Making Rural Immigration Work

Settlement Services in Small and Rural Communities

Contents

Key Findings

- Settlement service provision in small and rural communities is challenging because service providers are expected to serve a wide range of settlement needs with limited funding and few opportunities to refer people to other local social service organizations.

- Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) is a gold standard funder of settlement services for its high level of engagement with settlement service providers, the provision of long-term service agreements that offer organizational stability, and funding for a wide range of settlement service types.

- IRCC is continuing to expand the reach of settlement services. There were nearly 100 communities where no services had been provided in 2019–20 but where five or more unique services were provided in 2020–21.

- Settlement service providers need substantial resources and expertise to successfully apply for IRCC funding, making it difficult for organizations to emerge in small and rural communities that don't already have settlement services.

- While immigration policies aim to increase the distribution of immigrants across Canada, IRCC funding priorities for settlement services do not adequately support this goal.

- Digital service provision can improve access to settlement services by reducing transportation or child care barriers. But digital service provision works best as a complement to in-person services, not a replacement.

Introduction

In Canada, immigrants disproportionately settle in urban areas. The three largest cities—Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver—are home to 35 per cent of Canada's population but receive more than half of all arriving immigrants.

Canada aims to increase regionalization, the distribution of immigrants across Canada's regions. Although settlement services improve retention of immigrant residents, many small and rural communities lack local settlement services. Canada needs a strategy to establish and fund settlement services in small and rural communities.

Small and rural communities[1] can benefit from immigrants, who bring new ideas and contribute to multiculturalism, population growth, and the local economy.[2] These benefits make the most meaningful difference if immigrants remain in the community, which allows their contributions to endure. Federal, provincial, and municipal governments must think beyond just attracting immigrants to small and rural communities and plan for retention.

Infrastructure, including settlement services, is integral to retention of newcomers.[3] Settlement services improve the immigrants' economic integration and their health and well-being.[4] By supporting immigrants, settlement workers support the economic development of their communities and region. Although settlement services in small and rural communities serve a small number of immigrants, they make a large impact because they affect many communities across Canada.

Past research shows that availability of IRCC-funded settlement services has not kept up with changes in settlement patterns of new immigrants.[5] This impact paper examines the availability of settlement services in small and rural communities under the current settlement service agreements, which began in 2020–21, and the final year of the previous settlement service agreements, 2019–20. It studies the institutional barriers to meeting the settlement needs of immigrants in small and rural communities and the role that government and other stakeholders can play in addressing these barriers.

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1   In this impact paper, the term "small and rural communities" refers to communities that have fewer than 40,000 residents (according to the 2016 census) and are located more than 70 kilometres from a census metropolitan area.

2   Akbari and Haider, "Impact of Immigration on Economic Growth in Canada and in Its Smaller Provinces"; Dinç and Dennler, *Building on COVID-Period Immigration Levels*.

3   Esses and Carter, "Beyond the Big City"; Cramer, "Municipal Approaches and Settlement System Development in Small Communities."

4   Laura Simich and others, "Providing Social Support for Immigrants and Refugees in Canada"; Chadwick and. Collins, "Examining the Relationship Between Social Support Availability, Urban Center Size, and Self-Perceived Mental Health of Recent Immigrants to Canada"; Zuberi, Ivemark, and Ptashnick, "Lagging Behind in Suburbia."

5   Lo, *Immigrant Settlement Services in the Toronto CMA*; Truelove, "Services for Immigrant Women"; Zuberi, Ivemark, and Ptashnick, "Lagging Behind in Suburbia.

The research shows that numerous small and rural communities have unmet needs for settlement services. These unmet needs arise from the funding model, the difficult fit between IRCC and provincial funding priorities, and the challenges of establishing settlement services in a new location. Geographic gaps in service provision are exacerbated by difficulties finding settlement services and limited access to the full range of service types in small and rural communities.

This is an opportune time to study the extent of geographic gaps in settlement services and possible solutions. Following the 2021 federal election, the Canadian government renewed its commitment to immigration to small and rural communities.[6] At the same time, the COVID-19 pandemic created a natural experiment to study the efficacy of digital service provision, one possible solution to address geographic gaps in settlement services.

IRCC-Funded Settlement Services

Settlement service providers may receive funding from numerous sources, including all three levels of government, foundations, and donations. But IRCC is the largest funder of settlement services in Canada. As a result, federal policies and priorities significantly shape the settlement sector.

Settlement service providers view IRCC funding as the "gold standard" funder in Canada because of the breadth of services it funds, the stability it provides through long service agreements,

and its high level of engagement with the settlement sector.

IRCC funds a comprehensive set of direct services. IRCC also funds support services to improve access to settlement services, as well as indirect services to build capacity and facilitate knowledge sharing within the sector, including local immigration partnerships (LIPs) and associations of immigrant-serving agencies.[7]

IRCC offers service agreements of up to five years and a consistent funding cycle. By comparison, provincial and municipal funding opportunities often have a shorter duration, and they shift focus depending on political or economic priorities. Long-term funding agreements allow service providers to engage in medium-term planning and retain qualified staff. Valerie, the director of a provincial association of immigrant-serving agencies, says, "The funding allows us to build capacity within the sector. We transform that to as big and as impactful results as we possibly can. So, the funding does matter. Because capacity matters. When you have multiple projects and you're not as tight on your pennies and time, you can start dreaming big ideas—innovating and implementing some of your initiatives."

IRCC funds settlement service providers on a call-for-proposals (CFP) basis. IRCC solicits proposals, evaluates submissions, and funds providers that have capacity to deliver settlement services. IRCC directs funds to communities with well-established populations of permanent residents.

6   Prime Minister of Canada, "Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Mandate Letter."
7   Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, "Settlement Program."

Where Are Settlement Services Needed?

Identifying new communities that need settlement services is challenging. Census data provide a snapshot of where people live, but the numbers are updated infrequently. Landing data are more current but do not reflect secondary migration after arrival. In small and rural communities, secondary migration is often an important source of new immigrants, making landing data less accurate in those communities. The iCARE database provides up-to-date information, but it measures access to services, not settlement patterns. Regional representatives of IRCC engage in ongoing conversations with service providers and local stakeholders which can help supplement the available data.

Research participants across Canada reported that IRCC representatives regularly attend stakeholder meetings. IRCC representatives are responsive to questions from associations of immigrant-serving agencies and settlement service providers. IRCC actively monitors a wide range of issues that shape settlement service provision — immigration and settlement patterns, needs for particular service types, and innovations in service delivery models.

Geography of Settlement Service Availability

The geographic footprint of IRCC-funded settlement services is large and expanding. IRCC funds nearly 500 organizations to provide settlement services in more than 600 communities outside Quebec.[8] In fiscal year 2020–21, IRCC funded 55 organizations that had not received funding in the previous cycle of service agreements.

In nearly 100 communities, no services were provided in 2019–20, but five or more clients received services in 2020–21. In 2019–20, no settlement services were provided in Pictou, Nova Scotia; Owen Sound, Ontario; or West St. Paul, Manitoba. But in 2020–21, more than 60 client interactions were recorded in each municipality.

Access to specific service types is also expanding. In 138 communities across Canada in 2020–21, a service type was delivered that had not been delivered in the previous year.

8   Under the 1991 Canada–Quebec Accord Relating to Immigration and Temporary Admission of Aliens, Quebec manages the allocation of settlement service funding within the province. This study focused on IRCC funding policies, which do not affect Quebec.

Despite the large and expanding number of communities with IRCC-funded settlement services, gaps in settlement services persist. Expansion of IRCC-funded settlement services continues to benefit urban areas. Of the 55 newly funded organizations, nearly half are located in major metropolitan areas.[9] Only two of the newly funded services were in the 45 small and rural communities we identified as having a small but growing number of immigrants.[10]

Research participants in New Brunswick and Manitoba reported that they regularly serve clients who live up to 150 kilometres away. Analysis of IRCC data also indicates that there are communities in Ontario, Alberta, and British Columbia where immigration is on the rise but the nearest IRCC-funded settlement service is more than 70 kilometres away.

Gaps in Availability of Service Types

The gaps in availability of settlement services are more pronounced when considering individual service types. Immigrants in small and rural communities need the same range of services as their urban peers. But many service providers in small and rural communities are funded to provide only a narrow range of service types. A representative of an association of immigrant-serving agencies said, "All of our member agencies have challenges and gaps in terms of offering the extent of the services that might be required."

Among 45 small communities with small but growing numbers of immigrants, 18 had three or fewer service types delivered in 2020–21. (See Chart 1.)

Language training and employment services are common gaps. Asked about service gaps, Jelissa, the director of a settlement service provider, said, "Employment—that would be [gap] number one. And I'm sure if you asked anyone in our region in any position similar to mine, they would also say employment services is such a gap." (See Chart 2.)

Chart 1

Number of Service Types in Communities with Growing Immigration

(number of service types per community, n = 45)
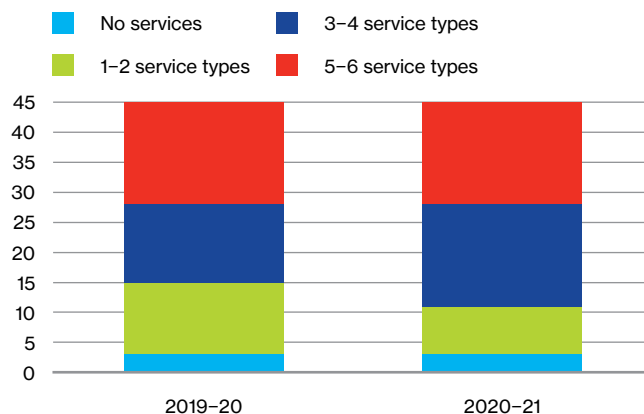
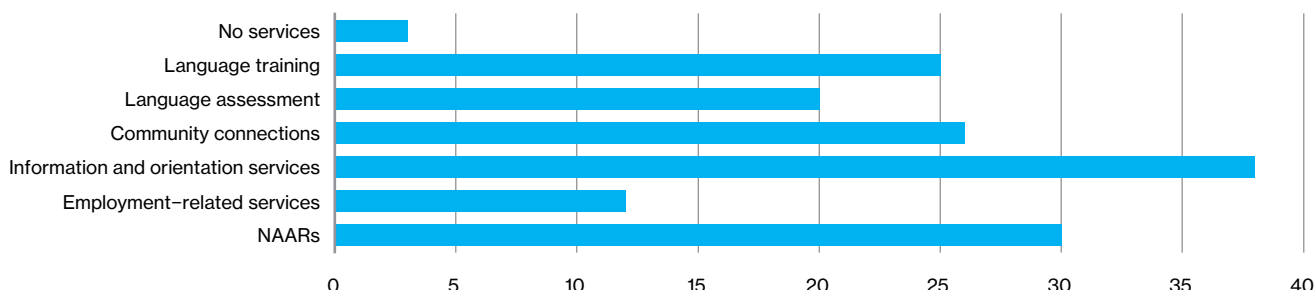Sources: The Conference Board of Canada; Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada.

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9   The data did not indicate whether these organizations also provided itinerant or satellite services in other locations.

10 See "Methodology" for a definition of small and rural communities with a small but growing number of immigrants.

Service Types in Communities With Growing Immigration, 2019–20
(number of service types per community, n = 45)

No services	
Language training	
Language assessment	
Community connections	
Information and orientation services	
Employment–related services	
NAARs	

0 5 10 15 20 25 30 35 40

Sources: The Conference Board of Canada; Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada.

Evidence of the gap in language training and employment services was reinforced by iCARE data. Among the 45 communities with recent growth in immigration, needs and assets assessment and referrals (NAARs) were provided in 30 and information and orientation services were provided in 38 in 2019–20, whereas language training was offered in 25 and employment services were offered in only 12. Employment services expanded only slightly in the next fiscal year, but the number of communities where language training was available increased to 34 in 2020–21.

A further consideration is access to services that are attuned to the linguistic, cultural, or specialized needs of the client. Francophone communities and individuals benefit more if they can access francophone service providers, which may increase distance to the right service provider. Large urban areas often have service providers that support specific groups of service users, such as women or people from particular religious, ethnic, or linguistic communities. Specialized services are uncommon in small and rural communities.[11]

Impact of Gaps in Service Availability

Gaps in settlement services are felt especially acutely in small and rural communities because the social service ecosystem there is so small. Residents already face difficulties accessing basic services, including health care, Service Canada, and provincial one-stop shops. Most communities have few social services to address unemployment, poverty, homelessness, or family issues.

A settlement worker may be the only person within a hundred-kilometre radius who has the expertise to assist with the unique challenges faced by immigrants. Within a context of limited social services, settlement workers can rarely rely on other nearby organizations to meet some of the service needs of their clients. The director of an association of immigrant-serving agencies explained, "In smaller agencies, an incredible amount of work falls on the shoulders of one or two people."

11 Truelove, "Services for Immigrant Women"; Reitmanova and Gustafson, "Mental Health Needs of Visible Minority Immigrants in a Small Urban Center"; Lo, *Immigrant Settlement Services in the Toronto CMA*.

Limited public transit infrastructure in small and rural communities exacerbate geographical gaps in services. Transportation is a major challenge in many small and rural communities. Some communities have a single bus route with infrequent service, and others have no bus at all. Mitra, who works at an association of immigrant-serving agencies, illustrated how distant services erode accessibility, explaining, "There are some parts [of the province] that offer language [training]. But the commute is 45 minutes by driving. A newcomer who has no driver's licence or no car? They're taking bus, and that takes so long." While IRCC-funded support services may assist with transportation costs in some cases, research participants continued to name transportation as a significant barrier to accessing services in small and rural communities.

Gaps in Data About Geographic Availability of Services

Both public data about settlement service locations and internal IRCC data contain gaps in location of services. Gaps in information about service locations interfere with immigrants' ability to access settlement services and IRCC's ability to evaluate geographic availability of services.

Finding Settlement Service Providers

There is no central directory to find nearby settlement services. IRCC operates a directory of IRCC-funded settlement services called "Find Free Newcomer Services Near You"[12] that is searchable by location. However, the database is limited in two ways. It does not include provincially funded settlement service providers, and there are IRCC-funded locations that are missing.

The directory gives the appearance of large service deserts in places where services are, in fact, available. For example, according to the directory, Dauphin, Manitoba, is 110 kilometres from the nearest IRCC-funded settlement service provider, although there is a provider in Dauphin. Similarly, the directory indicates that Bonnyville, Alberta, is 120 kilometres from the nearest IRCC-funded service provider. In fact, there are at least two agencies in Bonnyville, each providing a different service type.

The gaps in data on the directory appear to occur when a service provider operates in multiple locations. The result is that a user of the directory may be discouraged from using settlement

12 Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, "Find Free Newcomer Services Near You."

services due to the appearance of inaccessibility. Lack of knowledge about availability of services may contribute to relatively low uptake of settlement services overall.[13]

The census of community services revealed that settlement services in small and rural communities are not necessarily easy to locate online. Some satellite offices or itinerant services in small and rural communities cannot be found on the IRCC directory, on the municipality website, or by Google search. The list of satellite service locations may not be located on the settlement service provider's website. We were only able to identify certain service locations by speaking to an association of immigrant-serving agencies or by asking a settlement service provider elsewhere in the region.

Not every immigrant looks for services online. Immigrants may find a settlement service through a word-of-mouth referral or by seeing a sign. But research participants reinforced concerns about an information gap. Several settlement workers said they knew clients who took years to find their service. They worried that other immigrants did not know about available services.

Many settlement service providers try to increase visibility by renting office space in a prominent location and by marking the location with a large sign. For example, some participants reported that they sought office space across from the grocery store or rented space in the same building as another social service provider. Service providers also conducted extensive outreach, speaking to local leaders, employers, and social services to increase knowledge of settlement services.

However, settlement workers providing itinerant services that take place frequently may not be able to conduct much outreach. Similarly, they may be unable to advertise their services with a big sign or secure space in a visible location. Thus, a comprehensive online directory remains an important tool to locate services.

IRCC Data on Service Location

IRCC holds data on service location of settlement services. The data are entered into the iCARE database by settlement workers. Analysis revealed that the iCARE data on service location are more accurate than the IRCC online service directory. Nonetheless, there are gaps in the iCARE data as well. Services provided through an itinerant service delivery model are sometimes recorded as taking place at the main office rather than in the community where the services are actually provided.

In small and rural communities where settlement service providers are spread far apart, data entry errors for a single location significantly distort knowledge about geographic coverage of settlement services. The availability of settlement services can only be determined by conducting a case-by-case analysis of every community where it appears that no services are provided. To get an accurate picture, one must analyze every small and rural community to ensure that the data are accurate for each service type.

Regional program officers likely know the locations and itinerant services they fund. But knowledge at a regional level does not allow IRCC to conduct a comprehensive analysis of geographic gaps in services and to develop a strategy to address those gaps.

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13 Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, *Evaluation of the Settlement Program*.

Settlement Service Needs for a New Era of Immigration

Two changes in immigration policy shape needs for settlement services in small and rural communities. Firstly, the Canadian government has launched programs and pilots to attract immigrants to smaller communities beyond Canada's traditional gateway cities, with a municipal pilot on the horizon.

Secondly, since 2006, more people have been granted temporary residence permits than permanent residence each year.[14] Temporary residents are an increasingly important source of permanent residents. In 2019, 74,500 people transitioned from temporary to permanent residence, making up nearly 22 per cent of new permanent residents that year.[15] The pandemic has amplified the trend even further, at least temporarily. Two-step immigration is especially common in many small and rural communities, which often first attract people as temporary foreign workers or international students and then retain them as permanent residents.

The rise in two-step immigration and regionalization has significant implications for settlement in Canada. Although IRCC implements both immigration and settlement policy, the two areas have not developed in tandem. Rather, settlement service priorities have remained consistent as immigration has evolved. This has contributed to gaps in settlement services in small and rural communities.

Supporting Regionalization Through Settlement Services

Canada lacks a strategy to ensure that settlement service infrastructure supports regionalization goals.[16] IRCC prioritizes funding organizations that will be able to meet settlement service targets. IRCC does not direct settlement service funding to communities to strengthen an emergent settlement trend or to increase the attractiveness of small and rural communities. Howard, a regional representative from IRCC, captured this dynamic when he said, "We are not set up or entitled to 'build it and they will come.' It is absolutely the opposite. It's 'move the money to where the clients *are*.'"

Responding to major settlement trends rather than anticipating them creates a lag in the availability of settlement services. The lag is exacerbated by the five-year service agreements, which offer stability to funded organizations but delay funding to new locations. A persistent lag contributes to the amenity gap that makes small and rural communities less attractive to many immigrants.[17]

Three dynamics play an important role in allowing gaps in settlement services to persist. Firstly, there is a high barrier to entry for IRCC funding. Secondly, small and rural communities are disadvantaged by IRCC eligibility criteria that only support services to permanent residents. Finally, provincial funding for settlement services does not sufficiently fill gaps in small and rural communities.

14 Alboim, *Adjusting the Balance*; Hou, Crossman, and Picot, "Two-Step Immigration Selection: An Analysis."

15 Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, "Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada Departmental Plan 2020-2021."

16 For a recent policy announcement that may improve access, see Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, "Government of Canada Invests $35 Million to Expand Settlement Services for Newcomers in Small Towns and Rural Communities."

17 Hyndman, Schuurman, and Fiedler, "Size Matters"; Esses and Carter, "Beyond the Big City."

Responding to settlement trends rather than anticipating them creates a lag in the availability of settlement services. This lag contributes to the amenity gap that can make small and rural communities less attractive to many immigrants.
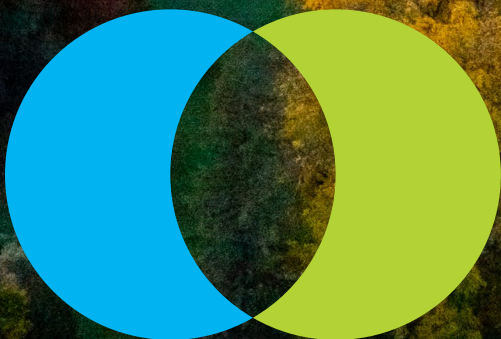
Establishing Settlement Services in New Locations

As more regions recruit and welcome new immigrant residents, those places will need settlement services.

There are three common models to establish settlement services in a new place.

- A **new organization** focused on serving immigrants may form. The organization may initially rely on volunteers and small grant programs until it is able to receive IRCC and/or provincial funding.
- A **local social service organization** may extend its service offering to meet the unique needs of immigrants. For example, an adult education agency may create employment and education services targeting immigrants.
- A **settlement service provider in another community** may establish itinerant services or a satellite office. Those services may eventually break off to create an independent organization or stay connected to the parent organization.

Regardless of how settlement services are established in a new location, settlement services benefit from strong local connections, expertise in serving immigrants, and organizational support for the settlement worker(s).[18]

The research also showed that there are significant institutional challenges to establishing settlement services in new locations and no road map for how to do so successfully. Limited off-cycle flexibility for funded settlement service providers inhibits them from serving new areas. All three models still face the challenge of making a strong case for services in a new location, given the higher cost-per-service in small and rural communities.

High Barrier to Entry for IRCC Funding

The application process for IRCC funding is time-consuming and highly competitive. As Howard, a regional representative from IRCC, explained, "We're set up for very large contribution agreements that last five years and cost millions of dollars, which is not a small-scale grant program that's easy to access." Inaccessibility does not serve the goals of regionalization. Rather, it contributes to the challenges of setting up settlement services in a new community.

Communities that do not have an IRCC-funded settlement service provider may struggle to be successful in applying. An organization is more likely to be funded if it can document the presence of permanent residents and the capacity of the organization to provide the services. Some infrastructure must already be in place to fulfill these requirements, but there is no clear process for creating that infrastructure without funding. As Robin, a settlement worker, said, "You have to prove that need, and you prove it with numbers of clients. When you just have one settlement worker, you can only do so much in the day, so you can't get the numbers. It is a 'chicken and an egg' or a 'dog chasing its tail' situation."

IRCC is aware of unmet needs for settlement services. IRCC regional representatives described their work preparing new organizations for the next CFP. These regional representatives

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18 Leslie Cramer, "Municipal Approaches and Settlement System Development in Smal Communities" (Calgary: AAISA, 2022), Draft shared prior to publication.

connect emerging organizations with funded organizations, umbrella organizations, and nearby local immigration partnerships for mentorship and support. They work with emerging organizations to help them understand the requirements of the application process and what makes a successful proposal. One regional representative of IRCC, Rosemary, explained that "a part of our work is not just to fund organizations, it's to build capacity in organizations, so they develop this expertise and the governance and the infrastructure and organization so that they can apply on the next CFP intake cycle."

Despite these efforts, service providers in small and rural communities emphasized the difficulty of accessing IRCC funding. Small organizations whose funding proposals had been refused reported not knowing why they were not funded. Research participants from several organizations were not aware that they may get support from an IRCC regional representative. They did not know how to get in touch with the IRCC regional representative. Service providers with no or minimal IRCC funding were caught in the "chicken and the egg" dilemma, unsure of what they would need to do to make a proposal successful or where they could get that information.

These dynamics give an edge to large or well-established settlement service providers. Such providers have more expertise and capacity for responding to IRCC CFPs. This gives a competitive advantage to communities that have a history of receiving immigrants and have established settlement service providers.

Flexibility Within Service Agreements

Settlement services may also be established in a new location when an existing provider expands into a new community. For this to be achieved between CFPs, settlement service providers need awareness of emerging needs in other communities, as well as the flexibility to respond.

IRCC has mechanisms to alter service agreements to reflect changes in settlement patterns and demand for settlement services. The level of flexibility varies based on availability of funds, as well as decisions by regional IRCC representatives and individual program officers. Flexibility is more accessible for larger providers that can negotiate with IRCC and have multiple programs or locations across which to redistribute resources.

Settlement service providers in small and rural communities gave mixed reviews about using flexibility to meet the needs of their clients. Sasha emphasized the difficulties in making changes to service agreements within a context of already-onerous reporting requirements: "It's a very tedious process to try to make changes to existing agreements. And that creates a challenge. I am one person running an organization and trying to do the funding pieces and making sure that my board knows what's going on, and the follow up and reporting that comes with IRCC is also time-consuming."

Robin had the opposite view. She had a positive impression of making changes to the service agreement: "Absolutely, we have that flexibility. We might not be able to do thingsovernight. But if the need is there, we can shift resources. We are not confined to just do things in one space the same way for five years. Absolutely not."

Inflexibility limits geographic expansion through satellite offices or itinerant services in a new community during a service agreement. This delays the opening of services in new locations until the next round of service agreements.

Cost per Service User

The gaps in services also arise due to the high cost of delivering a full range of services in small and rural communities with smaller numbers of immigrants. Even a small organization needs enough capacity to submit proposals, do bookkeeping, pay for a workspace, and hire a settlement worker, all of which is costly to serve a small number of immigrants.

Teresa, who leads an organization that serves a wide geographic area, explained how they use a hub and spoke model to ensure that services in small communities are financially viable: "If you have one or two programs, there's no way you can pay rent, have a building, or have support staff because it's just too small. You have to combine it with something else.... Our main office serves enough people for funding. But [two remote communities] can have 20 newcomers combined over a year, and no one is going to fund a service for that."

Kimberley, a settlement worker at an organization in a remote community said that the high cost per user interfered with getting IRCC funding. "You really need to hire a full-time staff. It's a lot of money to ask for the small amount of people that we serve. I guess that's where they see there's not enough value for their funding."

Settlement workers and associations of immigrant-serving agencies nonetheless emphasized the robust community benefit to funding services in small and rural communities. IRCC funding decisions are not currently set up to account for the community benefit and the role of settlement services in supporting regionalization.[19]

Limited Eligibility for IRCC-Funded Settlement Services

IRCC-funded settlement services are available to permanent residents, not temporary residents or naturalized citizens. Settlement service providers, organizations of immigrant-serving agencies, and scholars consistently call out IRCC's narrow eligibility criteria as a key concern.[20] Lack of access to settlement services heightens vulnerability among people who may already experience increased challenges based on their temporary visa. As the number of people with temporary residence has increased dramatically, the gap in services affects more people.

Research participants in small and rural communities echoed these sentiments. Small and rural communities may have many temporary residents, such as temporary foreign workers and international students, who need services. However, settlement service providers struggle to meet these needs because of funder restrictions, limited capacity, and no local organization where they can refer temporary residents. There is currently no national plan for how to address the needs of these people who are admitted into Canada by IRCC.

19 ACS-AEC, *Envisioning the Future of the Immigrant-Serving Sector.*

20 Alboim, *Adjusting the Balance*; Esses and others, *Supporting Canada's COVID-19 Resilience and Recovery*; OCASI, *OCASI Comments on Immigration Levels Plan*; Rajkumar and others, "At the Temporary–Permanent Divide."

The research participants also pointed out that the eligibility criteria place a distinct strain on small and rural communities that wish to attract and retain immigrant residents. A temporary resident who feels connected to and supported in a community is more likely to remain if they are later granted permanent residents. Settlement services offered later, when someone has transitioned to permanent residence, are unlikely to offer the same benefits. Settlement services for temporary residents can therefore support the goal of regionalization, benefiting the whole community.

The current eligibility criteria also make it difficult for service providers in small and rural communities to demonstrate a sufficient population of service users to merit IRCC funding. Expanding eligibility criteria would allow service providers to more accurately reflect community need for settlement services in their funding applications and reports to IRCC.

The Role of Provincial Funding

Like IRCC, provincial governments also fund settlement services. Together, the two funding sources provide more services in more communities. But the research shows that this collaboration is not enough to close service gaps in small and rural communities.

Provincial priorities vary. Because IRCC funding covers such a substantial range of service types but with limited eligibility criteria, provinces frequently prioritize funds for services that expand upon the services already offered by IRCC rather than duplicate them. They also tend to focus on service types that will support economic and demographic development goals, such as language training and employment support.

This works well in communities with multiple service providers or a large service provider that offers the full range of service types from both funding sources. It works less well in communities with small numbers of immigrants. Additionally, while the barrier to entry may be lower for getting provincial funding than for IRCC funding, the provincial funding has sufficiently eased the establishment of settlement services in new communities.

Many service providers in small and rural communities are only funded by one government funder—either the province or IRCC. Having a single funder significantly reduces the range of service types and client eligibility, compared with a service provider with funding from both sources.

Even if a service provider in a rural community has both provincial and federal funding, use of

services may not be seamless. When provinces and IRCC fund different service types with different eligibility criteria, certain people will fall through the gap.

Even though provinces may use different eligibility criteria than IRCC, certain groups of people may be excluded from settlement services altogether. For example, some provinces will not fund services for international students, young dependents of someone with a temporary work permit, or a dependent spouse who is not eligible to work. None of these individuals would be eligible for settlement services funded by IRCC. Nonetheless, the well-being of these individuals benefits the community, as well as the longer-term prospects that the individual or family will remain in the community in the future.

Some interviewees also described gaps in service types that are created as federal and provincial governments strive to avoid duplicating one another's funding. Sasha described a situation in which her agency was denied IRCC funding for employment support because the province was already funding the service. One year into the IRCC service agreement, the provincial funding for employment support ended. The province did not issue a subsequent CFP for employment support. The organization was left with a gap in that service type that could not be addressed until the next federal or provincial call for proposals.

When situations such as the one facing Sasha's organization occur in an urban area with a large number of settlement service providers, there are likely possibilities to make a referral, for example, to a larger IRCC-funded settlement service provider. However, in Sasha's case it meant that all the communities she served were left without specialized employment supports for immigrants. This gap did not come about because her agency was serving too few people, but, rather, because of gaps that occur between federal and provincial funding priorities.

Bridging Service Gaps

When settlement workers see client needs that are not funded, it falls to them to negotiate that gap, either providing the service outside the scope of their service agreement, seeking additional funding, or turning people away.[21] Settlement workers are the intermediary between IRCC, which funds settlement services, and immigrants who are seeking settlement services. Settlement workers must negotiate being client-centred while operating the service in a way that will not jeopardize their funding.

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21 Praznik and Shields, *An Anatomy of Settlement Services in Canada*; Rose and Preston, "Canadian Municipalities and Services for Immigrants."

Expanding Access to Settlement Service Types

Each settlement service type plays an instrumental role in improving the well-being of immigrants in their community. Language instructors reported that without language training, it would be difficult for immigrants to communicate, make connections to their new community, find employment, and feel at home. Providers who offered information and referrals felt that referrals improved quality of life by ensuring basic needs are met. Without employment support, families with an unemployed family member are more likely to leave for another community where all members will have job prospects.

Providers Go Above and Beyond for Their Clients

Across the interviews, we encountered settlement service providers performing a large workload beyond the scope of the funded service types. For example, we spoke to:

- a language instructor who included form-filling, community connections, and information and referrals into language class;

- a settlement worker that created language circles as a form of community connections to supplement virtual language instruction because there was no funding for in-person language training in her community;

- a SWIS worker who was sorting through the impacts of family violence on immigration status;

- a settlement worker who was informally providing employment support in a town with high rates of unemployment and located 150 kilometres away from the nearest agency funded to provide employment support.

The point was reinforced by the director of an association of immigrant-serving agencies who wanted to dispel the myth that settlement work in small communities is easy compared with the work in urban areas: "[One or two people are] expected to do the same breadth of services [as service providers in large centres]." In small and rural communities, client needs are not matched with funding to develop service offerings that meet those needs.

There is a gap between what settlement workers do and what they can report to the funder. This skews IRCC's systemic understanding of client needs and the real impact of settlement services.

Role of Digital Service Delivery

Digital delivery of settlement services offers opportunities to expand the geographic reach of settlement services. It also has limits. Digital service delivery works well for certain groups of clients and certain types of client interactions, but it works less well for others. The availability of digital services can provide a more client-focused service by expanding options for access, but it does not adequately replace having a local settlement worker.

Some settlement service providers have long used digital service delivery to serve a large geographic area, whereas others only gained this capacity during the pandemic. Service providers reported that now that they have the infrastructure for digital service delivery, they plan to continue to use it even when in-person meetings are considered safe. The option of digital service delivery improves access to settlement services—for example, for clients who have difficulty with transportation or child care.

It can also help people access a provider that has a service tailored to their specific needs— for example, a settlement worker who speaks their language.

Service providers still need to develop relationships in the communities where they serve their clients. This allows for more effective referrals and helps link newcomers to the members of their community who they will be seeing in their everyday life. Teresa, the director of a service provider who regularly serves clients hundreds of kilometres away, explained, "You're talking integration, you're talking settlement, you're talking about becoming a part of your community.... We didn't want to [provide services in a remote community] but not connect you to that community. That's why we went to councils and municipal offices and libraries and the school and the clinic and the daycare and you name it—the churches, the grocery stores—to talk about how they would want to be involved in the settlement of families that arrived in their communities." Maintaining these relationships with non-immigration partners across the communities they serve is built into the service model at Teresa's organization.

In-person service delivery also creates a stronger community connection. James prefers in-person work when possible because "meeting somebody face to face, I might be the only person that talked to that newcomer that day, especially if they're here by themselves." This was reiterated by Robin, who said, "You'll always need a person on the ground. When you were talking about newcomers, you will need that person because a computer voice or a face across the screen is not community connection. You need that human interaction. There's no way you could deliver good

The option of digital service delivery improves access to settlement services. But in-person settlement services remain important to build rapport with service users and connect them with their communities.

settlement service just wholly online. Absolutely not possible. You are missing something and it's just not going to be captured via Internet."

Virtual service delivery does not work as well for certain clients and certain activities.[22] When there is a big language barrier, it is easier to communicate with someone in person rather than virtually. Some clients have limited access to IT or limited digital literacy and need the opportunity to meet the settlement worker in person. In-person appointments function better for building rapport. Settlement workers prefer in-person meetings for conducting a full needs assessment or discussing sensitive issues.

Numerous interviewees pointed out that language instruction is less effective when it is delivered online. Research shows that results vary depending on the specific language learning program and the level of language knowledge and self-motivation.[23] Valerie explained, "There's these thresholds of how many clients we need to host a language class, it means that rural communities receive second-tier services. You don't have enough people for the in-person class, just do this virtual class…. It's not as engaging. People don't learn as well. So the quality of settlement services does suffer." Virtual language training also relies on access to high-speed Internet, which can be a challenge in small and rural communities, as well as for low-income households.

Remote classes also reduce opportunities for language learners to meet each other and form a community of peers. Service providers in small and rural communities worked to improve the quality of virtual language instruction by supplementing it with in-person classes, conversation circles, or language cafés. However, these activities require time and capacity, and therefore need to be factored into the funding for organizations that are expected to refer clients to virtual language instruction.

Offering Settlement Services to Temporary Residents

The narrow eligibility requirements place a strain on settlement workers who are invested in the well-being of their clients and their communities. Many research participants felt that turning temporary residents away violated their organizational mission. They addressed the gap in settlement services for temporary residents by seeking additional funding or providing the services off the side of their desk.

Many research participants found creative ways to fill gaps in services for newcomers who do not have permanent residence, a phenomenon also documented in past studies.[24] Settlement workers have the expertise needed by potential clients. Many participants stated that refusing to serve someone would be unethical and would harm the wider community. James said, "Our office policy is that we don't turn anybody away."

Robin described a period when the province where she works did not fund services for temporary residents: "It became very tricky for us. We could not do that in good conscience. I

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22 Esses and others, *Supporting Canada's COVID-19 Resilience and Recovery*; PeaceGeeks, *Settlement 3.0 Project.*

23 Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, *Evaluation of Language Training Services*; Stockwell and Reinders, "Technology, Motivation and Autonomy, and Teacher Psychology in Language Learning."

24 Rose and Preston, "Canadian Municipalities and Services for Immigrants."

would either help people off the side of my desk or obtain all sorts of little funding envelopes…. I wrote four grants so we could serve temporary foreign workers, so I could hire somebody to teach English to temporary foreign workers."

Kimberley described the types of cases she sees in rural Alberta: "A lot of times, temporary foreign workers are not treated by their employers as they should be… and then they try and get support, bridging money, or temporary housing from Alberta Supports, but they're not allowed because they're temporary foreign workers. So then they're out of a job, they don't speak the language, and they have no money." Such situations require time-consuming casework, but it was important to the organization to do this work anyway.

Successful Settlement Involves the Whole Community

Settlement services support immigrant retention, but they must be complemented by support and engagement from all levels of government, as well as from the community itself. Community involvement in immigrant settlement not only amplifies the impact of settlement services, it also makes immigrants feel welcome and part of their new community.

Connecting Settlement Services to the Community

Settlement services benefit from being visible and well-connected to the community. A big part of settlement work is introducing someone to the community where they live. Interviewee Chloe explained, "Successful integration of newcomer, refugee, and immigrant families is [determined by] their experiences when they're accessing those broader community services."

Investing time into outreach to local stakeholders may seem counterintuitive when a small service provider is under pressure to find clients and deliver the number of services required in the service agreement. But without those connections, the settlement work is much more difficult. Jelissa explained, "Speaking rurally, that connection to the community is first and foremost, it's going to be your way to success. Your community buy-in is so important."

Jelissa worked in a community where stakeholder knowledge and buy-in were particularly low. She had the experience of stakeholders cancelling meetings with her or refusing to refer newcomers to the organization. She reflected, "It's an ongoing struggle. I'm still trying to fight to really understand what's going on underneath that, and then I would say people not wanting to get involved or not seeing the importance of getting me involved." Nonetheless, she said that her relationships to the community were what made the success of those aspects that were working well, and she found it more difficult to provide effective and impactful services to immigrants living in surrounding communities where she did not have those personal relationships.

Settlement service providers emphasized that their role is not to take on every immigration issue on behalf of the community, but rather to partner with the community to make settlement work well. As Robin said, "It's very important that the community itself—stakeholders,

municipalities, people who live there—feel that this is a local organization. You have to have that local sense. Otherwise people are just thinking, 'Hey, that's somebody else coming in to do your settlement work.'" Settlement service providers address the needs of an immigrant that require specific expertise on immigration, whereas it is the responsibility of the community to make newcomer families feel welcome.

Impact Through Partnerships

The work of IRCC-funded settlement services can be amplified when those services are embedded in a broader ecosystem of support. Settlement service providers can increase impact by working together with other local stakeholders. The settlement workers we talked to described working with public health officials, economic development officers, community centres, museums, employers, food banks, libraries, and churches. They used space in city halls or churches to provide itinerant services. Settlement workers provided digital services to people without a home computer or Internet by sending them to the library.

Partnerships can often service the interests of both settlement services and the local institutions. Settlement workers refer people to community events at museums, libraries, and community centres to strengthen community connections and to have opportunities to reinforce language learning. The local institutions benefited by having more people attend their events.

A network of sponsors supporting Syrian refugees developed relationships with numerous local organizations and social services. For example, the network referred many newly arrived refugees to the Salvation Army for clothes and furniture. To offset this increased use of the Salvation Army, Robert, a member of this sponsorship network, asked the Salvation Army to contact him when there were shortages of popular items like winter wear and socks. When needed, Robert mobilized the volunteers and local businesses to donate those items, which were then available at the Salvation Army for all customers, not only the refugees.

Infrastructure

Like all residents, immigrants in small and rural communities rely on infrastructure, such as transportation, housing stock, child care, health services, and high-speed Internet.[25] Service providers in small and rural communities gave numerous examples of communities that wanted newcomers but could not retain them because they could not find a job, secure appropriate housing, or enrol their children in child care. Lacking transit infrastructure increased the strain on immigrants, who needed to either get a driving license and a car, pay for a taxi, or rely on infrequent bus service.

While infrastructure will support attraction and retention of immigrants, it is beyond the purview of IRCC to fund improvements in infrastructure. Rosemary described a medium-sized community introducing new bus routes to meet the needs of international students who lived predominantly in one area and wanted to access shops and services in another area. "I [at IRCC] would never have funded any of that work … those

25 Esses and Carter, "Beyond the Big City"; PeaceGeeks, "Settlement 3.0 Project."

community consultations or survey to put in those bus routes ... but it's part of this larger conversation that these students hopefully become the new permanent residents in that community." Developments in infrastructure in small and rural communities will make them more attractive to immigrants.

Community Hug

Settlement service providers emphasized that settlement services need to be complemented by a sense of welcome. Teresa, the director of a settlement service provider, suggested building what she called "the community hug." She elaborated, saying, "Get the people that are supportive involved from the beginning ... health care, education, and employment for sure. But then recreation and language and friends and neighbours and community." This community hug serves the long-term goal of retaining new immigrants.

Holding community conversations about immigration can broaden investment in immigration. Chloe explained, "So often settlement service providers start too far ahead, and then we have to backtrack, sensitizing communities and pitching the need for population growth and this kind of thing. If people from the beginning understood and were engaged in reimagining their communities, in how they could be a part of building more inclusive spaces, I think it goes a long, long way." Research participants emphasized that positive messages about immigration should come from diverse stakeholders—from employers to local elected officials to community leaders.

What a Community Hug Looks Like

One stakeholder explained what the community hug looks like in his community. Before COVID, a local employer who sponsored many newcomers sent a welcoming committee to the airport to greet the arriving immigrants. They would drive back together and enjoy a meal in housing that was already secured for the family. Wanting people to feel at home sooner, the employer also offered no-interest loans to new employees to buy furniture. The employer support helps immigrants meet their core needs and be able to shift their focus to quality of life and building strong connections to the community.

A sense of welcome can be easily undone by discriminatory or exclusionary comments.[26] Rahat explained, "Attraction is fine, but what are you doing to actually keep people and ensure that they meaningfully settle? The atmosphere, the vibe, the climate…. There's a lot of work that we need to do, deconstructing racism and xenophobia." Several research participants described situations in which an immigrant family was recruited to the community only to leave again after being treated poorly. The availability of a good job and a good home was not enough to retain the newcomer. Discriminatory treatment negatively impacts the newcomer family. It also undermines the opportunities for communities to benefit from immigration.

26 Esses and Carter, "Beyond the Big City."

Recommendations

How to Support Immigrants in Small and Rural Communities

Canada's regionalization policies will be most successful if they are complemented by policies that ensure the availability of settlement services. The current funding model for settlement services results in limited availability of settlement services in small and rural communities with recent growth in immigration. To create a more robust settlement support system in small and rural communities, we recommend the following:

IRCC

Create a strategy to facilitate the establishment of settlement services in small and rural communities. Settlement needs to be at the core of regionalization policies. Settlement services will enhance settlement outcomes and immigrant retention in small and rural communities. IRCC should explore a funding model that supports the development of settlement services in small and rural communities and accommodates the higher cost per user and the need for all six service types. For example, IRCC could develop a parallel stream that funds settlement services in new locations. Where organizations do not have the funding or capacity to provide all six service types, there should be a road map for how immigrants in those communities can access additional service types that takes user experience into consideration.

Continue to fund digital infrastructure to supplement, but not replace, in-person service delivery. Digital service delivery can improve access to services. This is especially true when there are transportation or child care barriers, or a need for a specialized service not available locally. Settlement workers should be able to use digital and hybrid service delivery to deliver a client-focused service. But digital service delivery should not be seen as a replacement for local settlement workers, whose relationships with their clients and local institutions deliver impactful services.

Expand eligibility criteria so that temporary residents and naturalized citizens can access IRCC-funded settlement services. IRCC's eligibility criteria affect the whole settlement sector. They also have distinct impacts on small and rural communities. Temporary residents (including temporary foreign workers and international students) and naturalized citizens contribute to the communities where they live, work, and study. They are also a potential pool of new residents that small and rural communities are seeking to retain. Settlement service provision can support that goal. Expansion of eligibility criteria will require a significant additional investment in the settlement sector, but this will outweigh the opportunity costs of the current misalignment between immigration and settlement policies.

Create a comprehensive online directory of settlement service providers that is searchable by location and service type. It should be easy for immigrants to locate settlement services. Currently, data about settlement service availability is fragmented across several sources, and the directory of IRCC-funded settlement services is missing information. These gaps could discourage people from seeking settlement services, rather than encouraging them. A comprehensive online directory of settlement services will improve accessibility of settlement services. The database should be provided as pre-arrival information for new immigrants, and it should also be widely publicized within Canada.

Improve transparency about accessing settlement service funding. Communities with recent growth in immigration and no settlement services cannot easily access information about how to build a settlement service infrastructure. IRCC should develop a website that provides resources for stakeholders in small and rural communities. The website can provide information on how to connect with regional and provincial groups, as well as how to get support from IRCC in preparing a proposal for settlement service funding. Settlement service providers that apply for IRCC funding and are not successful should be informed why they were not successful and whether they can access mid-stream opportunities to seek funding.

Improve integrity of iCARE data about service location. Without accurate data about service location, IRCC cannot conduct rigorous evaluation and planning exercises about service provision in small and rural communities. Current iCARE data have some services attributed to the wrong location. IRCC should ensure that settlement workers can easily and accurately input data regarding service location.

Allow greater flexibility of funding to accommodate changes in mode and location of service delivery. Settlement services in small and rural communities frequently lack a robust network of local referral partners. In this context, settlement workers need the flexibility to meet the needs of their clients. These needs might change throughout the course of a service agreement, particularly with respect to service location, itinerant services, and service types. A greater degree of flexibility would ensure a more client-focused service and stronger outcomes.

Work with other government departments and other levels of government to address racism and xenophobia. Immigrants will struggle to settle and succeed if they feel unwelcome in their communities. All levels of government must continue to innovate interventions that address racism and xenophobia.

Provinces and Territories

Improve access to settlement services in small and rural communities. Investments in settlement services in small and rural communities complement existing provincial and regional immigration programs, as well as economic development initiatives. The funding needs of small and rural communities may be different than in urban areas due to the limited settlement service ecosystem. Provincial governments should evaluate how to use funding to improve access to ensure that local needs are being met.

Invest in critical infrastructure that will support growth and retention in small and rural communities. Immigrants, like other residents, benefit from robust infrastructure in the areas of transportation, health care, child care, and high-speed Internet. A number of communities that would like to attract new immigrants are struggling to do so due to limited housing stock, high housing prices, and difficulty accessing other critical infrastructure.

Maintain a directory of settlement services and share the directory with IRCC. It should be easy for immigrants to locate settlement services. Provinces should create and regularly update a directory of settlement services in the province. This data should be shared with IRCC to support the national directory.

Improve communication between provincial ministries that fund settlement services and local immigration stakeholders. Information sharing and alignment of goals across immigration stakeholders ensures better support for immigrants. This requires communication across settlement service providers, associations of immigrant-serving agencies, local immigration partnerships, and provincial ministries that fund settlement services. Provincial officials should attend stakeholder meetings and be responsive to stakeholder questions.

Work with other government departments and other levels of government to address racism and xenophobia. Immigrants will struggle to settle and succeed if they feel unwelcome in their communities. All levels of government must continue to innovate interventions that address racism and xenophobia.

Municipalities

Invest in critical infrastructure that will support growth and retention in small and rural communities. Immigrants, like other residents, benefit from robust infrastructure in the areas of transportation, health care, child care, and high-speed Internet. A number of communities that would like to attract new immigrants are struggling to do so due to limited housing stock, high housing prices, and difficulty accessing other critical infrastructure.

Create an online directory of social services in the municipality that includes settlement services. New residents should be able to find social services easily. Municipalities should create a directory of social services, including settlement services. It can be available online and be given to new residents as part of a welcome package.

Lead local conversations about immigration and welcoming communities. Municipalities are well-placed to bring together local stakeholders to talk about immigration. These conversations ensure that residents understand the role of immigration in their community and allow residents to contribute to a vision for the future for their community. At stakeholder meetings, people can identify concerns and discuss possible solutions to concerns. Overall, these conversations set up the community for success in welcoming immigrants. Municipalities can provide infrastructure to support stakeholder meetings, such as providing space to meet, chairing meetings, taking minutes, and distributing meeting invites.

Work with other government departments and other levels of government to address racism and xenophobia. Immigrants will struggle to settle and succeed if they feel unwelcome in their communities. All levels of government must continue to innovate interventions that address racism and xenophobia.

Settlement Service Providers in Small and Rural Communities

Build strong relationships with the local community. Meaningful settlement occurs when numerous stakeholders participate in the process. When settlement service providers build relationships with the local community, it increases the community buy-in, as well as opportunities to partner on projects that support both settlement work and the mission of the partner organization. Settlement service providers should seek opportunities to talk about their work and to work together with other local services and institutions.

Seek out opportunities to share information and leading practices. Across Canada, settlement service providers work in hundreds of small and rural communities. Many communities also have local immigration partnerships (LIPs). Settlement service providers also get support from provincial or regional associations of immigrant-serving agencies. Emerging organizations can reach out to settlement services in nearby communities, to LIPs, and to the local association of immigrant-serving agencies for information and to find resources that can support their work.
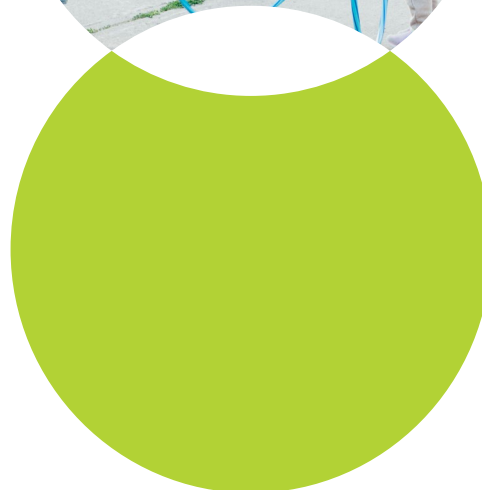
Appendix A
Methodology

The findings in this impact paper were developed based on quantitative and qualitative research methods, as well as a review of academic and grey literature.

The quantitative data sources include both publicly available data and a custom data request. Publicly available data used for this paper include:

• 2016 Census Data, Immigration and Ethnocultural Diversity Highlight Tables—Immigrant status and period of immigration, 2016 counts, both sexes, age (total), Canada and census subdivisions (municipalities) with 5,000-plus population, 2016 Census—25 per cent sample data;
• IRCC, Admissions of Permanent Residents by Province/Territory and Census Metropolitan Area (CMA) of Intended Destination (2015–2021).

In response to a custom data request, IRCC provided the following data from the iCARE database for both the 2019–20 and 2020–21 financial years:

• Settlement service clients, by service type and provider organizations;
• Settlement service clients, by service type and community (location) of service location;
• Settlement service clients, by provider organization and community of service location.

The comparison across two financial years is useful because the two years include the end of one round of service agreements and the first year of the new service agreements. In consideration of the impact of COVID-19 on service providers and service delivery, this impact paper only presents data about expansion of service provision (new communities with services or an increase in number of services in a community) from one year to the next. We did not analyze places where services decreased because it would not be possible to determine whether those contractions were due to funding changes or to COVID-19 restrictions.

Using the census data and IRCC data on recent admissions, we developed a list of 45 small communities (less than 40,000 residents in in the census subdivision, according to the 2016 census) of particular interest because of recent growth in immigration. Communities drawn from census data were selected based on an increase in immigration based on three criteria. The number of immigrants by period of immigration increased across the most recent two immigration periods (more immigrants in 2006–10 than in 2001–05 and more immigrants in 2011–16 than in 2006–10). The number of immigrant arrivals during the most recent period (2011–16) was at least double the number during the previous period (2006–10). The immigrants who arrived in the 2011–16 period account for at least one-third of the community's total immigrant population. Communities drawn from the landing data were selected based on having an increase in immigration. An increase in immigration in these communities is defined as immigration that grew in at least two years during the 2015–21 period, reached at least 50 new arrivals in one of the years, and grew by at least 50 per cent between two years.

The qualitative data is derived from interviews and a community census. We conducted interviews with 20 individuals, including two regional representatives

of IRCC, three associations of immigrant-serving agencies, three engaged local stakeholders, and 12 settlement service providers. We interviewed participants in Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Ontario, and Saskatchewan. Service providers were either based in a small community, provided services in small communities, or had experience with digital settlement service delivery. The interviewees were identified based on preliminary interviews with key informants and based on the community census.

The community census included nine communities across four provinces. The communities were all included in the list of 45 communities of interest (criteria described above). The census included an Internet search of the municipality website, the IRCC service directory, the IRCC data on settlement service provision, and a Google search of the community name to determine what social services and settlement services are available. The community census helped establish the integrity of service location data and the social service ecosystem in small and rural communities.

Appendix B
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Making Rural Immigration Work: Settlement Services in Small and Rural Communities
Kathryn Dennler

Where insights meet impact