

PRIVATE SPONSORS' RESOURCE HANDBOOK ON

Best Practices for Sponsoring Refugees in Rural and Remote Communities



Refugee
Sponsorship
Training
Program

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Sponsoring refugees in rural and remote communities offers exceptional opportunities for renewal, cultural enrichment, and long-term economic resilience. Across Canada, local sponsorship groups have helped realize these benefits by resettling newcomers in rural areas and smaller centres through Canada's Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program.

Resettling newcomers in smaller communities offers several benefits. Strong community interdependence and connections allow residents, volunteers, and local organizations to work closely together, often providing personalized support and helping newcomers build relationships and a sense of belonging.

Rural areas may also offer opportunities for entrepreneurship and the development of small businesses, especially to fill local service gaps and trades. They often provide safe, family-friendly settings, access to nature, and a slower pace of life that can support wellbeing during resettlement. For communities, welcoming newcomers can help address population decline, meet labour needs, sustain schools and services, and strengthen cultural diversity and long-term vitality.



However, despite these benefits, rural and remote communities often face distinct challenges, including limited housing availability, fewer service providers, reduced access to specialized medical programs, limited childcare options, transportation barriers, an aging volunteer base, and smaller labour markets. Addressing these gaps in services and infrastructure require additional resources and coordinated support from multiple levels of government.

Within this context, this handbook focuses on practical approaches that communities and local partners can implement. It incorporates best practices and strategies drawn from community experience to support sponsors in fostering positive settlement, integration, and the long-term retention of refugee newcomers in rural and remote communities.

Conduct a Local Capacity Audit

For new communities looking to embark on a sponsorship program, it is helpful to conduct a community mapping exercise of local services and supports, such as:

- Assess available housing (short and long-term).
- Map healthcare access, including family physicians and mental health services.
- Identify language training availability (in-person or virtual).
- Evaluate school capacity and newcomer support programs.
- Review transportation options (public transit, volunteer drivers).
- Consider the refugee selection process (to avoid or minimize secondary migration, consider family composition and needs.)

A readiness assessment may help to reduce the risk of secondary migration (when newcomers relocate to other areas, often enticed by large urban centres).

Smaller centres and rural communities often benefit from strong relationships among individuals and organizations. These close connections create a high level of interdependence, which can make local systems easier to navigate. As a result, communities are often able to collaborate more effectively and develop creative, locally driven solutions to challenges.

Engage Local Leadership

In the process of resettling newcomers to a new community, the following organizations can provide important connections:

- Municipal government
- School boards
- Healthcare providers
- Libraries
- Faith and cultural organizations
- Employers and Chambers of Commerce

*Check out
this resource!*

[Welcoming Immigrants and Refugees to Canada:
The Role of Municipalities](#)



Experienced sponsors say

“A family in southern Alberta stated that they can’t imagine moving to a bigger centre and they have also bought a house in their community. They feel safe where they are and like the quiet. They go shopping in the city and always like coming back “home.”

Seek Stable, Affordable Housing

Housing shortages are often a barrier in rural areas. Best practices include:

- Negotiating with local landlords
- Exploring partnerships with housing cooperatives, nonprofit organizations, or other community connections
- Seeking housing connected to transportation options, when feasible

Plan for Transition

Develop a housing plan that:

- Encourages financial independence
- Supports newcomers living close to services where feasible
- Avoids abrupt rent increases after sponsorship support ends

*Check out
this resource!*

[Private Sponsors'
Arrival and Orientation
of Newcomers \(2025\)](#)





Match Skills to Local Labour Needs

Successful integration depends on employment alignment:

- Conduct skills assessments pre-arrival when possible.
- Connect with employers experiencing labour shortages (e.g., agriculture, healthcare support, trades, manufacturing).
- Provide credential recognition guidance early.

Support Entrepreneurship

Rural communities can benefit from newcomer entrepreneurship.

Sponsors can:

- Connect refugees with local business mentors
- Facilitate micro-loans or community investment
- Offer financial literacy training

Creative Ideas



In Ontario, the Starter Company Plus program provides individuals starting, expanding or buying a small business training, mentoring, and grants up to \$5,000.



Creative Ideas

Consider regional or provincial immigration programs, as these initiatives demonstrate how labour market alignment improves retention.

Transportation

Public transportation is often limited or nonexistent in remote communities.

Develop Creative Solutions

- Volunteer driver networks
- Community vehicle sharing programs
- Assist newcomers in obtaining a driver's license
- Build partnerships with local auto dealers for affordable vehicles



Access to transportation directly affects employment, education, and healthcare access.

Education

Engage Schools Early

- Notify school administrators in advance.
- Arrange English or French language learner supports.
- Identify peer buddies



Support Parents' Engagement

Help parents:

- Understand school systems
- Attend parent-teacher meetings
- Participate in school events
- Encourage and support children's attendance in extracurricular activities

*Check out
this resource!*

[Language Learning on Your Own:
Self-Study Ideas and Resources](#)



Leverage Virtual Services

When in-person services are limited:

- Utilize online language classes
- Arrange telehealth appointments
- Connect newcomers to regional settlement agencies virtually

Sponsors should help families to set up:

- Internet access
- Digital literacy skills
- Online banking and service portals

Creatively leverage volunteers as:

- Conversation buddies
- To lead conversation groups
- To take families to libraries and local literacy networks to participate in English and French programs

Build Regional Partnerships

Connect with urban settlement agencies for:

- Periodic outreach visits or satellite offices
- Specialized trauma-informed counseling
- Legal and immigration advice

*Creative
Ideas*



In smaller centres, sponsorship groups have formed partnerships with a local women's centre, literacy networks, and social clubs with positive outcomes.

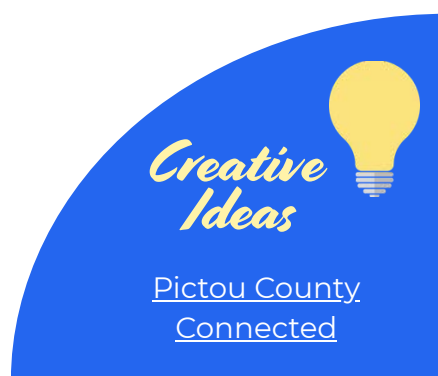
Experienced sponsors say

“Addressing loneliness is crucial. A lack of linguistic and cultural communities, combined with harsh weather and geographical isolation, can make for a very difficult adjustment. It is important to help the newcomers develop social connections.”

Prepare the Community

Community orientation reduces misunderstanding:

- Host information sessions about refugee sponsorship
- Share accurate information about refugee journeys and rights
- Address myths proactively



Foster Social Connections

Small communities can be highly supportive if structured intentionally:

- Pair newcomers with local mentors
- Organize potlucks and cultural exchange events
- Encourage participation in sports, community or faith groups, and volunteer organizations

Strong social networks are one of the strongest predictors of long-term retention.

Check out these resources!

[Canadian Council for Refugees \(CCR\) Toolkit: Code of Ethics for the Private Sponsorship of Refugees](#)

[Making Rural Communities Home Toolkit: Tools to Build Social Connection](#)





Many refugees arrive after prolonged displacement or persistent instability in asylum countries.

Adopt Trauma-Informed Practices

- Avoid overwhelming families in the first weeks
- Provide interpretation services
- Respect privacy and confidentiality
- Understand signs of stress and prepare to address mental health challenges

*Check out
this resource!*

[Building capacity to support the mental health of immigrants and refugees: Toolkit for Settlement, Social and Health Service Providers](#)



Budget Realistically

Rural sponsorship may require additional funds for:

- Transportation
- Costly Internet services
- Winter extracurricular activities
- Travel to medical and other specialized services

Ensure sponsors understand full 12-month financial obligations.

Plan Beyond Year One

Long-term retention improves when:

- Employment is available
- Social networks are strong
- Families see future prospects

Encourage newcomers' empowerment by gradually shifting responsibilities to them and fostering their independence throughout the sponsorship year.



Sponsoring refugees in rural and remote communities often requires sponsors to take on an active advocacy role because services may be limited.

Effective advocacy also builds community awareness and support for refugee sponsorship. By advocating for accessible services, equitable opportunities, and welcoming community practices, sponsors contribute to both the well-being of newcomers and the long-term success of settlement in rural and remote areas.

Sponsors can advocate to remove barriers and promote inclusion by:

- Helping newcomers navigate and access essential services such as healthcare, education, language training, and social supports.
- Working with landlords, municipal leaders, and community organizations to expand housing options.
- Encouraging local employers to recognize newcomers' skills and create pathways to meaningful employment.
- Collaborating with schools, faith groups, and community organizations to build welcoming environments.
- Identifying service gaps and communicating these needs to local providers, networks, or policymakers.
- Supporting newcomers to voice their needs and advocate for their own goals.

The welcoming community:

- Respects diversity
- Has a range of educational opportunities
- Invites newcomers to share leisure time activities
- Acknowledges faith and spirituality
- Promotes health and wellness for all
- Has accessible public services
- Is safe, and talks about it

*Check out
this resource!*

**[“The Welcoming Community”
in a Toolbox of Ideas for
Smaller Centres](#)**





Secondary Migration

It is an ever present challenge of settling newcomers to rural and remote areas. New arrivals may be drawn to larger urban centres. It is important to communicate with newcomers who may be thinking of moving during their sponsorship year.

Information about secondary migration and requirements for sponsorship groups can be found here: [IRCC Post-arrival Requirements Guide](#).

Creative Ideas



SAFE, a Sponsorship Agreement Holder in Nova Scotia, developed a list of questions (p 14) to review with a newcomer family considering a move to a larger urban area. This list helps a family to realistically reflect on a secondary migration and all of its implications.

Secondary Migration Relocation Considerations for Newcomers

Who will:

- Find a new bank, transfer funds from current bank, close local bank account
- Register with provincial health plan – waiting period?
- Change address with Canada Revenue Agency—Child Tax Benefit, HST/GST
- Complete Change of Status Form for IRCC
- Find English or French classes
- Notify school and register children at new school; forward documentation to new school; consider how children will get to school—bus? Walk?
- Find family doctor
- Change address with Interim Federal Health Program (IFHP)
- Find dentist (registered with IFHP)
- Find affordable housing; research option of subsidized housing
- Research Social Assistance
- Cost and plan for moving belongings? Selling belongings?
- Cancel phone, internet
- Change over cell phone provider
- Talk to landlord about breaking lease
- Driving or fly to new location – own vehicle large enough to drive family?
Book airline tickets, vehicle repairs before move?
- Contact settlement agency to notify of move, change of address
- Cancel utilities: electricity, fuel
- Resignation from job—letter of reference?
- Get new drivers license
- Check with car insurance to see if rate changes with the new address
- Find interpreters and translators to help with settlement
- Write a letter of confirmation to CG and SAH of move
- Provide feedback about your experience settling before move

*Check out
this resource!*

[Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative's Policy Design Workbook](#)



Experienced sponsors say

"The stronger the Constituent Group (CG), the better. They will need to trouble-shoot scenarios and advocate for support in ways that city-based CGs do not need to think about."

Establish Regular Check-ins

Organize assessments at:

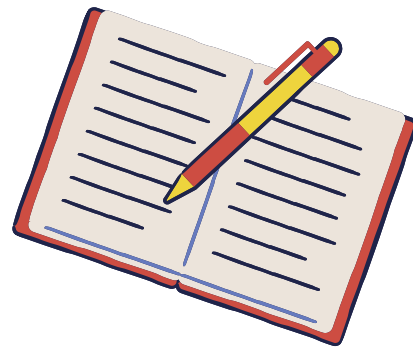
- 1 month
- 3 months
- 6 months
- 9 months (Preparing for the upcoming end to the sponsorship year.)

Include both sponsors and newcomers in evaluation discussions.

Document Lessons Learned

Create a local sponsorship toolkit for future groups:

- Housing contacts
- Employer partnerships
- Transportation networks
- Cultural orientation materials



This builds institutional memory and improves future sponsorships.

Key Success Factors:

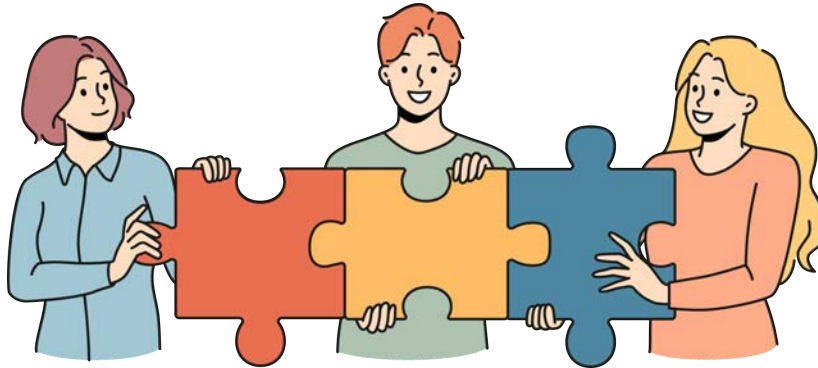
- Early planning and realistic assessment
- Strong employer and housing partnerships
- Creative transportation options
- Social integration strategies
- Trauma-informed, culturally responsive support
- Long-term retention planning

Conclusion

Sponsoring refugees in rural and remote communities represents not only a humanitarian commitment but also a unique opportunity for community development. When thoughtfully planned and well-supported, refugee sponsorship can invigorate local economies, bolster demographic sustainability, and enrich the cultural fabric of the community.

With careful preparation, realistic expectations, and ongoing engagement, rural and remote sponsorship initiatives can serve as powerful examples of resilience, shared prosperity, and cultural vitality.





Resources

- [Private Sponsors Arrival and Orientation of Newcomers \(2025\), 'A Note on Orientation in Rural Areas and Small Towns'](#)
- [Canadian Orientation Aboard Participant Workbook](#)
- [Making Rural Communities Home \(2019\) Toolkit](#)
- [Welcoming Immigrants and Refugees to Canada: The Role of Municipalities \(2019\) Toolkit](#)
- [Attracting and Retaining Immigrants \(2007\) Toolbox of Ideas](#)
- [Rural Migration Antigonish Workshop Report \(2023\)](#)
- [Newcomer guides](#) (national and provincial)
- [Start Your Life in Canada website](#) published by IRCC
- [On Orientation by Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative \(GRSI\)](#)
- [Summary Report From Anecdotes to Evidence: Research-Based Recommendations for Supporting Rural and Remote Sponsorship](#)
- [We Feel Like We're Home: The Resettlement and Integration of Syrian Refugees in Smaller and Rural Canadian Communities](#)

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