

Amplifying Indigenous, Employer & College Voices for Stronger Rural Integration

Presentation by Soheila Homayed, Elaine Flores, James Franks, and Shannon Guppy

November 26, 2024 | Pathways to Prosperity Virtual Workshop



CENTRE FOR
CIVIC RELIGIOUS
LITERACY



Land Acknowledgement

*Treaty 6 Territory and
within the Metis Nation
of Alberta, District 9 and
10*

We acknowledge the Indigenous Peoples of Turtle Island and respect the histories, languages, and cultures of the First Nations, Métis, Inuit, and all First Peoples of Canada, whose presence continues to enrich our vibrant community.





*Scan to participate in
the poll*

 POLL

- Which sector do you work in?
- What province/territory in Canada do you operate in or serve?

Who Is In Our Virtual Room?



Who We Are

VISION: Thriving rural communities.

MISSION: Working *with* communities and partners, through networks we build capacity by developing tools and resources, implementing projects, facilitating access to funding and trusted data, while amplifying the rural voice.



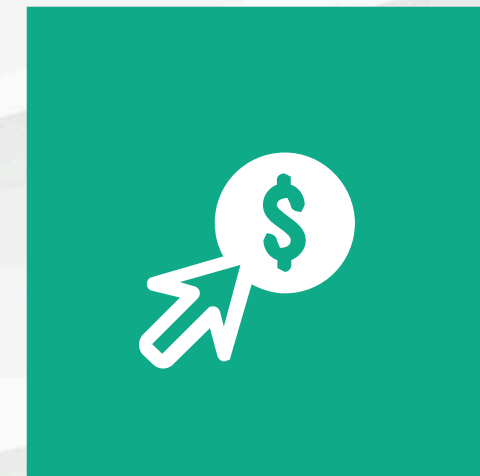
Innovative
tools &
resources



Expertise &
capacity
building



Advocacy &
amplifying the
rural voice



Help with
accessing
funding





**SUPPORTING
HOUSING
DEVELOPMENT**



**ADDRESSING
HOMELESSNESS**



**INTEGRATING &
RETAINING
NEWCOMERS**



**COMMUNITY
DEVELOPMENT**

Key Program Areas



Rural Employers' Awareness of Diversity and Inclusion (READI) Project

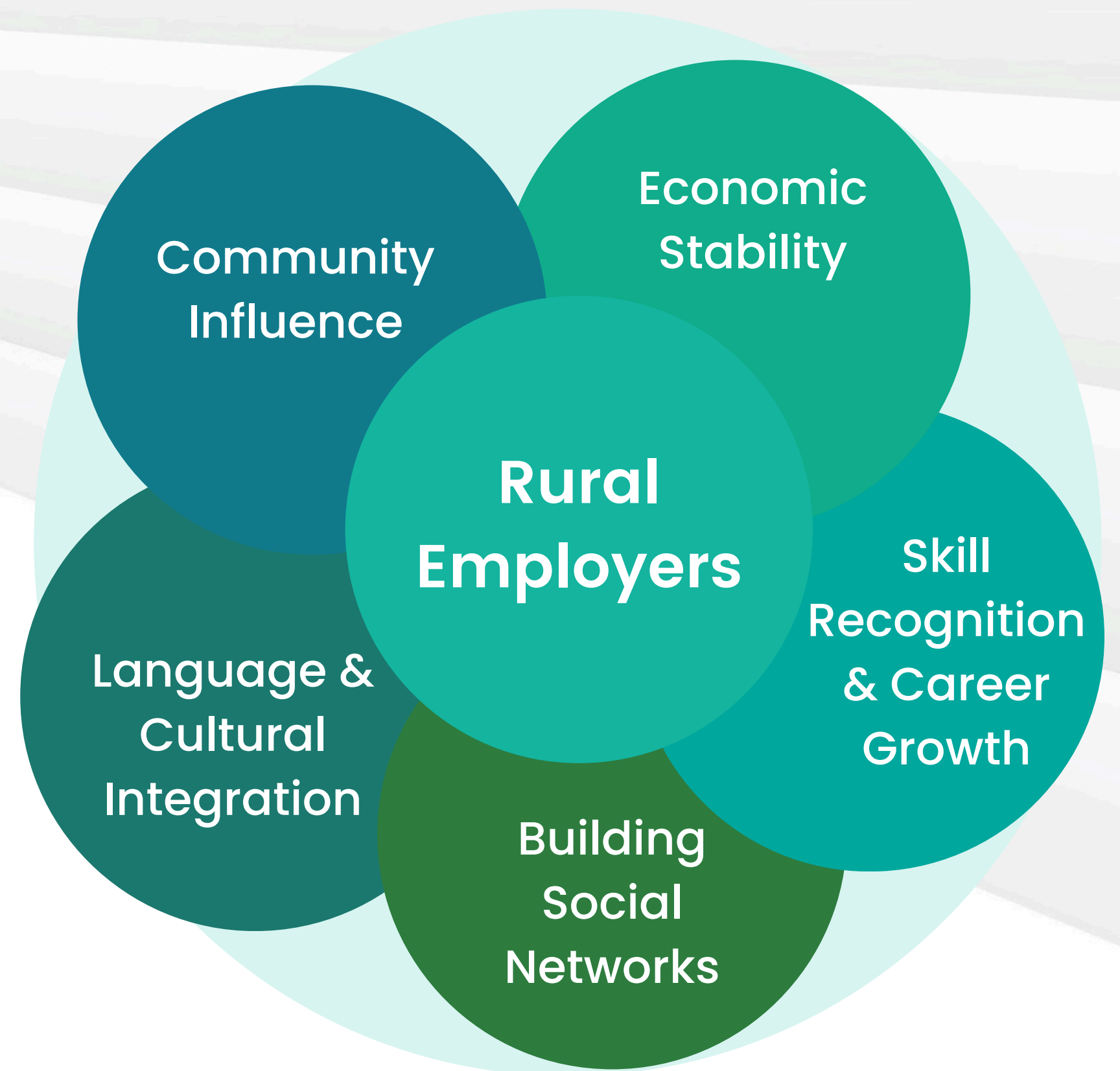
Supporting Employers Across Rural Alberta

Presented by: Soheila Homayed

Employers play a **pivotal role** in the lives of newcomers.

By supporting the **capacity-building** of employers, we are directly supporting newcomers in rural communities.

When newcomers feel a **sense of belonging** in the workplace, they are more likely to **stay, grow and thrive** in their communities.



Rural Employers' Awareness on Diversity & Inclusion (READI) project

Funded by:



In Partnership With:



Rural Employers' Awareness on Diversity & Inclusion (READI) project



Support attraction
& retention of
newcomer
employees in rural
workforces



Identify and
address the gaps
& challenges
experienced by
employers



Capacity-building
training to support
more welcoming &
inclusive
organizations



Target Employer Participants

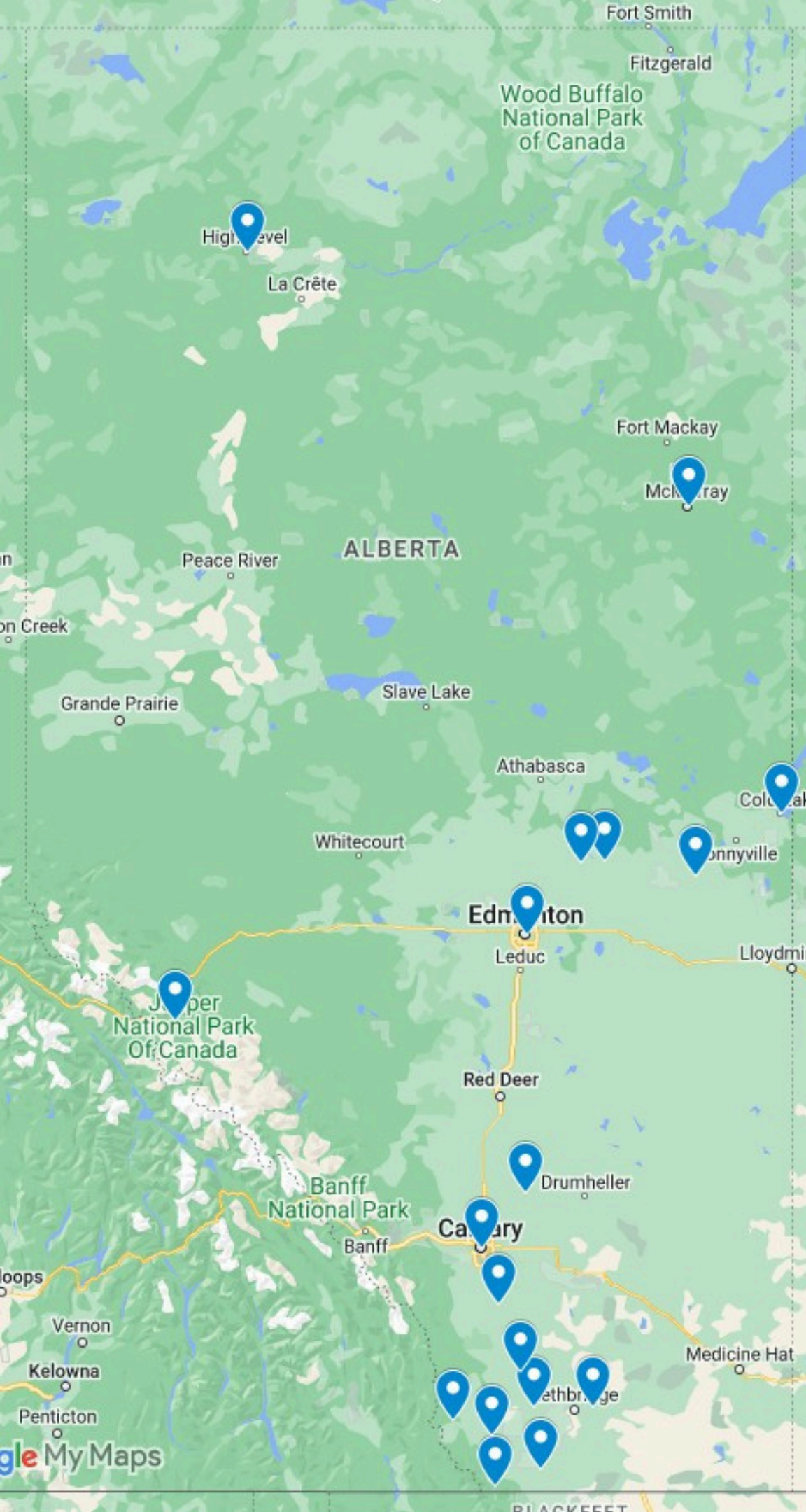


- Small to medium sized organizations
- Employers who **want to** hire or **who have** hired newcomers
- Communities smaller than **50,000**
- Central and Southern Alberta
- Business owners, leadership team or HR



- Small, medium & **large** organizations
- Employers who have hired **any number** of newcomer employees
- **North**, Central & Southern Alberta Central and Southern Alberta
- **Business owners, community representatives, Economic Development, Settlement agencies**

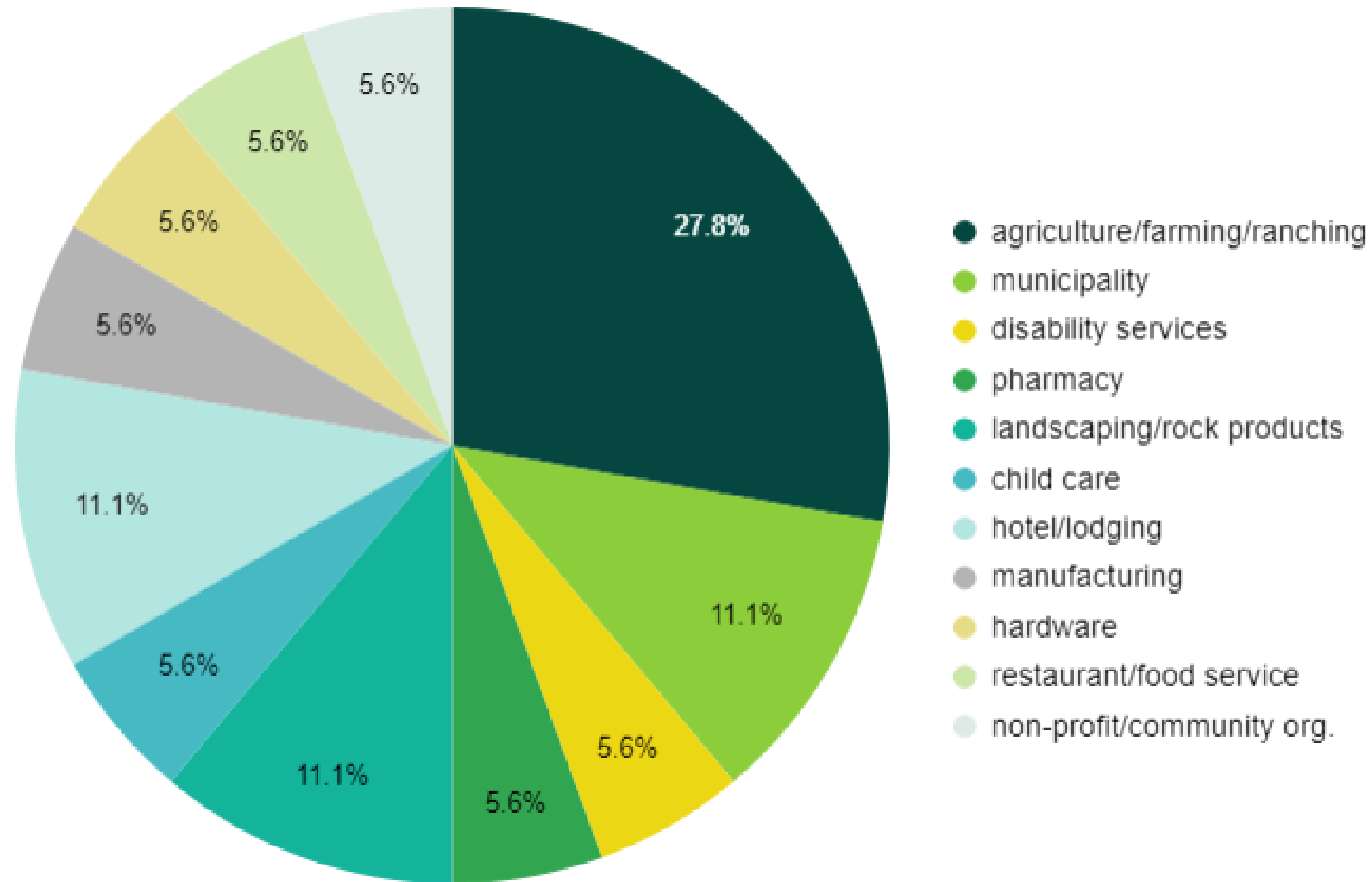




READI Communities

- Acme
- Blairmore
- Calgary
- Cardston
- Claresholm
- Coaldale
- Cold Lake
- Edmonton
- Hinton
- Fort Macleod
- Fort McMurray
- High Level
- High River
- Jasper
- Lac La Biche
- Lethbridge
- Pincher Creek
- St. Paul
- Smoky Lake
- Sylvan Lake
- Wainwright
- Waskatenau
- Waterton Park

Employer Industries



The Employer Journey



Submit an EOI

Interested employers submitted an expression of interest to be part of the project.



Needs Assessment

RDN conducted a needs assessment with each organization to understand their gaps & develop personalized training



Customized Training

2-3 staff from each organization were invited to receive personalized training over the course of six months



Get Certified

READI Certified employers get access to resources, a toolkit and a certificate to showcase their dedication



Understanding Employer Needs

The needs assessment told us that employers valued:

- ✓ Anti-discrimination & inter-cultural communication training
- ✓ Tools and resources to support **leadership staff**
- ✓ Tools and resources to support **current workforce**
- ✓ Policy development & implementation
- ✓ Best practices to support with onboarding & retention
- ✓ Rural case studies / best practices





6 virtual training
sessions
2.5 hours in length



2 in-person
engagement
sessions



Recorded
sessions for
employers
unable to attend



Guest speakers,
real-life case
studies,
newcomers with
lived experience

The READI Training



Dedication to Reconciliation

- Indigenous liaison with lived experience attended sessions
- Discrimination experienced by Indigenous Peoples
- Best practices to support a more welcoming workplace for Indigenous staff
- Connection opportunities between newcomer and Indigenous employees



Project Challenges

- Employer engagement and buy-in
- Timing of the sessions to meet employer needs
- Employers were at various stages in their journeys toward implementing effective anti-discrimination practices
- No funding for an advisory committee



Project Successes

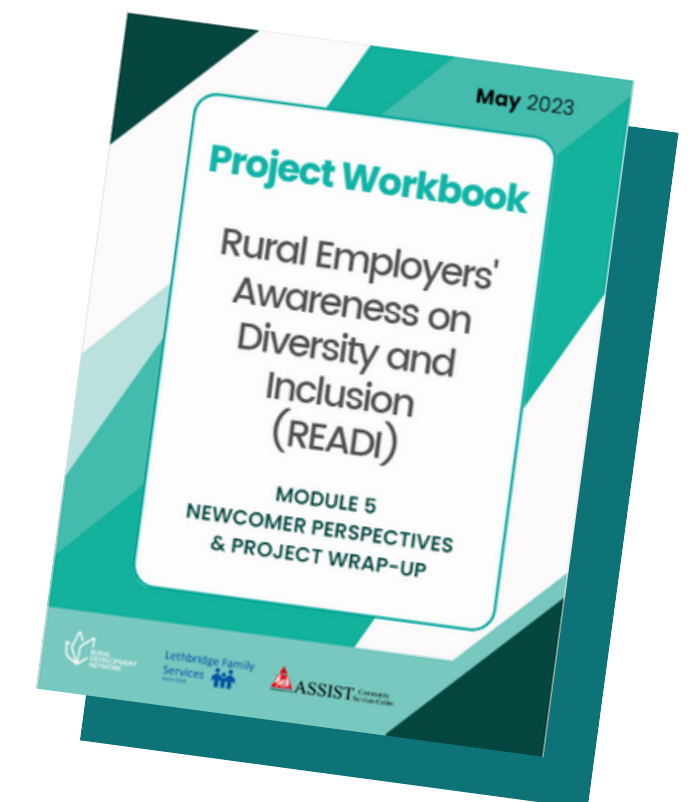
- **30 employers** across north, central and southern AB received training
- Two successful in-person events (Red Deer and Fort McLeod) that featured newcomers with lived experience
- **100% of employers** reported having increased organizational capacity to better understand and support newcomer employees
- Received **additional funding** to continue the work in other parts of **AB and SK**



Participant Workbooks



- Onboarding & Project Introduction
- Module 1: Newcomers in the Workplace and Community
- Module 2: Intercultural Competence and Communication
- Module 3: The Hiring Process Part 1
- Module 4: The Hiring Process Part 2
- Module 5: Non-traditional Newcomer Workers, Inclusive Workplace Policy
- Module 6: Newcomer Perspectives and Project Wrap-Up



The READI Toolkit can be accessed by employers across Canada and features:

- READI training materials
- Case studies
- Lessons learned from engagement sessions
- Sample workplace inclusion policies



The READI Toolkit



Lessons Learned



- Inter-sectoral collaboration made this project successful
- Many employers can benefit from supporting one another with newcomer employees
- Need for more settlement support in rural communities & better connections between settlement organizations and employers
- Rural communities are resilient and can make great homes for newcomers



Next Steps for READI



Connecting with employers to **measure the success** of the project



Continuing READI training for more employers in **AB and SK**



Continuing to advocate and act as **a champion for immigration in rural communities**



Understanding Community Readiness in Welcoming International Students

Community Engagement with Portage College

Presented by: Elaine Flores and Soheila Homayed



Benefits: Economic and Social Impact



\$22.5 billion
annually



220,000
jobs across
Canada



Increase the
cultural
richness of
campus life



Helps local
businesses **find**
workers & attract
talent



Benefits: Population Growth

- **Aging population = Over 861,000 people aged 85 and older in 2021 Census**
 - number of seniors aged 65 and older grows six times faster than children 0-14
- **Low fertility rates = 1.33 in 2022**
 - 2.1 births per woman to sustain long-term generational replacement of the population
- **Population growth = 3.2% on January 1, 2024**
 - highest since 1957 due to temporary immigration in 2023 – temporary workers and international students





**NOV '21 -
JAN '22**

Research

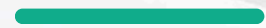
Environmental scan
and start of gap
analysis



**FEB '22 -
MAR '22**

Engagement

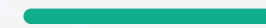
Engage with
committee,
international
students and
community



APR '22

Framework

Analyse common
themes and data
gathered




MAY '22

Completion

International Student
Strategy prepared
for review before Fall
2022 term









Legend:

 Done, ongoing

 In development

 Not done yet

Recruitment and Attraction

-  Review website for easy navigation and other info for IS
-  Assess capacity of current staff in admissions and registrar's office and hire new staff
-  Plan for pre-arrival orientation sessions for IS
-  Create process to assess international partners
-  Develop in-house education credential assessment of IS
-  Design special programs for IS that already have degrees from home country

Activities Recommended



Student Success



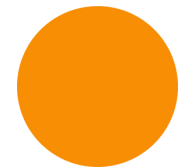
Assess training / workshops needed for staff

Plan for initial arrival orientation sessions for IS



Plan for cultural-based events and recreational activities

Plan for searching mentors / tutors that speak the language of incoming IS



Plan for a “buddy program”

Assess capacity of facilities



Apply EDI lens into current course curriculum and teaching methods

Look for additional funds for capital funding and for ongoing staff trainings



Assess capacity of current faculty and support staff and hire new staff

Assess which departments on campus can create part time jobs for IS



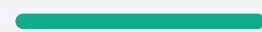
Plan when and how to reach out to IS to understand their challenges, what supports they access, promote student services

Continuous relationship building with local organizations and municipalities



Activities Recommended





**Information
Gathering &
Engagement
Preparation**

**Community
Engagement**

**What We Heard
Report**

**Follow-Up
Community
Engagement**



International Student Experience (2023)

Going Well in the **Campuses**

- Staff are approachable/welcoming
- Affordable (in comparison with other bigger cities)
- Diversity
- Accessible/amazing facilities – student services, student association, kitchen for culinary arts program
- Orientation; Community tour
- Soccer program
- Food services on campuses
- Resume writing service

Going Well in the **Communities**

- Foodbank
- Churches nearby
- FCSS that provides welcome bags for newcomer
- Part-time work available
- Multicultural center



International Student Experience (2023)

Community Barriers

- Transportation
- Housing
- Part-time employment
- Use of technology
- Cultural and religious differences – shy to seek help/advice
- Racism & discrimination
- Language and communication
- Community integration
- Food insecurity



Community Engagement Discussions

What **opportunities** and **challenges** for ...

- **housing** exist in your community that IS can access?
- **transportation** exist in your community that IS can access?
- **part-time work** exist in your community that IS can apply for?
- supporting IS in **integrating into the greater community**?



Housing



Opportunities

- Student accommodation in St. Paul and Lac La Biche.
- Community assessment of the rental market
- Hosting / homestay program
- Roommate groups through its College App
- Approach other organizations if they have rooms to rent (e.g., churches, shelters)
- Training opportunities

Challenges

- No student accommodations in Cold Lake
- Availability and affordability
- Hotels and motels are packed or pre-booked for certain times of the year for seasonal workers.
- Distance of housing location to campus
- IS have no no rental history/references
- Racism



Transportation



Opportunities

- Partnerships/community sponsors
- Apply for funding
- Rental of bike/e-bikes/scooters
- Explore service learning opportunities
- Expansion of community bus(days/hours/people served)

Challenges

- Limited transportation options
- Challenging for IS to get a driver's license (no vehicle to practice)
- Distance
- Community buses have limited operation times



Part-time Work



Opportunities

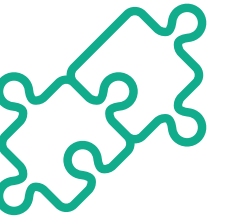
- Online work available
- Job fairs on campus or online
- Business and student mixers
- Flexible work hours
- Career training
- Training for employers
- Summer/ weekend job opportunities
- County or municipality to consider putting a certain % of part-time work opportunities for IS

Challenges

- Remote work may not be legitimate
- Work hours are within IS' class time or soon after
- Distance of workplace from home or campus
- Language barrier
- Cultural understanding
- Fear of employers to train IS and not able to retain them
- Concerns with employers taking advantage of their workers
- Public perception of newcomers in general that they are taking local



Integration into the Greater Community



Opportunities

- Explore having an advisory committee made up of students
- Explore having a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system
- Meet and greet events opportunities to get to know IS
- Connect IS with similar ethnic groups existing in the communities
- Have awareness campaigns
- Make IS aware of Indigenous culture and history
- Training events for IS and employers

Challenges

- Some IS are very shy and do not feel comfortable sharing their problems
- Feeling isolated
- Limited transportation options
- Get the buy-in from multicultural groups
- Racism and discrimination in the community, workplace, social media
- No settlement organization and services in some communities
- IS being temporary residents are not eligible for services



Next Steps for Portage College Community Engagement



International student interviews



Portage College International Operations Committee meeting to have a clear picture of where they are at with their IS Strategy



Follow-up community engagement in Spring 2025



Faith and Belief-Friendly Workplaces in Rural Canada

Presented by: Elaine Flores

Guest Speakers: James Franks and Shannon Guppy



Discover a whole new Ontario • Découvrez un tout nouvel Ontario



Project Background

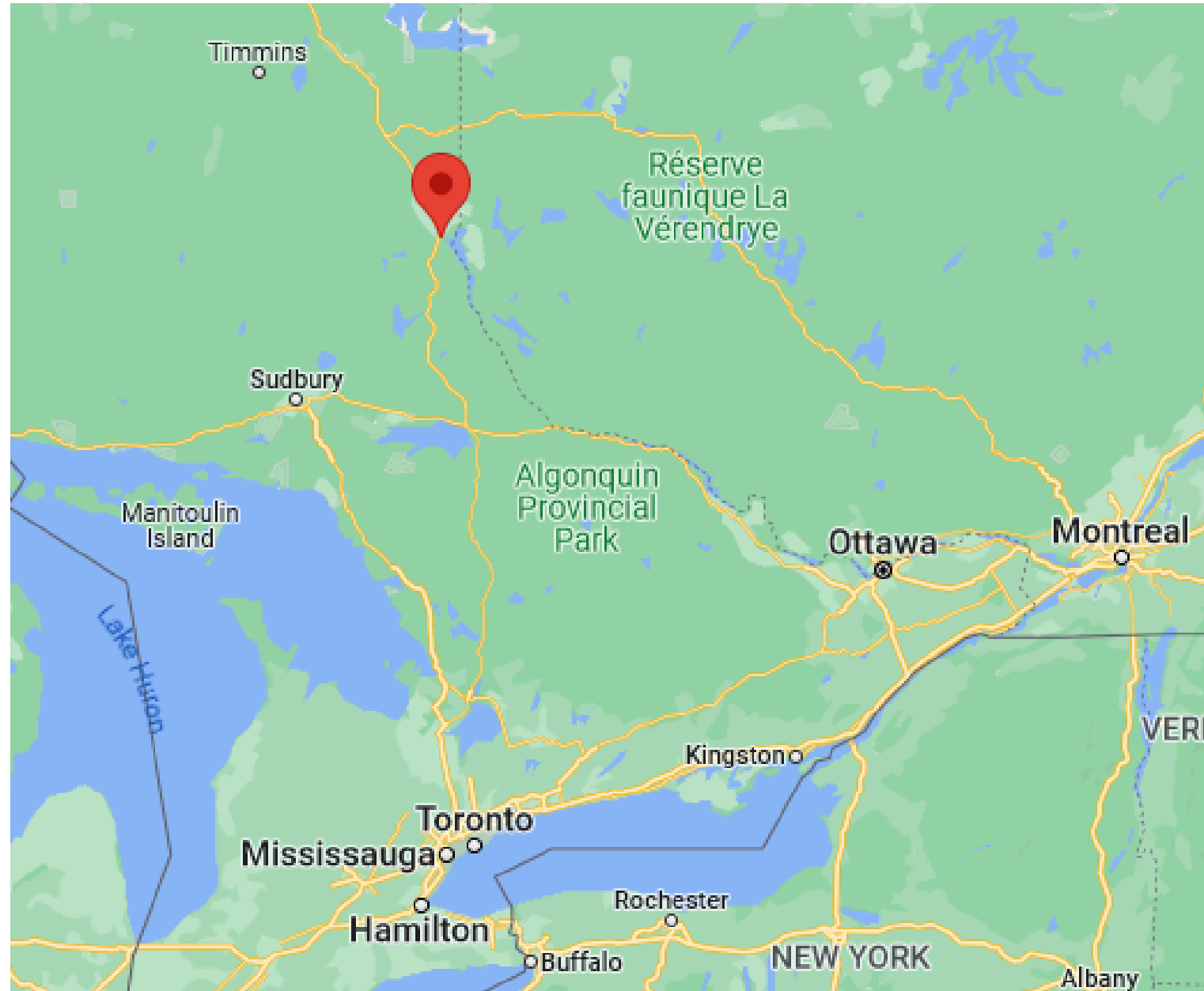
Problem we are trying to solve:
Employers have a strong desire to welcome and recruit immigrants and refugees but **struggling to attract and/or retain** them substantially

Funder [WES Mariam Assefa Fund](#)



Image Source: unsplash.com

Temiskaming Shores



- Approx. 500 km north of Toronto, Ontario
- Population size: 9,634 (Census 2021)
- On the traditional territory of the Algonquin peoples, with a well established Anishinaabe and Metis community
- On Robinson-Huron treaty land (Treaty 61, 1850)

Project Partners: co-led by six organizations



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LITERACY**

- Religious literacy lens



- Liaison



- International experience supporting faith-friendly initiatives in businesses



- Local Support



- Rural & intersectoral development lens



- Indigenous lens

Project Goal: Co-create & pilot 2 business initiatives that support recruitment and retention of newcomers

Outcomes:

1. An Interbelief employee resource group (ERG) to increase employers' and employees' understanding informally

2. A faith & belief friendly workplace training certification to help employers support employees



- Lunch
- 10-15 min local speaker share + Q&A
- Foster community

- 6 biweekly sessions
- 18 certified



Q&A with James and Shannon

1. Can you please tell us a little bit about yourself? e.g. Your role and background that led you to this training.

2. How has the training and Interfaith ERG impacted you?



3. How has the training and Interfaith ERG impacted your workplace and/or community? e.g. Have you seen any changes since the project was introduced locally? If so, what?

4. Do you have any comments for communities considering a project like this?



Thank you!

Any questions?

Soheila Homayed

Program Manager
Rural Immigration Initiative
Rural Development Network
soheilah@ruraldevelopment.ca

Elaine Flores

Project Manager & Evaluations Coordinator
Rural Immigration Initiative
Rural Development Network
elainef@ruraldevelopment.ca

James Franks

Economic Development Officer
Corporation of the City of Temiskaming Shores
jfranks@temiskamingshores.ca

Shannon Guppy

Human Resources Manager/Payroll Administrator
Keepers of the Circle
hr@keepersofthecircle.com

