



SUPPORT NETWORKS FOR RURAL NEWCOMERS TO ALBERTA

RESEARCH REPORT





Research performed for this report took place between fall 2022 and spring 2023.

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LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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


OTHER ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report was authored by Meghan Cunningham, Research and Policy Lead, with contributions from Crystal Guzman, Research and Engagement Lead. Kate McBride and Zahra Rahmani Nooshabadi served as evaluators on this project. AAISA greatly appreciates their highly clarifying contributions.

AAISA would like to extend sincere gratitude to the participants of the Rural Support Network from across Alberta, whose insights, collaboration, and engagement were imperative to these findings. Participating settlement agencies included Brooks County Immigration Services (BCIS) and Francophonie Albertaine Plurielle (FRAP). BCIS is a rural project of Calgary Catholic Immigration Society (CCIS); part of CCIS’ hub and spoke model which serves the communities of Hanna, Drumheller, Brooks, and Taber. FRAP promotes the cultural diversity and inclusion of Francophones for the settlement and resettlement of Francophones in Alberta. Municipal participants work in the following communities:

Claresholm	Paintearth Country
Drayton Valley	Slave Lake
Drumheller	Taber
Fort Macleod	Trochu
Hanna	Two Hills
Hinton	Vegreville
Lac La Biche	Wainwright
Peace River	Wood Buffalo region

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INTRODUCTION AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report discusses preliminary results by the Alberta Association of Immigrant Agencies (AAISA) in the “Support Networks for Rural Newcomers to Alberta” project, or the Rural Support Network. The findings serve as the base for development of resources for rural practitioners, which will proceed through 2023. AAISA looks forward to further collaboration with connections in rural communities in the coming months.

AAISA already provides certain supports to practitioners in small centre and city agencies, including training, toolkit resources, and forums for coordination and collaboration. However, interested staff in rural and remote communities where a dedicated settlement agency is not available do not currently have access to similar supports. (Underlined terms are defined in Appendix A.)

This project sought to create a forum for collaboration among selected rural and remote communities. The communities were chosen because of their high immigration levels, existing relationship with AAISA, and interest in enhancing their settlement capacity. This forum also provides opportunities for rural practitioners to bring their perspective to the development of AAISA resources which would support their settlement services.

Between September 2022 and February 2023, AAISA facilitated two Research Support Network meetings, conducted a Needs and Assets survey as well as one-on-one interviews, initiated a variety of background and lateral discussions with experts in rural settlement, and participated in learning opportunities in rural communities. Through these means, AAISA developed a new understanding of rural communities and laid groundwork for resource development.

Research products

The research phase of this project has culminated in three key products:

- **An account of the “settlement ecosystem” in participating rural areas.** This primarily serves to ensure AAISA is grounded in the context of rural settlement. However, once reviewed by rural participants, AAISA may also promote the account to city and small centre agencies to increase understanding of rural settlement systems. AAISA also envisions that participants may adapt the messaging and diagrams from this account as they desire to discuss their settlement systems with settlement-sector collaborators and community members.
- **A model of potential resources for participants.** AAISA compared its organizational position and resources to the needs of participants to begin generating possibilities for settlement resources that rural staff could use in settlement.
- **A table of barriers and opportunities,** designed based on the initial research by partners Kate McBride and Zahra Rahmani Nooshabadi, which further elaborated the possibilities for tools and resources useful to participants.

Note on terminology

For the sake of brevity, this report regularly refers to participants as “practitioners” or sometimes “interested staff”. However, it is useful to clarify that not all participants were front-line service workers. Many valuable insights came from participants who were economic development officers or served other similar roles, such as grant writing. As the report will review, in rural areas staff are often deeply involved in programs and projects that might be distributed differently in a larger population centre. Further discussion on the roles of participants appears in the demographic section of the report.

Some specialized settlement sector terminology also appears in the report. AAISA learned that certain settlement sector terms are used differently in the generalist context. A key example is the term “newcomer”. Economic development officers might use “newcomer” in the rural context to mean any individual who arrives in town from the city or another province. In this report “newcomer” is used in its settlement-sector sense, that is, an immigrant or refugee.

Other underlined terminology is defined in Appendix A.

PURPOSE

The Support Networks for Rural Newcomers to Alberta project is designed to improve settlement prospects for newcomers to Alberta's rural regions and to support capacity increase for settlement in partnership with municipalities where they choose to settle.

AAISA's role as the settlement sector umbrella organization for Alberta positions the organization to reach out to practitioners and agencies in rural municipalities doing settlement work without the benefit of integration in the wider settlement sector. AAISA provides supports through provincewide networks to small centre and city agencies. This project investigates which similar supports may be most useful to rural practitioners.

Background

More new Albertans who arrive in Canada from abroad are choosing to live in smaller and rural centres. Although rural centres contain many dedicated social services staff, limited resources may inhibit these communities from providing the breadth of newcomer supports available in urban areas. The [Rural Entrepreneur Immigration Program](#) and the [Rural Renewal Immigration Program](#) mark the way to a continued increase of newcomers to diverse locations throughout Alberta (Government of Alberta, 2023a; Government of Alberta, 2023b). As this occurs, the need for additional programming to meet their needs will also increase.

Alberta understands the integral role rural communities, and the newcomers within them, play in the province's economic development. Ultimately, increased support to settlement and integration will improve communities' ability to attract and retain newcomers, serving rural renewal across the province.

Census data shows that the number of municipalities receiving newcomers in Alberta greatly exceeds the number of municipalities that have newcomer-serving agencies. More than 25 municipalities that do not have a localized settlement agency show at least 100 newcomers within their borders. These communities are also quite diverse in terms of their compositions, their immigration histories, newcomer demographics, and available services. As such, there is a unique variety of both community needs and community assets that exist across the province.

For example, locations such as Hanna use 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 city agencies. Other towns incorporate welcoming newcomers into their municipal strategy through programs like Ponoka's incentive program for new residents. Many of these services operate through local [Family and Community Social Services \(FCSS\)](#) funding, a program funded by the Government of Alberta, but each community leverages that funding differently. Municipalities must prioritize certain aspects of newcomer programming over others.

Individual gaps in service availability across the province could potentially be bridged through targeted coordination, training, and remote services support. Currently, coordination of newcomer services across communities is limited to smaller regions benefitting from the partnership of particular city agencies.

Project History

AAISA's [Enhancing Small Centre Collaboration](#) project in March 2021 brought together service providers from across the province's smaller centres and highlighted the need for connection among communities. The report called for "collaboration that aligns with the needs and desires of small centre organization" and found that this collaboration could powerfully impact effective service provision to newcomers.

AAISA then began cultivating a network among rural communities in late 2021. Prior research concluded with a report, "[Municipal Approaches and Settlement System Development in Small Communities](#)," released in February 2022. This report was foundational in increasing AAISA's base of knowledge about service in rural communities.

As part of the beginning of this project, an environmental scan and literature review were conducted. As key project staff shifted, these scans and reviews were further expanded.

The environmental scan served to identify possible municipalities of interest and to familiarize the research team with the communities targeted for recruitment. The information derived through the environmental scan was partially superseded by later, more specific information offered by participants. During the tool development phase of the project which will follow this preliminary research report, a secondary environmental scan is expected to further inform where AAISA can enhance existing supports.

The literature review consisted primarily of existing gray literature on rural settlement, particularly in Alberta and Canada. Academic literature was also taken into account, but because the aims of the project are practical in nature, researchers prioritized understanding the context of investigation specifically in Canada and Alberta.

In the past years, rural settlement has become a topic of great interest to many organizations. Alberta Municipalities (then Alberta Urban Municipalities Association) performed a "[Needs Assessment: Role of Municipalities in Immigration and Settlement](#)" as far back as 2012. AAISA's investigations served partially to update the information in this report.

During the period of this study, several other organizations were working in partnership with rural communities. The Rural Development Network (RDN) released the "[Strengthening Rural Capacity to Support Newcomers](#)" tool in late 2022. RDN also published "[Rural Immigration and Health](#)" in partnership with the University of Alberta, which surveyed four further communities. A handful of AAISA's participant municipalities had worked with RDN recently on these projects.

AAISA's specific contribution is the organization's position within the settlement sector. As an umbrella association, AAISA coordinates training and resources for settlement-sector staff in larger population centres. Bridging the larger settlement sector with smaller communities is one of the possible benefits of this project. AAISA's existing infrastructure and knowledge base also facilitates providing settlement resources to staff.

Stages of Resource Development

The project envisions three stages of resource development following from this research report.

1. Tool development

AAISA's Toolkit has a three-year history of developing tools and resources to meet the needs of Alberta's small centres. The tools and resources developed in this phase will be based on the recommendations from this report. AAISA staff will develop five online tools throughout the second year of the project.

2. Training

The training portion of this project will be created in alignment with AAISA's longstanding Professional Development programs. The training courses developed in this phase will be based on the recommendations from this report and will focus on priority community needs. AAISA training courses are developed to be delivered as online, facilitated courses, typically with 15 hours of course participation over 5-6 modules per course. The exact number of hours and modules per course will vary depending on the subject matter identified through the research and Support Network. The courses will be developed by AAISA staff in conjunction with Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) as required, using the established AAISA Learning Management System (LMS) infrastructure, which already houses dozens of courses. AAISA will develop five courses throughout the second year of the project.

3. Virtual platform development

This final phase follows AAISA's established platform development model. The platform development framework that will be used was generated over the previous two years as part of AAISA's "Digital Transformation of Employment Programming" project, which established infrastructure for virtual platform development. AAISA will create 3-5 online programs through virtual platforms in the following year of this project.

Project History Timeline



PROCESS AND METHODOLOGY

Initial Target Participants

The process of targeting participants began with a prior piece of research performed by Leslie Cramer for AAISA in late 2021. This study focused on the municipal government as a settlement actor and concluded with a report, "[Municipal Approaches and Settlement System Development in Small Communities](#)," released in February 2022.

Due to the scope of the Leslie Cramer's research, all participants in that study were individuals directly employed by a municipal government, as opposed to organizations operating in settlement within the rural context. Roughly half the participants were economic development officers who promoted immigration from a strategic lens but were not direct providers of social services. The other half consisted of managers and service providers in social services funded through Alberta's provincial [FCSS](#) program.

The situation in rural communities was found to be of considerable interest. It became clear that in rural areas there were highly differing approaches to settlement, which could influence a newcomer's journey in Canada. Many communities were leaders in their approach to fostering settlement and integration for newcomers, but without pre-existing connections with the rest of the settlement sector, they faced challenges finding resources and supports for their efforts.

"Municipal Approaches and Settlement System Development in Small Communities" suggested that spaces for collaboration to enable knowledge sharing among rural practitioners would create conditions that increase the success of newcomer settlement. AAISA saw an opportunity to support these practitioners by using its position at the centre of existing provincial network meetings to bring them together in a space to facilitate collaboration. This space also serves as a foundational feedback group to design professional development aimed at individuals involved with

settlement in rural areas. AAISA applied for a grant from the Government of Alberta in September of 2021 to perform this project.

Recruitment of Participants

Given that the participants in the prior research study had already had contact with AAISA, they were the first to be considered as potential participants. After the initial research and background stage, outreach to these participants began in late 2022.

As the recruitment phase continued, and as the research team connected with practitioners and other experts in the sector on background, it became clear that the initial scope of the study would have to expand to accurately reflect settlement activities taking place in rural areas. Many organizations that are not directly part of the municipal government contribute to the settlement system in rural areas.

A prominent example is adult learning centres, also known as [Community Adult Learning Programs](#) (CALPs), centres funded by Alberta Advanced Education to provide services such as adult literacy, which often offer English as a Second Language courses, can become a significant touchpoint for rural newcomers. Other organizations like libraries, community colleges, and churches also play major roles.

City-based and small-centre-based settlement organizations have made inroads in a number of rural communities and have settlement staff working there. With this in mind, the recruitment expanded to include individuals from these types of organizations.

While these individuals have an extremely important role in settlement in the communities where they operate, cold-targeting municipalities where AAISA had no pre-existing connections, as opposed to beginning with settlement agencies operating in rural areas, proved to be a revealing process. Through

this approach, AAISA observed that the majority of participating municipalities did not have a partnering settlement agency at the time of recruitment. In some municipalities, it could be possible that dedicated settlement organizations are providing itinerant services or other types of partnership services which network participants were not aware of. For example, Settlement Workers in Schools (SWIS) may be present in some municipalities without the knowledge of network participants, since those participants do not necessarily work with school-age children. That said, based on public information and network participant discussion, AAISA estimates that only five of the thirty-five participant municipalities targeted in this way had a pre-existing relationship with a settlement agency.

The following questions were proposed when defining the scope of outreach of the project:

- Who has direct impact on the settlement and integration process of newcomers?
- Who do newcomers first encounter upon arrival?
- Who else has informal or community expertise?

With these questions in mind, a list of thirty-five potential participants was compiled, which included the municipality, agency/organization, and main contact information (name, email, phone number). The main recruitment method used was contacting the participants by phone. Email recruitment was used in the past and was found to have a very low response and engagement rate, while phone calls were found to be more engaging. Additionally, speaking on the phone with (potential) participants allowed for easier snowball sampling in participant recruitment. Snowball sampling involves asking current participants to refer the project to people whom they think would be interested in or would benefit from joining the project. The snowball sampling method allowed the list of thirty-five to expand to forty-one. This list may continue to grow as the project progresses.

Once the participants agreed to join the Support Network for Rural Newcomers to Alberta project, AAISA shared several tools and resources with them and sent follow-up communications outlining the project goals and participant information, along with an invitation

to join a private group on SettleNet.org. The private group was created for all participants to share resources applying to rural settlement and integration, participate in open discussions, and connect with one another. AAISA also regularly shares resources on this platform such as but not limited to toolkits, events, and information guides. The goal of this platform is for sustainability and longevity of the research project. Participants can continue to connect and contribute to this group long after the project finishes in 2024.

Survey Development

The full text of the survey can be found in Appendix A.

The survey was developed by two successive Research and Policy Leads to gain a baseline understanding of the needs and assets of participant municipalities. The research vision was that the survey would be sent out to all Support Network participants to begin the process of cataloguing their settlement services. This would be reinforced by interview participation and by the independent environmental scan. It also served as a “baseline” description of the municipality and its services, which the Research and Policy Lead could use later when developing the individualized interview protocol for those survey-takers who went on to participate in a research interview.

Participants were given an indefinite amount of time, constrained only by the demands of the grant timeline, to complete the survey. Network members were overall very responsive to the survey. Although there was no strict deadline, the large majority of participants submitted a response, with only a handful of individual reminders sent out by the research team. Only one response was requested from each community. Fifteen responses to the survey were ultimately collected.

On the final page of the survey, an option was provided to participate in one-on-one interviews. Six participants requested to participate in an interview. The Research and Policy Lead made contact with any individuals seeking one-on-one interviews to schedule.

Interviews later provided several interesting lessons learned about the design of the survey. For example,

many interview participants interpreted particular questions or answers differently from the researcher's intent. "Umbrella association" is an example of a jargon term used in the survey that ultimately proved to be confusing to participants. In future, the possibility of a trusted research participant "previewing" the survey could be considered.

One-on-One Interviews

Interviews commenced shortly after the survey was launched and after the first Rural Support Network meeting—the first meeting took place on November 10, 2022, and the first research interview only seven working days later.

The interviews were taken with a relatively open, unstructured approach. Due to the low level of context possessed by the interviewer about the occupational environment and the services provided by the participants, it was important that the interviews be allowed to follow the participant's areas of knowledge and comfort. The interviews aimed to build bridges with participants as much as to derive data, and the former purpose was held above the latter.

The interview protocol used as a loose structure contained five sections:

- A "baseline" section covering demographics and general questions about the community's experience with newcomers
- A section that used the participant's survey responses as a jumping-off point for discussion of their specific barriers and assets
- A review of the partnerships and the outreach efforts participants disclosed in the survey responses
- An investigation of particular gaps in training and information that participants might experience
- A discussion of participants' aspirations and visions for their community.

Of the six participants, one was an English language teacher, two were economic development officers or had posts adjacent to economic development, and the remaining three worked in FCSS. As of the time of writing, no participants in the larger network who were employees of larger settlement agencies partnering with rural areas chose to participate in interviews. As a result, as will be elaborated in sections below, the interview data findings are only able to speak to the needs of municipal and institutional staff in "generalist" positions.

Data Analysis

Analysis of the interview data in particular relied heavily on an emergent, descriptive coding process following loosely the tenets of Grounded Theory coding as described, for instance, in Saldaña (2009). This approach was considered appropriate because of the breadth of the topics treated with in the interviews. The interviews were exploratory and an existing explanatory framework that would provide pre-existing codes according to which the data could be themed was not available. Taking an emergent coding approach attempts to guard against misses due to the limited scope of a researcher's pre-existing knowledge.

After an initial coding cycle, categories in the data began to surface and the analysis was further aligned with the specific goals of the project. The scope of the stated purpose of the project was to support practitioners in rural areas with settlement and ultimately to produce resources that would support them. Considering this purpose, two important questions arose in and followed from the data:

- Who is performing settlement services in Alberta's rural communities?
- How can these practitioners best be supported by AAISA?

Findings of the analysis are described further in later sections.

Other coding cycles were performed as permitted by the scope of the research to reinforce and investigate themes appearing in the network discussions, conversations with background experts, and supplementary information gathered in the course of recruitment and analysis around the project.

Notably, demographic information about each participant's role, the services they provide, their funding situation, the specific industries operating in each participant community, their Rural Renewal or Rural Entrepreneur stream status, and other information was coded in order to provide an at-a-glance picture of the community context for each interview.

Feedback and Evaluation

Prior to the final public version of this research report, a number of types of feedback were solicited by researchers. Preliminary findings were presented at the AAISA Virtual Conference in February 2023 and at the national Metropolis conference in March 2023. Professional evaluators partnered with AAISA to review the report, process, and findings between February and April 2023. Research participants were also offered the opportunity to comment on the research report in writing prior to and after a key network meeting in April 2023 and as part of that meeting.

Feedback aided the research team in detailing points in the findings that proved to be unclear and in furthering AAISA's understanding of the rural context. Evaluators were particularly vital in clarifying the connection between the findings and recommendations by introducing a needs and assets matrix, which itself was reviewed separately by rural practitioners for adjustment. The same evaluators also provided a number of important and helpful suggestions related to future stages of the report, which have been reviewed and incorporated as appropriate in the Recommendations section of this report.

Limitations

Project methodology was limited by a delayed start time due to organizational challenges outside of the research team's control, such as delays in hiring the key investigator for the project after staff shifted roles internally. Given the highly contracted timeline, the team concentrated effort toward the quality of core deliverables.

The recruitment process faced challenges due to limited access to rural practitioners. AAISA had only a limited pre-existing reach in the rural communities targeted by the project. Later stages of the project were also impacted by the need to build relationships and buy-in. As discussed below, rural practitioners, while generally highly engaged and interested in learning about the settlement sector, have a high workload. They are generalists who must divide their time among all the possible challenges facing their community. Participants were primarily discovered through word-of-mouth and snowball sampling as described above.

However, participation was more dedicated from a core group, mostly (but not all) one-on-one interview participants. Further measures will be taken to bring in practitioners who may be more capable of allocating their limited time to the project as it progresses and stabilizes, given the opportunity to make use of specific tools and resources. Additionally, AAISA will continue to seek to make connections in the sector through parallel channels. For example, AAISA team members attended an in-person rural immigration table held by a participant municipality in December and continue to seek out similar opportunities.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Participant Demographics

At the time of writing, a total of twenty-two participants from sixteen communities and two settlement agencies have agreed to take part in the Rural Support Network. Their level of engagement with the survey, interviews and meetings have differed, but AAISA hopes to continue to expand the core of participants who have been highly engaged with settlement issues. The map to the right shows the locations of participating communities.

On the following page, a table shows the percentage of newcomers in communities with municipal staff participants. The percentage comes from a combination of the Statistics Canada category for “immigrants” and the category for “temporary residents”, such as temporary foreign workers and refugees. This category is also reported as a percentage of the overall newcomer population. Note that Statistics Canada data, despite best efforts on the part of the collectors, is likely to leave out data from some under-reported communities, particularly those that have limited familiarity with the purposes of the census or who have reason to distrust or discount government communications. For example, individuals without status are not included in the records.

Figure 1 - Map of participating communities

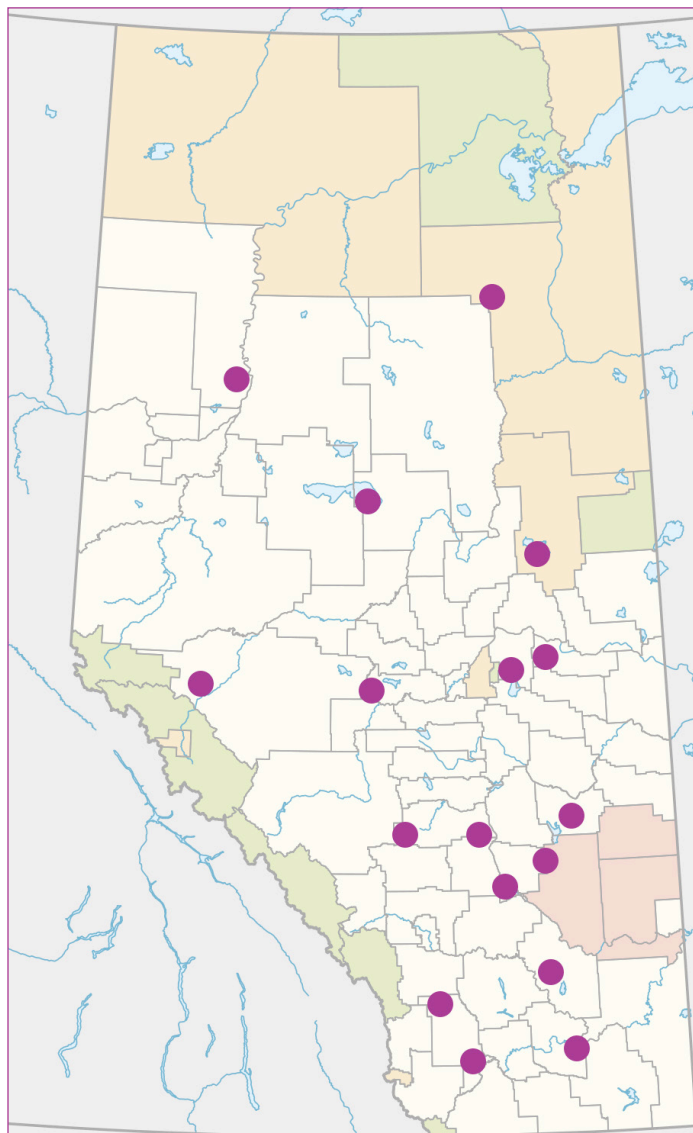


Table 1 - Participant community newcomer populations
[Statistics Canada 2021 data](#)

Community	Population	Newcomer population
Claresholm	3,804	135 (8.0% non-permanent status)
Drayton Valley	7,291	395 (19.7% non-permanent status)
Drumheller	7,909	530 (20.5% non-permanent status)
Fort Macleod	3,297	215 (22.9% non-permanent status)
Hanna	2,394	220 (10.0% non-permanent status)
Hinton	9,817	770 (21.3% non-permanent status)
Lac La Biche	9,636	365 (7.4% non-permanent status)
Peace River	6,619	570 (9.5% non-permanent status)
Paintearth County	1,990	0 ¹
Slave Lake	6,651	795 (21.4% non-permanent status)
Taber	8,860	715 (11.2% non-permanent status)
Trochu	1,000	120 (33.3% non-permanent status)
Two Hills	1,443	265 (% non-permanent status uncertain)
Vegreville	5,690	320 (% non-permanent status uncertain—high influx of Ukrainian refugees after 2021 data collection)
Wainwright	6,270	605 (4.3% non-permanent status)

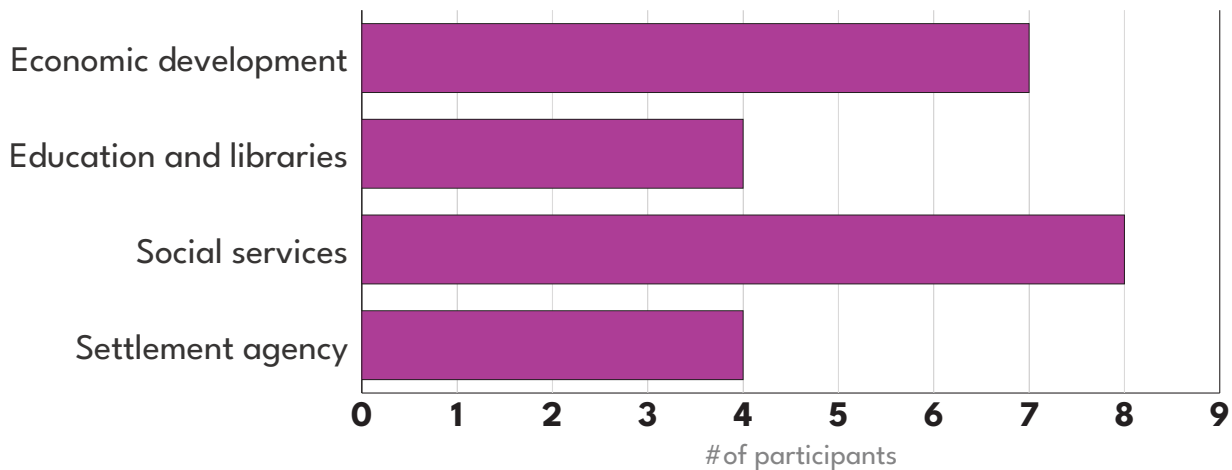
Notes on methodology: “Newcomer population” is a sum of Statistics Canada’s numbers for “Immigrants 2011 – 2021” and “Non-permanent residents” (Statistics Canada differentiates between “immigrants” on permanent status visas and “non-permanent residents” on temporary visas.) The year cut off has been chosen for simplicity of reporting, but newcomers who arrived earlier than 2011 may still access settlement services. The “population” number used is the “general” population number; the population number used by Statistics Canada for citizenship and immigration reporting is typically slightly smaller.

For reasons of scale, communities that are served by participating settlement organizations, but which do not have a separate municipal participant on the network, are not included in the table above. For example, Francophonie Albertaine Plurielle, the participating organization covering Wood Buffalo, covers several communities, and those communities do not appear in the table.

¹ Although Statistics Canada lists no immigrants in this time period, support network discussions with Paintearth County detail that there are newcomers in the community.

The participants differ in their roles in the community. The majority of participants work in FCSS offices or economic development offices – about equal numbers. A smaller number of participants work in libraries and CALPs, and another number worked in a settlement agency or other development agency that held offices in rural areas.

Figure 2 - Rural Support Network Participants by Role



Survey Data:

Overall Impressions and Key Findings

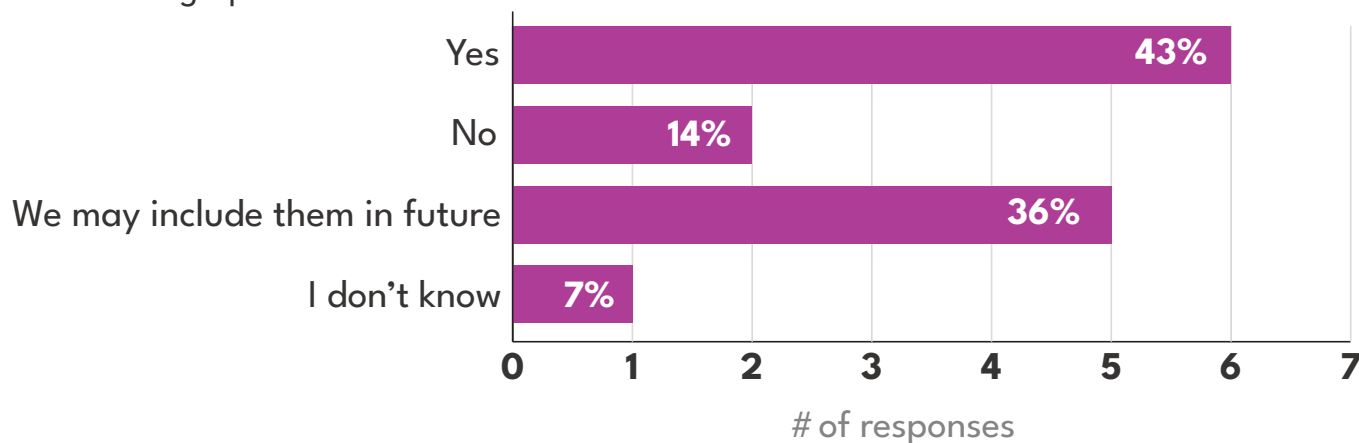
The survey provides an overview of participant community services. As noted above, some details of participant services are not available in such an overview due to the nature of inquiry by survey. Interview data supplements the information from the survey below.

Communities with multiple participants were asked to enter only one survey response. As a consequence, the survey results theoretically reflect the demographics of the communities, not the demographics of the participants. Different individuals within a single community may have different perspectives on the community's services and different sources of information. The results are useful, however, to provide a general sense of the network.

Overall, as might be expected based on their decision to participate in the network, participants demonstrated that they considered newcomer issues important and would like to see their communities continue to welcome newcomers.

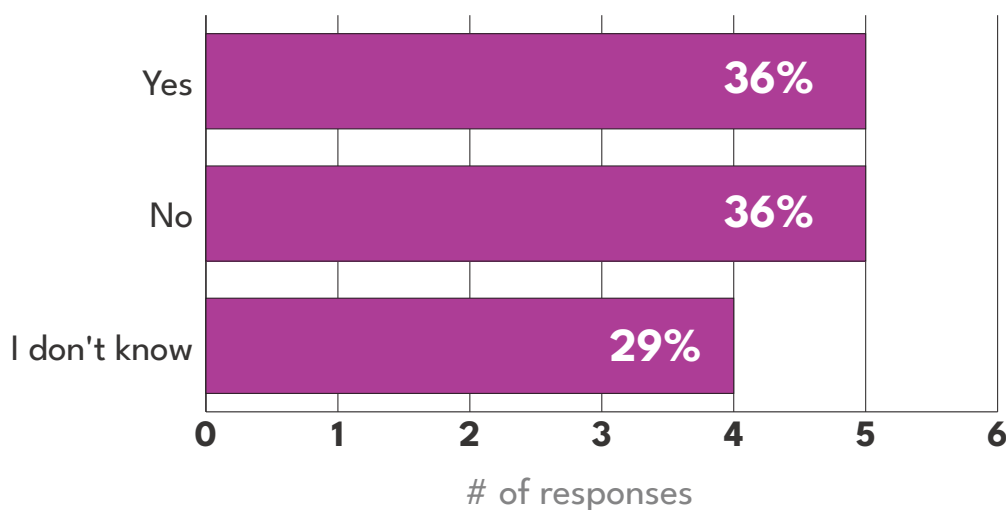
The figure on the following page shows that just under half of participants included services to newcomers in their strategic plan. However, another significant portion could foresee these services appearing in their planning in the future.

Figure 3 - Does the community you work with incorporate services to immigrants and refugees into its strategic plan?



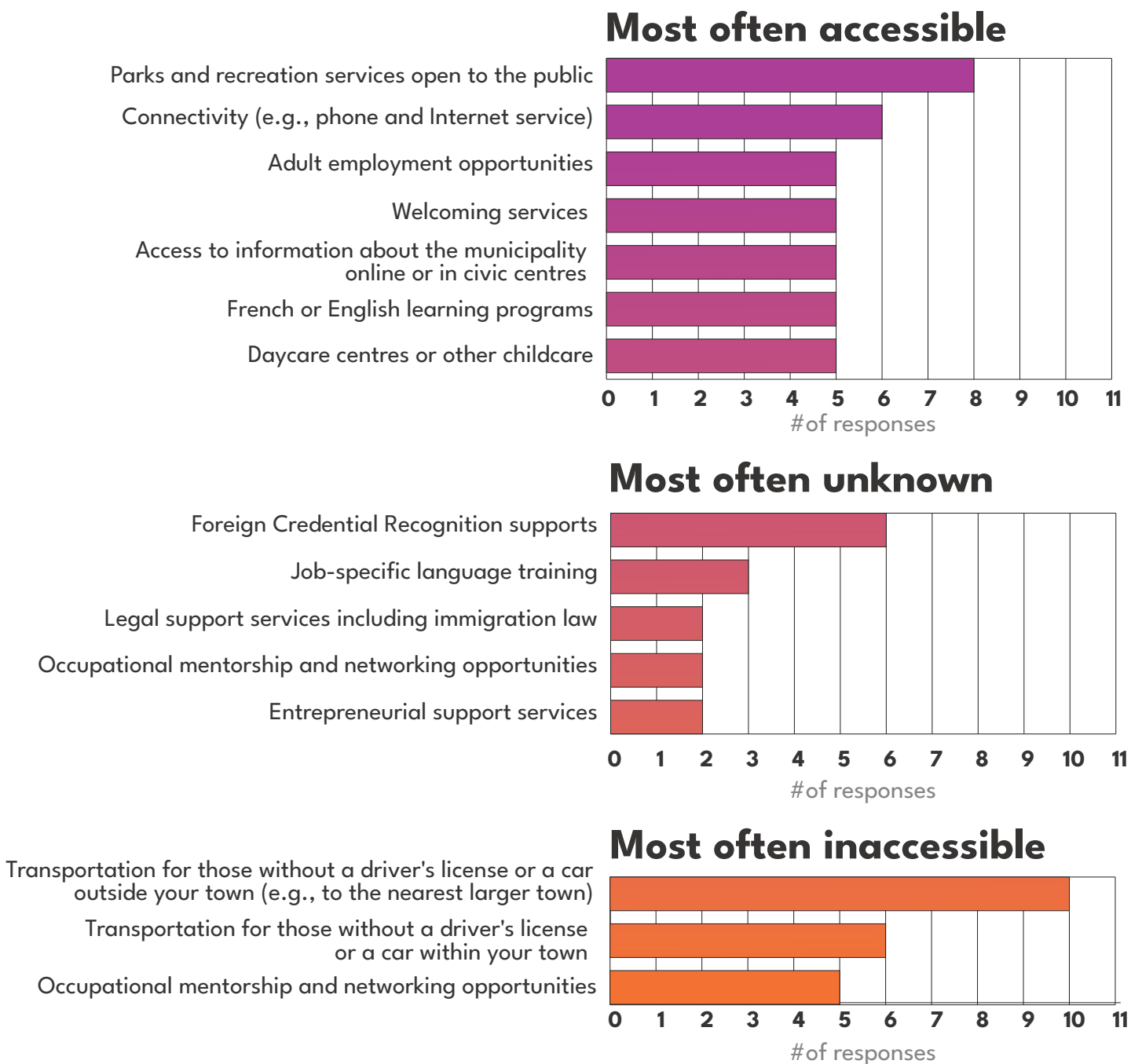
The existing presence of outreach to newcomers was also mixed, with about equal numbers of participants stating that they did, did not, and weren't sure about their outreach to newcomers.

Figure 4 - Does your municipality have any outreach efforts to direct immigrants and refugees to settlement services and information?



The survey asked participants to weigh in on the availability of various newcomer services in their community. A long list of possibilities was offered, and it became clear through interviews that participants interpreted the options in several different ways. Not all the statistics are offered here for this reason. However, the trends in which services are most available, which least available, and which least known may be of interest, and these are presented in **Figure 4**.

Figure 4 - Services most often rated “accessible”, “not accessible”, or “unknown.”



The participants stated that the biggest barriers to providing services to newcomers were transportation and housing by a large margin. As these results became clear, transportation and housing were selected as topics to explore in interviews. Collaboration and dedicated staff were held up as major factors in success of existing efforts to welcome newcomers.

Figure 5 - In your opinion, what are the greatest gaps preventing immigrants and refugees from settling in your municipality?

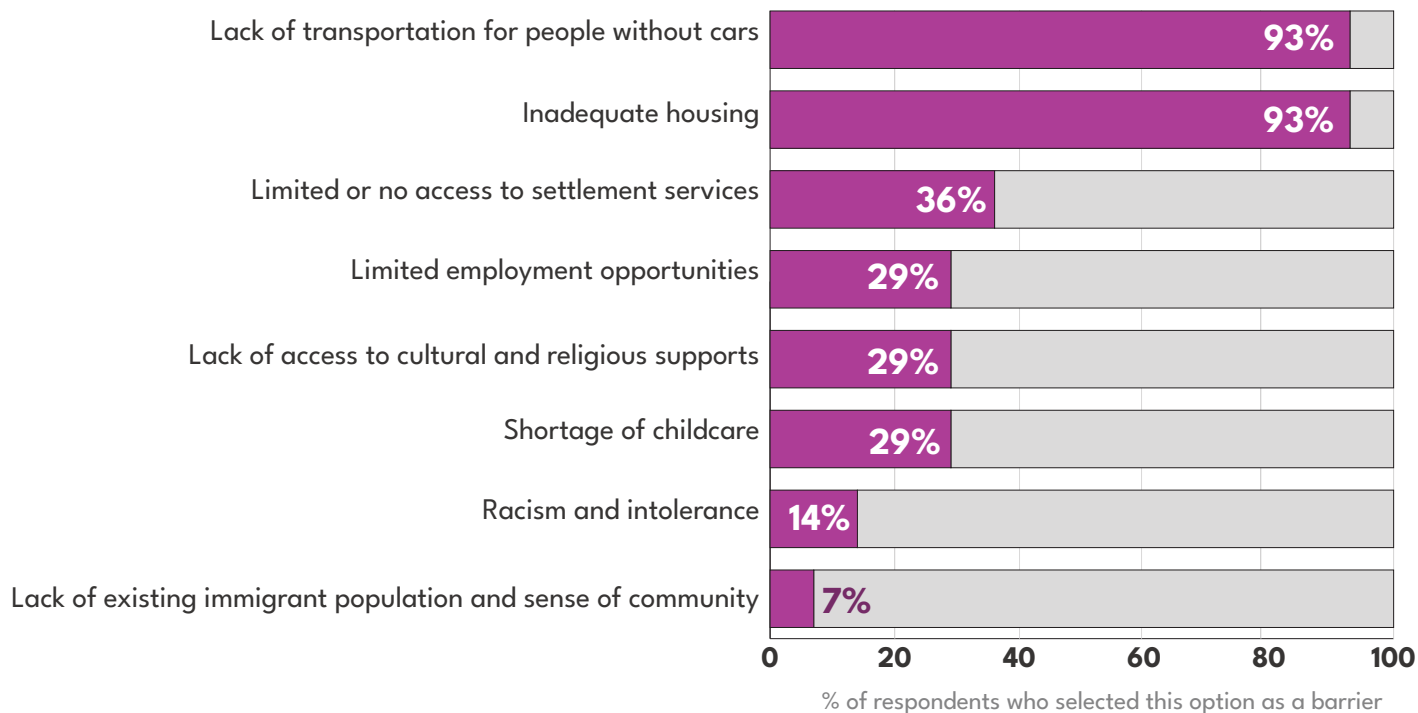
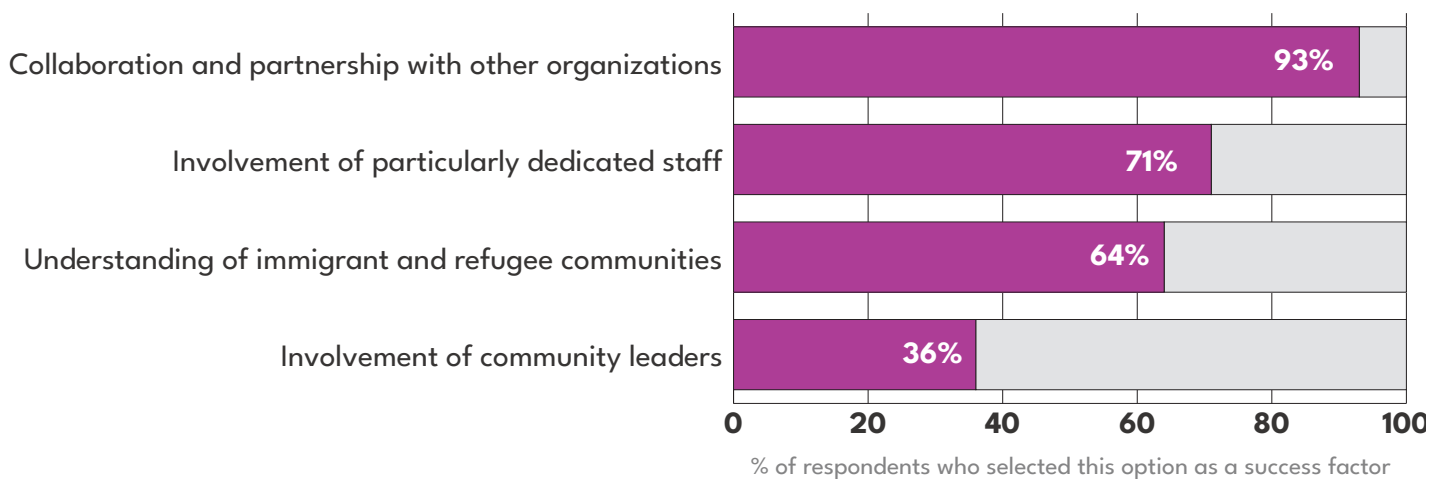


Figure 6 - In your opinion, what have been the most important factors in the success of any existing efforts to settle immigrants and refugees in your community?



Finally, the survey asked participants to indicate what types of services they would find most helpful from AAISA. Information resources, professional development, and connections with service providers in other regions were considered most useful, with research a lower priority.

Figure 7 - AAISA helps organizations provide services to immigrants and refugees in a number of ways. Which of the following services would be most useful to your community?



Interview Data: Overall Impressions

The generalist approach to settlement

As noted above, all of the interviewees whose testimony AAISA analyzed as part of the initial research phase were employees of municipalities and of municipally-funded institutions. Their situation differs from dedicated settlement staff of larger agencies who partner with rural areas to deliver services. Further discussions with these partner settlement agencies in the communities where they operate would inform the data further. In the meantime, the account below is specifically an account of the situation of those network participants where no dedicated settlement agency is present.

That said, the majority of network participants overall were in this situation. At the beginning of recruitment, only three of the thirty-five targeted municipalities had a partnership with a dedicated settlement agency.

The interviews and surveys made the complex system of settlement supports in very rural areas clear. In the absence of a dedicated settlement system, other actors and assets become central to the newcomer settlement journey and the provision of settlement services, even in roles that, in a larger centre, would be focused on other topics.

Economic development officers, for example, formed a significant portion of the network, and were involved in the selection of newcomers as nominees for the Rural Renewal stream in many municipalities. Early on, a rural expert consulted for background information alerted researchers that libraries and community colleges were important sources of settlement support, which was borne out by the data and testimony later in the project. Adult learning centres, which in some communities are combined with employment centres, often provide language classes to the community's newcomers and in doing so become a contact for many other types of settlement needs. Generalist social services providers, mostly funded through the FCSS program in this sample, also extend their efforts to newcomers.

This overall “generalist” approach to settlement services has benefits and downsides. For example, participants were able to make thoughtful comparisons in a holistic manner among different vulnerable groups and their needs. They also benefited from existing connections among a wide variety of service providers and agencies. For example, because they worked on homelessness as well as settlement, they had clear pictures of the landscape in social housing and nonprofit

Reaching newcomers in rural areas

Newcomers make up just under 10% of the population in some participant municipalities, and significant populations were present in all communities studied. While the history of immigration is long in several participant municipalities, with a number of municipalities having histories of significant in-migration from abroad stretching back to the 1970s, for a number of reasons newcomers may fall “off the radar.”

This should not by any means be considered a failing of rural municipalities or the dedicated practitioners working with them, but rather a more generally symptomatic phenomenon that points to the difficulties of stretching limited resources to cover a wide variety of social and human needs.

For example, researchers heard from several participants and background sources that newcomers were at times reluctant to pursue services for a variety of understandable social and structural reasons. Some newcomers had precarious statuses, and others had the mindset of “sticking it out” until they could obtain permanent residency and move out to a city where services and support would be more easily available. Additionally, participants stated that some newcomers sought services from grassroots ethnocultural associations rather than municipal services where available.

Finally, it should be noted that structural factors may prevent newcomers from easily accessing services at all even if they would like to, which can create “blind spots”. For example, newcomers, especially sponsored family members and spouses, may not have strong capacity in either official language resulting in isolation from services in rural municipalities where translation services are harder to locate. Also, newcomers who have extremely demanding work schedules, who live outside town in employer-provided housing without transportation, are likely to have a difficult time locating services, let alone accessing them.

An additional complication in rural municipalities is that it is much more uncommon in rural municipalities, as opposed to elsewhere, for social services staff themselves to come from a newcomer or second-generation background. In the support network, only two individuals had moved to Canada from abroad (at

some remove of time). One opportunity for rural municipalities to build their cross-cultural capacity would be to seek to hire social services staff with experience navigating the immigration system.

Collaboration and vulnerability to context change

Rural immigration has only recently begun to fall under the spotlight of higher-government attention, with the Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot and the Alberta government’s similar program launching under Premier Jason Kenney in 2022. The increased focus on rural immigration can result in both increased opportunities for funding and increased demands on service systems.

Luckily, in many rural municipalities the many different actors in settlement services benefit from a strong network of collaboration. However, the existence of that network from place to place depends on highly individual factors, such as the histories and personalities involved. In some locations, collaboration networks such as interagency tables had been in place for 20 years or more. Other communities struggled with changes in this context. For example, changing relationships between the town and the organizations it funds can influence service delivery. Other examples of these changes include replacement of leaders in the network with new staff whose priorities lay elsewhere, as well as variations of funding and policy flowing down from higher governments.

Describing Rural Settlement Systems: Triangulating the Survey and Interview Data

Without in-depth interviews with a larger number of support network participants, a descriptive and detailed picture of the needs and assets in every municipality is difficult. The information derived from the survey, for instance, is necessarily partial. The ultimate objective is to build relationships with support network participants throughout the remainder of the project. This will yield information that can be shared among participants and among other settlement agencies. In the meantime, this research report outlines some of the preliminary context absorbed from the initial work of relationship building and interagency discussion.

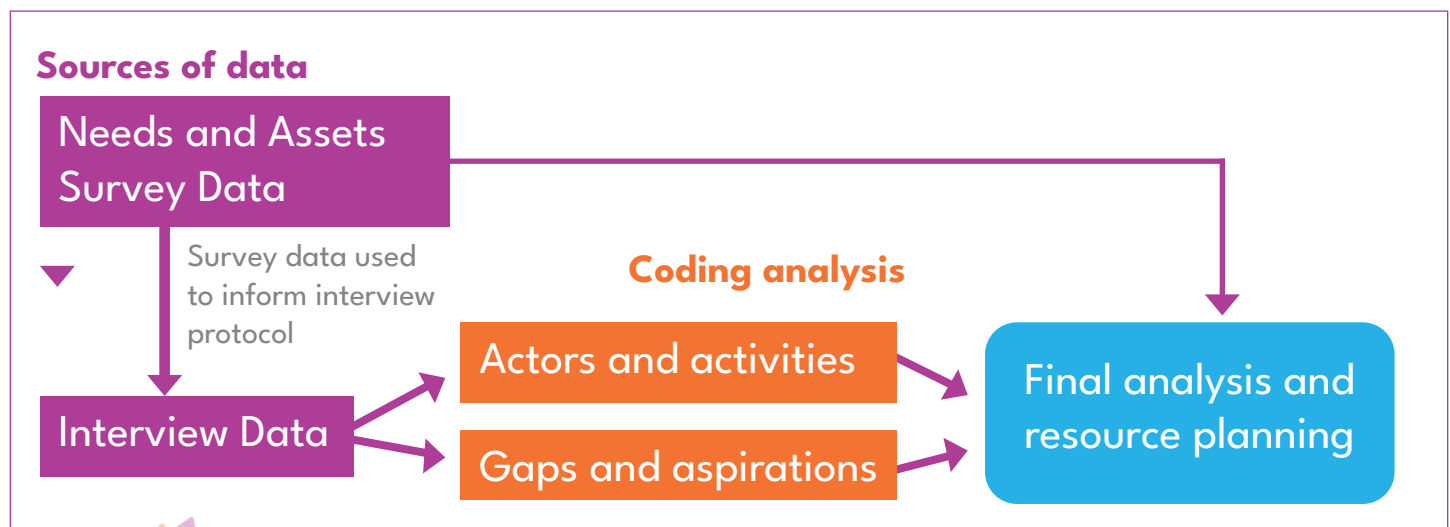
The assets of one municipality are not necessarily commensurable with the assets of the next in many respects. As mentioned above, differing histories and personalities in each case create complex pictures. In rural areas in particular, where single members of staff may be the driving force behind entire programs, systems behave differently depending on individual factors and aims that cannot necessarily be captured in a survey format. Therefore, interviews helped researchers develop informal case study-style understandings of what organizations meant when they answered, for instance, that they had in place welcoming and outreach services, or that they collaborated with local institutions of higher learning.

Both the survey and interview data are holistically considered in two sections of analysis below. The analysis is based on the two main coding cycles of the interview data.

The **actors and activities** coding cycle allows the research to sketch the various agencies and collaboration networks that contribute to settlement services in rural areas. An exhaustive description would be impossible, but the analysis seeks to improve understanding in the general settlement sector of the situation that rural agencies face. This section corresponds to the account of the “settlement ecosystem” discussed in the introduction.

The **gaps and aspirations** coding cycle allows the research to consider how AAISA could position itself to provide resources that communities asked for directly, or to support them in other ways to meet their goals and face their challenges. This section corresponds to the model of possible resources discussed in the introduction.

Figure 8 - Process of data analysis



Actors and Activities:

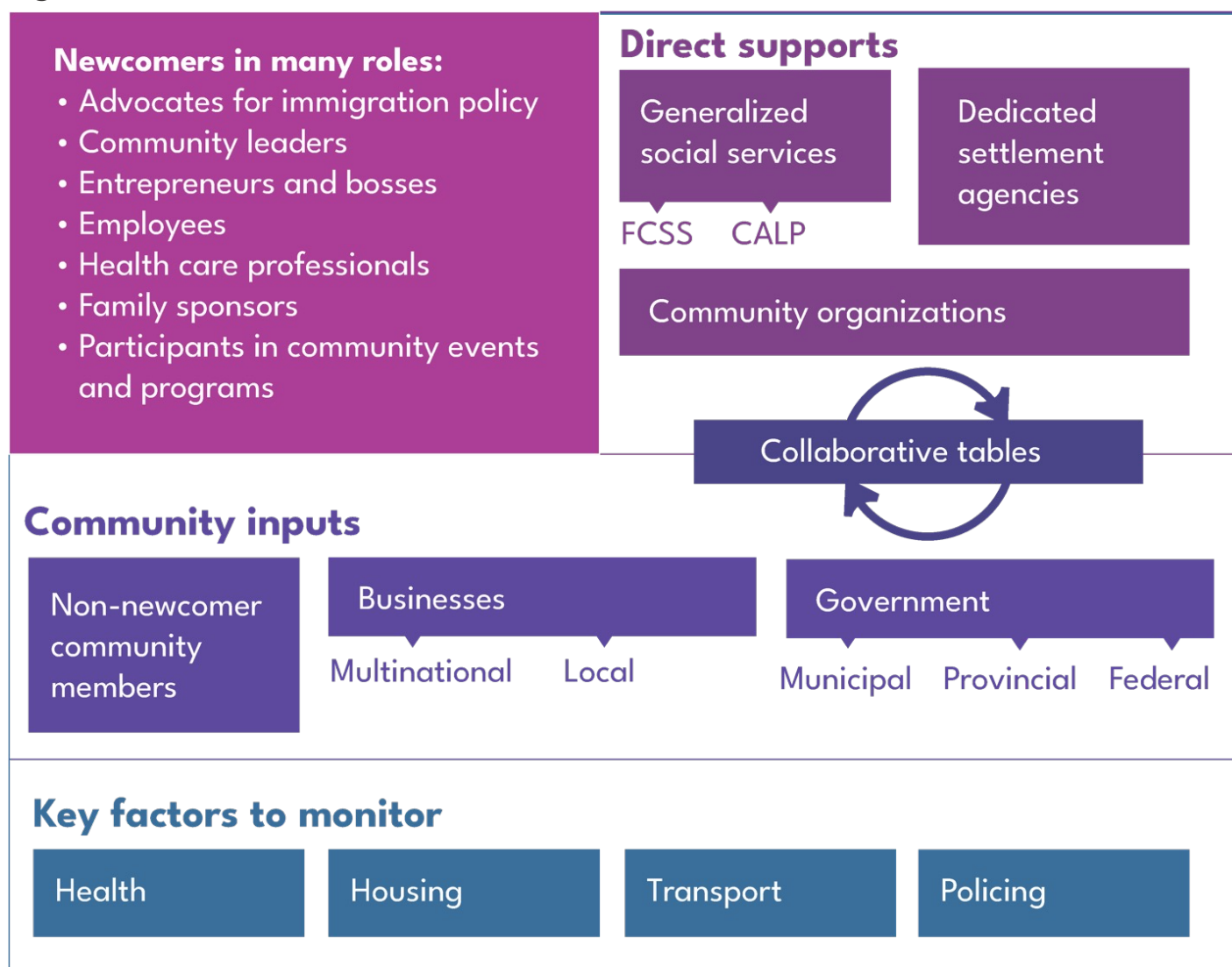
An Account of Participant Settlement Ecosystems

The graphic below (**Figure 9**) is a representation of the findings of the “actors and activities” coding cycle. An extensive analysis which moves through each of the codes and their subcategories can be found in Appendix C.

An important note is that the diagram below is **not intended to serve as a final or definitive representation** of rural areas. It merely reflects the **coding categories** that appeared in the interviews. Readers should also recall that the data comes exclusively from practitioners, and not from newcomers themselves.

The actors and activities described are organized into three categories: organizations that support newcomers directly in the local rural context, community organizations and actors that can dwaffect supports, and key “topics to monitor” that can be facilitators or barriers to settlement.

Figure 9 - Actors and activities from interview data



Where differentiation between types of organizations is important, subcategories are indicated in the graphic. For example, for generalized social services, in the rural context, FCSS offices and CALP organizations are extremely important. Businesses often behave differently as actors depending on whether they are small-scale local businesses or multinational businesses—both hire newcomers as employers, including temporary foreign workers. The differentiation between municipal, provincial, and federal government is also very important, as each of these levels of government has different powers and priorities when it comes to settlement.

For newcomers themselves, all the subcategories that were noted from the interview data are listed in the graphic. This emphasizes the many roles newcomers play in the community. The list is limited to situations that interview participants happened to mention. However, it provides a useful example of the variety of ways that newcomers interface with settlement systems.

This diagram shows a complex system with many components.

Direct social service providers

In rural contexts, **generalized social services** are more common than **dedicated settlement agencies**. Only a few communities among the sample had a dedicated settlement worker, including Claresholm, Drumheller, Hanna, and Kneehill County. Drumheller and Hanna shared partnership with a representative of Brooks County Immigration Services (BCIS). BCIS is part of CCIS's growing hub and spoke model that provide settlement services to Calgary's surrounding areas. CCIS's other hubs include Foothills Community Immigrant Services, providing services to High River, Okotoks, and Strathmore; Rocky View Immigrant Services, which includes Airdrie, Chestermere, and Cochrane; and Willow Creek Immigrant Services, which serves the communities of Claresholm, Stavely, and Nanton. These hubs work with municipalities to attract, retain, and integrate newcomers in these communities. Other areas had incorporated settlement services explicitly into existing programs, such as Kneehill Adult Learning and Newcomer Services, which incorporated

dedicated settlement services with Kneehill County's Community Adult Learning Program. CALPs often offer English as a Second Language, and dedicated ESL teachers are the next most common type of settlement worker in the rural contexts reviewed in the study.

Community organizations, such as ethnocultural organizations and churches, also offer supports. Indeed, in some cases they may be the primary source of support, especially for strong ethnocultural organizations such as those that Filipino newcomers maintained in several communities.

Several rural participants attested that in some cases **businesses** also provide direct services. Their attitudes toward these efforts were positive; for instance, they spoke of multinational businesses that provided settlement workers to employees and businesses that provided housing to newcomers. While housing accommodations provided by employers are typical in some immigration programs, due care must be provided to ensure that housing meets standards and that the vulnerabilities introduced by living in employer-provided housing are counterbalanced by protections and accountability. The federal government, for instance, is in the process of performing a review of the regulations around housing for temporary foreign workers (Government of Canada, 2022).

Community inputs

Other institutions and actors within the community are not direct service providers, but can still influence a newcomer's settlement journey to a large degree. **Non-newcomer community members** play a role; they may themselves be sponsors of refugees or employers of temporary foreign workers, or they may simply be community members whose attitudes will influence how newcomers integrate. **Businesses**, both multinational and local, may be a newcomer's employer and in some cases the sponsor of their visa.

Governments, at all levels, technically have the strategic reins of immigration policy, and the federal government ultimately makes visa decisions. Municipal governments may have limited policy leeway compared to the other levels of government. Governments are equally as often in the position of responding to

Key factors to monitor

Four key factors in settlement success identified in this analysis were health, housing, transportation, and policing. (**Note:** *policing had a considerably less privileged status than the other three factors and arose primarily out of investigation of certain survey responses, but is reported here for completeness.*)

Housing and transportation were the two factors most often identified as barriers by participants in the survey and were chosen as topics to investigate further in interview responses. Both of these major infrastructural issues troubled rural participants. Contrary to a common perception in cities, **housing shortages** affect rural areas equally, since although rents may be lower, availability is reduced.

Transportation is also a barrier; the majority of interview participants indicated that dial-a-bus programs were the only available public transport, often on restricted hours and sometimes with other usability restrictions. Participants floated several innovative ideas, such as volunteer driver matching services of a type that can be found to some extent in cities, and even partnering with the school district to use school buses.

Health was another area of concern. Availability of doctors in rural areas is of general interest and issues with access to health care are exacerbated for newcomers. Health was, however, the source of a positive story from one participant who was herself a newcomer, who spoke of receiving culturally sensitive and empathetic care from a rural doctor in her first period in Canada.

Participants spoke of newcomers in their capacity as health care providers even more often than they discussed issues of health care access for newcomers. One interview participant stated that all doctors in her area were newcomers. Another stated that a local community college offered ESL classes specifically for nursing.

Finally, **policing** was discussed in a few interviews, specifically those where participants had made a point of indicating on the survey their partnerships with RCMP and other peace officers. In these cases they spoke positively of the partnerships. The role of rural

police in ensuring respect and safety for newcomers could be worth investigating further, since the most vulnerable newcomers may have fears of deportation or may be living without status, and since in worst-case scenarios newcomers may be forced to access police services when discrimination or exploitation occurs.

These key factors are influenced by a large number of social and structural forces and must be approached incrementally. AAISA aimed to identify where its existing resources could be leveraged to support rural staff in these incremental changes.

Gaps and Aspirations: A Model of Possible Resources

Following the “actors and activities” coding cycle, researchers reviewed the instances where participants had indicated what resources they thought would be helpful and what they hoped to see in their community in a “gaps and aspirations” coding cycle. Using these points of discussion, two themes for resources in particular were identified where AAISA’s contribution might be helpful: **information needs** and **relationships and outreach**.

Two other themes from the data are areas where AAISA cannot act directly: **government policy changes** and **participant program changes**. These themes are still useful to contextualize challenges and also as cues for areas where AAISA could support efforts for change from other parties.

For example, while AAISA cannot directly change government policies in municipal governments or at higher levels, there is potential for AAISA to develop policy briefs and recommendations for these governments. Similarly, participants often spoke of desires to offer new programs. While AAISA cannot provide resources for these programs directly, support may be useful to

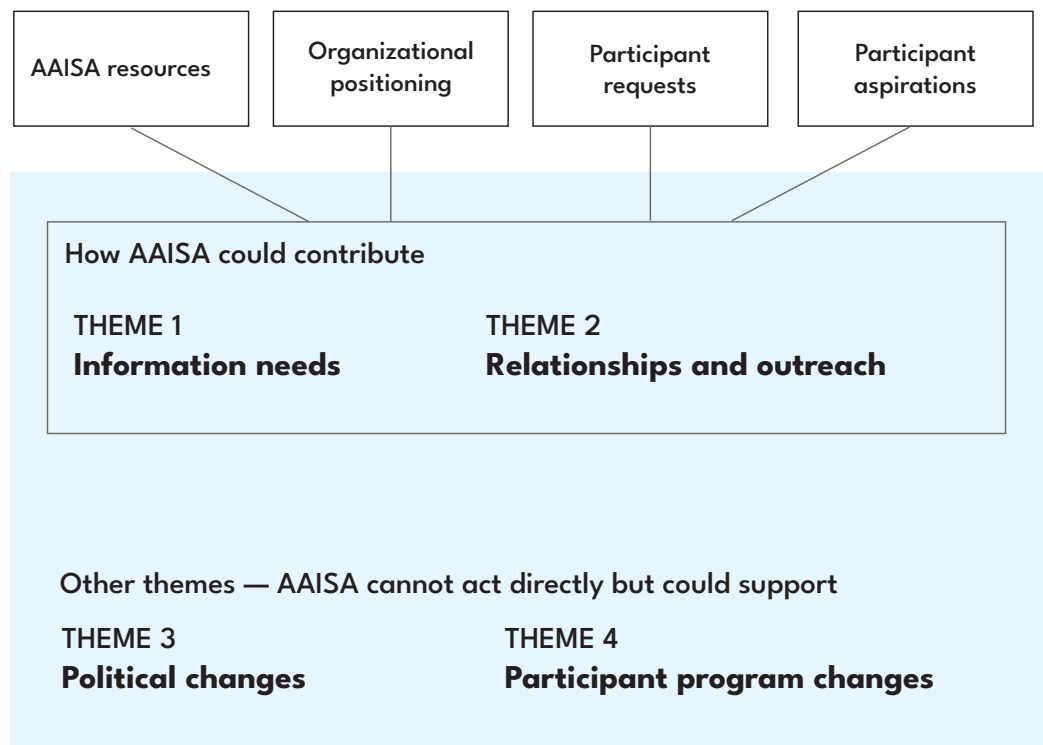
bridge participants with resources or information that could help them to reach program goals.

Conclusions about where AAISA’s contribution would be most useful came from several factors. First considered were the two types of information identified during coding: **participant requests** and **participant aspirations**. Another consideration was AAISA’s existing **infrastructure and resources**, as well as its **position as an organization** in the sector, such as the types of relationships AAISA has, the types of services offered and relationships with front-line service agencies.

Under these themes, researchers developed a number of ideas for resources. The recommendations below summarize a slate of possible resources, some of which discussed with participants in the 2022 – 2023 Q4 Support Network meeting. These ideas were generally met with interest. The research team anticipates further feedback and collaboration with network participants, which will shape decisions about which ideas to pursue further as tool development commences in the second half of the project.

Figure 10 -
Gaps and aspirations coding representation

Factors affecting AAISA’s contribution



RECOMMENDATIONS

Table of Barriers and Opportunities

Evaluators working with AAISA applied several new lenses to the research data. Their analysis resulted in a barriers and opportunities table which included a number of excellent suggestions for best practices and possible resources for development. The table is reproduced here in full:

Table 2 - Barriers and Opportunities Matrix

Barriers	Assets and Best Practices
Barriers faced by newcomers	
Lack of meaningful employment and opportunities for growth	Connecting newcomers with employers and professional mentors
	Providing entrepreneurial support and occupational mentorship by Community Future services
	Offering free online low barrier skill trainings by Up Skills for Work
	Exploring equivalency opportunities to recognize previous education and career history to retain people and advance them out of low-skilled jobs
	Promoting intercultural competency within the workplace and community
Language barriers and limited language learning opportunities	Offering adult learning programs by libraries and community colleges preferably with childcare services on site
	Accessing translation services like the AHS language line
	Promoting and providing information about online LINC classes
	Encouraging service providers (e.g., municipal employees, stores, rec operators etc.) to use plain language and Google Translate
Limited transportation	Funding public transportation by municipal governments
	Accessing a trail network which allows people to walk from anywhere in the community
	Assisting newcomers in obtaining their driver's licences by providing them with translated versions of the Driver's Guide and arranging opportunities for them to practise driving
Limited housing for newcomers in rural areas, even when employed	Assisting newcomers in comprehending and utilising affordable housing and rent assistance programs
	Taking cultural distinctions, such as multigenerational families into account when establishing guidelines for distributing affordable/social housing
Newcomers' disconnection and isolation	Adopting a strategic approach to ensure community services are easily accessible by newcomers
	Preparing a directory or welcoming kit that includes all community services and highlights ones of interest

Newcomers' disconnection and isolation (<i>cont'd</i>)	Applying for anti-racism grants to educate the community on promoting diversity and including newcomers
	Funding to support cultural events and welcoming initiatives that can bring people together
	Making free recreational passes available to newcomers
	Offering winter programming for newcomers (e.g., learn to skate with skates available)
Barriers facing service staff	
Limited resources for newcomer and settlement specific services	Building connections and partnerships among service providers
	Having a settlement worker within the community who supports and advocates for newcomers
	Reaching out to nearby settlement organisations to determine whether they offer programs catering to other communities, such as rural settlement or translation services
	Ensuring that no category of newcomers is excluded from settlement services solely because they are not permanent residents
	Improving general community programming with a welcoming lens
	Hosting a directory of information about rural settlement services provided by partnering city- and small-centre-based agencies on the AAISA website
	Having a template Welcome Package that can be easily updated or added to with an insert of services of specific interest
Lack of community knowledge on settlement processes and needs	Providing education on immigration processes, streams, and experiences
	Ongoing learning and mentoring for municipal agencies and services seeking to support settlement

This configuration of the data is clarifying to consider as the project moves into the stage of training and tool development.

Professional Development

The project set out specific parameters for professional development and training that would be designed by AAISA. During the interviews, AAISA also inquired as to the preferences of participants around professional development. While the grant initially set out online training in a course format, it is notable that many participants indicated that, although they had some funding for professional development, they had to make selections among topics for professional development. The courses may see greater uptake when advertised to participants outside the group. However, it may also be useful to explore other course formats, such as shorter webinars, that participants with limited time would be more likely to take advantage of. AAISA will continue these investigations into 2023 as the design of professional development courses begins.

At February 2023 Support Network meeting, participants had the opportunity to review some options that the AAISA team had generated for professional development courses based on their feedback, which included “immigration 101” courses intended specifically for rural practitioners and courses on outreach to vulnerable newcomers. These course topics were received positively, and discussions with the Professional Development team about training content and design are ongoing.

Planning for Tools and Resource Possibilities

Many resource possibilities have been generated to this point by AAISA research staff, evaluators, and research participants themselves. Some examples of specific tools and resource products that may address the assets and best practices above and which reflect the findings of the “gaps and aspirations” coding cycle are laid out in the table below. In some cases these resources may already have been designed in the province or elsewhere, and AAISA may be able to share the resource more widely. In other cases, AAISA’s role may be to design the resource from scratch within the organization or to find a suitable subject matter expert to produce it.

Table 3 - Generating possibilities for resources

Information resources	Relationship and outreach
<p>Information and professional development for participants:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primers on how immigration works, different immigration streams, etc. • Resources that prioritize voices of newcomers and direct testimony from newcomers, such as case studies • Directories of resources such as Community Future and Up Skills for Work that provide low-cost or free services to newcomers 	<p>Connections with settlement agencies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connections for specific services like translation • Programs to match communities with small-centre settlement agencies who may be willing to provide some mentorship or shadowing • Fostering partnerships between rural municipalities and small centre and hub-and-spoke agencies where those partnerships do not yet exist
<p>Supports participants can use while serving newcomers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Templates for welcome kits, where participants can include resources from their own community • Translated versions of supports such as the Driver’s Guide, tax supports, Registered Disability Savings Plan guide, etc. 	<p>Community outreach templates</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communications material participants can use to reach out to landlords and employers who may be newcomer-friendly, and guidance on forming those partnerships • Communications material participants can use with the general community to promote benefits of immigration

NEXT STEPS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

In the next year, AAISA is set to develop the five tools and resources and three courses noted in the grant.

The research also uncovered a number of interesting further specific topics for investigation that could lead to small-scope research and policy briefs. For example, investigators became interested in how communities were individually managing applicants to the Rural Renewal and Rural Entrepreneur streams. Communities appeared to generate their own unique committee structures for selection of newcomers and each had their own orientation toward the streams. Now that the Rural Renewal and Rural Entrepreneur streams have closed for evaluation by the Government of Alberta, further discussion about the processes operating in designated communities may be warranted. This research could yield suggestions for promising practices in the Rural Renewal stream that communities and government could review.

As another example, evaluators suggested that in addition to specific tools for use in participant communities, case study – style communications may be a particularly effective way to communicate out best practices and success stories in participant communities, which could take the form of videos, multimedia project profiles, or other types of resources.

In the remaining year of the program, AAISA is looking forward to continue building bridges with the participants of the Rural Support Network and pinpointing the areas where AAISA's resources can be leveraged in support of the challenges they face.

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APPENDIX A: DEFINITIONS

Newcomer: An immigrant, refugee, temporary foreign worker or other person who has come to Canada from abroad to live and work for some period of time for a variety of reasons.

Settlement agency: An organization specifically mandated to provide services that help newcomers thrive in their communities in Canada.

Rural and remote communities: For the purposes of this network, communities with less than 10,000 people which do not have an established settlement agency were considered the core audience.

Umbrella association: In the settlement sector context, this term refers to organizations like AAISA that create supports for settlement sector staff and represent them to the government. Each province has an organization of this type: AMSSA in BC, SAISIA in Saskatchewan, MANSO in Manitoba, OCASI in Ontario, and ARAISA in the Atlantic provinces.

APPENDIX B: NEEDS AND ASSETS SURVEY

Support Networks for Rural Newcomers to Alberta

You have been invited to this survey as a participant in AAISA's immigrant and refugee settlement support network for rural municipalities.

This survey will ask you about what specific settlement supports are available in your community. AAISA's aim is to understand what services immigrants and refugees can access in rural municipalities across Alberta. If your municipality has faced barriers facilitating settlement, this survey will help us see where existing resources might be leveraged to help.

The survey will take about 20 minutes to complete. Only one staff member per municipality or organization should enter a response to the survey.

If you prefer, you can contact Meghan Cunningham, AAISA's Research and Policy Lead, at (587) 747-0828 to make an appointment to take the survey by telephone. Full contact information is available in your email invitation and on the next page of the survey.

On the next page, you will also be asked to read and agree to the confidentiality conditions of the survey.

At the end of the survey, there will be an opportunity to express your interest in participating in a one-on-one interview.

Thank you for sharing your comments and experiences with AAISA!

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Thank you for sharing your comments and experiences with AAISA!

Confidentiality Information and Consent

By responding to the survey, you agree that AAISA can use your response data under the following conditions:

Individual survey responses will remain completely confidential except among the staff members who analyze the data.

However, the final overall and aggregate results of the survey will be assembled into a research report that may be shared with other AAISA staff, with the public, with other researchers, and with the other participants. The data will never be shared in a way that would uniquely identify you as a participant. This project's funding comes from the Government of Alberta's Ministry of Trade, Immigration and Multiculturalism, and the anonymized research report will also be shared with the Ministry.

Additionally, we may use parts of your text responses to demonstrate principles or common themes in the final research report. If we do, we will remove all identifying information, so your responses will remain anonymous.

At any time, you can contact Meghan Cunningham, or any other AAISA facilitators of the Support Network, to have your data or any comments withdrawn from the analysis. You may also contact Marokh Yousifshahi, the manager of the research team, with any concerns about how the survey is administered.

AAISA Survey Research Team:

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Research and Policy Lead
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(587) 747-0828**

**Marokh Yousifshahi
Manager - Engagement, Research and Policy
myousifshahi@aaisa.ca
(587) 774-2393**

IF YOU CONSENT TO THESE TERMS, please click Next to proceed to the survey.

Part 1: Demographics

* 1. I represent a:

- Municipality
- Community or Non-profit Organization

* 2. Name of Municipality or Organization:

* 3. What is your current position?

Part 2: Community Baseline

*** 4. General Impression**

In general, do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	I don't know
My community has the capacity to help immigrants and refugees settle here.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please use comment box to share any comments or examples.

My community collaborates with other organizations to strengthen our services to immigrants and refugees.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
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Please use comment box to share any comments or examples.

*** 5. Common Programs and Initiatives**

Has your municipality or organization participated in any programs or initiatives to help integrate immigrants and refugees? *Please select all that apply.*

- Website to advertise settlement services
- Events and programs to bring together immigrants and refugees with long-term residents
- Establishing community hubs for immigrants and refugees
- Financial or other incentives for relocation to or long-term settlement in your municipality
- Programs initiated by employers to attract or retain immigrants and refugees
- Establishing settlement-specific municipal social services (e.g., hiring a municipal settlement worker)
- Participation in provincial or federal government initiatives for immigrants and refugees
- Participation in other research projects for immigrants and refugees
- Participation in other formalized regional partnerships for immigrant and refugee services
- Other

- None of the above

*** 6. Level of Investment**

In your opinion, does the community you work in invest in resources for immigrants and refugees at an appropriate level? Investment could mean time, effort, or money.

- Not enough
- About right
- More than necessary

7. Level of Investment – Reasons

Please state your reasons for believing the investment in these resources is not enough, about right, or more than necessary.

*** 8. Strategic Planning**

Does the community you work with incorporate services to immigrants and refugees into its strategic plan?

- Yes
- No
- We may include them in future
- I don't know

Part 2: Community Baseline

*** 9. Assessing Key Factors**

In the following question, you will be asked to consider a list of 24 factors that can affect the integration of immigrants and refugees.

You will identify which of these factors are **accessible to immigrants and refugees** in the community you work in.

If you know a service is present but you are not sure if it is culturally appropriate or accessible, you might select "Not accessible at all" or "Somewhat accessible" depending on your assessment. For example, if your community contains an excellent health care clinic but you have heard they have difficulty communicating with immigrants and refugees, you might select one of these options.

In some cases, the assessment might be complicated. In the next question, and if you choose to participate in a one-on-one interview, you will have the opportunity to clarify some of your answers. For now, enter your best guess.

Select the appropriate score using the following scale.

"How accessible are these services to immigrants and refugees?"

- 1=Not accessible at all.
2=Somewhat accessible.
3=Accessible.
4=Highly accessible
5=I don't know

	Not accessible at all	Somewhat accessible	Accessible	Highly accessible	I don't know
Welcoming services, such as a "welcome package" or program to connect with locals	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Access to information about the municipality online or in civic centres	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
French or English learning programs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Employment services and skills training programs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Entrepreneurial support services	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Foreign Credential Recognition supports/services Click here for more information on Foreign Credential Recognition.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Job-specific language training	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Financial services, such as financial advice	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Occupational mentorship and networking opportunities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Multicultural events	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ethnocultural organizations (interfaith groups, cultural groups, etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sufficient access to religious organizations (churches, but also mosques, synagogues)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Parks and recreation services open to the public	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Daycare centres or other childcare	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Health care services	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Transportation for those without a driver's license or a car within your town	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Transportation for those without a driver's license or a car outside your town (e.g., to the nearest larger town)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Connectivity (e.g., phone and Internet service)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Adult employment opportunities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Youth employment opportunities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Affordable and appropriate housing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Mental health	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

support services



Legal support services including immigration law



Grocery stores that provide food and items that cater to world cuisine



Part 2: Community Baseline

10. **Somewhat Accessible Services**

You stated that the following services were **Somewhat accessible** in your community. What best describes the accessibility of these services?

	Available, but immigrants may face barriers	Available, but only for limited time periods	Available, but limited in another way	Other
Welcoming services, such as a "welcome package" or program to connect with locals	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Access to information about the municipality online or in civic centres	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
French or English learning programs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Employment services and skills training programs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Entrepreneurial support services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Foreign Credential Recognition supports/services <i>Click here for more information on Foreign Credential Recognition.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Job-specific language training	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Financial services, such as financial advice	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Occupational mentorship and networking opportunities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Multicultural events	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ethnocultural organizations (interfaith groups, cultural groups, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sufficient access to religious organizations (churches, but also	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

synagogues)

Parks and recreation services open to the public	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Daycare centres or other childcare	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Health care services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Transportation for those without a driver's license or a car within your town	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Transportation for those without a driver's license or a car outside your town (e.g., to the nearest larger town)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Connectivity (e.g., phone and Internet service)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Adult employment opportunities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Youth employment opportunities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Affordable and appropriate housing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mental health support services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Legal support services including immigration law	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Grocery stores that provide food and items that cater to world cuisine	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Enter any comments or clarifications below.

*** 11. Barriers to Integration**

In your opinion, what are the greatest gaps preventing immigrants and refugees from settling in your municipality?

- Limited employment opportunities
- Limited or no access to settlement services
- Lack of transportation for people without cars
- Lack of infrastructure
- Lack of existing immigrant population and sense of community
- Lack of access to cultural and religious supports/amenities
- Racism and intolerance
- Inadequate housing
- Shortage of childcare
- Other (Please use comment box to share any comments or examples)

*** 12. Success Factors**

In your opinion, what have been the most important factors in the success of any existing efforts to settle immigrants and refugees in your community?

- Involvement of particularly dedicated staff
- Involvement of community leaders
- Collaboration and partnership with other organizations
- Understanding of immigrant and refugee communities
- Other (please specify)

Part 3: Collaboration & Partnerships

* 13. **Partnerships**

Which formal or informal partnerships do you have with other organizations and communities to provide services to immigrants and refugees? *Please select all that apply.*

- Schools and school boards
- Adult learning centres, such as CALPs
- Municipal governments and municipal government FCSS
- Children and family service organizations other than FCSS
- Businesses and Chamber of Commerce
- Public libraries
- Health services providers
- Dedicated language training providers, other than adult learning centres
- Housing services providers
- Churches, synagogues, mosques, or other religious organizations
- Ethnocultural organizations
- Umbrella organizations
- Advocacy organizations for immigrant and refugee well-being
- Peace officers, local RCMP detachment, or other police
- Francophone organizations
- Other:
- None of the above

Part 3: Collaboration & Partnerships

14. **Partnerships (continued)**

For each of the partnerships you selected, please indicate what types of services are provided through collaboration with this organization (*e.g., language learning, employment referrals, welcome centre, counselling*)

Schools and school boards

Adult learning centres, such as CALPs

Municipal governments and municipal government FCSS

Children and family service organizations other than FCSS

Businesses and Chamber of Commerce

Public libraries

Health services providers

Dedicated language training providers, other than adult learning centres

Housing services providers

Churches, synagogues, mosques, or other religious organizations

Ethnocultural organizations

Advocacy organizations for immigrant and refugee well-being

Umbrella organizations

Peace officers, local RCMP detachment, or other police

Francophone organizations

[Insert text from Other]

Part 3: Collaboration & Partnerships

* 15. **Outreach**

Does your municipality have any outreach efforts to direct immigrants and refugees to settlement services and information?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

Part 3: Collaboration & Partnerships

* 16. **Outreach (continued)**

Please select which outreach efforts your municipality has undertaken to direct immigrants and refugees to settlement services.

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Outreach at community events | <input type="checkbox"/> Traditional media efforts (i.e., radio, newspaper) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> We rely on word of mouth | <input type="checkbox"/> We rely on referrals (i.e., from other municipalities, communities, organizations, governments, businesses) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Online and social media efforts | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) | |

* 17. **Outreach (continued)**

In which languages are these outreach efforts distributed?

- English
- French
- Another language or languages (please list)

18. AAISA Services

AAISA helps organizations provide services to immigrants and refugees in a number of ways. Which of the following services would be most useful to your community?

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Information resources for service providers | <input type="checkbox"/> Research on issues facing service providers |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Information resources that can be distributed to immigrants and refugees | <input type="checkbox"/> Connections with service providers in other regions |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Professional development for service providers | |

Other (please specify)

19. Final Comments

Is there anything else that you would like AAISA to know about your community's approach to immigrant and refugee support services?

Part 4: Conclusion

AAISA is interested in further exploring your experience in rural settlement. In the coming weeks, we hope to hold one-on-one research interviews with interested participants. Research and Policy Lead Meghan Cunningham will facilitate the interviews.

20. Are you interested in participating in a one-on-one interview?

- Yes - contact me for scheduling
- No
- Not sure - contact me with more information

APPENDIX C: ACTORS AND ACTIVITIES

Category	Code	Description and comments
Businesses	Multinational	Large multinational businesses, such as Tim Horton's and Subway. Participants often discussed that owners of franchises of these businesses in their communities approached them about their immigration policies and services. Tim Horton's was mentioned with particular regularity. Multinational businesses differ in their franchising structure, and individual franchises may have very different work environments, with some franchises probably owned by newcomers. Multinational businesses may have incentives to exploit temporary foreign workers—for instance, certain Tim Horton's franchises have been associated in the past with violations of employment standards (e.g., CBC News, 2015; Darrah, 2021). On the other hand, some multinational businesses use their larger resource base to invest in the well-being of their newcomer employees through in-house services for newcomers. Because these services are tied to particular jobs, they should not necessarily be considered a substitute for public services although they have the potential to be very beneficial.
	Local	Local businesses, typically single operations owned by an individual or family. Local businesses were mentioned by interview participants as employers of newcomers, including temporary foreign workers, just as multinational businesses were. In some interviewed communities, many local businesses were themselves owned by newcomers, particularly grocery stores and restaurants, but also a wide variety of other businesses.
	General	A general catch-all code for businesses that were mentioned in the interviews without differentiation.
Collaborative bodies	External tables	Meeting tables convened at the provincial or federal level, perhaps around a particular issue or crisis. For example, one interview participant took part in a provincial table associated with the influx of Ukrainian newcomers after the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2021.
	Intramunicipal agency collaborations	Meeting tables taking place within a single municipality among various social services agencies and other actors. In several municipalities, these were highly established bodies (referred to sometimes simply as “interagencies”) with histories of many decades and considerable engagement.
	Intermunicipal tables and programs	Meeting tables taking place among various municipalities, for instance, between several FCSS programs or between several economic development agencies.

Category	Code	Description and comments
Community organizations	Ethnocultural organizations	Grassroots organizations supporting particular ethnocultural communities of newcomers. The most commonly cited ethnocultural associations among this project's participants were organizations supporting Filipino people. These organizations are run, staffed, and programmed by newcomers themselves or potentially by Canadians with heritage in the targeted ethnocultural group, and as a closed group, most interview participants, who were for the most part white Anglo-Canadians, had limited insight into their activities and networks.
	Religious organizations	Religious organizations, which can serve in similar functions to ethnocultural associations in some cases, or more similarly to community associations in other cases. Most interview participants talked primarily about churches. Some of these churches may be Anglo-Canadian-run while others may be newcomer-run organizations serving newcomer Christians (and similar religious groups). A cursory map search suggests that mosques, for example, are rare in rural areas, although not all newcomer-run newcomer organizations may necessarily be formally organized and accessible to outside research.
	General	A general catch-all code for community organizations that were mentioned in the interviews without differentiation.
Dedicated newcomer services	Rurally internal agencies and settlement staff	Settlement agencies and settlement staff located directly in rural municipalities. Some city organizations, such as Calgary Catholic Immigration Services, maintain hub-and-spoke models, for instance, in which settlement agencies with separate branding and some amount of operational autonomy operate separately in rural areas. Some municipalities in the survey and interview sample had one settlement worker on staff or shared a settlement worker with another nearby municipality.
	Nonprofit small centre agencies	Settlement agencies located in small centres such as Brooks, Lethbridge, Grande Prairie and Red Deer—i.e., centres with more than 10,000 people, but not in major cities like Calgary and Edmonton. A few participant municipalities had existing partnerships with agencies in small centres nearby, or planned to initiate or strengthen such a partnership in order to support settlement efforts in their community.
	Nonprofit city agencies	This code was used when referring to an agency that was considered by the participant to be a “city organization”, typically an organization operating out of Calgary or Edmonton without being “housed” in a rural area. Some city agencies have branches or hubs that were considered by participant municipalities to be more like a rural settlement effort. This code refers specifically to the distinctions that participants drew, for instance, between practitioners that have direct experience living full-time in rural areas as opposed to those arriving briefly for itinerant services, etc.

Category	Code	Description and comments
Dedicated newcomer services (<i>cont'd</i>)	General	A general catch-all code used to refer to settlement agencies and services where no further differentiation was made.
General social services	Family and Community Support Services (FCSS)	Alberta's Family and Community Support Services (FCSS) program is a provincial funding stream which flows through the municipality. This stream served as the primary source of funding for social services in participant municipalities. This situation can be contrasted with the situation in larger centres, where third-party organizations primarily funded through the federal government or through grants take a larger role. An FCSS office is a generalist office that must cover a wide range of social services in the targeted community, including issues such as family violence, homelessness, supports for people who use drugs, care for seniors, community connections, reconciliation and culturally appropriate supports for Indigenous people, and so on in addition to services for newcomers. The FCSS offices in participant municipalities had a small number of individuals covering all these services (in collaboration with other types of organizations described below). For example, several participants had between one and three people working in their FCSS office.
	Recreation and arts spaces	Participant municipalities referred to a variety of recreation and arts spaces as community assets.
	Entrepreneurial support	Several third-party organizations may provide entrepreneurial support in rural areas of Alberta. The most prominently mentioned organization of this type among participant municipalities was Community Futures. Several interviewees had good connections with a Community Futures office in their area.
	Economic development office (municipal)	In some smaller municipalities, economic development officers took a prominent role in attracting and retaining newcomers. This is sensible because in rural Alberta (and in fact, in all of Canada) most if not all population growth comes from immigration, so the economic development office's role is deeply intertwined with settlement services. Economic development officers were often selected to manage logistics of the Rural Renewal stream in participant municipalities that were part of this stream. About half of the initial recruitment group was economic development officers, and they remain prominent members of the Rural Support Network.
	Other social service offices (municipal)	This code served as a catch-all code for social services office that did not fall into one of the categories above or one of the categories below. Note, for instance, that education offices, which were also very prominent in the rural settlement ecosystem, have a set of codes below.

Category	Code	Description and comments
Government	Municipal	Municipal governments were far more central to settlement services for newcomers in sample municipalities than they generally are in larger centres. Both FCSS offices and economic development offices were closely incorporated with the municipality, or were considered municipal staff, in most participant municipalities. This also means that some participants who were not municipal staff faced challenges in settlement related to their communication with municipal offices.
	County and other governance types	Some participant communities were structured as counties, not municipalities, or as other types of specialized geographical regions, such as Special Areas, which may have unique governance structures. (For example, Special Areas are governed by a board of directors who are appointed by the province.)
	Provincial	The Government of Alberta is an important settlement actor, particularly for municipalities that were planning to apply for, or had applied for, the Rural Renewal stream provincial nomination program, which ran from about May 2022 to February 2023 and designated 16 municipalities of under 100,000 people as capable of submitting special nominees for permanent residency through the Express Entry stream, similarly to how provincial nominees would normally be submitted (Government of Alberta 2023b; Government of Canada, 2023). The Government of Alberta's support workers associated with this program were often one of the only formal high-level contacts that participant municipalities benefited from in the settlement sector.
	Federal	Immigrants, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), the federal ministry that manages immigration to Canada, was sometimes mentioned by participant municipalities, although for the most part IRCC is a fairly distant influence on municipal policy. At the same time, all immigration applications ultimately flow through IRCC, and some participants who were front-line service workers mentioned a desire for a better understanding of changes and updates ongoing at IRCC.
Education	Community Adult Learning Programs (CALP)	Community Adult Learning Programs (CALP) are organizations that offer programs such as adult literacy primarily in rural areas. They are sometimes structured as part of the municipality, and sometimes structured as an independent organization. They receive funding primarily through Alberta Advanced Education, as well as grant funding where applicable. In some municipalities, CALPs provided employment services and training, while in others, another organization took that responsibility. CALPs often provide English instruction in rural areas.

Category	Code	Description and comments
Education (<i>cont'd</i>)	Community colleges	Community colleges, such as NorQuest College and Red Deer College, were cited to offer several types of services for newcomers, including special occupational instruction intended for newcomers and sometimes English instruction. Additionally, background discussions indicated that some community colleges are actively interested in seeking out international students. International students are often charged higher tuition prices. That said, because of the small scale of services, community colleges mentioned by participant municipalities showed a high level of dedication to the wellbeing of international students. In several cases, community colleges had directly contacted FCSS or CALP offices in participant municipalities to ensure that international students could be supported individually with wraparound services.
	Grade schools	Children of newcomer families enter into public schools as appropriate. This was noted as a stream of information by which municipalities may become aware of new immigrants and refugees coming into their community. The Settlement Workers in Schools program (SWIS) is a prominent operator in a number of rural municipalities, although other communities may not be aware of the benefit it can provide. While no SWIS workers participated in the rural support network, AAISA consulted SWIS experts as part of background discussion.
	Libraries	Public libraries were noted as an important source of settlement support by experts consulted during background research. Libraries may provide services such as community connections, family programs, and English supports. One staff member of a public library is a participant in the rural support network, but has not yet participated in a research interview.
Information, welcoming and orientation	Community events	This code was used to collect mentions of a variety of types of similar community events that participants mentioned, such as block parties, community potlucks, community barbecues, holiday celebrations, etc. This was a primary strategy participants used in the effort to engage with newcomers and invite them into community supports.
	General	This code was used to collect other types of efforts to orient newcomers. The primary type of program was something similar to a “welcome kit”, which might include orientation brochures, directories of services, community maps, and other welcoming information. Participants agreed that a major difficulty in orienting newcomers was identifying when new immigrants and refugees arrived in town so that they could be connected with resources.
Health care	Mental health	Several participants made comments about mental health supports available in their communities, which are collected under this code.

Category	Code	Description and comments
Health care (<i>cont'd</i>)	General	A general catch-all code for discussions of health care, including doctor's offices, emergency rooms, hospitals, specialist health care, dentistry, etc.
Housing	Public housing	Public housing organizations and co-operatives were in operation in several participant municipalities. As an example, these organizations might be structured as a housing authority with a board employed by the municipality. These organizations are designed to reserve affordable housing for individuals in need, which might include seniors and people living in poverty in addition to newcomers. It appeared to be typical for waitlists to extend several years for these housing types.
	Landlords	Private housing is the most common type of housing in rural Alberta, just as elsewhere in Canada. This code collects mentions of private housing and landlords. Participants agreed that, contrary to a perception that can be heard in cities, rural areas are also suffering from an extreme housing shortage.
	General	A general catch-all code for discussions of housing programs and provision of housing that was not explicitly public or private.
Newcomers	As entrepreneurs/ bosses	In several participant municipalities, newcomers were cited as the community's primary or only business owners in some sectors, such as restaurants and grocery. Newcomer entrepreneurs may also hire newcomers in turn as employers. Some newcomer entrepreneurs might need less services due to pre-existing advantages in the training and Canadian economic experience and knowledge required to set up a business. However, newcomer entrepreneurs were also cited by at least one participant as especially difficult to reach for services.
	As workers/ employees	This code collects mentions of newcomers as workers and employees in rural businesses.
	As students	International students of post-secondary institutions such as community colleges form a potential subset of newcomers in rural areas, and a few were present in participant municipalities.
	As advocates for immigration poli- cies	Newcomers in rural municipalities act as advocates for themselves and for immigration policies that benefit them and their communities. In particular, newcomers initiated discussion of the rural renewal stream with participant communities in several cases.
	As participants in community events	Community events were a popular strategy employed by FCSS offices and other social services offices to bring together long-term residents of the town and integrate newcomers.
	As community leaders	Several participants made mention of specific newcomers who were community leaders, either within newcomer-dedicated groups (including ethnocultural associations, etc.) or in the general community, for instance as council members.

Category	Code	Description and comments
Newcomers (<i>cont'd</i>)	As health care professionals	In a few municipalities, participants noted that newcomers were highly visible as doctors, nurses, long-term care professionals, and so on. In fact, a community college in at least one municipality offered a nursing program specifically directed at newcomers.
	As family sponsors	Newcomers may act as family sponsors to invite their family members and spouses into Canada from their home countries. Family reunification was the source of secondary immigration into rural municipalities in a number of examples given by participants.
Non-newcomer community members	Refugee sponsors	In several participant municipalities, churches, community organizations, independent groups, and individual families had chosen to sponsor refugees and evacuees. The most common countries of origin for these refugees, where they were mentioned, were Syria (related to the push to resettle individuals from Syria in late 2015 – 2016) and Ukraine (related to the Russian invasion of Ukraine beginning in 2021).
	Long-term caregiver employers	At least one participant was aware of a family who had hired a long-term caregiver from abroad within their catchment of service. Because long-term caregivers may live in their employer's home, it is especially important to connect them with other sources of support and services. However, as for other employment types, participants agreed that a major difficulty was the inability to determine when a newcomer arrived in their area.
	As service providers	This code collects certain mentions of non-newcomer community members in their capacities as front-line service providers, particularly when discussing how these individuals relate with newcomers.
Policing	RCMP	The federal RCMP often has a detachment in rural areas of Alberta to handle issues of provincial and federal law, for example, emergencies. RCMP would also most likely be the enforcing authority in a rural area in the case that a newcomer in a rural area sought to avoid a Removal Order and a warrant was issued for their arrest (Canada Border Services Agency, 2021). No participant municipalities felt the need to touch on this interconnection, which could speak positively to their models of immigration systems. However, in cases of exploitation of newcomer workers, the threat of deportation often plays a role, so knowledge of the logistics of this issue may be a benefit to social services providers.
	Bylaw	Bylaw enforcement officers are often also present in rural areas. These officers are municipal employees and take responsibility for issues of municipal and county bylaw (for example, traffic enforcement, noise ordinances.)

Category	Code	Description and comments
Policing (<i>cont'd</i>)	Other	A general catch-all code collecting mentions of police and policing which were not differentiated for type of enforcement officer. The few participant municipalities asked explicitly about police in their areas stated that officers in their area were interested in making community connections and serving as safety supports.
Transport	Public transport (government funded)	Participant municipalities generally, but not universally, managed some type of dial-a-bus program intended primarily for use by seniors and people with mobility challenges. This bus program was typically limited in its hours of operation, and in some municipalities bus drivers had authority to make specific choices about who to pick up based on their reason for the transportation request. Some municipalities also ran a public bussing route.
	Volunteer transport	Several participants discussed or had initiated a program to match volunteer drivers with people in need of transport. These programs were also typically intended for seniors but could be employed by newcomers.
	Private transport	Buses between cities and participant municipalities were in evidence in some cases. Some municipalities also suggested that taxis or rideshare services such as Uber were a solution they had considered to transportation issues.
	General	A general catch-all code for discussions of transportation in settlement services that were not clearly public or private. Transportation was a major issue for participant municipalities. Interviewees agreed that the problem is not easily solvable due to the high cost of gas and insurance and the remoteness and large scale of community service catchments. For example, several participant communities are 45 minutes to 90 minutes across by car, so simply getting a bus from one end of the area to the other is an unavoidable logistical drag.

APPENDIX D: GAPS AND ASPIRATIONS

Category	Code	Description and comments
Information resources	Service menu	AAISA could consider creating a template for towns to fill out their own “service menus” for newcomers that would include provincial resources and a variety of resources that the settlement sector knows to be important to newcomers.
	Newcomer orientation materials	A tool of this description could include a “service menu” list of resources above, but also welcoming materials—maps, letters from town officials, and so on.
	Newcomer perspective resources	Some participants specifically requested resources that included the direct perspectives of newcomers.
	Landlord or employer directory	This proposal was for a directory of landlords or employers who were newcomer-friendly. Of course, AAISA is unable to create a tool like this for individual communities, but it may be worth investigating whether small centres have done this and what platforms, outreach tools, communications techniques, etc. they have used to do it.
	Outreach strategy to newcomers	Several participants stated that an issue in their communities was outreach to newcomers and ensuring that newcomers could identify services.
	Knowing when newcomers come into town	Another issue cited in several communities was difficulty knowing when newcomers arrived in town. Of course, this is the case in all municipalities, especially cities, but it speaks to potentially more difficulties with outreach to newcomers when there is not a specific settlement organization whose job it is to perform outreach to newcomers and which newcomers without resources to seek out decentralized services may be able to more easily identify on their own as a source of support.
	Keeping track of higher-government immigration policy changes	A front-line practitioner made note of changing federal immigration policies as an area where update resources could be useful.
	Navigating government information about policies and programs	Aid in navigating websites (and presumably other higher government communications) arose as a possible area for resources for front-line practitioners.

Category	Code	Description and comments
Information resources (<i>cont'd</i>)	Education for general practitioners about needs of newcomers	This request for resources was centered around a need for 101 tools that general social work practitioners in rural communities could consult when providing settlement services.
	Resource libraries for practitioners on needs of newcomers	Because such toolkits and libraries already exist (e.g. newcomerresearch.ca), this request for resources may be a good starting point to boost existing work by other organizations.
	Seeking general awareness about newcomer issues	“General awareness” could mean a number of things, and this code is likely not specific enough to yield strong tool recommendations, but it appears in the interview data.
Political changes	Municipal efforts	Practitioners who do not directly work for a municipality may desire more proactive efforts from their municipality in terms of newcomer settlement. Examples of possible changes include alterations to bylaws or tax incentives for newcomers; more strategic efforts to attract and settle newcomers; and pursuing more grants to improve settlement capacity. While AAISA is of course not in a position to influence municipalities’ policy strategies, this theme helps contextualize the work of service providers in communities where the municipality itself does not play a strong role in settlement efforts.
	More newcomers referred to rural services from city	This recommendation would be enacted by more collaborative links among city agencies and rural services (such as CALPs and employment agencies). Some rural service providers stated that they had plenty of capacity, for instance, for language teaching, and would be pleased to take referrals from cities in cases where waitlists are unmanageable.
Programming, infrastructure and personnel	Volunteer opportunities for newcomers	This recommendation, repeated in the Rural Development Network’s toolbox, was forwarded by a participant who was herself a newcomer as a type of program that agencies could leverage in rural areas to encourage community connections for newcomers.
	Dedicated municipal settlement personnel	Some practitioners anticipated or aspired to hire a dedicated settlement staff person, or otherwise assign specific individuals to settlement services, in the next two to five years.
	Transportation system – specific plan/idea	This theme collects several ideas and strategies that practitioners had begun to consider to address challenges around rural transportation. For example, some municipalities were considering working out some type of system involving school buses, while others had partnered with city volunteer driving agencies, and still others imagined a private solution (possibly even a taxi company or rideshare service operated by newcomers.)

Category	Code	Description and comments
Programming, infrastructure and personnel (<i>cont'd</i>)	Job shadowing/mentoring for newcomers	One of the gaps considered by practitioners was the lack of availability of job shadowing and mentoring for newcomers. Economy of scale issues were one of the factors to which participants attributed this gap, stating for instance that there were not enough newcomers in any given industry or position in their community for businesses to justify an increased level of training oversight for a single person.
	Public housing projects and housing infrastructure	Housing was a major topic the interviews addressed, and not an easily solvable problem. There were relatively few concrete plans participants discussed under this theme as opposed to transportation.
	Job opportunities through municipality	This suggestion was for municipalities to offer more job opportunities, such as internships, for newcomers. Some municipalities offered short-term or seasonal positions for which newcomers facing foreign credential recognition issues or lack of work experience in Canada would be eligible, but not full-time, year-round positions.
	Increased capacity	This code collects generalizes desires for increased capacity through increased resources or infrastructure.
	Translation services	Translation and interpretation services are relatively well-resourced in cities, so matching translation services to rural areas may be a significant source of support for rural practitioners, particularly as many types of translation can be done remotely.
	Increased breadth of community events	While a number of communities held welcoming community events, interview participants sometimes noted that they would like to be able to hold more varied events or that they were interested to hear what events other communities held.
	Change in office location	In some cases, locations of participants office were outside areas that were convenient to reach without a car. This problem points again to the importance of transportation in rural areas.
	Relationships	Relationship with an established settlement agency
Relationship of agency with municipality		In cases where participants were not direct staff of a municipality, the relationship between their agency and the municipality was important to success of settlement in the community.
Networking with other rural municipalities and agencies		This aspiration is one of the issues that this project is intended to address.

Category	Code	Description and comments
Relationships (<i>cont'd</i>)	Improved communication with other organizations in town such as schools or churches	This type of communication is likely best addressed in an interagency-style collaboration table.