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MENTORSHIP IN RURAL ALBERTA

An Environmental Scan from Alberta Mentorship Program

This project is made possible with funding provided by the



Land Acknowledgement



We respectfully acknowledge that what we call Alberta is the traditional and ancestral territory of the many First Nations, Métis, and Inuit whose footsteps have marked these lands for centuries.

We acknowledge that our work takes place in the territories subjected to Treaties 4, 6, 7, 8, and 10, traditional meeting grounds, gathering places, and travelling routes of diverse Indigenous peoples, including the Blackfoot Confederacy—Kainai (Kigh-nigh), Piikuni (Pee-kah-nee), and Siksika (Sik-sik-ah)—the Cree, Dene (Den-nay), Saulteaux (So-toh), Anishinaabe (A-nish-i-nab-ay), Dakota, Lakota, Nakota Sioux (Sue), Stoney Nakoda, and the Tsuu T’ina (Soot-tenna) Nation and the Métis People of Alberta. We acknowledge that this territory is home to the Métis Settlements and the Six Regions of the Métis Nation of Alberta within the historical Northwest Métis Homeland.

We are grateful for the traditional Knowledge Keepers and Elders who are still with us today and those who have gone before us. We acknowledge the many First Nations, Métis, and Inuit who have lived in and cared for these lands for generations. We make this acknowledgement as an act of reconciliation and gratitude to those whose territory we reside on or are visiting.

About the Alberta Mentorship Program

The Alberta Mentorship Program (AMP) is building a culture for career mentorship in Alberta. The AMP's mission is to support mentorship programs working on career and economic integration.



We focus on new immigrants in rural and small urban communities. The first phase of the AMP was a pilot (2019-2021) to create customized mentorship programs with two community partners: Lethbridge Family Services (LFS) and YMCA Northern Alberta in Wood Buffalo. These pilot sites were supported by organizational mentorships from the Edmonton Region Immigrant Employment Council (ERIEC) and Calgary Region Immigrant Employment Council (CRIEC).

During this phase, we developed a comprehensive website that provides free information about mentoring newcomers to Canada. The site maintains resources for mentors, mentees, employers, and organizations creating mentorship programs. The goal is to provide practical resources and information to jumpstart new mentorship programs or enhance existing ones.

The AMP also hosted free, online public events and boot camps with mentorship experts. Each boot camp covered key mentorship topics and was aimed at organizations already

running or planning to run mentorship programs. These events were recorded, summarized, and posted on the AMP website and YouTube channel.

Building on the success of this pilot, AMP is beginning a second phase of the program. During this phase, AMP will work collaboratively with five community organizations in rural or small urban centres to launch their own career mentorship programs. This phase will leverage the collective expertise of the current mentorship community champions and existing resources like the AMP website and other tools, such as a newly developed Return on Investment tool for mentees and mentors.

This programming phase seeks to increase the number of career mentoring opportunities in Alberta through a rapid start model that will also strengthen the provincial eco-system, focusing on rural or small urban mentorship programs. This phase will continue to promote a collaborative culture of mentorship in Alberta, including connecting with established programs (Mentorship Community Champions), sharing resources, findings, and tools to improve the mentorship program's success across Alberta. This environmental scan is part of the second phase of the program.

Alberta Mentorship Program is a joint project of mentorship and employment organizations started in 2019. It is led by ERIEC in collaboration with a provincial project team and stakeholder advisory committee. This project is made possible with funding provided by the Government of Alberta.

Why Mentorship Matters

Mentorship is a purposeful relationship that helps mentees transition their international experience and integrates it into the Alberta labour market. Career mentorship programs have key differences from employment preparation or career services programs. Rather than providing training and support services to clients, career mentorship programs match industry-based mentors with skilled immigrants seeking employment or a career transition. Career Mentorship is a proven immigrant career transition strategy that benefits mentees, mentors, and employers. Recent studies for career development make this clear.

65%

of mentees find work in their chosen career following mentorship

6X

Mentors are promoted six times more often than those who do not mentor

5X

Mentees are promoted five times more often than those without mentors.

15% - 38%

increase in promotion and retention rates for mentored minorities and women compared to non-mentored employees

9% - 24%

increase in minority representation in management at companies who participate in mentorship programs

25%

of employees who enrolled in a mentoring program had a salary-grade change compared to 5% of non-mentored employees

For organizations focusing on Internationally Educated Professionals (IEP), mentorship eases their transition into the Canadian workforce. “To connect the international education professional with someone working in their field will rapidly assist them in developing job search skills and a better understanding of the Canadian work culture,” says Najib Mangal, Manager of Career and Employment Services at LFSⁱ. Lethbridge Family Services grew its mentorship program during AMP’s pilot program.

Mentorship can also be a valuable tool for employers, either as an internal program or by partnering with local organizations that offer mentorship. Mentoring helps mentees learn soft and practical skills that can ease job transitions, improve safety, and shorten orientation timeⁱⁱ. To some extent, all individuals learning new skills in a job will benefit from training that is augmented by mentorship. Some jobs, where the consequences of performing the job improperly result in health and safety issues, require mentorship to avoid disastrous





results. Rural municipalities will sometimes find themselves in situations where they have difficulty attracting an experienced individual (e.g., heavy equipment operator) and do not have anyone capable of either training or mentoring an inexperienced recruit. (*Workable Solutions: A Labour Force Strategy For Rural Municipalities*, page 62.)

The advantage of partnerships is that they create a network of organizations that can connect and share resources, which benefit the mentorship program, employers, mentors, and mentees. Mentorship is deeply valuable for both mentors and mentees, providing high-quality professional development that can be tailored to each pairing and their unique needs. Such a mentorship better prepares mentees as new employees or develops their skills while they are employed.

Benefits of Mentorship Programsⁱⁱⁱ

<p>Educate</p> <p>both mentors and mentees in practical and leadership skills.</p>	<p>Prevent mistakes</p> <p>by creating a safe space to learn and ask questions.</p>	<p>Build confidence</p> <p>for both mentors and mentees.</p>
<p>Build loyalty</p> <p>because employees often feel valued when provided with mentorship.</p>	<p>Create leaders</p> <p>with good communication skills and the ability to self-reflect.</p>	<p>Build community</p> <p>through mentoring relationships and organizational partnerships.</p>

“There is a whole world of untapped resources and mentorship,” says Erin Brann, Program Director of Bridging the Gap, YMCA of Northern Alberta in Wood Buffalo. When they worked with AMP during the pilot program, she was surprised by the number of individuals and professionals in the community who were ready to be a mentor. “Many businesses want to be part of an activity such as mentorship, so that opened my eyes,” she states^{iv}.

When mentorship organizations understand the needs of employers, they can create stronger and more relevant programs for mentees. While working with IEP through LFS, Tyler Ramsay, Employment Practitioner with Career and Employment Services, could clearly see the challenges and barriers that IEPs faced. Lethbridge Family Services started its mentorship program to fill that gap, helping create new conversations with local employers. “With this mentorship program, we’re really getting to hear both sides of the story, of how challenges can be addressed, and the needs of the employers met in order to hire internationally educated professionals,” he says^v.

For the YMCA of Northern Alberta, their mentorship program connected them with more than employers but to other local employment and service organizations. “It allowed us to discover other organizations that we did not know before. We learned about their services while sharing our regular services with others,” says Adeline Azangue, Program Coordinator Employment, YMCA of Northern Alberta in Wood Buffalo^{vi}.

Organizations that believe in the power of mentorship have a strong focus on their client’s well-being. They are driven to improve services continuously while valuing collaboration as a method of providing the most opportunities for their clients^{vii}.





Current Situation

Mentorship for newcomers has a good foothold in immigrant-serving programs across Alberta and Canada. This is especially true in our largest centres because immigrants are far more likely to move to large urban centres instead of small urban centres or rural areas^{viii}. There is no comprehensive data regarding when immigrants settled outside of large cities^{ix}. This creates a challenge for organizations setting up mentorship programs in rural or small urban areas. There are often fewer services, programs, and mentorship available to newcomers, which makes them less likely to choose to settle in these areas^x. Investing in immigrant-serving programs, including mentorship, can make these centres and areas more desirable to newcomers. Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) has been key in supporting settlement service providers with long-term agreements and stable funding. With this support, settlement services have grown to areas outside of major centres^{xi}.

Career mentorship programs for new immigrants are limited in Alberta. Current programs exist in Edmonton (ERIEC), Calgary (CRIEC), Lethbridge (LFS), Medicine Hat (Immigration Partnership Mentorship Program), Fort McMurray (Northern YMCA), and High Level (Family and Community Services). While these programs cumulatively serve hundreds of mentees each year, each serves its local population of immigrant professionals in a select number of professions and industries. Immigrants to rural or small urban centres face the same challenges but are less likely to find local career mentorship programs. Community organizations in these areas may find it additionally challenging to launch a career mentorship program because their local talent pool is smaller and there is a smaller local business community. This can be a barrier to starting or sustaining a mentorship program.

Alberta Association of Immigrant Serving Agencies (AAISA) is the umbrella organization for Alberta's settlement and integration sector, representing 56 newcomer-serving agencies across the province. Not all these agencies provide formal mentorship programs, but all do informal mentorship as part of their service offerings. Often, this mentorship is more focused on settlement rather than career mentorship. Mentor Canada provides a national mentoring programs database that caters to children and youth up to age 30^{xii}. However, there is no complete directory of settlement and mentorship programs for adults in Canada. This can make it difficult for newcomers to locate services. A comprehensive list for children, youth, and adults would facilitate inter-agency collaboration and partnerships with businesses^{xiii}.

Challenges and Opportunities

for Small Centre and Rural Mentorship Programs



New Programs with Few Resources

Newcomers, municipalities, and residents often expect settlement services in small centres and rural areas offer a full array of services like organizations in larger centres. This array of services would be valuable to newcomers and the settlement process, but with limited funding, resources, and staff, it is less likely that this full range of services is available^{xiv}. These organizations also serve a larger area, especially in rural areas with their clients spread out, and there may not be access to affordable public transit. Most settlement organizations will add additional services, such as career mentorship, as a new side program or as a satellite program. It is more unusual for someone to start a new program focused entirely on mentorship^{xv}. These side programs often start off as a “side of the desk” with few resources or dedicated staffing until the program has proven some success in accessing funds from within the organization or through outside funders^{xvi}.

Access to funding from various sources would make it easier for organizations to add mentorship to their service offerings. A primary goal of the AMP website is to provide advice, forms, and resources that are freely available to help jumpstart new programs.



Finding Sufficient Funding

Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada is one of the key funders for settlement services, including mentorship. However, completing these applications requires a certain amount of experience and expertise, which makes it difficult for new programs or small teams to apply for these grants^{xvii}. Because most newcomers settle in large centres, funding tends to follow where the larger number of newcomers are. It is harder for organizations in smaller centres to access funding because they serve smaller numbers of newcomers^{xviii}. While large funders are valuable, it is also helpful for organizations to have a variety of funders^{xix} that can include working with the private sector for funding as well as government funders. The key to finding sustainable funding partners in the private sector is to partner with organizations that share organizational values^{xx}. Having access to regular, planned funding that enables stable staffing will help establish and support programming that might not otherwise be feasible. Funders must also avoid being too prescriptive in funding expectations to programs, as flexibility in designing and running mentorship programs is required to help serve the community needs^{xxi}.

Providing more flexible funding and focusing a portion of funds on small centres and rural communities despite a smaller client base may attract more immigrants to live and work in small centres and rural areas. While AMP cannot influence funding sources, we can foster relationships between organizations that could increase their ability to collaborate.



Service Delivery Knowledge and Experience Gaps

Starting a mentorship program requires specific skills that not even experienced settlement programs will have. Access to experience, resources, and advice can positively impact the success of new programs^{xxii}. In small centres and rural communities, tapping into the experience of other local mentorship organizations is not always possible. This can be helped with a broader base of organizational mentorship, which could be enhanced with workshops and training, in-person or online^{xxiii}. Alberta Mentorship Program has built their website to be a free resource for mentorship programs, employers, mentors, and mentees. Our boot camps provide free events where mentorship programs can connect and learn from others who work in career mentorship with newcomers.

With our growing network of Alberta mentorship programs, AMP and other mentorship programs can facilitate and encourage knowledge sharing.



Foster Partnerships and Collaboration

There is great interest in collaborative opportunities around employment and mentorship programs amongst settlement organizations in Alberta. Provincewide or umbrella organizations may be well positioned to connect potential partners or lead collaboration efforts^{xxiv}. Partnerships can provide organizations with additional resources and reach for fledgling mentorship programs. This can benefit the organization and newcomers in the area^{xxv}. Partnerships can provide a combined voice for advocacy on related political policy or public awareness^{xxvi}.

Inter-organizational collaboration and partnerships must be organic and willing. It is important that all collaborators have the need for mentorship and can contribute and are accountable. Collaboration is less effective if it is forced by the funders, the government, or outside forces^{xxvii}. Collaboration with local partners is common because it can be hard for organizations in other areas to recognize or even be familiar with organizations that might make good partners^{xxviii}. There is some concern that when a small organization partners with a larger organization, it will have less influence or potentially be absorbed into the larger organization^{xxix}. However, the advantages of this collaboration could outweigh the risks, which could be mitigated with clear plans and role definitions.

The reliance on funding creates a certain amount of competition between organizations for the same grants. This competition can reduce the incentive for organizations to collaborate^{xxx}. However, collaboration can create opportunities by increasing capacity, services, and resources beyond what one organization can offer. It also can increase the number of clients supported, which can attract funding that an organization might not access on their own^{xxxi}.

Alberta Mentorship Program has the capacity and mission to help support and promote collaboration with our understanding of the mentorship landscape in Alberta. This includes creating an Organization Directory^{xxxii} of programs that offer mentorship in Alberta.



Lack of Skills for Digital Delivery

Like many businesses and organizations, settlement and mentorship programs were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic shifted, reduced funding, and paused programming while we learned to shift to an online model and changed program needs for staffing and locations^{xxxiii}. This experience has proved the value of digital delivery and increased the acceptance of virtual programming. For smaller centres and rural areas with clients spread out across wide areas, digital delivery provides affordable, accessible options.

It is important to note that not all organizations have the skill set and or resources to offer online services at the standards people have come to expect. Not all rural areas have sufficient internet to provide digital services^{xxxiv}. Newcomers may not have the skills or access to the tools for digital program delivery^{xxxv} though these skill gaps can be solved through training.

While digital delivery may not be a solution for all programs and services, it provides an option that can complement in-person services and diversify opportunities to reach clients at any location. Alberta Mentorship Program will continue to use digital delivery as it makes our program accessible province-wide and can be preserved on our website for knowledge capture.



Resistance to Newcomers

Diversity and inclusion can be assets to businesses and communities. Newcomers can use their international experience for problem-solving and establishing new, creative ideas^{xxxvi}. However, small centres may not embrace newcomers, which can happen for many reasons, including fear of losing jobs and fear of difference and unfamiliarity. Even if a particular community welcomes newcomers, the reputation of rural communities being unwelcoming can make a newcomer less likely to take advantage of opportunities outside of larger centres^{xxxvii}. It is important that organizations and businesses embrace diversity, equity, and inclusion through professional development, policy, and culture. Mentorship and encouraging employees to be mentors can contribute to this culture of inclusion^{xxxviii}.

Mentorship programs provide opportunities for newcomers to connect with residents in meaningful relationships. Mentors also gain important skills and often become more open to diversity and inclusion. Our resources, programming, and social media will include information about the benefits of diversity and inclusion.



Mentor Recruitment

During the pilot phase of the AMP, participants of our boot camps repeatedly mentioned that finding mentors was the biggest challenge in establishing a new program. Mentees understand the value of mentorship and are easier to recruit. It can be harder to sell mentors on this value. Creating partnerships with employers can help with mentor recruitment^{xxix}. This can be even more challenging when programs seek mentors in sectors that match a mentee's skill set or fields, such as engineering, heavy equipment operators, or nursing^{xi}.

Rather than trying to attract mentors with information and statistics, it is more effective to attract them with passion and inspiration. Mentors usually volunteer because they want to give back to the community. The hardest time to attract mentors is when the program is new. As the program grows and has an established reputation with partnerships with local employers, mentor recruitment will become easier^{xii}. Programs can reach out to other nearby areas or use digital options to tap into expertise that is not locally available to help broaden their reach^{xiii}. Tapping into the recently retired workforce can be a way to recruit experienced mentors who have the time to invest in mentees^{xiii}. The Prairie Centre for Excellence in Mentoring, established in the summer of 2022 by CRIEC and Calgary Catholic Immigrant Services, has researched into understanding and enhancing employer engagement in mentoring programs^{xiv}. We hope this research can inform our stakeholders and us about barriers to and best practices for engagement with employers and mentors.

Finding mentors takes time and patience. Building partnerships and tapping into local and extended networks can increase the pool of mentors and desired experience matches. Through our pilot project, AMP has built resources that can provide ideas on how to approach this challenge, and we will continue to focus on this when we establish organizational mentorship.



Community Champions

Finding community champions can shorten the time to successful program implementation. A community champion is an individual who believes in your organization and your mandate beyond a typical volunteer. They can articulate your mission with passion and clarity and often have connections to the local community that can help your organization appeal to potential partners, employers, mentors, and mentees^{xv}. During the AMP pilot project, organizational mentors encouraged pilot sites to look for potential community champions in their area. Finding the person or organization who will help promote your mentorship program can be difficult, but it is not impossible. It will require patience to develop these relationships while educating a potential champion about your mission and program, but this patience can pay off. A community champion will be willing to invest time and energy to promote your program. Someone with community connections can be a credible advocate to help with recruitment.

Alberta Mentorship Program will continue to encourage new and existing programs to look for and foster community champions.



Conclusion

Mentorship in small centres or rural regions help communities grow. When immigrants learn that your community has the resources or a strong program to help establish life in the area, along with helping them flourish in their careers, a more diverse and inclusive background is established in the region that changes the dynamics and reputation of rural communities. During the second phase of AMP, we will continue to build our free, online resources to support our project partners and other organizations offering mentorship. We will focus on adding resources that fill in gaps in our current content and are responsive to the needs of our five project partners. Our efforts will also encourage relationships between organizations for knowledge sharing, potential joint ventures, and collaboration. This supports our overall mission to promote a culture of mentorship in Alberta.

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End Notes

- i AMP Spotlight: Lethbridge Family Services, <https://albertamentorship.ca/stories/spotlight-lethbridge-family-services-mentorship-program/>
- ii Workable Solutions: A Labour Force Strategy For Rural Municipalities, page 62
- iii Why Mentorship, <https://albertamentorship.ca/resources/why-mentorship/>
- iv AMP Spotlight: Northern Alberta YMCA, <https://albertamentorship.ca/stories/spotlight-ymca/>
- v AMP Spotlight: Lethbridge Family Services, <https://albertamentorship.ca/stories/spotlight-lethbridge-family-services-mentorship-program/>
- vi AMP Spotlight: Northern Alberta YMCA, <https://albertamentorship.ca/stories/spotlight-ymca/>
- vii Enhancing Small Centre Collaboration Report, page 3
- viii Making Rural Immigration Work: Settlement Services in Small and Rural Communities, page 3
- ix Making Rural Immigration Work: Settlement Services in Small and Rural Communities, page 5
- x Making Rural Immigration Work: Settlement Services in Small and Rural Communities, page 11
- xi Making Rural Immigration Work: Settlement Services in Small and Rural Communities, page 2
- xii Mentor Canada, Mentor Connector, <https://mentoringcanada.ca/en/take-action/mentor-connector>
- xiii Making Rural Immigration Work: Settlement Services in Small and Rural Communities, page 9
- xiv Making Rural Immigration Work: Settlement Services in Small and Rural Communities, page 2, 8, 17
- xv Making Rural Immigration Work: Settlement Services in Small and Rural Communities, page 12
- xvi Annual Settlement and Integration Sector Survey Report 2021, page 19
- xvii Making Rural Immigration Work: Settlement Services in Small and Rural Communities, page 2
- xviii Making Rural Immigration Work: Settlement Services in Small and Rural Communities, page 6, 10
- xix Health of the Newcomer-Service Sector in the PNT Region, page 61
- xx AMP Bootcamp: Funding Mentorship Programs, <https://albertamentorship.ca/stories/bootcamp-funding-mentorship-programs/>
- xxi Health of the Newcomer-Service Sector in the PNT Region, page 57; Annual Settlement and Integration Sector Survey Report 2021, page 27
- xxii Settlement Development in Small Communities PPT
- xxiii Workable Solutions: A Labour Force Strategy For Rural Municipalities, page 91
- xxiv 2021 Prairies and Northern Territories Summit PPT, page 52
- xxv Making Rural Immigration Work: Settlement Services in Small and Rural Communities, page 22; Enhancing Small Centre Collaboration Report, page 4
- xxvi Recommendations; Enhancing Small Centre Collaboration Report, page 7
- xxvii Enhancing Small Centre Collaboration Report, page 4
- xxviii Enhancing Small Centre Collaboration Report, page 3
- xxix 2021 Prairies and Northern Territories Summit PPT, page 52
- xxx Enhancing Small Centre Collaboration Report, page 3
- xxxi Settlement Development in Small Communities PPT
- xxxii AMP Organizations Directory, <https://albertamentorship.ca/organizations-directory/>
- xxxiii Annual Settlement and Integration Sector Survey Report 2021, page 17
- xxxiv Making Rural Immigration Work: Settlement Services in Small and Rural Communities, page 2
- xxxv 2021 Prairies and Northern Territories Summit PPT, page 10
- xxxvi Improve Workplace Culture with a Strong Mentoring Program, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/nazbeheshti/2019/01/23/improve-workplace-culture-with-a-strong-mentoring-program/?sh=1552485a76b5>

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- xxxviii Health of the Newcomer-Service Sector in the PNT Region, page 62
- xxxix AMP Bootcamp: Recruiting and Retaining Mentors, <https://albertamentorship.ca/stories/bootcamp-recruiting-retaining-mentors/>
- xl AMP Community Call: Mentor Recruitment and Matching, <https://albertamentorship.ca/stories/community-call-mentor-recruitment-matching/>
- xli AMP Community Call: Mentor Recruitment and Matching, <https://albertamentorship.ca/stories/community-call-mentor-recruitment-matching/>
- xlii Workable Solutions: A Labour Force Strategy For Rural Municipalities, page 62
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- xlv AMP Bootcamp, Funding Mentorship Programs, <https://albertamentorship.ca/stories/bootcamp-funding-mentorship-programs/>