

2019-2020 Saskatchewan Small Centre Face-to-Face Report

January 28th & 29th, 2020

Manitou Springs Resort and Mineral Spa, Watrous SK

This document is designed to evaluate the processes used and the effectiveness of the first ever, Saskatchewan Association of Immigrant, Settlement and Integration Agencies (SAISIA), Small Centre Face-to-Face Event. This report should also act as a guide to provide a clear direction for any future events.

Acknowledgements

It is important to recognize those that were involved in the planning process. The Small Centre Planning Group was composed of several individuals from the small centre organizations. The group of volunteers included key perspectives from each avenue of the small centre, service provider organizations (SPOs), including settlement and language staff and SAISIA's Rural Coordinator. Each individual offered a unique perspective, that served a vital role in the final product of the event, resulting in an interactive and relevant learning event. A great appreciation goes out to each and every individual that played any role in the process of the event along the way.

Gratitude should also be extended to Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), for not only funding SAISIA's small centre event, but also taking the time to attend the momentous occasion. IRCC's attendance further displayed their support of Saskatchewan small centres and allowed for firsthand experience and information to be shared between SPOs and IRCC. IRCC's presence also gave SK small centres the rare opportunity to meet and converse with key individuals and build a stronger connection with their federal funders.

Thank you to all organizations that attended the event and to all staff that actively participated in the activities.

Event Structure

The small centre event was created through the combination of multiple approaches. Feedback gathered from a small centre survey was added to information that the Rural Coordinator gathered from site visits. Information was also gathered via a targeted focus meeting, aimed to uncover the route issues and themes arising across SK small centres. All information gathered was brought to the attention of the Small Centre Planning Group. The planning group considered all appropriate information, which gave way to the following necessary foundations for the event:

- 1- The event content must be driven by the sole needs and concerns of the rural
- 2- Anyone from any position in the small centres, can attend the event and find value in the content
- 3- A variety of content is necessary and it must invite open communication and collaboration
- 4- Include key funding partners in the event
- 5- Clearly define Saskatchewan small centres by outlining the current reality of rural
- 6- Allow for first-hand sharing across stakeholders, highlighting and celebrating the uniqueness of small centres
- 7- The event must be located in central Saskatchewan to act as a neutral place for the first event

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The finalized agenda became a reflection of the building blocks above. Below is a basic outline of the two-part event:

1) Information Sharing Session – January 28, 2020 – This opportunity was highly recommended, and included an evening of information sharing and networking opportunities. Since most individuals attending the event had to travel the night before the conference, SAISIA used that opportunity to utilize the limited time SPOs had together. This portion of the event allowed SPOs to learn about each other and from each other, providing key inspiration and discussion among peers. This experience was highly valued by those that attended and it was recommended that similar opportunities be utilized in future events.

2) Conference day – January 29, 2020 – Agenda

- Welcome acknowledgments from:
 - SAISIA Rural Coordinator, Bobby Ray
 - SAISIA Executive Director, Ahmad Majid
 - IRCC SK Small Centre Supervisor, Renee Barnabe
- Icebreaker- Getting to know who is all in the room
- Plenary Session - *Truth and Reconciliation* - To increase understanding of Indigenous people with looks into the history of reconciliation in Canada after Residential Schools and the INBUILT-93 project at SAISIA
- Nutrition Break
- Plenary Session - *Importance of Taking Time Out for Self-Care* - Taking the time to check in with our own individual mental health
- Discussion Panel - *Revisiting Language and Settlement* - Discussing best practices of communication and collaboration between local SPOs
- Lunch Break
- Roundtable discussion and sharing of best practices on six main topics, *Social Media, Technology, Employment, Client Retention, Program Attendance and Language Learning Gaps*
- Nutrition break
- *Small Centre Analysis Presentation*- Results of the Small Centre Analysis, outlining the small centre self-evaluation of their perceived Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats.
- Roundtable discussion of the *Future of Settlement* for rural
- Closing and thank you from SAISIA’s Rural Coordinator, Bobby Ray



Survey Results

In evaluation of the first ever SAISIA Small Centre Face-to-Face event, it was important to obtain feedback from participants. It was crucial to evaluate the effectiveness of the event as well as give participants a chance to reflect back what decisions are necessary to move forward with future events. The survey included eight questions, where sixty three percent (63 %) of attendees completed the evaluation. Below is a summary, expressing the reflections of the participants:

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Question 1: I was informed about the 2020 SAISIA Small Centre Conference before the event and felt the event matched the reality I experienced. 53% strongly agreed with this statement; 42% agreed; 5% neither agreed or disagreed (95% strongly agreed or agreed).

Survey Comments:

- Had plenty of advance notice and what was “advertised” was delivered.
- It was broader than expected, hoping for more hands-on teaching help.

Question 2: The location for the 2020 SAISIA Small Centre conference was satisfactory and served the event well. 66% strongly agreed with this statement; 29% agreed; 5% neither agreed or disagreed (95% strongly agreed or agreed).

Survey Comments:

- So nice to stay in a rural location to support rural Sask. The location was generally accessible for everyone- a fairly good neutral spot. Furthermore, it was a real pleasure to be in a space where “off” time could be leisurely and enjoyable.
- The spa was great. The food was acceptable but not amazing. The room was okay but some rooms had plumbing issues.
- Provided relaxation as well as a great environment for networking.
- Great venue! Very pleasant to stay here and see a neat part of Saskatchewan.
- It would be nice in the future to do it in a location close to an organization and get a tour/site visit.

Question 3: On the evening of Tuesday, January 28th, the information sharing session was essential to the overall success of the 2020 SAISIA Small Centre Conference. 42% strongly agreed with this statement; 27% agreed; 26% neither agreed or disagreed; 5% disagreed (69% strongly agreed or agreed).

Survey Comments:

- It was a good time of networking and allowed us to become familiar with each other, each other’s agencies and also do some exposing of systematic issues and look at ways of collaboratively problem solving them. The time was very useful but perhaps lacked a certain measure of direction.
- Having time to interact with other agencies who have similar or different circumstances was one of the best parts.
- I found it less structured than I would have enjoyed.
- Very effective to meet face to face and realize common issues.
- This was one of the best networking sessions I have been to. The focus of the conference being small centre, and provincial specific made for an accessible, relational evening.



- Small Centers were able to network. We learned valuable information from other gateways. We were also recognized as having the best table with promotional materials.
- Good networking because there a good turnout and people brought their information. Could have had a brief formal portion for around the room introduction to their display.

Question 4: *What I learned from the plenary sessions will affect the work that I do today and my understanding of my work in the future. 32% strongly agreed with this statement; 50% agreed; 13% neither agreed or disagreed; 5% Disagreed (82% strongly agreed or agreed).*

Survey Comments:

- The content was valuable. I appreciated that self-care was highlighted. I think many in the sector can approach burnout if they are not careful and mindful.
- The speaker on First Nations was good. I continue to try and find the balance. Our newcomers need to hear the stories and troubles but they also have a high level of stress on their own. I am not willing to add much to their burdens. The self-care segment was nice, I appreciated it. If he spoke fast, we could have covered even more. I appreciated religion was included as an aspect.
- Learning other gateways are also struggling with same issues and also able to learn some successes will benefit our organization.
- Some sessions were excellent, others left a person wanting more structure and focus.
- Information was very basic, good for those new to the sector but not so much for those that have been working and able to attend other training. Would be good to hear more about how to partner with the Province and other service providers.
- I appreciated Janine and Rachel's presentation and switching up the tables to have settlement and language together by service area. IRCC spread out to the tables which was a good addition.
- Great speakers!

Question 5: *I liked the variety of presenters for the plenaries and the discussion work at the tables, and it added to my learning and takeaways from the event. 47% strongly agreed with this statement; 45% agreed; 5% neither agreed or disagreed; 3% Disagreed (92% strongly agreed or agreed).*

Survey Comments:

- I always enjoy interactive activities.
- The self-care was not well presented. It was an important topic but needed a different approach.
- As we only had limited time together, I wish if plenary 1 and 2 were done through webinar at separate occasion so we could have spent more time for roundtable discussions to take advantage or the rare opportunity for small centres to meet and exchange ideas in person.
- Having the group panel was excellent!
- With Canada's promotion of reconciliation, this conference provided educational information regarding our Indigenous. What I learned will benefit me in the future for scheduling cultural events as well as Aboriginal Day in June.
- Facilitation of the first presentation of the day needed more work. Afternoon presentation needed more in-depth content.
- Great to have variety to the event of topics covered.

Question 6: Reflecting on the entire event, the opportunity to build my network and connect with current and new friends/colleagues was valuable and necessary. 68% strongly agreed with this statement; 24% agreed; 8% neither agreed or disagreed (92% strongly agreed or agreed).

Survey Comments:

- Very positive and helpful event.
- It was great to put names with faces. We were also able to see differences in the needs of each gateway.
- Comparing and contrasting work done by our organization to others was an amazing opportunity.
- It was good to get away from the office and have time to build relationships both within our office and in the province. Great to hear what other small centres are doing in their communities.
- There would be a good opportunity for support workers to attend an event.



Question 7: The 2020 SAISIA Small Centre Conference offers a unique experience that is vital to small centre service providers in the region. 61% strongly agreed with this statement; 34% agreed; 3% neither agreed or disagreed; 2 % Disagree (95% strongly agreed or agreed).

Survey Comments:

- Yes, absolutely. Rural, regional, remote service providers are often siloed and isolated, as well as face limited resources and capacity. It’s so important for us to get together and have a sense of solidarity. To learn and gain insights and gather resources and new ideas and networking links. Furthermore, it was hugely beneficial to meet IRCC officers face to face, something that we often don’t have the opportunity to do.
- I’m so glad it was made available to us. We have different needs than the big organizations.
- Definitely yes. Thank you very much for your hard work to put this conference together, and I hope Small Centre Conference will continue in the future.
- Having a conference specific to small and rural centres is much more effective than the larger summit that includes all centres where most presenters and breakout sessions seem focused on the urban reality.
- Change starts with organizations most connected with common struggles. By sharing our experiences, either success or failures, allows us to share a voice.
- It is valuable to gather information from other small centres regarding challenges faces, solutions to challenges and best practices.
- I think this should become an annual or biannual event.
- I don’t think it needs to happen every year. It could be offered biannually depending on if SAISIA is hosting a symposium as there are other opportunities to get together. Or, the focus could alternate between focus group such as support workers, general etc.

Question 8: *What is the key thought or action you will take away from this event?*

Survey Comments:

- Collaborate with the people I connected with.
- The information from the presentations will make me a better SWIS worker and community organizer.
- As a small centre, we really do need to think outside the box and collaborate. Concerns are the eligibility and discrepancies between federal and provincial funding- Many newcomers fall through the cracks.
- Keep collaborating.
- The small centres have unique experiences, challenges and successes which in a way could not be compared to the bigger centres which are unique in their own ways as well. The small centres can band together to make things happen because it is already a group itself bound by their common characteristics and goals. There is just a need for more meeting whether its face to face or through teleconferencing.
- The self-care session really resonated with me. Also, I have some ideas of strategies that we could partner together on broadly to benefit the sector.
- I think one thing that should have been emphasized is the importance of collaboration, good and effective collaboration.
- We need to work on our collaboration across the sector.
- There is French radio available for my French speaking students. I learned that from someone in our group from Moose Jaw.
- It was a great opportunity for small centres to share common struggles as well as best practices, and for IRCC to hear the perspectives of small centres. Thank you again for organizing everything.
- The importance of teamwork, collaboration and communication in the sector.
- Communication.
- Connecting more with our small centre gateways.
- The importance of small centres communicating to share knowledge and resources is very important.
- Great to be reassured that small centres are being advocated for and supported with both our day-to-day successes and our struggles through the work of the rural coordinator. Thank you!
- The challenges in the rural sector are different from Urban centres, this conference was valuable in recognizing the unique differences.
- Sharing ideas, challenges and solutions.
- More workshops on delivery of methods/government expectation/ opportunities to work with funds to deliver unique programming.
- Stronger collaboration with other services to enhance greater results.
- Learning from each other is key to providing effective and consistent services.
- Self-care.
- The small centres' role in the settlement sector should be highlighted and given more importance.
- Partnerships in small centres are key.
- From a conference perspective, I think SAISIA should develop this into a 2-day conference.
- Newcomers should be in-deeply aware of the Aboriginal people's history.
- New connections and finding ways to partner/collaborate with local organizations.

- Identified an opportunity to work with settlement partners on more formal communication. Also discussed approaches to PBLA.
- Great to meet everyone in person.
- Connecting with other small centres is crucial as is the role SAISIA (Bobby- Rural Coordinator) plays in keeping us connected.

Lessons Learned

Taking into consideration the magnitude of information collected through the course of the process, including feedback gathered formally and informally from the event, three common themes arose:

1. Elements that proved valuable and successful

- The information sharing session before the conference proved to be highly successful and greatly appreciated by participants. It was referenced through multiple forms of feedback that the need for rural to network with each other is extremely important and needs to be further cultivated.
- The attendees expressed that the event was a much-needed opportunity for small centres to come together, learn from each other, and collaborate. Being face-to-face is a key ingredient to get the ball rolling on better communication and collaboration between organizations.
- The variety of sessions throughout the event, including plenaries, discussion panels and table discussions, offered an interactive yet engaging approach.
- The attendance of IRCC and SAISIA staff was invaluable and greatly appreciated by participants.
- The venue chosen was highly valued. Choosing it, offered support to rural Saskatchewan, while keeping the location in an accessible, centralized and neutral spot for all small centres. The location also allowed participants to take advantage of downtime by providing a great environment for relaxing and networking.

2. Elements that offered room for improvement

- More structure was desired from the information sharing event
- While the guest speakers were appreciated, more in-depth presentations on rural specific targeted topics was desired
- There were some concerns about the time of year, with road conditions and weather conditions. The goal for future events would be to utilize a better time of year to avoid weather concerns.
- It was highly desired that both sets of funders, federal and provincial attend the event. With the Province missing, there was a definite feeling of a missed opportunity. The goal moving forward is to prioritize ensuring that key members from both sets of funders can take part in future events.

3. The overall success of the event

Based on the collective feedback through survey results, informal conversations, feedback during the event and the general atmosphere and energy of participants throughout the event itself, the 2019-2020 SAISIA Small Centre Face-to-Face Event was a huge success. Great strides were taken at this first ever SK Small Centre event, with an overwhelmingly positive perception of the experience. Overall, the small centres expressed their desire for similar, rural specific events to continue, further stressing that these opportunities are extremely important to the rural sector in moving forward.

Recommendations for Future Events:

- i) Start the planning process early, including a planning committee and lessons learned from the first event to ensure planning does not have to start from square one.
- ii) Keep opportunities to network and share information, including the information sharing session prior to the main event.
- iii) Continue to provide a variety of sessions, regarding specific small centre issues and themes.
- iv) Continue to invite and include key stakeholders such as the federal and provincial funders.
- v) Provide an evaluation survey for participants to gauge the event's success and provide direction for future events.
- vi) Prepare a closing document to summarize a concise picture of the event's effectiveness, including information on a course of action for any prospective events.

Completed by Bobby Ray, SAISIA's Rural Coordinator