

Support Networks for Rural Newcomers to Alberta Research Project

PROJECT BACKGROUND

More new Albertans are choosing to live in smaller and rural centres once they arrive in the province. While these rural centres may pose unique challenges due to a less robust network of settlement and integration services, they also hold many inherent benefits. Census data shows that the number of municipalities receiving newcomers in Alberta greatly exceeds the number of municipalities that have newcomer-serving agencies.



For example, more than 25 municipalities that do not have a localized settlement agency show at least 100 newcomers within their borders. In response, the **Support Networks for Rural Newcomers to Alberta Project** is designed to improve both the settlement prospects for newcomers to Alberta's rural regions, and to increase the support capacity of the municipalities in which they choose to settle.

Across the province, rural communities are diverse in terms of their compositions, their immigration histories, newcomer demographics, and available services that result in a unique variety of both community needs and assets.

There are notable examples that showcase the different systems used by municipalities, including:

The Municipality of Hanna utilizes a centralized service model through the Hanna Learning Centre that acts as a central hub for a wide range of services.

Some municipalities, often those in proximity to urban centres, benefit from itinerant programming from those urban centres.

Some towns incorporate welcoming newcomers into their municipal strategy through programs, such as Ponoka's incentive program for new residents.



The **Support Networks for Rural Newcomers to Alberta** project seeks to assess these unique assets given this context of rural communities to build broad capacity, share best practices, and facilitate meaningful collaboration.

WHY NOW?

As there are increasing efforts to retain and attract newcomers to rural communities throughout Alberta, the need for additional programming to meet newcomer needs will also increase. Rural communities play an integral role in the social and economic success of newcomers who reside within them. Ultimately, increased support to newcomer settlement and integration will improve the communities' ability to attract and retain newcomers to support their economies in service of broad rural renewal across the province.

Additionally, AAISA is undertaking the **Support Networks for Rural Newcomers to Alberta Project** to:

Support the settlement and integration of newcomers already living in rural communities and future newcomers planning to relocate through government efforts such as the Government of Alberta's Rural Entrepreneur Immigration Program and the Rural Renewal Immigration Program. These programs endeavor to increase the presence of and retain newcomers in rural communities.

Address the lack of settlement and integration services available to newcomers in rural communities. This project will seek to meet the gap in service access to newcomers through Alberta's rural communities by aligning community assets to their needs which will allow for the ability to be strategic in providing collaborative solutions across municipalities.

Address the population stagnation or decline of Alberta's towns, villages and rural areas (McQuillan & Laszlo, 2022). This project will support the retention and attraction of newcomers in rural municipalities which will in turn create vibrant communities with strong local economies with high rates of employment.

Increase the sustainability of rural communities and understand that the role of immigration and presence of newcomers will undoubtedly increase future prosperity of their community.

Leverage systems, policies, and supports already in place and exporting them to increase the capacity of municipalities to meet the crucial needs of newcomers within their community. Municipalities that are welcoming and inclusive with newcomers feeling socially connected are more likely to retain newcomer populations within their community (Kornelsen, 2018).



Ensure that the broader framework of municipalities are connected to Francophone speaking communities. Currently, there are service gaps present that prevent Francophone newcomers from accessing French language resources and accessing support.

WHAT WILL THE PROJECT DELIVER?

There are five phases of this project:

1. RESEARCH

This phase will include an environmental scan, a literature review, and an individual Needs and Asset Assessments of the participating rural centres.



2. COORDINATION

This phase will serve two main purposes. Firstly, the coordination will begin alongside the research phase to support the outreach and recruitment of municipalities to the project. Secondly, this phase will result in the creation of the Support Network of rural municipalities, which will help guide all aspects of this project. One important aspect of the Coordination phase is to connect Francophone speaking communities to the broader framework of municipalities as well. Currently, the challenge of this demographic to access French language resources and support limit their ability to settle Francophone populations in the province.

3. TOOLKIT DEVELOPMENT

This phase will follow **AAISA's Toolkit** that has a four-year history of developing tools and resources to meet the needs of Alberta's Small Centres. Following the recommendations of the final report of the research phase and the guidance of the rural Support Network, the community assets that have been prioritized to meet the newcomer needs of further municipalities through the development of tools and resources will be actioned accordingly in this phase. This phase will include the supports that are an effective asset for one municipality that can be implemented by others through shared materials and structures.

4. TRAINING

This phase will follow AAISA's long standing program model of Professional Development. Following the recommendations of the final report of the research phase and the guidance of the rural Support Network, the community assets that have been prioritized to meet newcomer needs of further municipalities through the development of training courses will be actioned accordingly in this phase. This phase will include the supports that are an effective asset for one municipality that can be learned for adoption and adaptation by further municipalities.

5. VIRTUAL PLATFORM DEVELOPMENT

This phase will follow AAISA's established platform development model which will focus on structures and programs that are effective in one municipality that can be transformed into online delivery through the creation of virtual programming to meet the needs of further municipalities.

DEFINITION OF NEWCOMER



Please note that when we refer to “**newcomers**”, we are referring to individuals who are new to Canada and have gained **status** in the country through the various entry systems available such as:

- **Permanent residents** who gain this status through the **federal skilled worker** program and **family sponsorship**.
- **Government Assisted Refugees (GAR)** are individuals determined to be a refugee by an organization and given **permanent residence** in Canada with the assistance of the **Canadian Government**.
- **Privately Sponsored Refugees (PSR)** are individuals determined to be a refugee by an organization and **sponsored by a private or community group** to claim refuge in Canada.
- **Temporary residents** are individuals who are given **residence in Canada for a specific period of time**. Temporary residents include Temporary Foreign Workers (TFWs) and those issued **student visas, temporary resident visas or temporary resident permits**.
- **Refugee claimants** are individuals who have travelled into Canada and have **claimed refugee status** and are **awaiting the Canadian governments response to their claim**.

If you are interested in learning more, our [AAISA Toolkit](#) provides more information on various terminologies used in the settlement and integration sector and the various entries of arrival of newcomers into Canada.

WHAT IS THE MUNICIPALITIES' ROLE IN THIS RESEARCH?

Prior to identifying the appropriate municipalities for the project and as a part of the environmental and literature scan, identifying the programming, needs and assets of each municipality is essential. This will allow AAISA to identify municipalities that will benefit from the recommendations that will be formed. Please stay tuned for more details.

Participation in this project will be open for those municipalities who wish to consent.