

THE COALITION OF INCLUSIVE MUNICIPALITIES:

Small and Rural Municipalities



With the support of the
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Introduction

Small and rural municipalities have been members of the Coalition of Inclusive Municipalities since its early days and have acquired a wealth of knowledge about how to address racism and discrimination. While every municipality has its own context, small and rural municipalities share unique assets and similar challenges.

Unfortunately, many resources and toolkits that support municipalities in their anti-discrimination work are designed with larger and urban communities in mind. This toolkit aims to fill this gap by providing information that is useful and relevant to smaller and rural centres. It offers possible strategies, promising practices, and reflections on how best to fight racism and foster inclusion and, in particular, offers advice and ideas for small and rural municipalities who are just starting out on this work.

As someone working with a small or rural municipality, you are dedicated to building a sustainable and vibrant community that is a good place to live. You want residents to have economic security and an appropriate cost of living; you want to maintain and protect local ecosystems; you want a strong cultural scene that supports creativity and innovation; and you want to meet social needs, like health, education, and safety.

You know there are definite benefits to living and working in a small or rural centre. These could, for example, include closer-knit communities, shorter commute times, slower pace of life, less pollution, more affordable housing, and closeness to nature. When working on projects within your municipal organization and community, it may be easier to move initiatives forward – because once people decide something needs to be done, there are fewer parties involved and less red tape to get through. Further, smaller communities usually have strong social networks and often a few individuals have their finger on the pulse of a number of different initiatives.

You also know that your small or rural municipality faces challenges. Young people might be leaving

and taking talent with them, there may be gaps in services and infrastructure, and local employers may have difficulty finding the skills they need from the local population. There may be new people moving in, either newcomers from other regions or from outside Canada who aren't yet connected to the social fabric of the community. The small population might mean that there's not a lot of diversity, so community members aren't used to interacting across difference. Or it might mean that there aren't a lot of services to support people who experience exclusion and discrimination. Funding for municipal projects may be stretched, and your small staff team can only do so much.

Finally, this toolkit should be reviewed together with the Coalition of Inclusive Municipalities's [Guide for New and Established Members](#); this resource offers valuable information for municipalities of all sizes.

Building sustainable communities

Addressing racism and fostering inclusion can help build sustainable small and rural municipalities. It can be useful to think about sustainability in terms of the sustainability frameworks used by many municipalities across Canada, which see sustainability as incorporating four main pillars: economic, environmental, social, and cultural. Although issues of racism and discrimination are often relegated to the social and cultural pillars, they have a significant impact on the economic and environmental pillars as well.

Here are some examples of how addressing discrimination can support municipal sustainability.



Economic sustainability

- Less discrimination and exclusion in the job market
- Ability to attract immigrant workers – and workers from other underrepresented groups – who can fill employment needs in your municipality
- Ability to retain these workers for many years once they arrive
- Diverse employees bring new skill sets, talents, and perspectives that can reinvigorate the practices of local companies and allow them to better serve diverse customers
- Increased migration to the community can expand the customer base for products and services
- Increased marketability of your community as a tourist destination for international visitors and newcomers



Environmental sustainability

- Better relationships with Indigenous communities who can share knowledge about how to take care of local ecosystems
- Ensuring that racialized people are not unfairly treated when decisions are made about land use and infrastructure projects (environmental racism)
- More sustainable transportation that is accessible to all residents



Social sustainability

- More trust, interdependence, and social cohesion among individuals and groups who are different from each other
- Increased safety and perception of safety in the community, including reduced crime
- Growth in education, employment, housing, and community programs and services
- Stronger relationships among business, government, education, community, and cultural organizations
- Greater collaborative capacity within your community to respond to new and emerging issues
- Increased participation of people who experience discrimination in public consultation processes, which can help leaders make decisions that benefit these residents



Cultural sustainability

- Increased willingness of people who are marginalized to share their stories
- Increased levels of community understanding and valuing of diversity and difference
- Greater variety of artistic expression
- More opportunities for diverse groups to meaningfully take part in community events, celebrations, and festivities

Addressing issues of racism and discrimination in your municipality means that residents who already live there will have an improved quality of life. It also means your municipality is more likely to keep people who don't feel they have opportunities or a sense of belonging and who might leave – such as young people, Indigenous people, and racialized people – and attract new people who have heard about your community's reputation for being equitable and inclusive. Reducing the barriers that people in your small or rural community face can go a long way to ensuring that everyone can experience the benefits of living there.

Promoting equity and diversity

Each section of this toolkit offers step-by-step guidance for structuring, planning, implementing, and measuring your Coalition-related work, and has been written with different sizes of municipalities in mind. Refer to the following sections for more information on each of these steps.

Although the general steps are the same in a municipality of any size, the details might look unique in a small or rural municipality. As you do this work, identify your assets and find ways to build on them. You may even want to do a formal review of municipal and community assets that considers some of the items set out in the sections below. More information about identifying community assets can be found in this section. Try to anticipate some of these challenges and put strategies in place to prevent them from happening or mitigate them if they arise.



Diversity is more than race

Often when we talk about “diversity” in Canada we assume we’re talking about race or culture, but discrimination happens to a wide range of people based on qualities like gender, gender identity, age, religion, ability, and sexual orientation, among others. Often small and rural communities start their journey down the path of anti-discrimination initiatives because there has been a recent influx of newcomers or because the municipality wants to commit to reconciliation work with nearby Indigenous communities. However, doing this work well means we need to recognize all forms of discrimination. It also means we need to recognize that multiple forms of discrimination can happen to the same person (e.g. someone can be Indigenous and bisexual, or a young person with a disability), which is called intersectionality. See section about Developing a Plan of Action in the Coalition of Inclusive Municipalities’s [Guide for New and Established Members](#) for more information on diversity and intersectionality and how to take them into account.



Plan your inclusion strategy based on your needs and objectives

- What are the current and future projected demographics of your community?
- What is your vision for your community? What would you like your community to look like in 10 years? In 50 years?
- What are your municipal priorities with regards to inclusion and equity? (Elderly people? Indigenous people? LGBTQ2+ people? Newcomers? People from racially diverse backgrounds? Youth? People with disabilities? Women?)
- What are your community's assets and how can you use these assets to meet your goals?
- What are the gaps? What new strategies need to be developed? What assets need to be cultivated?
- Who can you partner with to help you move your work forward?

Immigrant attraction and retention

Many small and rural municipalities start their journey down the path of anti-discrimination work by attracting and retaining immigrants. This may be rooted in an economic development strategy designed to address population decreases and the need for new people to fill jobs in the community. However, once people arrive, it becomes clear that residents, businesses, and services in the community need to be welcoming, inclusive, and equitable.

If this is where your municipality wants to start, here are a few questions to consider:

- **How can you make the case for working to attract newcomers? How will an influx of newcomers benefit your community?**

- **Are you looking to attract economic immigrants? Refugees? Entrepreneurs? Temporary foreign workers? International students?**

- **Who will drive the attraction strategy? What about the retention strategy? Which partners can you work with?**

- **How will you ensure that newcomers are treated fairly and not exploited by employers, landlords, and other businesses? What happens if they are?**

- **What supports are available for newcomers once they get here? Think about formal supports like settlement services and informal social networks of compatriots and non-immigrants.**

- **How do you think the community as a whole will respond to newcomers? Are there ways to build relationships and cohesion between current residents and newcomers? Are there processes in place if incidents of racism or discrimination happen?**

Attracting immigrants

Based on a [study of rural municipalities in Ontario](#), researchers from the University of Guelph created a model of promising practices for attracting and retaining immigrants in rural communities. Their research recommends that communities seeking to attract and retain immigrants do the following:

1. Work with what you have
2. Build and maintain relationships
3. Gain political will
4. Involve newcomers as key players
5. Ensure research-based decision making
6. Emphasize process and build capacity
7. Plan with a long-term horizon in mind

Source: *Attracting and Retaining Newcomers in Rural Communities and Small Towns*. 2017. Wayne Caldwell, B. Labute, B. Khan and N. D'Souza Rea. Publisher: Municipal World, Union Ontario. Page 24

Retaining immigrants

Another research project from the Rural Ontario Institute focused on how to enhance newcomer engagement and build social capital to cultivate social inclusion.

The findings suggest newcomers and stakeholders will benefit by focusing on four essential areas:

1. Providing intentional community leadership from municipalities and municipal leaders
2. Reducing system barriers in employment, culture, transportation, housing, etc.
3. Building relationships between newcomers and other community members
4. Developing robust support systems like programs and services, faith communities, and networks

Source: [Newcomer Engagement and Social Capital in Rural Communities](#)

The benefits for small and rural municipalities

Close connections

One of the most important benefits of doing anti-discrimination work in a small or rural municipality is that people tend to know each other or have mutual connections. Municipal staff and elected officials are more likely to know about the work of non-government organizations or already have relationships with these organizations, which makes

it easier to find potential partners. This can also be helpful when you're looking for a champion – a prominent member of the municipality or the community who can connect people across departments or organizations and influence them to see the value of Coalition-related work.

There are fewer municipal staff and elected officials in a small municipality, so if you're looking for internal allies for anti-discrimination work, it's more likely that you already know who to approach for help and

support. As municipal staff, you might even have a closer relationship with senior administration or council. This can make it easier to have initial conversations communicating the value of inclusion and diversity work. Once you've signed onto the Coalition, this will help you to closely align your activities with the core priorities of the municipality, which better ensures success and sustainability of the work, and to identify roadblocks related to approvals from leadership.

Proximity to local issues

In a small community, municipal staff and elected officials are also closer to the ground. You might have a better sense of the real issues related to racism and discrimination facing people in your community because you or your colleagues likely work directly with the public. In some small communities, there's less distance between residents and decision makers, which may mean that residents are more comfortable approaching leaders directly to voice their concerns or work together to find solutions. This also means that when municipal staff and elected officials want to hear from the community, they know who to ask for advice and feedback. Consultations and public forums to elicit feedback from communities can be easier to organize and to implement because many marginalized groups and the organizations that represent them are already known to municipal staff. Because people know each other, and because there are fewer organizations and initiatives in town, when something is going on, it is likely that everyone knows about it. Word spreads quickly about new initiatives, which can help to promote events and programs. People doing Coalition-related work in small municipalities also report that it's easier to see the results of your actions in a day-to-day way.

Overcoming challenges for small and rural municipalities

The closer connections in small municipalities also mean there are certain challenges in doing Coalition-related work that large municipalities are less likely to face. This section discusses three common challenges faced by small and/or rural municipalities: limited resources, lack of support from council or staff, and resistance to racism- and discrimination-related work.

Limited resources

One of the most common challenges in small municipalities is a lack of resources for work related to the Coalition – financial, human, and otherwise. Municipalities often have to meet competing demands with small budgets and few staff, and discrimination and inclusion are often seen as lower priority issues than “core municipal business” like economic development or infrastructure. A lack of resources can especially be a problem if there is no formal mandate from council for Coalition-related activities – which often means there is no budget. The work ends up being done “off the side of someone's desk” or, worse, it slows to a stop altogether. This can result in disappointed and frustrated community members who are expecting changes. Outside the municipal organization, the low number of community organizations in small and rural communities means that staff and volunteers are often overstretched and unable to take on new work without additional resources. Responding to racism and discrimination also requires a specific set of knowledge and skills, and municipal staff may need to build their expertise in this area.

1. Identify and build on existing assets

One way to address the challenge of limited resources is to utilize and build on the current assets within your community. When creating your Plan of Action, take stock of what's already happening in the municipality or the community that relates to racism and discrimination, and build on it instead of starting from scratch. This might mean that your Coalition work involves bringing an equity lens to existing municipal programs instead of creating a new initiative. It could also mean building a network of existing service providers who want to work together to reduce racism through their programs.

2. Focus on one or two priority areas

Small municipalities working in the Coalition have also found that when dealing with resource constraints, sometimes the best solution is to take it slow and steady. Limited funding can be an opportunity to choose one priority area (or one of the Common Commitments mentioned in the Coalition of Inclusive Municipalities's [Guide for New and Established Members](#)) to work on at a time, which allows you to plan for and implement that priority thoughtfully. For example, if a lot of refugees have recently arrived in your municipality, enhancing settlement services may be a priority. Or, if the number of racist incidents in

your community is high, you may want to work on a protocol to respond.

During the action planning process, be realistic about the goals you can achieve with your current resources. Be clear about who is responsible for implementing the plan, out of what department, and what human, financial, and other resources you'll use. Overshooting your capacity is a sure way to create a sense of disappointment and frustration from council, staff, and the community and will affect the success of future initiatives. You may also want to focus on activities that are low-cost or no-cost, instead of ones that require significant financial or human resources.

Limited resources can also be an opportunity to spend your time on the essential work of gradually building relationships and trust within the municipality and community for anti-discrimination work. Taking the time to build appreciation for why this work is important might be exactly what you need to convince council to provide funding.

3. Establish partnerships

By far, the most common way that small municipalities deal with a lack of resources is to partner with other organizations, including community groups, service providers, and businesses. Creating partnerships in a

Using community asset mapping

A community asset can be a physical structure or place, community service, business, or person. Community asset mapping processes bring these various groups together for one or more sessions led by a facilitator. The process produces a set of maps and reports for planning and implementing initiatives.

- The [Community Tool Box](#) describes how to identify and map community assets
- The [Facilitator's Guide to Community Asset Mapping](#) outlines how to lead an asset mapping session
- The [Community Foundations of Canada](#) measures the vitality of communities across Canada

small community is often easier because there are fewer groups, and people already know each other. They may already trust one another or each other's organizations, which makes it easier to build buy-in for a new initiative. If those relationships don't already exist, they are easier to create and turn into formal or informal partnerships when the time is right.

Partnerships allow organizations to pool resources – financial, human, and knowledge – and enable them to achieve more than they would on their own. They can support genuine relationship-building between the municipality and people who experience discrimination, which can improve understanding and trust. They can also allow for capacity building and increased prominence of each organization that is part of the partnership. See “Creating a Structure” and “Developing your Plan of Action” from the Coalition's [Guide for New and Established Members](#) for more information on the benefits of and advice for creating partnerships. Below are some types of partnerships:

Interagency networks: Representatives from various community organizations meet regularly to share information and identify areas for collaboration. For example, a local organization hosts a monthly meeting of all organizations in the community that work with youth.

Communities of practice: Individuals, whether from organizations or independently, meet regularly to exchange knowledge and get help from each other with emerging issues. One example is the Southern Alberta Inclusion Network.

One-time collaborations: Organizations pool resources or expertise to implement a short-

duration initiative (for example, to bring in a trainer for a series of workshops or conducting research on a specific social issue in the community).

Ongoing collaborations: Organizations work together to offer a new program or service in the community, Local Immigration Partnerships are an example of such collaborations.

Agreements with Indigenous communities: Municipalities sign agreements with nearby First Nations to build relationships and collaborate on specific joint initiatives. For example, the City of Pitt Meadows and Katzie First Nation have signed water, sewer, and fire agreements and a Friendship Agreement. More information on signing accords and agreements with Indigenous communities can be found in [Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples: A Holistic Approach](#) (Canadian Commission for UNESCO, 2019).

Funding: Municipalities provide funding to local organizations to take on community projects. For example, a municipality funds a local ethnocultural organization to create brochures on services for newcomers in several languages.

Coordination: Organizations align initiatives or schedule events at the same time to build momentum or awareness, for example, [Raising the Curtain](#), an annual celebration of diversity and inclusion in Medicine Hat, Saskatchewan.

Mentorship: Programs or individuals enter into a mentoring relationship where the mentor shares information and helps the mentee troubleshoot emerging issues. For example, a municipality mentors a new local disability justice organization to set up administrative infrastructure and apply for grants.

4. Collaborate on funding proposals

A key strategy that many small municipalities have used to deal with resource challenges is to jointly apply for provincial, federal, or other sources of funding for a particular initiative that meets their Coalition commitments. This can be a one-time project or a more extensive initiative that requires multi-year funding. Alternatively, municipalities can support organizations to develop their own funding proposals, especially smaller organizations that do not have the resources or expertise to write grant proposals.

5. Focus on actions that have low or no cost associated with them

There are many ways your municipality can do diversity and inclusion-related work at minimal or no cost. Celebrating special dates, raising a pride flag, and organizing community meetings or consultations are some examples of how this can be done. Your municipality can also build on the experiences of other municipalities (examples are scattered throughout this toolkit) to identify possible avenues for actions that do not entail major costs.

Lack of support from council or staff

Strong support from council and senior administration is essential to the success of municipality-wide action on racism and discrimination, and not just for small municipalities. There may be interest in anti-discrimination work, but a lack of appetite or a perceived lack of reasons to sign on to the Coalition. Or your municipality may have signed on to the Coalition based on the enthusiasm of one passionate staff member or elected official but, once that person left, no one else was invested in or responsible for implementing the Plan of Action. Perhaps there is no formal mandate from council for Coalition-related work. This may be due to the lack of resources

discussed above. But it may also be due to a lack of buy-in from council or other municipal staff.

1. Find champions

Finding champions within the municipality or in the community is a great way to build support for Coalition initiatives. Champions should be able to work across multiple sectors and use their influence to build relationships and get others engaged. Over time, the goal is to build a broad understanding of why work around racism and discrimination is beneficial for the community, and to secure commitments from individuals and organizations to work on the issue. It's important to see the champion as a catalyst who can build excitement and ownership so that the work begins to sustain itself and does not rest on one person. Champions can be trusted and influential elected officials, municipal staff, or community members. For example, municipalities who have a mayor as a champion have been able to use that person's position to gain administration's acceptance for the initiative and to lend credibility to their initiatives. Although champions at senior levels may have more formal decision-making authority and influence, it can be powerful to have champions spread across all levels of the organization.

2. Provide education, dispel myths, and facilitate dialogue

Education and dialogue are an excellent way to build support, especially if there has been little access to education, or misinformation about discrimination in the past. Many small municipalities have successfully implemented public education campaigns or hosted training for leadership and municipal staff. Other municipalities have organized "conversation cafes" where people can gather in an informal setting to raise issues and concerns and brainstorm ideas for projects and initiatives. It's important that educational

initiatives are appropriate for the audience's current level of understanding. This requires assessing people's knowledge, attitudes, and learning needs and deciding on the most appropriate educational strategies and methods to meet those needs. It's also important to consider how to deliver education broadly so it reaches people without making them look for it. Small municipalities have had success partnering with other local organizations to jointly host training sessions or organize community-wide awareness-raising events. Placing information in public venues where individuals don't have to seek it out (i.e. billboards, recreation facilities, etc.) is another way to spread the word.

3. Show how the Coalition can contribute to council's goals

Look at council's existing priorities and plans and identify how doing anti-discrimination work will help council achieve its goals. Find opportunities – in formal proposals or presentations or in informal conversations – to demonstrate these alignments. The four pillars of municipal sustainability referred to at the beginning of this section provide a place to start as the pillars are familiar to many municipalities across Canada. Use the examples above, and come up with some of your own, to make the case that doing Coalition-related work will support the economic, environmental, social, and cultural sustainability of the municipality. Look at "Section 2: Before Joining the Coalition" and "Section 3: Joining the Coalition" for more ideas about how to present the benefits of the Coalition to council.

Resistance to anti-discrimination work

Small municipalities often find that an early and ongoing roadblock to Coalition-related work is people's sense that "discrimination doesn't happen here." This story might come from community members, councillors, or municipal staff. This

response might emerge because "diversity" isn't visible in a way that people expect. Often, when people say "diversity" they're referring to ethnic or racial diversity, but it's important to recognize that diversity and discrimination exist along many axes: socioeconomic status, religion, gender, gender identity, age, disability, sexual orientation, and many more. One reason diversity might not be visible is that there are barriers to visibility. Perhaps people with physical disabilities in your community are reluctant to go out in the community due to barriers in the built infrastructure and a lack of accessible transportation. Transgender people might not be comfortable being "out" about their identity for fear of violence. If people feel comfortable enough to speak about their experiences of discrimination, take that as a good sign. It's likely that they trust you or think that you might be able to do something about it.

But for people who don't experience discrimination, it can be hard to admit that this happens in "our community." This could be due to a lack of education, a lack of exposure, or a lack of information about marginalized groups. We also might not hear about discrimination because, when people have talked about it in the past, they have faced backlash and exclusion. Or it may be that people don't know where to go when they experience discrimination, so they don't talk about it at all. But this doesn't mean discrimination doesn't happen.

If someone's experience of their community is positive, it can be difficult for them to hear that not everyone feels this way. They might feel powerless to do anything in the face of something as serious as deep-seated histories of racism. Acknowledging that discrimination is an issue doesn't take away from the positives of the community, but it allows us to have

a more honest look at who doesn't have access to these positive experiences. Below are some ways to address resistance to anti-discrimination work:

1. Educate the public to shift powerful ideas

Sometimes resistance comes from residents in your community who lack information about or haven't interacted with people who are different from them. Information and awareness campaigns about how equity and inclusion can benefit the community as a whole can be useful, along with opportunities for people to learn about each other and work together. Providing education to people who are not interested in being part of "inclusion initiatives" can be tricky. Social marketing and other informal public education methods are good ways to make an impact on people who might not search out inclusion-related education or might even think they don't need it.

However, often resistance to anti-discrimination work comes from powerful ideas about ourselves, about certain groups, and about what each group deserves. There may be deep-seated myths circulating in your municipality about particular communities or histories of violence and exploitation between groups that must be taken seriously if they are to change. You cannot hope to change the perspective of every person in your community, but you can make it clear that certain behaviour will not be tolerated and you can work to shift mainstream values to the point where discrimination is an exception rather than an everyday occurrence.

2. Work with people where they are

People who work in small municipalities must learn to listen carefully to assess where people are in their knowledge about and openness to learning about difference and discrimination. This can look like formal assessments, such as a municipal workforce survey

about staff perceptions of equity, meetings with community groups, or informal conversations with the public at events. Once you have a sense of where people are, design your Plan of Action to meet people at this point and move them forward from there.

Listening can also take the form of honest internal conversations about how well the municipality is doing with respect to inclusion and anti-discrimination. How many municipal staff come from underrepresented groups? Do barriers to access exist in your programs and services? Who is missing from the conversation about your Plan of Action? Again, one of the benefits of being in a small municipality is that it can be easier to assess where people are because your relationships are closer.

3. Learn from other municipalities

Small municipalities have found that learning from other municipalities is a great way to deal with some of these challenges, and to kickstart their Coalition work in the first place. CCUNESCO encourages signatory municipalities to connect with each other to exchange ideas and talk about their experiences with this work. Hearing from another small municipality can save you time and resources and help you figure out what could work for your community.

In exchange, share what you've done. Talking about your work – both successes and challenges – helps create pride in your work and builds relationships of mutual benefit with other municipalities. The Coalition, and other organizations that represent municipalities like the Federation of Canadian Municipalities or your provincial association of municipalities, are platforms you can use to start this. Some small municipalities are even creating their own inter-municipal networks to share their experiences and work together.

Building relationships with Indigenous communities

For many years, municipalities have been entering into agreements and relationships with nearby Indigenous communities and with organizations that represent Indigenous people living off reserve or in urban centres. Since the release of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action in 2015, more municipalities have recognized their role in accounting for and repairing past harms and building positive relationships to carry us all forward. Below are some ways municipalities are working together with Indigenous communities. For more guidance, and to read examples of initiatives other municipalities have undertaken for reconciliation, check out CCUNESCO's resource, [Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples: A Holistic Approach](#).

Agreements & Accords

Some of these agreements take the form of Friendship Accords, which outline common values and principles and commit both parties to working together. Others focus on particular infrastructural or environmental issues, like wastewater or land use. Examples of friendship accords can be found in the [Stronger Together handbook](#) from the Federation of Canadian Municipalities.

Education & Conversation

This might take the form of trainings or workshops where the municipality invites members of Indigenous communities to teach about their histories, values, practices, and current issues. Other municipalities have participated in or hosted meetings or conferences where Indigenous and non-Indigenous community members can get together and discuss issues of common concern.

Collaborative Service Delivery

In some cases, municipalities and Indigenous communities sign agreements to collaborate on the provision of emergency, recreation, or transit services. In other cases, municipalities might work with local Indigenous communities to adapt existing programming. For example, a municipality could contract local knowledge keepers to redesign cultural or heritage programming so it more accurately reflects the history and present of Indigenous people in the region.

The Federation of Canadian Municipalities has developed a set of resources to support municipalities to collaborate with First Nations on community economic development and infrastructure projects. The FCM website also contains a set of case studies of [municipal-First Nations collaboration](#).



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