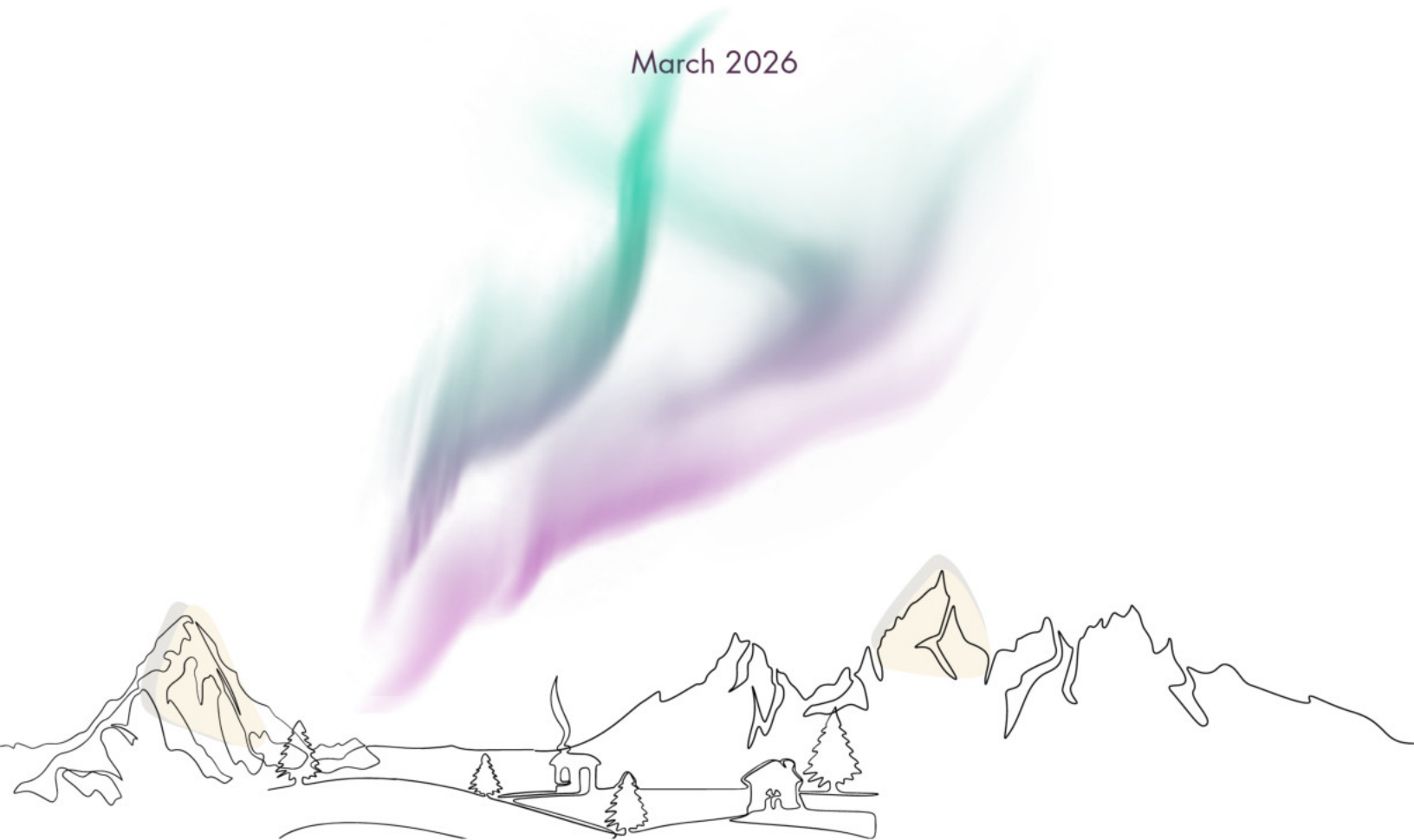


Tailored Attraction, Integration and Retention Strategies for Northern Ecosystem (TAIGA RISE)

Mapping Northern Readiness

An Environmental Scan of Attraction, Integration, and Retention
Systems in Northern Alberta and the Northwest Territories

March 2026



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How to cite (APA): Kazemzadeh, H., Kazemi, F., Zeraati, N., Ong, A., Plesche, A., Hilario, K., & Palova, K. (2026). *Mapping northern readiness: An environmental scan of attraction, integration, and retention systems in northern Alberta and the Northwest Territories*. Centre for Immigrant Research. The Immigrant Education Society (TIES).

Contact Information for the Centre for Immigrant Research at TIES:

research@immigrant-education.ca

<http://www.immigrant-education.ca/>



Acknowledgements

This report is part of a study, **Tailored Attraction, Integration and Retention Strategies for Northern Ecosystem (TAIGA RISE)**.

We would like to acknowledge the following TIES contributors:

Katerina Palova
Kreisha Hilario
Dr. Fatemeh Kazemi
Dr. Hamed Kazemzadeh
Nova Zeraati
Annisha Plesche
Amanda Ong
Sophie Kaur

Funded by:

Financé par :



Immigration, Refugees
and Citizenship Canada

Immigration, Réfugiés
et Citoyenneté Canada

In Partnership with:



Research Institute
Institut de recherche

About The Immigrant Education Society (TIES)

The Immigrant Education Society (TIES) is a not-for-profit registered charitable organization that has been serving newcomers and Canadians since 1988. The primary goal of the organization is to provide immigrants and economically disadvantaged individuals with a solid foothold in Canada and afford them the opportunities to feel belonging in their new community. TIES is governed by a Board of Directors made up of devoted community-minded volunteers and operates through funding from both government and private organizations. Since 1992, TIES has been offering the Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) program, with over a thousand clients participating daily. In the early 2000s, TIES expanded its services to include employment and settlement programs and later introduced the Centre for Immigrant Research to further strengthen its research capabilities. More recently, TIES added childcare services, enhancing its ability to support the diverse needs of newcomers.

TIES now operates and fully owns two large facilities in Calgary's Northeast, Forest Lawn and Whitehorn neighbourhoods. In December 2021, TIES expanded its services to a new, larger facility in the Westwinds area of Northeast Calgary. Since its inception, TIES has assisted over 350,000 clients in strengthening their identities as members of Alberta society.



About TIES Centre for Immigrant Research

The Centre aims to use evidence-based knowledge, data, and best practices to inform services and programs and help newcomers settle in Canada. Research projects and programs emerge from and are driven by impacted communities and practitioners. The Centre focuses on three main areas: community-based research, program development, and providing evaluation services.



Community-based Research

Ongoing research allows us to identify and address barriers to integration and share best practices. The Centre employs researchers experienced in quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods approaches.



Program Development

We aim to determine and respond to community needs by designing both well-established and innovative solutions and testing pilot programs.



Evaluation

We provide fee-for-service program evaluations, systems mapping, community engagement, staff satisfaction evaluation, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) evaluation, etc.

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Executive Summary

This report is part of the **Tailored Attraction, Integration, and Retention Strategies for Northern Ecosystems (TAIGA RISE)** project, a three-year initiative that launched in April 2025. Funded by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) through the Service Delivery Improvement (SDI) program, the project's goal is to co-create tailored, community-centric strategies to strengthen the attraction, integration, and retention of newcomers in Northern Alberta and the Northwest Territories. This environmental scan contributes to that goal by building a comprehensive baseline of online data and digital resources. It systematically identifies, reviews, and catalogs a wide range of stakeholders and service providers in both regions, using a culturally responsive, settlement-focused, and inclusion-oriented lens. The focus is on small population centres (1,000–29,999 residents) and medium population centres (30,000–99,999 residents), as defined by Statistics Canada's 2021 Census (Statistics Canada, 2022). It further explores the preparedness of these communities for attracting, integrating, and retaining newcomers, three strategic pillars of the project that will be explained in details.

Key Findings

- Out of 2,207 SPOs and non-SPOs reviewed across 27 population centres in both regions, 264 organizations (11.9%) demonstrated the adoption of at least one type of service for newcomers and immigrants.
- With regard to the strategic pillars of the project, among these organizations, as part of the services they provide, 19 organizations focus on attraction strategies, 170 organizations focus on integration strategies, and 116 organizations focus on retention strategies, based on our methodology.
- This indicates that most services focus on integration and some on retention of newcomers and immigrants in these regions, with the least focus on attraction strategies. Organizations often demonstrated the use of multiple tools.

Overview of TAIGA RISE

TAIGA RISE is a pilot initiative funded by IRCC's SDI stream, responding to an urgent need to attract, integrate and retain immigrants in the small urban communities of Northern Alberta and the Northwest Territories.






Northern Alberta and the Northwest Territories have experienced demographic and economic challenges in recent years, including population stagnation and decline driven by factors such as the out-migration of youth, low birth rates, and an aging populace. For instance, Northern Alberta's northern region saw a net loss of 1,700 people in 2021 alone, as 4,100 residents left the region (interprovincial out-migration) while only 2,400 were added through natural increase (Government of Alberta, 2023). Similarly, the Northwest Territories' total population decreased by 0.9% between 2011 and 2021 (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), 2025), reflecting near-zero growth and persistent negative net migration.

These shifts place increasing pressure on local economies, labor markets, and community vitality. Nationally, rural Canada's labour force trends underscore this challenge: between 2001 and 2016, the number of potential workers in rural areas declined by 23%, while the number of people nearing retirement age increased by 40% (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), 2019).

In short, many northern communities face critical labour shortages and economic stagnation stemming from these demographic realities. Immigration is widely seen as a key opportunity to counter these trends by filling jobs and revitalizing communities. However, smaller communities often struggle to attract and retain newcomers due to limited settlement infrastructure and resources available at the local level (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), 2024). New immigrants and newcomers in rural or remote areas may lack access to services such as language training, employment support, or social integration programs that are more readily found in larger cities.




Recognizing these gaps, TAIGA RISE aims to build the capacity of northern communities to offer culturally responsive, community-led settlement support, while also helping these communities better communicate the social, economic, and environmental advantages of life in the North (TIES Centre for Immigrant Research, 2025). The project adopts an interdisciplinary, community-driven and “citizen science” approach to develop evidence-based strategies and tools that bolster newcomer attraction, integration, and retention. In practice, this means engaging local stakeholders at every step and grounding solutions in local knowledge and priorities.

Throughout the project, TAIGA RISE is:

-  Adopting a community-centric approach to newcomer integration, positioning local communities as partners in welcoming immigrants.
-  Developing resources to enhance the attraction, integration, and retention of newcomers in Northern Alberta and the Northwest Territories, with a focus on supporting each stage of the newcomer settlement continuum.
-  Creating multilingual welcome materials and toolkits tailored to the needs of prospective immigrants and recent arrivals (e.g., multilingual guides, orientation videos, and interactive community asset maps).
-  Engaging community stakeholders in co-designing settlement strategies through local partnerships, workshops, and participatory design sessions — a process that aims to strengthen social cohesion and expand community capacity.
-  Incorporating local knowledge and Indigenous practices into settlement resources and programs to support culturally grounded, inclusive, and sustainable approaches to social and economic integration.

By empowering communities with these tools and approaches, TAIGA RISE seeks to bridge the gap between top-down immigration policy and the on-the-ground realities of northern regions. The pilot ultimately aims to develop a scalable model that enables northern communities to sustainably attract newcomers and support their integration and retention.

For the purposes of the TAIGA RISE project, attraction, integration, and retention are understood as interconnected and mutually reinforcing processes.

-  **Attraction** refers to the capacity of northern communities to draw newcomers by effectively communicating employment opportunities, quality of life, and the social, cultural, and environmental assets of the region.
-  **Integration** is defined as the extent to which newcomers are supported to participate fully in economic, social, cultural, and civic life through access to responsive settlement services, employment pathways, and inclusive community networks.
-  **Retention** refers to the ability of communities to create the conditions that encourage newcomers to remain long term, including access to stable employment, housing, social belonging, and opportunities for personal and family well-being.

These definitions guide the analysis throughout the report and inform the project's assessment of community preparedness and capacity.

Introduction

The **TAIGA RISE Environmental Web Scan** presented in this report provides a comprehensive baseline assessment of the newcomer settlement landscape in Northern Alberta and the Northwest Territories. Initiated in April 2025 as an early component of the TAIGA RISE project, this environmental scan was designed to systematically catalogue the spectrum of stakeholders, service providers, and digital resources that support newcomers in these regions. Employing an inclusion-focused framework, the scan examined how rural and remote communities, particularly those in small (1,000– 29,999 residents) and medium (30,000–99,999 residents) population centres (Statistics Canada, 2022), address the needs of diverse newcomer populations. By mapping existing services and identifying key actors in newcomer support, this study establishes a critical baseline to inform and evaluate subsequent TAIGA RISE interventions.

Why does this matter?

Developing a comprehensive understanding of settlement services in Northern Alberta and the Northwest Territories is critical for evidence-informed decision-making:

- 1** It enables government agencies and funders to identify priority areas for investment by revealing where service gaps are most pronounced and which forms of support remain underdeveloped.
- 2** The findings highlight both challenges and opportunities for policymakers and community leaders—for example, identifying regions that lack language training programs that could be mobilized to support integration.
- 3** The scan functions as an advocacy tool for northern communities, providing a roadmap for collective action to foster a more inclusive and pluralistic society.

Methodology

A key component of the research is an **Environmental Web Scan** of current settlement and integration services in small and rural communities across the Northwest Territories and Northern Alberta. This scan of publicly available information (often termed a web scan of grey literature) aims to identify, map, and analyze the ecosystem of services and supports available to newcomers in the target regions (Adams et al., 2017).

The guiding research question for the service scan is:

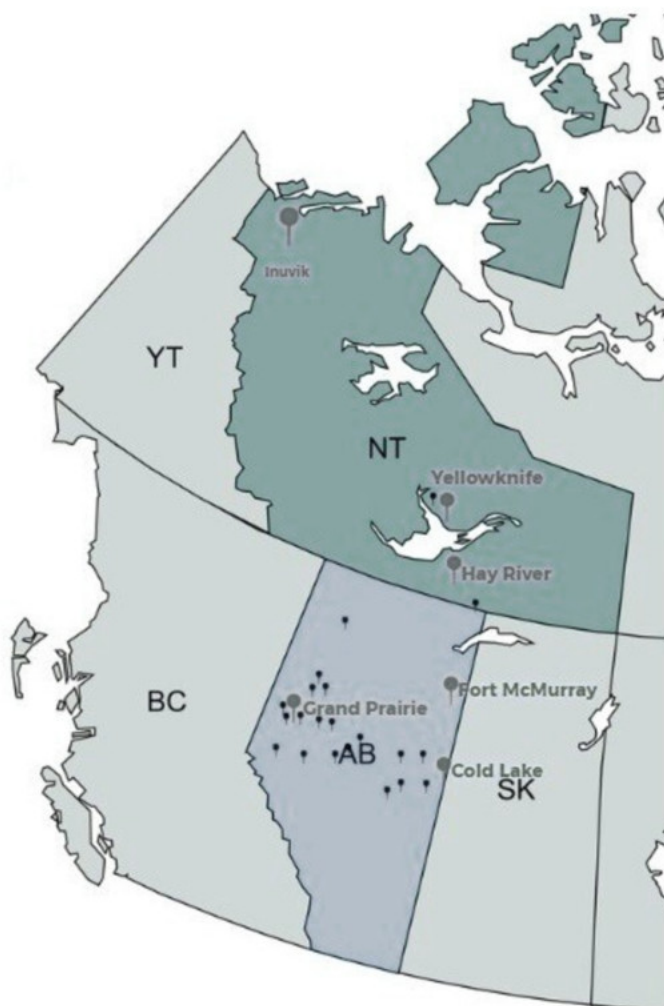
Research Question

What services and supports for newcomers are currently available in Northwest Territories and Northern Alberta, and how do they align with the attraction, retention, and integration needs of immigrants and newcomers in these regions, based on publicly available information?

1- Geographic Scope

The scan is limited to small and medium population centres in Northern Alberta and the Northwest Territories. According to the 2021 Census definitions, small population centres have 1,000–29,999 residents and medium population centres have 30,000– 99,999 residents (Statistics Canada, 2022c). Based on this definition, the following centres were included:

Northern Alberta	Northwest Territories
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Grande Prairie• Fort McMurray (Wood Buffalo)• Athabasca• Cold Lake• Lac La Biche• Beaverlodge• Bonnyville• Elk Point• Grande Cache• Grimshaw• High Level• High Prairie• Peace River• Slave Lake• St. Paul• Swan Hills• Valleyview• Whitecourt• Sexsmith• Fox Creek• Fairview• Wembley	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Yellowknife• Hay River• Inuvik• Fort Smith• Behchokò



2- Organizations Selection Criteria

We employed a multi-step procedure to conduct the environmental web scan, drawing on methods used in prior research on immigrant services (Matharu et al., 2025). The scan was deliberately broad in scope to capture both formal **Service Provider Organizations (SPOs)** funded by the federal government and more informal or locally funded initiatives (non-SPOs). The following steps summarize our approach:

Identifying SPOs

Using Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada's online directory "Find free newcomer services near you", we gathered the list of IRCC-funded service provider organizations in the target regions.

Identifying non-SPO organizations

This included registered non-profits, charities, local immigration partnerships, cultural associations, Indigenous organizations, faith-based groups, as well as public institutions (municipal programs, libraries, schools) and private sector initiatives that might support newcomers.

Inclusion criteria were deliberately broad to capture formal, federally funded programs and informal, locally initiated initiatives.

To provide clarity on the nature of these organizations, we categorized them based on the nature of their work. This classification highlights the diversity of organizations contributing to newcomer support across northern communities.

Table 1. Organization Type

Categories	Subcategories
Community-Based Organizations	Immigrant associations, ethnic community groups, Indigenous societies, diaspora networks
Faith-Based Organizations	Religious communities, faith-based newcomer outreach, church/mosque/synagogue programs for migrants
Gender-Based Organizations	Women’s shelters, LGBTQ+ centers, youth programs
Immigrant-Serving Agencies	Local Immigration Partnerships (LIPs), Welcoming Communities Initiatives (WCIs), Zoned Immigration Partnerships (ZIPs), housing providers, legal/advocacy centers
Healthcare Providers	Clinics, public health services, hospitals, trauma counselling
Educational Institutions	Schools, school boards, colleges, universities, adult learning centers
Municipal Agencies	Public libraries, settlement desks at City Halls, local community centres
Others	Volunteer centers, multicultural associations, sports clubs, co-ops, unregistered settlement sector allies

3- Search Protocol

Our scanning protocol had three layers to systematically identify and verify newcomer-serving organizations:

- Manual site navigation: Key sections of the organization's official website (if available) were browsed, including pages such as "About Us," "Programs/Services," "Projects," and "Events."
- On-site keyword search: Using in-page search (Ctrl+F) and site search features, researchers looked for keywords in English and French indicating immigrant services.
- Google "site:" search: If a website lacked a search function or contained extensive content, Google's site-specific search operator was used (e.g., site:organizationwebsite.com) to locate relevant information.

Inclusion of Flagged Community Groups: During the scan, some community-based organizations were identified whose names or mandates suggested they served immigrant populations, but whose websites did not contain the keywords specified in the on-site search. Examples included ethnocultural associations and faith-based groups, such as a Filipino community association in Yellowknife or Arab and Ukrainian cultural societies. A methodological decision was made to include these organizations in the inventory when their focus was clearly related to newcomer or immigrant communities, even if explicit references to services were not found on their websites. This step ensured a more comprehensive representation of the settlement ecosystem and captured organizations that might otherwise have been overlooked by keyword-driven searches.

Targeted search terms were applied across all layers to capture services aligned with TAIGA RISE's strategic pillars (Attraction, Integration, Retention).

4- Data Compilation

Following the multi-step scanning protocol, all identified organizations were systematically recorded in a master Excel database. For each organization, detailed information was captured, including the community of operation, organization name, website and social media links, and the types of services provided. Then, organizations were assessed for alignment with the TAIGA RISE strategic pillars of Attraction, Integration, and Retention, and supplementary notes were recorded to capture populations served, languages available, or other distinguishing characteristics. Table 2 provides a detailed overview of these pillars and the types of services or initiatives included under each.

Table 2. Strategic Pillars and Example Strategies

Attraction	Integration	Retention
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment opportunity promotion • Regional marketing/promotion • Initial outreach or first-contact services • Financial or housing incentives • Partnerships with employers or recruiters • Community appeal • Others – any other initiative that doesn't fit the above categories. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Language training and assessment • Employment-related services • Information and orientation programs • Community connections initiatives • Support services (e.g. childcare, transportation, interpretation to enable access) • Needs assessment and referral programs • Others as applicable. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social bonds and belonging efforts • Community participation supports (e.g. sports leagues, arts programs, town halls, volunteering) • Place attachment initiatives (e.g. community storytelling, cultural festivals, local heritage programs) • Economic stability and resilience supports (e.g. affordable housing initiatives, career mobility programs, financial coaching) • Others as needed.

Findings

The initial environmental web scan identified a total of 2,207 organizations in the study area. From this pool, we ultimately found 264 organizations that provide some form of service to immigrants or newcomers – approximately 12% of all scanned organizations (Chart 1). Of these 264 organizations, 200 were discovered through the keyword-based search, and an additional 64 were identified via the analytical approach as explained in the methodology section (Chart 2).

Chart 1. Summary of Total Scanned Organizations

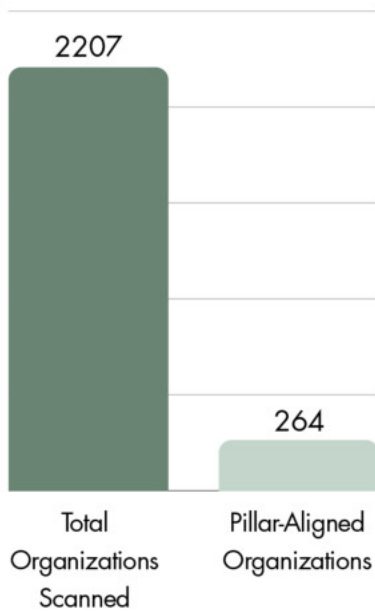
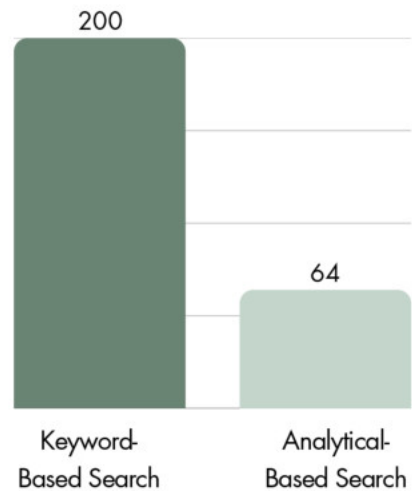


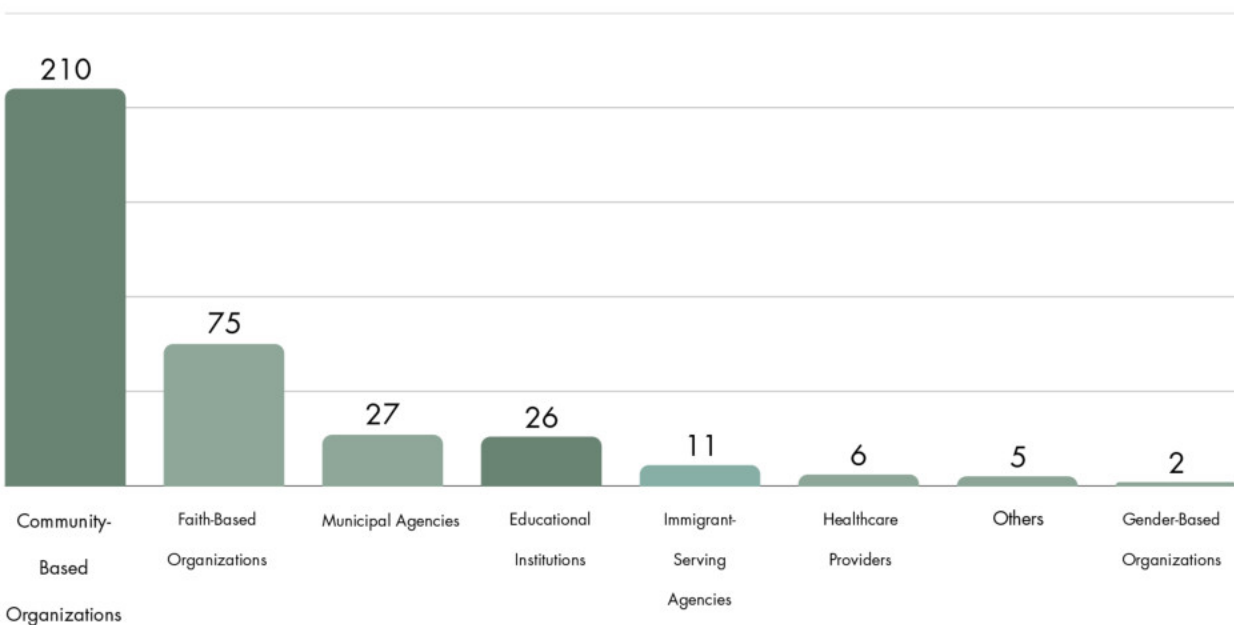
Chart 2. Search Method of Identified Pillar-Aligned Organizations



Organization Type

Of the 264 organizations identified, the majority (210) were community-based, representing most ethnocultural and local newcomer-support networks. They were followed by faith-based organizations (75), educational institutions (26), municipal agencies (27), healthcare providers (6), gender-based organizations (2), and other groups (5). Some organizations appeared in multiple categories—for instance, certain colleges are classified as educational institutions while also receiving IRCC funding as SPOs, reflecting overlapping roles in newcomer support. The chart below illustrates the distribution of organizations across these categories.

Chart 3. Types of Identified Pillar-Aligned Organizations



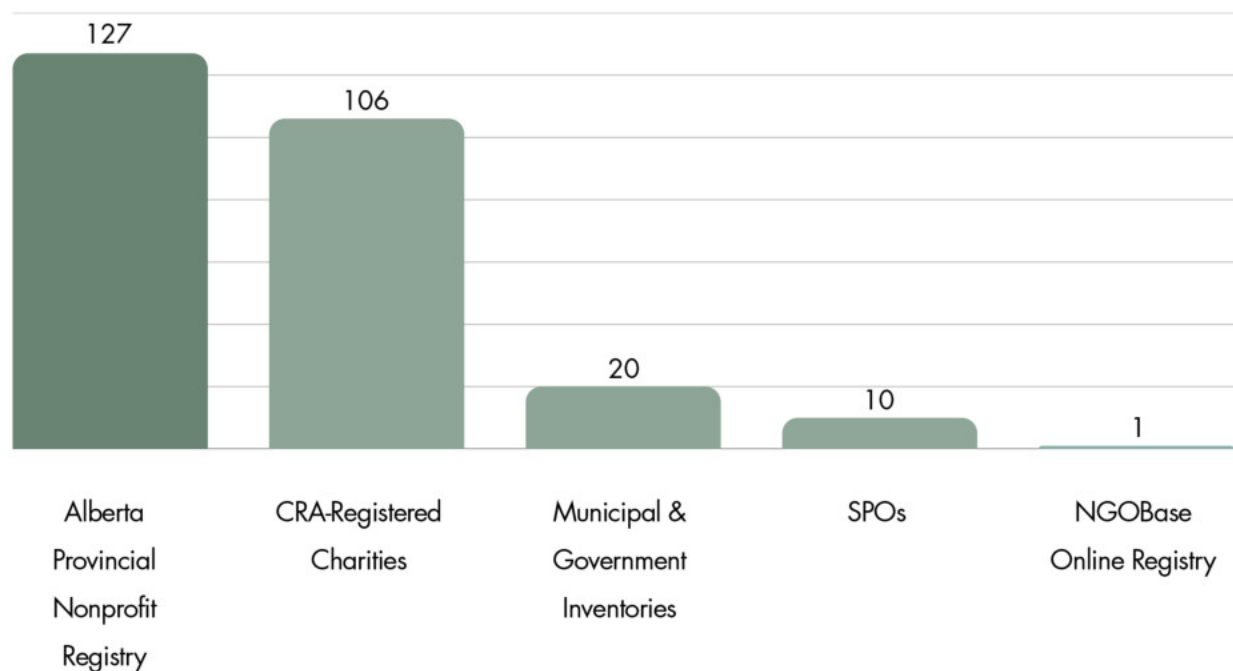
Organization Identification by Data Source

Each identified organization was classified into one of two main categories based on the nature of its services:

- **SPOs:** Organizations that primarily serve immigrants and newcomers and are typically funded by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC).
- **Non-SPOs:** Organizations whose services are broadly available to the general public but include targeted programs or support for immigrants and newcomers.

Non-SPOs were identified from four major data sources: (1) the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) Registered Charities database, (2) Alberta’s provincial nonprofit registry, (3) NGOBase online registry, and (4) municipal and government service inventories. Among these, the Alberta nonprofit listings contributed the largest share of records (1,427), though it is important to note that this dataset covers only Northern Alberta and does not include the Northwest Territories (Chart 4).

Chart 4. Sources of Identified Pillar-Aligned Organizations



Geographic Distribution

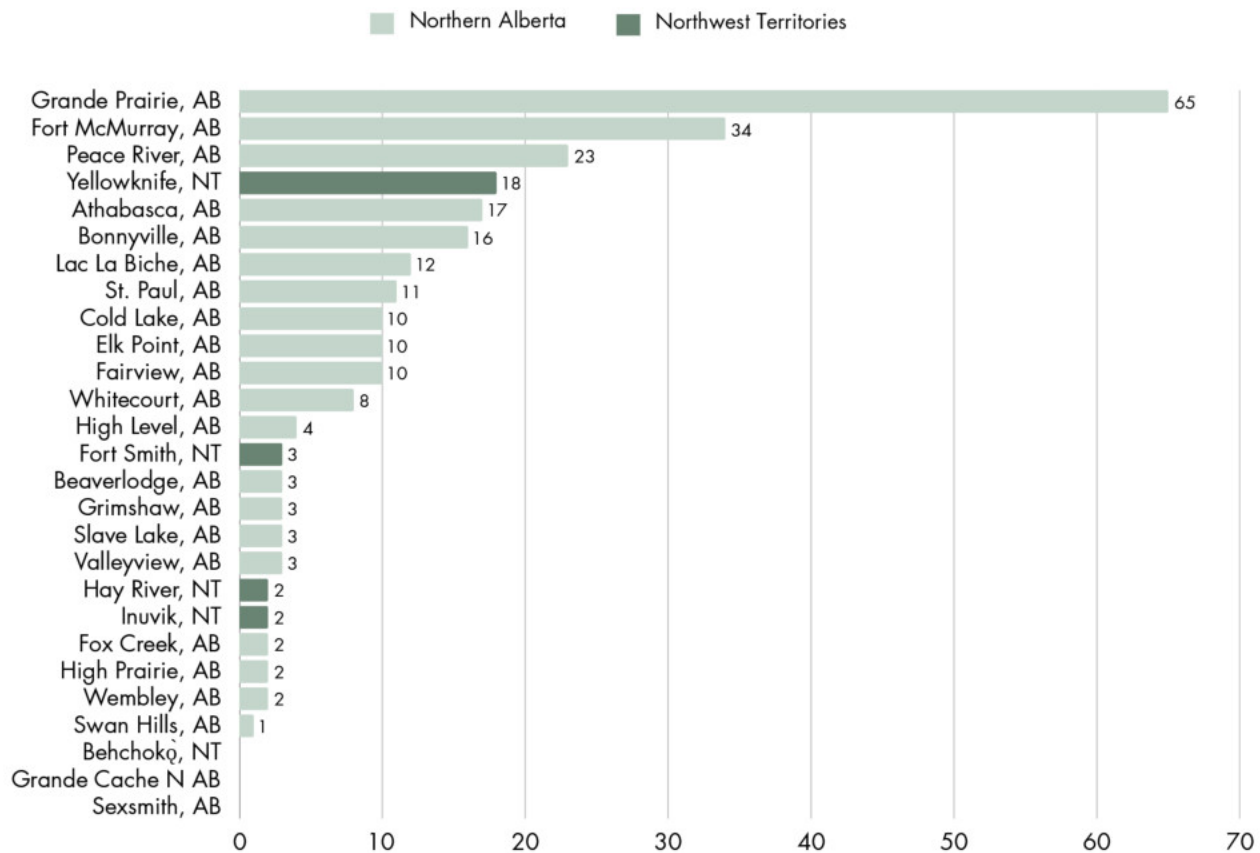
The scan covered 27 population centres in total—five in the Northwest Territories (NT) and 22 in Northern Alberta (AB). The most densely represented locations were:

- **Grande Prairie, AB:** 417 total organizations scanned, with 65 included in findings;
- **Fort McMurray, AB:** 304 organizations scanned, with 34 included;
- **Yellowknife, NT:** 74 organizations scanned, with 18 included.

At the other end of the spectrum, three communities—Behchokò (NT), Grande Cache (NAB), and Sexsmith (AB)—had zero organizations included in the final findings.

Out of 264 newcomer-serving organizations documented, **239 were located in AB**, and only **25 were in the NT** (see Chart 5 for detailed breakdowns).

Chart 5. Geographic Distribution of Identified Pillar-Aligned Organizations

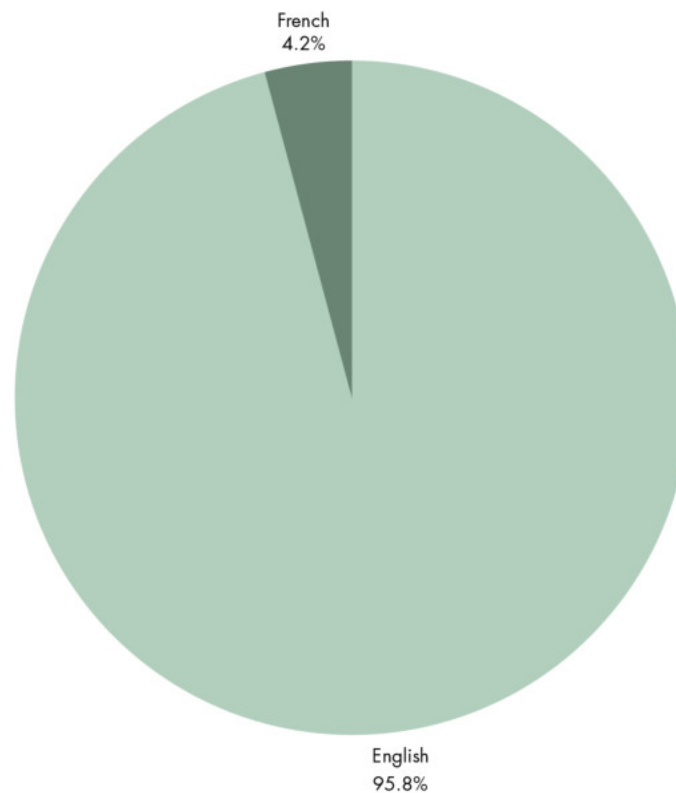


Organizational Language Capacity

We also examined the **language capacity** of these organizations. Out of the 264 organizations, 253 (about 95.8%) had **English** as the main language of their website and services, while only 11 organizations (4.2%) operated primarily in **French** (Chart 6).

This is consistent with population language demographics in the regions: according to the 2021 census, roughly 261,435 Alberta residents could conduct a conversation in French (approximately 6% of Alberta's population), and in the Northwest Territories about 1,135 people (2.8% of the territory's population) reported French as their only first official language (with an additional 155 reporting both English and French) (Statistics Canada, 2022d; Statistics Canada, 2023). Given these proportions, it is not surprising that only about 4% of the organizations identified have French as their main service language.

Chart 6. Primary Languages of Identified Pillar-Aligned Organizations



Strategic Pillars: Attraction, Integration, and Retention

As outlined in earlier sections, each organization was assessed against the TAIGA RISE framework's three strategic pillars: **Attraction, Integration, and Retention**. These pillars were defined according to existing academic and policy literature on rural settlement (Esses et al., 2010), and organizations were assigned to one or more pillars based on the types of services described on their websites. As anticipated from preliminary fieldwork, the majority of organizations were focused on **integration-related services** (e.g., language instruction, employment support, community orientation). A smaller number were engaged in **retention strategies** (e.g., social bonding activities, cultural participation), while **attraction-focused efforts** (e.g., promotional outreach, pre-arrival information) were rare (see Table 3). Of the 264 organizations included in the scan, a total of **305 pillar assignments** were made—this number exceeds the total number of organizations because several were active across multiple pillars. Specifically:

- 170** organizations offered services that aligned with the integration pillar;
- 116** organizations supported retention;
- 19** organizations were engaged in attraction efforts.

Chart 7. Number of Organizations by Strategic Pillar

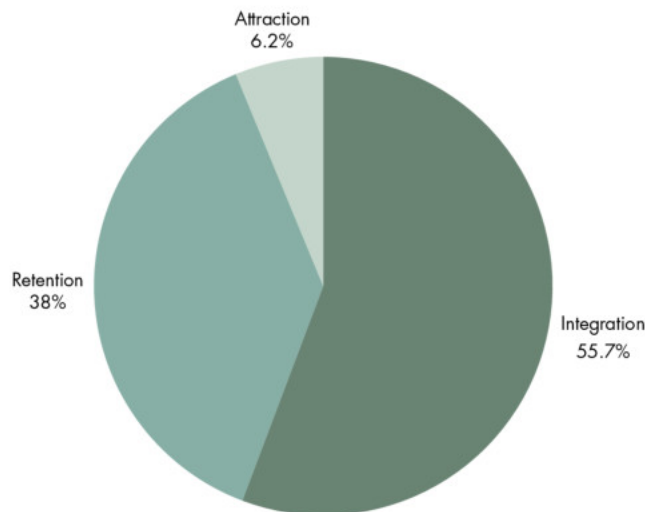


Table 3. Coding Sample

Strategic Pillar	Service/ Activity	Analysis Category	Organization	Population Centre
Attraction	Outreach Program & Services	Initial outreach / first contact services (Pre-arrival info, welcoming package)	Waypoints Community Services Association	Fort McMurray
Integration	English Language Programs & Classes	Language Training and Assessment	Grande Prairie Council for Lifelong Learning Society - Lions Learning Centre	Grande Prairie
Integration	Employment assistance services	Employment-Related Services	Conseil de développement économique des Territoires du Nord-Ouest (CDÉTNO) - Northwest Territories Economic Development Council	Yellowknife
Retention	Cultural events	Social Bonds & Belonging (Efforts to deepen social connections and encourage belonging, both inter- and intra-community)	Yellowknife United Church	Yellowknife

Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings from this environmental web scan provide valuable insights for the *TAIGA RISE* project by highlighting the current landscape of newcomer services in Northern Alberta and the Northwest Territories. Overall, services tailored to immigrants and refugees in these regions appear **limited in number and scope**, though our results indicate a growing interest and some innovative efforts, particularly in larger urban centres such as Grande Prairie, Fort McMurray, and Yellowknife.

Importantly, the scan reveals gaps across all three strategic pillars of attraction, integration, and retention. Although integration activities are more common than attraction or retention initiatives, the overall level of integration support remains modest and constrained by limited infrastructure, resources, and coordination. Retention-focused initiatives are scarce, and explicit attraction efforts are rare, highlighting a service ecosystem that is not yet fully equipped to support long-term newcomer settlement or population sustainability in northern communities.

These findings underscore both the urgency and relevance of the *TAIGA RISE* project. By identifying systemic gaps and regional disparities, this scan serves as primary baseline data that informs the project's next phases. Building on this foundation, *TAIGA RISE* will move beyond online and organizational mapping to centre community voices through surveys, interviews, and focus groups with newcomers, service providers, employers, and local stakeholders. This mixed-methods approach will generate deeper, community-informed evidence on lived experiences, local capacities, and unmet needs—insights that cannot be captured through web-based analysis alone.

By combining this foundational environmental scan with robust community engagement, TAIGA RISE is uniquely positioned to bridge policy objectives with northern realities. The project's emphasis on co-creation, cultural responsiveness, and locally grounded evidence ensures that the strategies and tools developed will be practical, scalable, and aligned with the needs of northern communities. In doing so, TAIGA RISE demonstrates clear value as an SDI-funded initiative and contributes critical knowledge to strengthen attraction, integration, and retention outcomes across Northern Canada.



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