any direct program or service offered by the municipal government that aim to promote individual, family, or community wellbeing, where some level of activity is related to supporting newcomer-related needs. This classification entails a municipal approach that is focused on the individual or a single family, though may also include the provision of community-focused programs and events. This represents a more case-by-case approach rather than a more concerted strategic initiative targeted at the community level. While there are instances of municipally-delivered settlement services, such as in the Bow Valley region of Alberta, this adaptation of the Boese and Phillips (2017) typology is intended to provide a more robust assessment of instances of municipal approaches encountered through this research, which fall outside of both passive and lead/facilitator classifications. This also relates to established public management practices in Canada, where governments predominantly contract out service delivery to actors in the private and non-profit sectors (Schmidtke, 2014).

The municipalities interviewed as part of this study frequently discussed playing a support role. Rather than a support role constituting its own specific classification in the typology, how support was described fell within the existing role typology. For example, 'moral support' for external agencies, as described by one interview participant (LF3), falls more into the passive role type. Conversely, finding an appropriate location for newly developed services or a future welcome centre, as described by two different interview participants (LF1, LF2), would fall into a more lead/facilitator role.

Boese and Phillips (2017) have created their typology of roles based on how local levels of government approach newcomer settlement, and therefore each type is imbued with a sense of the manner in which municipalities consider newcomer-related issues or a specificity related to newcomers. With a more passive approach it is less likely that consideration of newcomers is given within the scope of current municipal activities, while a lead/facilitator role connotes direct consideration or targeting of these activities in relation to newcomers. A service provider role sees consideration of newcomers within direct service provision activities. For the purposes here, further assessment of the newcomer-focused aspect of municipal approaches can garner further insight into how municipalities are considering the settlement system in their communities.

A classification of the normative foundations of municipalities can be applied to municipalities' overall approach to newcomer issues, the development of the settlement service system, and the approach to inclusion and the integration of newcomers. A normative approach to newcomer-related strategies, issues, and initiatives is defined as either pluralist or universalist, following the typologies provided by Tossutti (2012), which draws on Alexander (2004) and Poirier (2004). The pluralist theme applied to the analysis here represents a simplified form of Tossutti's (2012) classification, and connotes a normative approach where municipalities recognize the role of cultural difference and specifically design aspects of their programming or approach to newcomers. While Tossutti's (2012) examination of large urban centres distinguishes between intercultural and multicultural forms of pluralism, this level of distinction is beyond the scope of this study based on its research design and the consideration of small communities.

A universalist approach is found when the normative foundation of municipal activity does not apply a recognition of cultural differences and does not recognize differences in strategy or service delivery based on differences between newcomers to a community and its existing residents (Tossutti, 2012). A universalist approach is associated with assimilationist approaches to settlement and integration, though this does not have to be an explicit aspect of a municipality's approach or communications (Tossutti, 2012). Further, following Tossutti (2012), the universalist approach can involve some brief or limited acknowledgement of multicultural aspects of the community, but is more focused on providing more equal opportunities to all residents.

For the purposes of this study, the classification of municipal roles following this framework has been applied to the analysis of the approach to newcomer issues and the settlement system. In the next section, the typology of municipal role type is applied to the municipalities interviewed as part of this study, along with some discussion of how evidence of normative approaches that were found in the interview data.



## **3.2 APPLICATION OF MUNICIPAL ROLE TYPOLOGY TO MUNICIPALITIES**

To apply this typology of different roles to the different municipal contexts examined through this study, the responses of interview participants were considered in relation to their municipality's overall role and at each stage of the settlement process. This assessed the role played in strategies, initiatives, and services related to newcomers' attraction, settlement, and integration. This approach was taken to provide a classification system for how municipalities approach the settlement process of newcomers to their community, while also providing a structure to compare municipalities and identify different models for settlement system development. This supports the identification of stages of newcomer settlement where there may be gaps or active developments in the communities considered.

Though municipalities were found to play different roles in different facets of the settlement process, for the purposes of comparing their contexts an overall role type was determined. It was determined that the role that was found most frequently across the attraction, settlement, and integration stages of the settlement process would be weighted most heavily. There were two cases where all three role types were found. In these cases, the overall role was determined by where the municipality was playing the most significant role and in relation to whether the normative foundation was more universalist or pluralist. Because the three role types identified here are not necessarily a spectrum of activities, where one builds from a passive role to a lead/facilitator role, greater weight was given to the role type that was found most frequently or where greatest municipal activity was identified.

The roles assigned are based on the data provided in an interview at one point in time, and in many contexts, there was indication that the role could evolve in the near future. It is also important to note that in some cases, the role a municipality plays does not necessarily match the role that municipal representatives believed it should play or would like to play. Based on this and inevitable changes in context, fluctuation in the role played in each stage of the settlement process is therefore expected. Additionally, the assigned role type does not account for differences in the level of development of the approaches of municipalities related to the stages of the settlement process. This entails that both developed and developing systems can be found in each role type. The differences based on the level of development in these contexts will be explored further in subsequent sections.

Additionally, consideration was given to whether municipalities approached strategies, initiatives, and services from a pluralist or universalist normative perspective. This was again based on an assessment of the information provided by interview participants during a single interview.

Though the degree or depth of pluralism was difficult to determine at this level, contexts where there was greater consideration of the specificity of newcomer needs and processes of their settlement and integration were apparent. Conversely, evidence of a universalist perspective was easier to assess from how interview participants described their municipal approaches and their strategies, programs, and services. This likely relates to the history and theoretical foundations underpinning public administration and management in Canada, as well as the shorter history of newcomer arrivals in these contexts.

The application of this approach resulted in an assessment of four municipalities playing an overall lead/facilitator role, two playing a proactive service provider role, and the remaining four playing a passive role. These overall role types, as well as how they varied across stages of the settlement process, are summarized in Table 1. Overall, the universalist normative foundation was found to be most prevalent, with this approach apparent in seven cases. The distribution of municipal roles and normative approaches in the sample are outlined in Table 2.

<b>Table 1. Municipal role type across stages of the settlement process</b>				
<b>Municipality code</b>	<b>Overall role</b>	<b>Role by stage of the settlement process</b>		
		<b>Attraction</b>	<b>Settlement</b>	<b>Integration</b>
LF1	Lead/facilitator	Proactive service provider	Lead/facilitator	Lead/facilitator
LF2	Lead/facilitator	Lead/facilitator	Lead/facilitator	Lead/facilitator
LF3	Lead/facilitator	Lead/facilitator	Passive	Lead/facilitator
LF4	Lead/facilitator	Lead/facilitator	Proactive service provider	Lead/facilitator
SP1	Proactive service provider	Lead/facilitator	Passive	Proactive service provider
SP2	Proactive service provider	Proactive service provider	Passive	Lead/facilitator
P1	Passive	Passive	Passive	Passive
P2	Passive	Passive	Passive	Passive
P3	Passive	Passive	Passive	Lead/facilitator
P4	Passive	Passive	Passive	Passive

<b>Table 2.</b> Distribution of municipal roles and normative approaches			
<b>Role Type</b>	<b>Number of municipalities</b>	<b>Normative Approach Type</b>	<b>Number of municipalities</b>
Lead/facilitator	4	Universalist	7
Proactive service provider	2	Pluralist	3
Passive	4		

Based on this application of the municipal role typology, the role that a municipality took on did not correspond to the size of its total population based on 2016 census data (See Table 3). The two smallest communities had both a passive and lead/facilitator role associated, while the three largest population centres (towns/cities) had each of the three roles types represented. Similarly, while those municipalities with the largest percentage of immigrants and non-permanent residents in their total population in private households played a lead/facilitator role, there was greater variation in the roles assigned among the rest of the sample (see Table 4). This variation was found when the percentage of recent immigrants in the total population in private households was considered (see Table 5). From this, it can be inferred that in the sample of municipalities explored through this study, population size does not affect the role taken by a municipality. The two municipalities with the largest percentage of total newcomers in the total household population have a longer experience with immigration than the remaining seven, as well as more developed settlement systems (LF3, LF4). The remaining municipalities have more recent experiences with an increase in the arrival of newcomers, with the municipal responses to these trends being more varied (LF1, LF2, SP1, SP2, P1, P2, P3, P4). The findings related to these municipal contexts will now be explored in detail through the remainder of this report, starting with the features that have been used to determine municipal approach overall and then across all stages of the settlement process.

<b>Table 3.</b> Municipal role compared to total population size (2016 Census)	
<b>Municipal Role</b>	<b>Ranking by total population size (Largest = 1)</b>

Proactive Service Provider	1
Lead/facilitator	2
Passive	3
Passive	4
Passive	5
Proactive Service Provider	6
Lead/facilitator	7
Lead/facilitator	8
Lead/facilitator	9
Passive	10

Source: Statistics Canada, 2016

<b>Table 4. Municipal role by total newcomer population (2016 Census)</b>	
<b>Municipal Role</b>	<b>Immigrants and non-permanent residents as % of total population in private households</b>
Lead/facilitator	17.07%
Lead/facilitator	15.35%
Passive	14.21%
Proactive Service Provider	9.70%
Passive	9.16%

Proactive Service Provider	8.96%
Lead/facilitator	8.27%
Passive	8.16%
Lead/facilitator	8.13%
Passive	7.81%

Source: Statistics Canada, 2016

<b>Table 5. Municipal role by recent immigrant population (2016 Census)</b>	
<b>Municipal Role</b>	<b>Recent Immigrants as a % of total population in private households</b>
Passive	7.87%
Passive	5.13%
Lead/facilitator	4.77%
Lead/facilitator	4.15%

Proactive Service Provider	3.68%
Passive	3.34%
Lead/facilitator	2.92%
Proactive Service Provider	2.06%
Passive	1.69%
Lead/facilitator	0.86%

Source: Statistics Canada, 2016

## 4. FINDINGS

The context of regionalization and decentralization in immigration policy has brought about opportunities for municipalities to play a greater role in the attraction, settlement, and integration of newcomers (Khan and Labute, N.D.). With this context in mind, the findings of this research are presented in relation to insights how settlement systems in small communities are developed and to draw insight on engaging municipalities as potential actors in these endeavors. First, this section outlines findings related to the application of the typology of municipal roles and normative foundations to those municipalities interviewed as part of this study. It shares the contexts of municipalities playing lead/facilitator, proactive service provider, and passive roles in the settlement system overall, and the features of their normative approach to this. This provides an understanding of the different manners in which municipalities can engage with the settlement system, before looking more directly at each stage of the settlement process in the second part of this section. The different contexts of attraction, settlement, and integration are compared to identify some of the models through which settlement system development can occur. Lastly, this section outlines some of the considerations related to municipalities as actors in the settlement system, namely the constraints and advantages that affect the roles they play and how system development can occur. The final part of this report will then discuss the implications of these findings.

### 4.1 MUNICIPAL APPROACH: ROLE & NORMATIVE FOUNDATIONS

#### 4.1.1 LEAD/FACILITATOR ROLE WITH PLURALIST AND UNIVERSALIST NORMATIVE APPROACHES

There were four municipalities that were assessed as playing a lead/facilitator role in their community. Each of these four demonstrated evidence of the criteria related to a lead/facilitator role, including consideration on the municipal agenda, municipal funding directed to support specific initiatives and staff positions, and that municipal representatives were playing leadership roles in initiatives and collaboration in the broader community (LF1, LF2, LF3, LF4). Three of the interview participants described their communities as familiar with and receptive to newcomers, based on experiences of newcomers and new residents arriving over the long term (LF1, LF3, LF4). In all four of these municipalities, there were formalized approaches to different facets of the settlement process and designated positions within the municipality assigned to specific areas of work or initiatives. Three of these municipalities had the most developed settlement systems of the municipalities included in this study, with established initiatives related to economic immigration, settlement service providers in the community, and participation in collaborative initiatives

focused on issues of integration (LF2, LF3, LF4). These specific activities will be further detailed in subsequent sections. The other municipality did not have an established economic immigration initiative or existing settlement services, but played a leadership role in efforts related to integration to promote retention (LF1).

Regardless of the form these municipal efforts took on, those interviewed from all four lead/facilitator municipalities described a high level of integration and collaboration with other actors in the community specifically related to newcomers. This was through committee work, where municipal representatives acted as convenors and chairs (LF1, LF2, LF3) or where they participated more generally (LF4). These approaches also involved partnership with settlement service providers or other community organizations that provided some newcomer-specific services (LF1, LF2, LF3, LF4).

It was found that most municipalities who took on a lead/facilitator role also evidenced pluralist perspectives that recognized the specificity of newcomer needs and made some accommodation to this in their efforts and initiatives. Examples of this consideration included conversation events, skating events, and plaques for business to list languages spoken (LF1); efforts related to branding and regional policy development on welcoming and inclusion (LF3); and in municipally-owned transitional housing for newcomers who arrive through the municipally-driven immigration initiative (LF4). One lead/facilitator demonstrated more of a universalist normative foundation. The municipality had experienced a considerable expansion of initiatives and the number of positions whose work focused on newcomer integration (LF2). The interview participant described their efforts to universalize staff positions and responsibilities in an effort to normalize the work within the municipal administration and increase the likelihood of their long-term sustainability (LF2).

Lastly, it is important to note that even where a lead/facilitator approach to settlement systems is taken on, these topics may not be especially high relative to other priorities on the municipal agenda. One interview participant stated that although filling labour shortages and newcomer housing were priorities, they were not at the top of the agenda at municipal vision and planning meetings (LF3). Support from council and committees related to economic immigration was something that had to be built over time in another context (LF2). Furthermore, changes in council priorities could bring about change in funding for established initiatives, regardless of the duration in which they had been operating (LF4).



#### **4.1.2 PROACTIVE SERVICE PROVIDERS WITH UNIVERSALIST NORMATIVE APPROACHES**

In the two municipalities that were found to have taken on the role as a proactive service provider, interview participants described a suite of programming provided by the municipality, which was characteristic of a universalist normative approach. Both these municipalities had active programs and services to welcome and orient new residents, along with other direct services that could be tailored to clients as needed (SP1, SP2). While newcomers were welcome to access these programs and accommodations to specific needs were possible in certain cases, the programs and services provided by the municipality were targeted to community residents in general (SP1, SP2). One of the interview participants shared that when services were tailored to newcomers' specific needs, it was often within the context of one-on-one service provision and within the capacity constraints of staff or programming (SP1).

The number and variety of programs targeted at welcoming or integrating new residents to the community were more extensive in proactive service provider municipalities than those shared by interview participants from municipalities playing a passive role. This included facilitated orientations to the community by either municipal staff (SP1) or with volunteers (SP2). There were also different programs targeted at building relationships between individual residents as well as support for block parties (SP1, SP2). Events related to welcoming new residents and multicultural-focused events were also cited (SP1). Within all of these activities, the objective was to build community inclusion for all residents. Additionally, while a municipality taking on a lead/facilitator role provided specific services to newcomers, this occurred within a broader mandate and strategy that constitutes a lead/facilitator role rather than proactive service provider (LF4).

While all the municipalities from Alberta had Family and Community Support Services (FCSS) programs that could be conceived of as potentially falling into a proactive service provider role, the application of this typology here is concerned with the level of engagement with newcomers through such programming, even if they aren't the specific targets of service delivery. For example, in one passive municipality, there were no welcoming resources, very few newcomers accessed the direct services provided by FCSS, and newcomers were described as using their organic networks to learn about the programs and resources available to them (P4). Comparatively, the interview participant from one of the proactive service provider municipalities highlighted how they responded to a gap in the availability of Service Canada and Alberta Supports services by providing support to residents in filling out forms (SP1). This includes tailoring to newcomers, such as with support filling out citizenship applications (SP1).

### **4.1.3 PASSIVE ROLE WITH UNIVERSALIST NORMATIVE APPROACHES**

Of the four municipalities found to be taking on a passive role overall, there were variations in how this role was conceptualized. Two interview participants stressed that as municipalities, they had a broad mandate and the development of newcomer-related initiatives should come from the community and non-profit organizations (P1, P3). One stressed that they were limited in the role they could play based on this mandate (P3), and both cited municipal capacity challenges as a barrier. Should such initiatives emerge, the municipality would be supportive (P1, P3). In one case the interview participant was eager to bring greater energy to newcomer-focused efforts with the support of other actors in the community (P1). In the other, the municipality was currently playing a leadership role in a capacity building project, though this was perceived as a limited term role that would ideally transition to a more passive one over time (P3). The universalist perspective was apparent in their intention in expanding facets of this newcomer-focused project to focus on all new residents (P3).

Another interview participant described the municipality's responses to settlement system issues as reactive, rather than resulting from a strategy or plan based on capacity limitations (P2). This interview participant expressed understanding of initiatives from a pluralist perspective, but cited that capacity constraints necessitated actions that were reflective of a more universalist framework (P2). Work related to newcomers took place through one main department, which was responsible for collaborating with community partners on newcomer-related topics and undertaking other facets of work related to integration, though this was considered on the side of the desk.

In the fourth passive municipal context, the interview informant shared that newcomers to the community were able to navigate the community and get the support they needed (P4). In this community, there was no delineated role for the municipality in relation to newcomers, but rather a focus on universal provision of municipal services (P4). The interview participant highlighted the role of organic social networks in connecting newcomers to their service needs and how the active promotion of a service directory ensures a high level of awareness of services across the community (P4).

In three of these municipalities work had previously been done that would fall into a lead/facilitator role related to welcoming and inclusion, but efforts were stymied by various barriers (P1, P2, P4). Two of three interview participants expressed the desire to reinvigorate this work and shared some of the developments in partnerships with regional organizations that made them hopeful that there would be developing initiatives in their communities in the future (P1, P2). There was eagerness to provide support to external organizations who were leading these efforts, within the staff capacity constraints (P1, P2). These developments, including the municipality participating in a

capacity building project (P3), indicates that settlement systems are developing in areas where a passive, and universalist approach is found.

This assessment of the overall approach of the municipalities participating in this research provides insight on different perspectives and tactics through which these actors engage, or disengage, with the settlement system. The following section examines how these municipalities approach each stage of the settlement process, including attraction, settlement, and integration. This allows for comparison on differing approaches and the identification of different models of how the settlement system can be developed in small communities. Following this examination, the constraints and leverage points for working with municipalities as actors in the development of the settlement system is discussed.

## **4.2 SETTLEMENT SYSTEMS: CONTEXTS OF ATTRACTION, SETTLEMENT, AND INTEGRATION**

In this research, the overarching settlement process is conceptualized in three distinct stages. As this study is centred on the municipal government as an actor in the settlement system, this depiction frames the first stage of this process as attraction. The activities attributed to the attraction stage of the settlement process include promoting a community to potential immigrants, facilitating processes to match economic immigrants with employers through federal and provincial programs, supporting with immigration processes, and facilitating the arrival of a newcomer in the community (LF2, LF3, LF4, SP2, P3). Settlement is understood as the process by which newcomers become established in a new community, including accessing specialized programming related to settlement, language skills, and employment. The integration stage of the process relates to creating a sense of belonging through social inclusion and the ability to participate in community life among newcomers (Khan and Labute, N.D.; Sampedro and Camarero, 2018). Integration involves activities cited by interview participants related to welcoming, community receptiveness to newcomers, building cultural awareness, and activities that foster relationship building and participation (LF1, LF3, LF4, SP1, SP2, P1, P2, P3). Collectively, all the activities related to attraction, settlement, and integration in a community are understood as its settlement system. Based on this depiction, the different municipal approaches to attraction, settlement, and integration are now examined and compared.

### **4.2.1 ATTRACTION: ECONOMIC IMMIGRATION AND LINKAGES TO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

In the attraction efforts, municipalities were found to have established economic immigration initiatives, developing processes connecting immigration to economic development, and provided

support to individuals as the situation arose. Established approaches to economic immigration were found in three of the lead/facilitator municipalities (LF2, LF3, LF4), which included two initiatives through the federal Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot that were established in 2019 and a municipal immigration initiative operating for over 13 years in partnership with the Provincial Immigrant Nominee Program. In two cases, the municipality directed fairly significant funding to support these initiatives (LF3, LF4). In the third, the council did not direct additional funding to support the program, beyond existing staff positions, and funding from external grant programs was pursued (LF2). In all three municipalities, the interview participants all commented on the benefit and impact these initiatives had on the business (LF2, LF3, LF4). In one instance, having access to skilled labour through the municipal initiative was cited as a factor that allowed larger employers to stay in the community, as they were able to sustain the workforce they needed (LF4). One of the interview informants described a “paradigm shift” that occurred within the municipality through the implementation of this initiative, where economic immigration is now considered a permanent tool for economic development (LF2). Considering that previously this municipality played a passive role over all, this represents a considerable shift in thinking.

Interview participants from one of the proactive service provider municipalities (SP1) and two passive municipalities (P1, P3) described burgeoning work that considered the attraction of immigrants or economic immigration. The proactive service provider municipality was described as developing approaches to promote newcomer attraction and retention through their economic development department, which was participating in processes to develop capacity (SP1). It was indicated that responsibility for newcomer related issues would likely be centralized in this department in the future (SP1). One of the two passive municipalities was developing an economic development committee and engaged in a hiring process for an economic development staff person (P1). The interview participant stated that though economic immigration was not a current priority or strategy, the future development of this and considerations of attraction more generally would fall under the purview of this new position and committee. The interview participant from the other passive municipality stated that their draft economic development plan included a brief mention of economic immigration (P3). This municipality was also engaged in a capacity building project related to newcomers that was initiated through the economic development department (P3).

The second proactive service provider municipality had an overarching goal of being an attractive and friendly community to new residents and tourists (SP2). While newcomers were considered within this, the goal was framed universally. While this could be considered aligned with consideration on the municipal agenda that is associated with a lead/facilitator role, it does not meet the more explicit focus on newcomers that has been associated with the definition of this type. Economic development prioritized attracting businesses rather than individual economic

immigrants, which saw some individualized support with immigration occur on a case-by-case basis (SP2). This last facet of this proactive service provider's approach aligned with that of a lead/facilitator municipality, where some support was provided to immigrant entrepreneurs on a situational basis (LF1). The lead/facilitator did not have a formal initiative related to attraction, though the interview participant did consider immigration to be once facet of the overall economic development strategy (LF1). Lastly, two of the passive municipalities (P2, P4) did not have any existing strategy or approach to attract immigrants or promote economic immigration.

Outside of those formal immigration initiatives developed through participation with provincial or federal governments, municipalities generally play a limited role in directly attracting newcomers or economic immigration. Outside of these programs, municipalities participating in this study were found to focus efforts related to retention (LF1, SP1, SP2, P3). However, all these participants stated they would be interested in participating in some form of immigration program with provincial or federal governments (LF1, SP1, SP2, P1, P2, P3, P4). One participant stressed the caveat that this was dependent on the capacity required of municipalities and ability to fit within their constraints (P3). Further, interview participants from two municipalities with established economic immigration initiatives expressed their desire to continue engaging in such programs and cited the conclusion of programs they were participating in to be a challenge moving forward (LF2, LF4). Further, there was interest by some in participating in future opportunities to bring in skilled labour (LF2) or in diversifying the number of pathways they had municipal participation in (LF4).

Attracting immigrants is only one side of economic development through immigration, and it was highlighted that retention was just as critical in the context of small communities (LF1, LF2, LF2, LF4, P1). The success of economic immigration initiatives relies on developing capacity in relation to settlement and integration (LF4). In one passive municipality, the interview participant shared that it was employers in the community who had highlighted the connection between retaining economic immigrants and challenges in the settlement services that were more difficult to come by in a smaller community (P1). Another from a lead/facilitator municipality highlighted that while their activities related directly attracting new immigrants were more limited, they considered activities that contributed to newcomer retention to be a critical facet of their economic development strategy (LF1). Further, in a municipality playing a lead/facilitator role, the interview participant spoke to the prioritization of retention given the labour and resource intensity of their economic immigration initiative (LF4). The proactive promotion of activities that support settlement and integration was therefore interconnected with attraction efforts.

#### **4.2.2 SETTLEMENT: LOCAL SERVICE SYSTEMS AND SETTLEMENT SERVICES**

Of the ten municipalities participating in this study, half had settlement services either established or newly developed (LF2, LF3, LF4, SP2, P2). One municipality offered some direct services specific to newcomers or on a case-by-case basis (LF4), while others provided direct services through more general community service programs (LF1, LF2, SP1, SP2, P1, P2, P3, P4). This was primarily through Family and Community Support Services (FCSS) programs, which provide grant funding and direct services that promote the social wellbeing of individuals and families in the community (FCSSAA, 2022). Interview participants cited direct services that related to some initial settlement and integration need for newcomers, including community welcome and orientation (SP1, SP2), information and referral (SP1, P2, P4), support with applications (SP1), and events and community building activities (LF1, SP2, P1, P4).

The existing system of services was cited as an advantage for newcomers coming to the community by interview participants (LF2, LF3, LF4, SP1, P1, P2, P4). This was related to settlement services (LF2, LF3, LF4), initiatives led by churches and community groups (LF3, P2), and the existing general service system (LF2, LF4, SP1, P1, P2, P4). Collaboration and partnership among organizations in the community was frequently cited as an advantage (LF1, LF2, SP2, P1, P2, P4).

In relation to the challenges the system of existing services experienced with serving newcomers, there were a variety identified by interview participants. Capacity limitations in the community and among service organizations were highlighted in four municipalities in relation to all organizations working at full capacity (SP1), limited experience with newcomer-specific and intercultural service (P2, P3), a lack of knowledge on the specific needs of newcomers (P2), and understanding how to best support them (SP2, P2, P3). Challenges related to awareness were cited, both in relation to the knowledge held by newcomers themselves on the community and services available to them (LF3, SP1, P1) and that of community organizations, businesses, and municipal staff on the specific resources available to newcomers (LF1, P2, P4).

Additionally, gaps in data and knowledge of the number of newcomers in the community was cited as a challenge (LF1, SP2, P2). This affected the ability to effectively reach out to newcomers and connect them to services or initiatives (LF1, P2), to know if newcomers were accessing services (SP2), and whether there were enough resources available to them (SP2). Lastly, there was a sense that there were limitations in the availability of appropriate supports for newcomer needs (LF1, SP1, SP2, P1, P2) including: the lack of a single landing place or welcome hub (LF1, P1); the lack of needs aligned supports (P2); the need to travel outside the municipality for newcomer specific services (LF1); accessibility issues and location of services (LF1, SP2, P2); and limited language and employment services based on delivery model (P1) or based on demand (SP1).

When the settlement service provision and system development are considered, municipalities were most frequently found to be passive in their approach (LF3, SP1, SP2, P1, P2, P3, P4). There were a range of variables that contributed to this approach, such as having established settlement agencies (LF3), other actors leading service expansion (SP2, P2), and conceptions of municipal role (P1, P3). In all these cases, a passive role does not entail a lack of support for settlement services or their development. Many had strong relationships with settlement service providers, either established in their community or in a nearby municipality (LF2, LF3, LF4, SP2, P2).

The context of settlement service provision in two of the lead/facilitator municipalities was well-established, with a settlement agency in operation prior to the initiation of municipal involvement in economic immigration initiatives (LF3, LF4). In both communities, a regional settlement service provider provides the full suite of newcomer services in both communities, including settlement, language, employment, and community connections programming (Regional Connections, 2022). Settlement services were available in three other municipalities, though more recently, with limited staff positions, and with only basic settlement services provided (LF2, SP2, P3). These services were complemented by Community Adult Learning Program (CALP) services, which include English as a Second Language (ESL)/English Language Learning (ELL) and some employment support. For some, this was the only form of newcomer-specific support available (LF1, SP1, P1, P3, P4). CALP ESL offerings were more substantial in some communities than others. For example, in one community ESL was only available when there were volunteers available to provide it (P1).

In three communities with established settlement services, the municipality was also an active collaborator with these service providers in initiatives related to newcomers' integration (LF2, LF3, LF4). In one municipality, having the established settlement agency was cited as giving the municipality the confidence to pursue an economic immigration program with the federal government (LF3). In addition to being supportive of the settlement service provider, this municipality highlighted the development of a local settlement agency as their most significant recommendation for others looking to expand immigration initiatives (LF3). In another of these municipalities, staff engaged with the settlement service provider early on to coordinate their activities and delineate roles and areas of responsibility (LF4). The municipality does provide some initial services when newcomers arrive in the community through the municipal economic immigration program, including transitional housing and other welcoming activities (LF4). These activities are outside the scope of the settlement agency's work and therefore the municipality complements those services (LF4). The services provided by the municipality in this context are intended to ensure that newcomers have a good experience in the community at the outset to support their retention (LF4). Further, the interview participant highlighted that through the

economic immigration initiative, the municipality was able to provide the settlement service provider with insights on the number and timing of arrivals to support their preparedness (LF4).

In the other contexts with settlement services, these were more recent additions to the network of services in the community. This ranged from services being in operation for almost two years (LF2), to a newly hired settlement worker (SP2), and one context with a hiring process underway at the time of interview (P2). In the municipality playing a lead/facilitator role overall, the development of settlement services was initiated by the municipality reaching out to different settlement service providers in medium and large urban centres nearby (LF2). This was undertaken following the initiation of the economic immigration initiative as part of the condition set out by IRCC and resulted in a new branch of the settlement agency opening to provide services in the community and surrounding region (LF2). The municipality continues to meet regularly with the staff at the settlement agency to coordinate activities, discuss the retention of newcomers in the community, and collaborate on events targeting integration (LF2).

In a proactive service provider municipality, local organizations encountering an increased number of newcomers had requested a presentation from a settlement service provider in a nearby small urban centre (SP2). This took place through the interagency network facilitated by FCSS, which was followed by the settlement agency pursuing funding opportunities that would allow them to hire a settlement worker who would be based in the municipality (SP2). The passive municipality where settlement services were newly established went through a similar process to the service provider municipality. In this municipality, collaboration on a cultural event between the municipality and a settlement agency based in another municipality led to discussions of the expansion of settlement services to that community (P2). The settlement agency then went through the process to secure funding for a settlement worker (P2). In both of these municipalities, this arrangement involves one half-time settlement worker (SP2, P2), while in the lead/facilitator municipality, the settlement agency has two staff (LF1).

Two other municipalities had discussed the progress on the development of settlement services in their communities. In one passive municipality, a conversation had been initiated by a settlement service provider in a large urban centre about the potential expansion of services (P1). In another, the lead/facilitator municipality had identified the development of a welcome hub as a priority for their community and had been in conversations with community organizations about where this would be best located (LF1). When asked about who would lead the development of this work, the interview participant identified the municipality as playing a leadership role, including applying for grants, as well as working in partnership with organizations in the community (LF1).



For those other municipalities that did not have any settlement services, interview participants provided additional insights about how future development might occur. In one proactive service provider municipality, the development of services was described as potentially occurring through collaboration between the municipality and community organizations, where the municipality would play a supportive facilitator role in a working group for service development (SP1). A passive municipality highlighted that any development of a welcome hub or services would likely be driven by community organizations (P3).

### **4.2.3 INTEGRATION: ACTIVE MUNICIPAL INITIATIVES, PROJECTS, AND PROCESSES**

Of the three stages of the settlement process explored here, integration was found to be the area where municipalities were most likely to approach as a lead/facilitator (LF1, LF2, LF3, LF4, SP2, P3), having a the highest representation of this role than both attraction and settlement (see Table 1). Municipalities were most likely to view integration from a universalist perspective, considering inclusion across the community broadly (LF2, SP1, SP2, P1, P3, P4). Those municipalities considered to play a lead/facilitator role overall and one playing a proactive service provider role were found to have active strategies, initiatives, and events related to inclusion and integration (LF1, LF2, LF3, LF4, SP2). The lead/facilitator municipalities either convened or participated in specific committees to foster welcoming, inclusion, and integration, which engaged multi-sectoral representatives to develop strategy, coordinate activities, respond to issues, and develop and implement programs (LF1, LF2, LF3, L4). The service provider municipality had a high-level municipal goal related to being friendly, a range of programs in place, and was leading the development of an inclusion framework that could be applied to programming both within the municipality and by other actors in the community (SP2).

There were three municipalities with no formal strategy or approach, including three in a passive role and one in a proactive service provider role overall (SP1, P1, P2, P4). The three passive role municipalities had previously engaged in formal initiatives related to welcoming and inclusive communities. In one, formal efforts had little impact and lacked uptake by the community organizations the municipality was looking to engage in training and workshops (P4). Rather, the interview participant stated that they had found that an informal approach was more effective, through events supporting the promotion of community connections more generally (P4). A second passive municipality was previously engaged in a formal initiative in partnership with another municipality in their region, but this lost momentum (P1). The municipality's principles of community inclusion were described as embedded in their work and programming, and that there was interest in re-energizing some of this work in the future (P1). Another passive municipality also had previously been more active in relation to inclusion and integration (P2).

Following a successful multi-cultural event hosted in partnership with a settlement agency in another municipality, staff with the municipality tried to use the momentum to develop further initiatives with the newcomer community (P2). The interview participant was uncertain of the barriers that prevented them further engaging with newcomers and eventually the work was no longer pursued actively (P2). The proactive service provider municipality had some general initiatives in place that were directly related to building community connections and welcoming new residents, with priority given to the inclusion of all residents (SP1).

The last passive municipality had recently developed strategies related to integration through a capacity building process (P3). The interview participant recognized that there was a role for work related to integration, including a need to more robustly welcome people into the community and to support the connection of new residents to the broader community (P3). Though strategy development was related to newcomers specifically, there was interest in expanding integration efforts to consider all new residents (P3). Further, the interview participant saw a role for the municipality in hosting events, but intended for community organizations to take over other facets of settlement system development (P3).

Those activities engaged in by municipalities related to integration fell into three categories: events; programs, projects, and initiatives; and committees. The purpose of events were cited as intending to bring people out to connect and build relationships (LF1, LF2, SP2, P1, P4); to bridge newcomer or new residents and existing residents (LF1, LF4, SP2); to showcase or raise awareness of different cultures (P2); to share information and promote awareness of services (LF1, P4); as a strategy to promote retention of newcomers in the community (LF1, LF2); and to welcome new arrivals or new residents to the community (LF4, SP2). Events were perceived as easy actions that were within the capacity of municipalities to deliver, both by municipalities that hosted them (LF1) and those developing their work related to inclusion and integration (P3). They were also considered by municipalities as being effective in building connections and raising awareness (LF1, P3, P4).

The programs, projects, and initiatives cited by interview participants to promote integration included: programs to foster connection among residents and neighbours (SP1; SP2); regional collaboration for policy development related to inclusion (LF3); capacity building initiatives facilitated by the AUMA and RDN, (LF1, SP1, P3); a Community and Program Inclusion Framework (SP2); a welcoming website and information directory (LF1); and sharing stories and framing immigration positively through the media (LF3, LF4). In some of these, the role of the municipality in promoting dialogue and educational opportunities related to diversity is apparent. This also includes multi-stakeholder committees that coordinate efforts related to welcoming, inclusion, and systemic integration (LF1, LF2, LF3, LF4).

Based on the in-person nature of the events and programs that municipalities relied on to promote integration in their communities, many of interview participants cited the COVID-19 pandemic as a major challenge to this work and a cause for the loss of momentum (LF1, LF4, SP2, P1, P2, P3). The limited uptake of newcomers, community members, and community organizations was also cited (P3, P4). There were also challenges to progress in collaborative initiatives related to navigating differing perspectives, priorities, and processes (LF2, LF3, LF4). The limited capacity of departments and staff to develop or implement integration work was cited as a main barrier to its advancement (LF1, P2). Funding was additionally cited as a barrier, both for the initiation of new work and for its sustainability over the long-term (LF1, LF2) These two barriers are discussed in further detail in the subsequent section.

This section has explored findings on the different approaches municipalities have taken to different stages of the settlement process and the development of this system in their communities. It considered how different role types affect how municipalities engage in different facets of the settlement system, as well as the challenges that they encounter at an operational and community level. From this exploration, different models of settlement system development are apparent as well as considerations of how different roles affect how municipalities can be engaged as actors in settlement systems. These implications are discussed in the final section of the report, following the exploration of findings on the constraints and leverage points municipalities experience in their connection to the settlement system.

## **4.3 ENGAGING MUNICIPALITIES AS ACTORS IN SETTLEMENT SYSTEMS: CONSTRAINTS AND LEVERAGE POINTS**

Across consideration of the different approaches of municipalities in relation to the settlement system, various constraints and advantages have been identified. This section considers constraints related to capacity, funding, and policy and programs opportunities and the advantages of collaboration, leadership, and existing processes and capacity that can be leveraged. From this analysis, insight can be garnered on how municipalities can be engaged in settlement systems development, in light of differences in their approach and based on findings related to attraction, settlement, and integration.

### **4.3.1 CONSTRAINTS**

In many cases, the role of municipalities in the settlement processes was most greatly shaped by capacity limitations and policy change at all levels of government. Some form of capacity limitations were cited by nearly all interview participants, while the potential challenge of policy changes was cited by interview participants from lead/facilitator municipalities with economic

immigration initiatives and one proactive service provider. Broadly, interview participants cited funding as a challenge in seven cases (LF1, LF2, LF4, SP1, SP2, P1, P2, P3), while staff capacity limitations related to workload or the number of staff positions was also cited six times (LF1, LF2, SP1, P1, P2, P3). These capacity limitations were cited across stages of the settlement process and persisted for municipalities regardless of how developed their approaches were. One interview participant highlighted that while other organizations in the community are small and volunteer-driven, municipalities themselves are small organizations too (P3). Overall, intersecting capacity limitations affect the activities municipalities take on and how they resource the work.

Across municipal role types, capacity limitations affected the ability to pursue or maintain and priorities that had been developed related to settlement and integration. This was the case in one case funding was the biggest barrier to advance the strategies that had been developed (LF1) and another where there was uncertainty in how much of a strategy could be implemented due to limited capacity (P3). One interview participant highlighted that the uncertainty of external funding for integration initiatives had the potential to affect the continuity of the work (LF2). Additionally, the interest in opportunities to attract newcomers can be present, but the ability to actually pursue such strategies was contingent upon funding and capacity (SP2, P3).

Inevitably, any development of work related to newcomers affects the workload of the staff responsible for the work. Where municipalities have a broad mandate and scope of responsibility, they also have small departments with few staff (LF2, SP1, P1, P2, P3). Having specific staff positions that can focus on newcomer-related work and coordinate with other actors in the community, including settlement service providers, was highlighted as needed to make progress (LF1, P2). Further, there are expanding workloads and time commitments for volunteers from the community supporting the work of committees (LF2). Therefore, the capacity requirements of developing initiatives can be at odds with the existing capacity of municipalities.

Interview participants from lead/facilitator municipalities with active economic immigration initiatives identified changing policy priorities and programs at all levels of government as a potential challenge (LF2, LF3, LF4). While a supportive council had contributed to the development of one municipal approach, potential changes in the representation on council or in its priorities could affect future support for the program and the funding allocated to staff positions (LF4). Another interview participant highlighted that they had done considerable work to ensure that the value of their position was recognized by council, committees, and the community, but that was an ongoing activity to ensure the continuity of their position as well as others that had developed jointly with expanding newcomer-focused work (LF2).

It was also highlighted that changes in priorities and policy at the federal and provincial level would directly affect the sustainability of these initiatives and their ability to continue the work moving forward (LF2, LF3, LF4). This was also highlighted in terms of the priorities and focus of funding streams provided by higher levels of government (LF2). Another facet of this affecting municipalities is when gaps in community needs result from changes in federal or provincial policy and programs. In one proactive service provider municipality, policy changes and cuts at both federal and provincial levels resulted in the municipality adapting their programming in order to address the unmet needs in the community (SP1). With this experience, there was hesitancy related to further expanding the role of the municipality in relation to trends of regionalization.

### **4.3.2 LEVERAGE POINTS**

Within municipalities, factors including existing capacity, leadership, organizational processes, and infrastructure were highlighted as beneficial for the development of newcomer initiatives. These were predominantly reported by lead/facilitator municipalities with active economic immigration initiatives, which corresponded with more developed settlement systems. There were some examples of passive and proactive service provider municipalities where the support of municipal leadership was cited (SP2, P1), and one with existing municipally-owned infrastructure (P4). Conversely, the context of partnership and collaboration at local and regional levels was highlighted by the majority of interview participants as an area of strength and central to how municipalities approach emergent issues in their communities.

For those municipalities with developed economic immigration initiatives, the considerable capacity and infrastructure that had been developed within the municipality and the community was cited as an advantage (LF2, LF3, LF4). One interview participant stated that their municipality was well prepared for an increase in economic immigrants based on the existing capacity in the community (LF3). Another cited that while they were less prepared for the initiation of their economic immigration initiative, the capacity they had developed during its implementation would be beneficial into the future (LF2). Capacity that had been built in the municipality, community, and among businesses and non-profit organizations could be applied and adapted alongside changes in immigration policy and programs, or to pursue future immigration program opportunities (LF2, LF4). Capacity developments in one area can strengthen the overall context of the settlement process, such as where improvements in the selection of immigrants supported better retention rates in the community over time (LF4).

Different factors related to the existing municipal culture, processes, and infrastructure were also highlighted as advantages to developing initiatives related to the settlement system. The support of municipal leadership and councils for efforts to develop attraction and retention initiatives was

highlighted as an advantage by interview participants across role types (LF2, LF3, LF4, SP2, P1). Interview participants in two lead/facilitator municipalities (LF3, LF4) highlighted that the municipality provided funding to staff positions and initiatives related to economic immigration, which was of significant advantage to their progress and success. Further, municipally-owned transitional housing infrastructure was highlighted as something that could be leveraged to support newcomers and their retention in the community (LF4, P4).

Collaboration and partnership featured heavily in discussions of local service systems and in how municipalities approached emergent needs and issues in their community. All municipalities mentioned some form of collaborative network or committee in which they participated or facilitated. Six municipalities (LF2, SP1, P1, P2, P3, P4) highlighted their interagency networks, which were convened and facilitated by their FCSS departments. Through interagency networks, local community organizations and municipal staff meet regularly to coordinate services and referral, discuss emerging issues, and collaborate on solutions (LF2, SP1, P1, P2, P3, P4). Interview participants also referenced the municipal development of local committees (SP2) and issue-specific coalitions of organizations as a method of responding to emergent issues (P3, P4).

In regard to the impact of collaborative initiatives and partnership at the local level, five interview participants cited these arrangements as effective (LF1, SP1, P1, P2, P4). One highlighted that they are working to strengthen the capacity of these initiatives, in service to their goal to foster better collaboration between agencies and groups (P3). This was partly related to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the challenge posed by virtual meetings compared to in-person, which foster greater informal connection outside the space of a meeting (P3). One interview participant highlighted that these collaborative approaches were necessary based on the size of the community (P2), while another highlighted that the small size of their community made such initiatives effective and contributed to the strong relationships required for partnership (LF1). In one case, the development of a regional initiative with similar objectives to a long-standing local committee caused it to become stalled in efforts not to duplicate work (LF4).

Municipalities also discussed the regional partnerships and collaborations they had participated in, either presently or previously. These included regional partnerships with other municipalities or organizations on specific projects or issues (LF2, LF3, LF4, SP1, P1, P2, P3); regional committees for specific municipal departments or positions for information sharing and collaboration (LF1, LF3, SP1, SP2, P3, P2, P4); and participation in capacity building projects facilitated by regional organizations (LF1, SP1, P3). With regional committees, these spaces served to share information and resources, which was cited as valuable (LF1, P1, P4). Other interview participants found the work of regional collaborative initiatives to be somewhat effective (LF3, LF4, P3). This was related to information sharing and learning in regional spaces (P3) and where committees and projects

were slow to gain traction and to see impact (LF3, LF4). In some cases differing political views and priorities among actors contributed to the slow pace or disagreement within such initiatives (LF2, LF3, LF4). Due to significant variation between where municipalities assigned responsibility for newcomer issues, dialogue and information sharing on topics pertaining to settlement systems was limited in regional meetings for specific municipal department types (LF1).

Five municipalities were currently participating in regional partnerships with specific focus on settlement or integration (LF2, LF3, LF4, SP2, P2), while one was in the initial stages of discussion with an organization external to the municipality (P1). Additionally, three municipalities were cited as participating in limited-term capacity building projects with two different provincial organizations, the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association (AUMA) and the Rural Development Network (RDN) (LF1, SP1, P3). Partnership experiences with regional organizations were cited as positive (SP2, P1, P2) and had positive impacts on momentum and energy (LF1, SP2, P1, P2). One interview participant highlighted that their ability to consult a regional settlement service provider was of significant advantage, providing them insights that they would not have otherwise considered (LF2). Points of disagreement between a partner organization and the municipality about the area of the settlement system on which capacity should be focused (LF2) and the need to prioritize outputs of projects for future implementation (LF1, P3), indicate the need to reconcile the needs and constraints when participating in different projects and processes at the regional level.

Overall, the responses of interview participants emphasized collaboration and partnership between local organizations and municipalities in small communities was an effective leverage point through which to understand emergent issues in the community and to coordinate responses. Partnerships at the regional level also appeared effective, particularly related to the development of settlement services and integration initiatives in small communities (LF2, SP2, P2). This initial partnership with settlement service providers appears to be an important step for municipalities and can be leveraged for progress on attraction initiatives over time (LF3, LF4). Partnership and collaboration can be leveraged to address some constraints related to capacity, though further resource and capacity development must accompany growing initiatives (LF1, LF2, P3). Further, settlement service providers and other non-profit actors often face similar capacity constraints to municipalities. Overall, it is an area where further partnership and coordination may prove fruitful in developing municipal dialogue, leadership, and collaborative approaches to develop settlement systems in small communities. Based on the understanding of varying municipal approaches to settlement systems and the constraints and leverage points that exist in these contexts, the final section of this report will now outline the implications and conclusions of this research.

## 5. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Through a comparison of ten small municipalities in Alberta and Manitoba, this report has outlined the different ways in which settlement systems have developed and where nascent approaches are gaining their footing. Based on the focus on municipalities as actors in settlement systems, this research applied a typology of roles, assessed normative approaches, and considered how municipalities approach different stages of the settlement process. This also highlighted considerations related to engaging municipalities in small communities as actors in settlement system development, through an exploration of constraints and leverage points. Based on this, there are implications for actors looking to develop settlement systems on how they can work with municipalities towards this end, including specific implications for each stage of the settlement process.

### 5.1 WORKING WITH MUNICIPAL ROLE TYPES TO DEVELOP THE SETTLEMENT SYSTEM

Through applying role types adapted from the classification system provided by Boese and Phillips (2017), municipalities were assessed for their overall role in the settlement system of their community and then compared for their approaches to attraction, settlement, and integration. Based on how this typology was applied, there was diversity between the municipalities that were assigned to each category including differences in the level of development of settlement systems, the factors that have induced municipalities to take on particular roles, and how they envision their ideal role. How a municipality approaches the settlement system is informative for other actors wishing to engage in its development.

From the interviews conducted, in municipalities that played lead/facilitator roles, the municipality itself is a source of momentum behind settlement system development. These municipalities were able to take advantage of opportunities available to them, whether through federal or provincial immigration programs, funding opportunities, or capacity building project participation (LF1, LF2, LF3, LF4). There was confidence in the continued progress of initiatives, amidst some concern related to uncertainty in the continuity of policy or funding (LF1, LF2, LF3, LF4). In all cases, there was investment by the municipality into staff positions that were responsible for advancing work, within the municipal administration (LF1, LF2, LF4) or with elected representatives and contracting out to external non-profit organizations (LF3). These municipalities can be considered to be an active partner and contributor in settlement system development.



For municipalities to take on this type of role, confidence in the system of services related to settlement is important (LF2, LF3, LF4) along with active collaborators and partners (LF1, LF2, LF3, LF4). The importance of these collaborators and partners is also reflected in the comments of interview participants where the municipality had previously engaged in integration efforts; momentum was lost without continued engagement and partnership from settlement agencies or other non-profit organizations (P2, P4) and other municipal partners (P1). Continued support from municipal leadership and council is also vital to sustain the efforts of municipal staff (L2, L3, L4). As municipalities begin to lead the development of different aspects of the settlement system, additional funding and growing staff capacity are required for them to support these efforts (LF1, LF2). Lastly, it is important to note that not every municipality is going to play this type of role or maintain it over time. Even in cases where a lead/facilitator role is taken on for a particular project or to address a particular gap in the community, a municipality may aim to step out of that role after building an initiative for other actors in the community to take over (SP1, P3).

Where a proactive service provider role is played, the municipality is found to respond to individual needs as they emerge through existing programming. While there is some capacity to tailor support in alignment with existing programs, this is often only within the scope of staff capacity and knowledge (SP1) or specifically in relation to a particular case (SP2). There was found to be a suite of existing programming related to welcoming new residents and promoting connections between neighbours and the community more broadly, where newcomers' inclusion and integration could be addressed (SP1, SP2). Promoting information sharing, resource development, and knowledge mobilization related to newcomers-specific needs and the services available to them can support proactive service providers, both in referral and in tailoring their services. To this end, building pathways for newcomer perspectives to inform approaches to events and programming is also valuable. Developing strategies to integrate goals and practices that can support settlement and integration can be a pathway to strengthen the context of these service systems.

Additionally, a proactive service provider described how they adapt their services to address gaps in the community, while also actively developing approaches that fill gaps until they can be passed off to other actors (SP1). Based on this approach, fostering connections with settlement service providers outside their community may support these proactive service provider municipalities in this process and to address emergent needs of newcomers in their community. The role of municipal leadership is also a point that can be leveraged in proactive service provider contexts. High-level municipal goals and perspectives related to universal service delivery direct how proactive service provision is approached (SP1, SP2). Through engaging council members and administrative leaders in settlement system initiatives actors can support them to build awareness

and understand their impact (LF2, LF4). These efforts to engage and inform can build political will and support for developing initiatives (Caldwell et al., 2017).

Where a passive role is played by a municipality, it may be by design (P1, P3), based on constraints (P1, P2), or based on a lack of awareness (P3, P4). Where municipalities prefer responses to come from the community (P1, P3), it may be contingent upon actors in the community to highlight the gaps or issues they are seeing in collaborative fora, identify how solutions to settlement systems issues should be addressed, and to outline the form of support or partnership that they need from the municipality. A lack of awareness may contribute to municipalities not engaging in the settlement system, which may leave them unprepared for an increase in arrivals or for longer-term settlement and integration needs (Boese and Phillips, 2017). There also may be awareness that newcomers have particular needs, but a lack of experience can challenge communities to engage this population or understand how to best support them (P3). In these cases actors invested in settlement system development can work to build awareness and familiarity through different tactics, such as presentations or sharing resources and tools. While a municipality may still remain in a passive role, increased awareness may contribute to support for actors working to develop settlement systems as well as opportunities to engage further with municipal staff and leadership on these topics.

Addressing capacity constraints, which were cited by municipalities across all role types, can take place through a variety of strategies. The emphasis placed on the role of relationships, partnership, and collaboration by all interview participants highlight this as a key area to leverage in relation to capacity limitation, develop awareness of issues, and develop responses. This is supported in the literature, such as where Boese and Phillips' (2017) found a complementary role between municipal governments and community organizations in settlement systems in small communities. Collaboration and partnership become requisite to support attraction and meet needs related to settlement and integration amidst gaps in staff and resource capacity constraints, with close relationships enabling greater responsiveness in people and resources (Fourot, 2015; Ashton, Pettigrew, and Galatsanou, 2016; Agrawal and Sangpala, 2021). These partners can be collaborators on grant proposals and in projects to advance different priorities in settlement system development (CIM, 2021; LF2).

The role of the business community as partners is also an asset. The ability of these actors to benefit from market-based immigration initiatives was cited as both an impetus for pursuing immigration programs and subsequent settlement system development (LF2) and to rationalize the continuity of such initiatives in the community (LF2, LF3, LF4). Engaging businesses can also be a starting point for developing immigration initiatives, where business surveys can be used to understand the context of labour shortages and provide a base and rationale (LF2, SP2). The engagement of

businesses, alongside other community actors, has direct links to policy development at the municipal level (Fourot, 2015).

An understanding of the prevalence of universalist approaches in small municipalities can strengthen how to approach service system development. A universalist perspective is common among municipalities, even in large urban centres with a high level of diversity (Tossutti, 2012). Therefore, this is an important lens to apply to understand the context of developing settlement systems. This affects the context of municipally-provided services (SP1, SP2), the provision of events (SP2, P3, P4), overarching municipal goals (SP2), and how issues are understood to affect newcomers (LF1, LF2, SP1, SP2, P1, P3, P4). It also may affect how newcomer-focused initiatives or projects are adapted in a municipal context to either conform with municipal approaches and support their sustainability (LF2, P3). However, the adaptation of approaches to more universalist frameworks may affect their impact for newcomers or the ability to foster higher levels of integration for this population. Involving newcomers to provide input and participate in municipal processes is one approach to develop perspectives related to newcomers (Caldwell et al., 2017). Additionally, involving settlement service providers in local multi-stakeholder committees and interagency networks could also bring a newcomer lens into community dialogue (LF3, LF4, SP2).

While settlement system development can occur rapidly in some contexts, in others this is approached through planning with a longer time horizon and through prioritizing a limited number of activities in alignment with current capacity and resource constraints (Caldwell et al. 2017; CIM, 2021; LF2, LF1, P3). Assessing the differences at each stage of the settlement process can produce further implications for how these systems develop and has relevance for stakeholders interested in the mechanics of settlement system development. This is the focus of the following section.

## **5.2 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE SETTLEMENT SYSTEM**

At the outset of this research, there was interest in learning about whether the instance of an economic immigration strategy would contribute to the development of other facets of the settlement system. In two of the municipalities interviewed, settlement services were established prior to the pursuit of economic immigration initiatives (LF3, LF4), while one municipality saw developments in settlement and integration processes coincide with the implementation of an economic immigration initiative (LF2). In this latter case, rapid development of the overall settlement system did occur through the municipality taking on a lead/facilitator role in relation to an initiative to attract newcomers. This appears to be a scenario that is less likely than the gradual development of settlement and integration processes prior to the pursuit of developing active

attraction initiatives, both based on the burgeoning settlement services found in several municipal contexts and because program opportunities at the federal level are currently more limited.

This draws attention to the relationship between different facets of the settlement system and the readiness of small communities to receive an increase in newcomer arrivals. Returning to consider the experience of the two municipalities participating in the RNIP, the municipality that had developed settlement services and longer-term municipal participation in an integration committee considered itself well prepared for the initiation of the initiative (LF3). The municipality where settlement services and integration work were not established at the time of applying for RNIP described itself as unprepared for implementation (LF2). This municipality described how the rapid development of settlement service systems and work related to inclusion and integration were foundational for the success of the initiative (LF2). While the first municipality provided funding to an external non-profit economic development organization to administer the program (LF3), the latter had taken it on internally and received no additional funds from council for additional staff capacity for the initiative at the time of its initial implementation (LF2). In the second instance, partnership with a settlement service organization and fund development from other government funding sources supported parallel processes to develop settlement services and integration activities (LF2). The purpose of sharing these two divergent experiences illustrates that there are different pathways to settlement system development.

Those municipalities that were not directly engaged in a provincial or federal immigration program, lacked formal or comprehensive approaches to attracting newcomers (LF1, SP1, SP2, P1, P2, P3, P4). Though municipalities had considered the role of attracting immigrants and skilled labour within economic development strategies, they were more limited in their ability to actively pursue this (LF1, SP2, P3). These municipalities were more likely to provide services or support to newcomers on a case-by-case basis (LF1, SP2) or included a brief mention of economic immigration within economic development plans (P3). One interview participant commented that they could not really compete with larger urban centres to attract immigrants if they did not already have a job opportunity or family in the community (P3). Another suggested funding to promote their community to newcomers would be beneficial, as it was not something they could do otherwise (SP2). Regardless of capacity to actively pursue the attraction of newcomers, there was interest from those interviewed to participate in economic immigration programs (LF1, SP2, P1, P2, P3, P4). This indicates that without the opportunity to participate in such initiatives in partnership with federal and provincial governments, many small communities are unable to be lead actors in attracting newcomers to their communities. This conclusion contrasts that of Fourot (2015), which found that municipalities are more active in efforts to attract newcomers than in their efforts to settle and retain them. This difference may be an indication of differences in small communities compared to medium and large population centres, and the larger ecosystem of

services already available in these areas. The implication of this is that those municipalities that do not have an immediate opportunity to participate in an economic immigration initiative can focus on prioritizing activities related to settlement and integration, which will support their preparedness for future initiatives.

An increase in newcomer arrivals requires the expansion of resources and capacity in all facets of the settlement system (LF2) and to ensure attraction coincides with retention (LF4). However, while settlement is an important facet to support the attraction and retention of newcomers in small communities (Bruce, 2007; Rose and Desmarais, 2007; Ashton, Pettigrew, Galatsanou, 2016), it is also the area where the municipalities participating in this study were most inclined to play a passive role (see Table 1). In the two instances of a lead/facilitator role in the development of settlement services, municipalities worked to facilitate the establishment of services, supported service providers to find an appropriate location for new offices, and coordinated with non-profit organizations in the community, rather than to provide direct services (LF1, LF2). More frequently, settlement service development occurred through the leadership of settlement agencies, with municipalities being supportive partners and facilitating connections with other local organizations (SP2, P2). While examples of municipally-offered settlement services exist, these instances are rare (Boese and Phillips, 2017). Therefore, focusing efforts to develop the settlement system of a community through the transfer of a model of settlement service provision by municipalities is limited. Based on the interviews conducted as part of this research, this approach appears to be more of an exceptional arrangement than a transferable model.

A more effective approach lies in supporting connections between municipalities and the settlement sector, as well as building awareness among municipalities on the scope of settlement service and needs of newcomers. In municipalities without developed settlement services, there was generally a more limited understanding of the scope of these services. This was directly stated in some cases (P1, P2) and inferred from responses to questions on newcomer needs and service gaps. Only in two cases were gaps in specific settlement and integration services cited as challenges in areas with either no direct settlement services or nascent ones (LF1, P2). This is likely related to a lack of familiarity with those particular services. This highlights the role of knowledge sharing, particularly as municipalities highlighted that resource directories, introductory tools, information on resources and newcomer needs would be valuable for newcomers, municipal staff, and community members (LF1, SP1, P1, P3).

It was found that most frequently municipalities in this study would lead or facilitate efforts in the area of integration (see Table 1). Some municipalities cited that the scope of activities related to integration best fit within their capacity and were the easiest type of activity for them to implement (LF1, P3). In contexts where settlement service systems were less developed, the most frequent

approaches to promote inclusion focused on initial welcoming and orientation activities, such as welcome packages, events, and community orientation, as well as the use of events to promote multicultural awareness and community building (LF1, SP1, SP2, P1, P2, P3). Even in areas where there was limited understanding of newcomer experiences in the community, there was consideration of how events could contribute to their inclusion (P4).

In contexts with more developed settlement systems, activities related to inclusion and integration were often formalized within the work of multisectoral committees. These committees engaged with inclusion and integration systemically, considering broader issues affecting newcomer integration beyond relationship building with community members (LF3, LF4). This brings attention to forms of broader systemic integration and participation in the community (Khan and Labute, N.D.; Sampedro and Camarero, 2018). An example of an exchange in a committee meeting related to police noting that newcomers had challenges understanding a particular bylaw and the settlement service provider agreed to include that information in orientation workshops (LF3). In the municipality with the most long-standing economic immigration initiative, the interview participant highlighted the representation of newcomers on boards and on council was the most pressing issue for newcomer inclusion and integration in the community (LF4). This indicates that long-term processes of settlement system development can lead to more advanced considerations of integration, regardless of community size.

In sum, the process of developing different facets of settlement systems can occur through different approaches and with different levels of engagement from municipal actors. The implications discussed here, pertaining to both municipal roles and models of system development, have been summarized in two tools that accompany this report. In the first, found in Appendix 1, the different municipal roles are summarized, along with considerations related to their advantages, challenges, features of the community required to support municipalities, and recommended approaches to engage each type in the settlement system. The second outlines six different models of settlement system development that have been identified through this research, including the facet of the settlement system it focuses on, advantages, challenges, capacity requirements, and actors involved. This is found in Appendix 2.

## 6. CONCLUSION

This study examined the approach of municipalities in small communities related to the development of settlement systems, which includes considerations of attraction, settlement, and integration. Through this process it was found that municipalities can play different types of roles in these systems, which can vary related to municipal priorities and capacity considerations. While there are examples of municipalities leading and facilitating different aspects of the development of settlement systems, it also must be noted that there are those where the settlement system is not a priority. This study compared municipal contexts where there was evidence of a recent newcomer population and that the municipality had paid some consideration to some facet of their arrival in their community.

Overall, it was found that different models of settlement system development exist. While a comparison of these approaches was provided in the sections related to attraction, settlement, and integration, they have also been summarized in a companion tool that is included in Appendix 2 of this report. While this study was able to examine several different models of settlement system development found within the municipalities participating, there are inevitably additional approaches and variations to be found in other communities. These models still provide insight into how actors looking to engage in system development can approach this in their own contexts. Additionally, based on the examination of the different roles played by municipalities, some consideration has been given to what is needed to take on each role type and how these actors can be supported amidst the constraints identified through this study. This has additionally been summarized in a companion tool to this report that is included in Appendix 1.

Regardless of role type, staff capacity, funding, and awareness were found to be areas where municipalities and small communities more broadly are constrained. Collaboration and partnership were highlighted as both existing strengths and leverage points to address some of these constraints. Further network development with the settlement sector and umbrella organizations can contribute to this. There are many existing supports and resources developed by AAISA and its partners that can affect capacity and knowledge building. Combined with the more nuanced understanding of municipal approaches to settlement systems developed through this study, AAISA can be an effective partner for actors developing these systems in small communities.

## 7. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this research, the following areas have been identified as key areas for AAISA to engage to support the development of settlement systems in small communities: information and awareness; relationship building and network development; and supporting settlement services. Further recommendations related to areas for capacity development and for engaging municipal actors in small communities in settlement system development have been outlined in the resources found in Appendix 1 and 2 of this report.

### INFORMATION AND AWARENESS

#### Findings:

- Municipalities and other actors in small communities lack knowledge and experience with understanding newcomer needs and how to best serve them.
- Settlement systems are developing in many small communities and this information can be captured to promote connections between actors and promote learning across different contexts.
- Municipal staff requested information and resources related to newcomers that would be easy to access when serving newcomer clients.
- Municipalities with developing approaches to newcomer settlement and integration most frequently exhibit universalist normative foundations, which prioritize equal service provision to all actors in the community.

#### Recommendations for AAISA:

- Promote existing resources (e.g. Toolkit) and professional development supports related to needs assessment, intercultural awareness, and service availability to community service department and FCSS programs in small communities.
- Include information on itinerant services, regional settlement offices, and service options in small communities on the Alberta Service Map, hosted on AAISA's Toolkit ([aaisa.ca/toolkit](http://aaisa.ca/toolkit)).
  - Promote the Alberta Service Map to FCSS offices across Alberta to raise awareness of settlement service types and support referral.
- Support municipalities by developing and promoting resources that support outreach to newcomer communities.
- Identify or develop resources that support municipalities to integrate newcomer inclusion within existing service models and universalist approaches.



## RELATIONSHIP BUILDING AND NETWORK DEVELOPMENT

### Finding:

- Relationship development, partnership, and collaboration are both assets in small communities and areas that can address capacity constraints.
- Development of settlement services can occur through relationships between municipalities and regional settlement agencies.

### Recommendations for AAISA:

- Leverage existing networks to connect with small communities to share information on newcomer needs and promote the settlement and integration sector.
  - This includes FCSS interagency networks and regional groups, as well as building relationships with provincial-level associations including the Family and Community Support Services Association (FCSSA), the Community Learning Network (CLN), and Alberta Urban Municipalities Association (AUMA).
- Facilitate connections between actors in small communities and settlement service providers.
- Adapt language used when engaging with actors in small communities to ensure that the immigrant-focus of AAISA's work is adequately conveyed.

## SETTLEMENT SERVICES

### Finding:

- Frequently, settlement service development in small communities in Alberta occurs through a service provider organization reaching out to a municipality and securing funding for a single settlement worker.
- Newly developed settlement services often have one staff person that works part-time hours.

### Recommendations for AAISA:

- Promote existing resources (e.g. Toolkit) and training to new settlement offices.
- Engage with members who are expanding services to learn more about their efforts to expand services, how the experiences of the settlement staff in these communities may differ from those in urban centres, and discuss what sorts of tailored support are needed for these particular staff.
  - Identify how staff working part-time hours can be accommodated within existing professional development programming.

- Develop professional development opportunities tailored to the needs of settlement workers in small communities.
- Develop engagement opportunities for settlement workers in small communities to support information sharing, relationship building, and professional development.
- Conduct a literature review or engage in research on the efficacy of CALP provided English as a Second Language (ESL)/English Language Learning (ELL) and employment support for newcomers.

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