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Serve it Up: The Roll of Service Providers in Creating Welcoming Communities

What Makes a Welcoming Community? (Series)

By: Mercedes Labelle



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Land Acknowledgement

NPI would like to acknowledge the First Peoples on whose traditional territories we live and work. NPI is grateful for the opportunity to have our offices located on these lands and thank all the generations of people who have taken care of this land.

Our main offices:

- Thunder Bay on Robinson-Superior Treaty territory and the land is the traditional territory of the Anishnaabeg and Fort William First Nation.
- Sudbury is on the Robinson-Huron Treaty territory and the land is the traditional territory of the Atikameksheng Anishnaabeg as well as Wahnapiitae First Nation.
- Kirkland Lake is on the Robinson-Huron Treaty territory and the land is the traditional territory of Cree, Ojibway, and Algonquin Peoples, as well as Beaverhouse First Nation.
- Each community is home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples.

We recognize and appreciate the historic connection that Indigenous peoples have to these territories. We support their efforts to sustain and grow their nations. We also recognize the contributions that they have made in shaping and strengthening local communities, the province, and Canada.

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Author's calculations are based on data available at the time of publication and are therefore subject to change.

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Executive Summary

This paper presents the findings from the Service Provider Survey for organizations that are in or serve the 'Big 5' – Sault Ste. Marie, Timmins, North Bay, Greater Sudbury, and Thunder Bay. Organizations that are in or serve the Big 5 represent a subgroup of 26 organizations out of a total of 35 organizations from across the North that responded to this survey. Notably, the distribution of respondent organizations are as follows: Sault Ste. Marie (6), Timmins (6), North Bay (6), and Greater Sudbury (6), and Thunder Bay (16). The purpose of this survey was to assess the capacity of service-providing organizations to contribute to welcoming communities in Ontario's northern regions. This survey is a part of the larger Measurement Month initiative led by Northern Policy Institute, in partnership with organizations across Ontario's northern regions, to collect consistent and comparable community-level data on the themes of attraction, retention, reconciliation, anti-racism, and welcoming.

This paper found that a total of 81 services are offered by organizations that are in or serve the Big 5, with the most reported service type being education. It also found that these organizations offer a variety of programs and services that help with the integration and retention of newcomers, most commonly, through connection services and by hosting and inviting newcomers to networking events. Similarly, organizations in the Big 5 offer a variety of programs and services that promote community acceptance and welcoming of newcomers,

although cross-cultural awareness training was the most popular service offered in this regard. In terms of funding and capacity, this paper found that 56 per cent of service providing organizations in the Big 5 feel they have sufficient capacity to meet their mandate. On the other hand, however, almost a third of organizations that responded to this survey feel they do not have the capacity to meet their mandate. Moreover, it found that just over a half of organizations in the Big 5 had some interactions with their community's RNIP program, while nearly a quarter of these organizations actively participated in their community's RNIP program. Finally, 81 per cent of organizations indicated that they have worked in collaboration with other service providers; all of these organizations collaborated through resources sharing.

In consideration with the above findings, this paper recommends that service-providing organizations continue to form strategic partnerships to overcome limited resources, that they collaborate in terms of referring clients to the appropriate organization for their needs, and that employers promote diversity training to other employers and employees that are currently not involved in these activities. It is further recommended that there should be continued effort amongst organizations to share, promote, and participate in these surveys to enable informed decision-making in Ontario's northern regions.



Introduction

In February 2022, Northern Policy Institute, in partnership with organizations across Northern Ontario, launched surveys to collect consistent, comparable data for our regions. These surveys were a part of the Measurement Month initiative, which will occur on a yearly basis.

The surveys focused on the themes of attraction, retention, reconciliation, anti-racism, and welcoming, and explored both individual experiences and the capacity of organizations to contribute to welcoming communities.

In total, 35 organizations responded to the Service Provider Survey, 26 of which are in or serve the Big 5—North Bay, Timmins, Thunder Bay, Sault Ste. Marie, and Greater Sudbury.

The purpose of this survey was to assess the capacity of service-providing organizations in Ontario's northern regions based on what they offer, where, and to whom. Additional analysis was done on funding levels, clients served, collaboration, and interaction with the local Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot (RNIP) program. There are also reports available that look at the experiences of individuals in Northern Ontario communities, including their access to and satisfaction with services.

To aid in both the attraction of migrants and the retention of people already living in our communities, there must be an adequate array of services offered. These services must be available to all diverse populations in a timely manner, and accessible both physically and financially.

Methodology

The cities selected for cumulative analysis are all participating in the RNIP program—a community-led economic immigration path to permanent residence.

The challenges associated with this undertaking were creating service provider awareness of the survey, encouraging self-recognition among organizations that provide services outside of the traditional sense (e.g., direct Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada-funded settlement services), and securing survey participation. Distribution was a collective effort by organizations across Northern Ontario and took the form of targeted social media ads, direct distribution through emails, social media posts, newsletters, and information sessions. Respondents were entered into a draw to win one of two \$100 prepaid Visa gift cards.

All surveys and promotional materials were available in French and English.

In total, 35 unique organizations responded to the Service Provider Survey, 26 of which are in or serve the communities identified for analysis. The distribution of respondents is as follows:

- Sault Ste. Marie (6)
- Timmins (6)
- North Bay (6)
- Greater Sudbury (6)
- Thunder Bay (16)

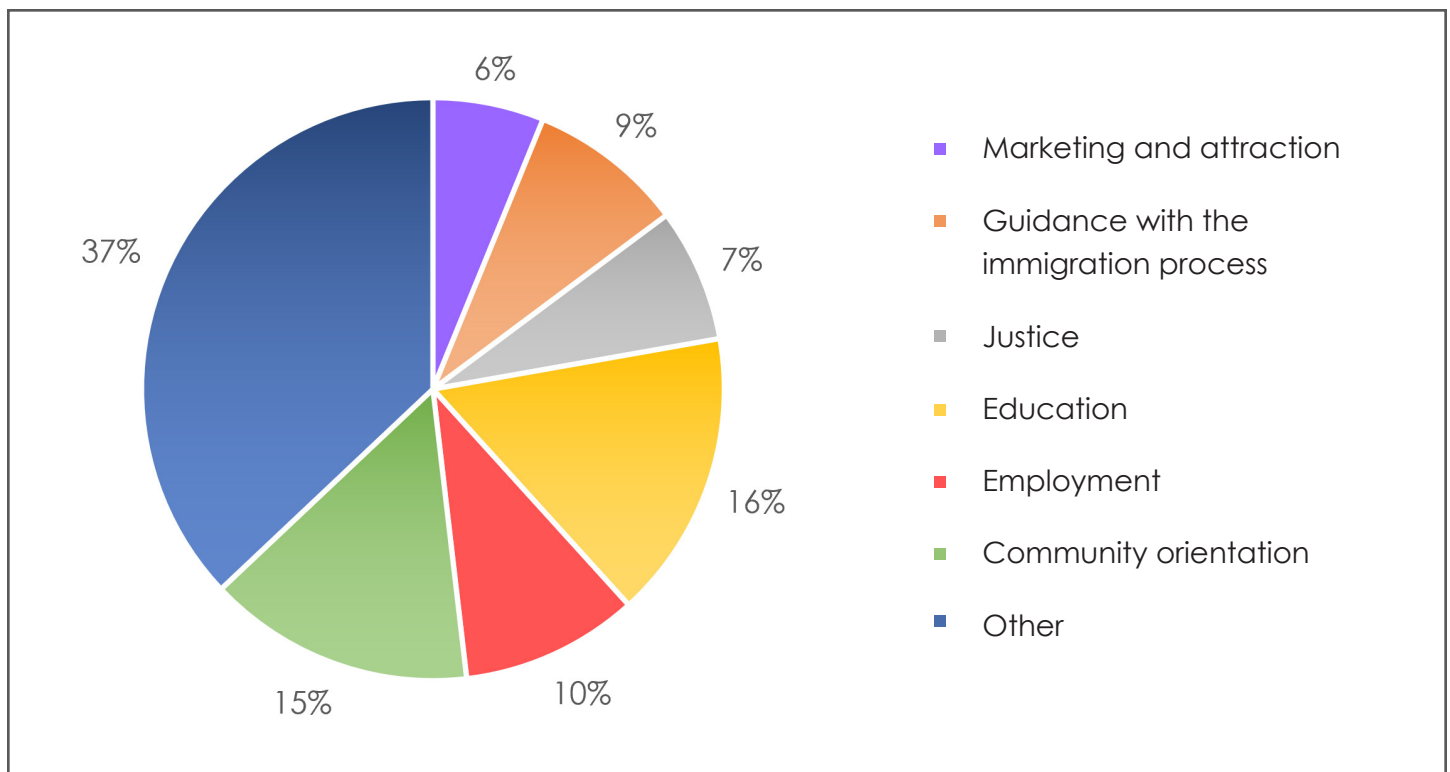


Services Available – By Type and Group

This survey was distributed across networks and targeted at any organization that provides services, such as health, municipal, legal, settlement, and employment. Given that most service providers provide more than one service, there were 81 service offerings identified. For example, an organization that provides settlement services to newcomers may provide guidance with the immigration process, education in the form of language training, and employment in the form of resume building. This organization in the example would therefore provide three unique services even though they are only one entity.

Out of the 81 services provided within the Big 5, the most reported services were education (16 per cent), community orientation (15 per cent), and employment (10 per cent). Other commonly reported services were guidance with the immigration process (nine per cent), justice (seven per cent), and marketing and attraction (six per cent). Conversely, services offered fewer than five per cent of the time were compiled into the 'other' category which includes food services, financial services, violence counselling, non-violence counselling, health services, visa/work permit applications, and other respondent identified services. Once combined, these services represent 37 per cent of the various services available.

Figure 1: Division of services available in Northern Ontario's five largest cities, 2022



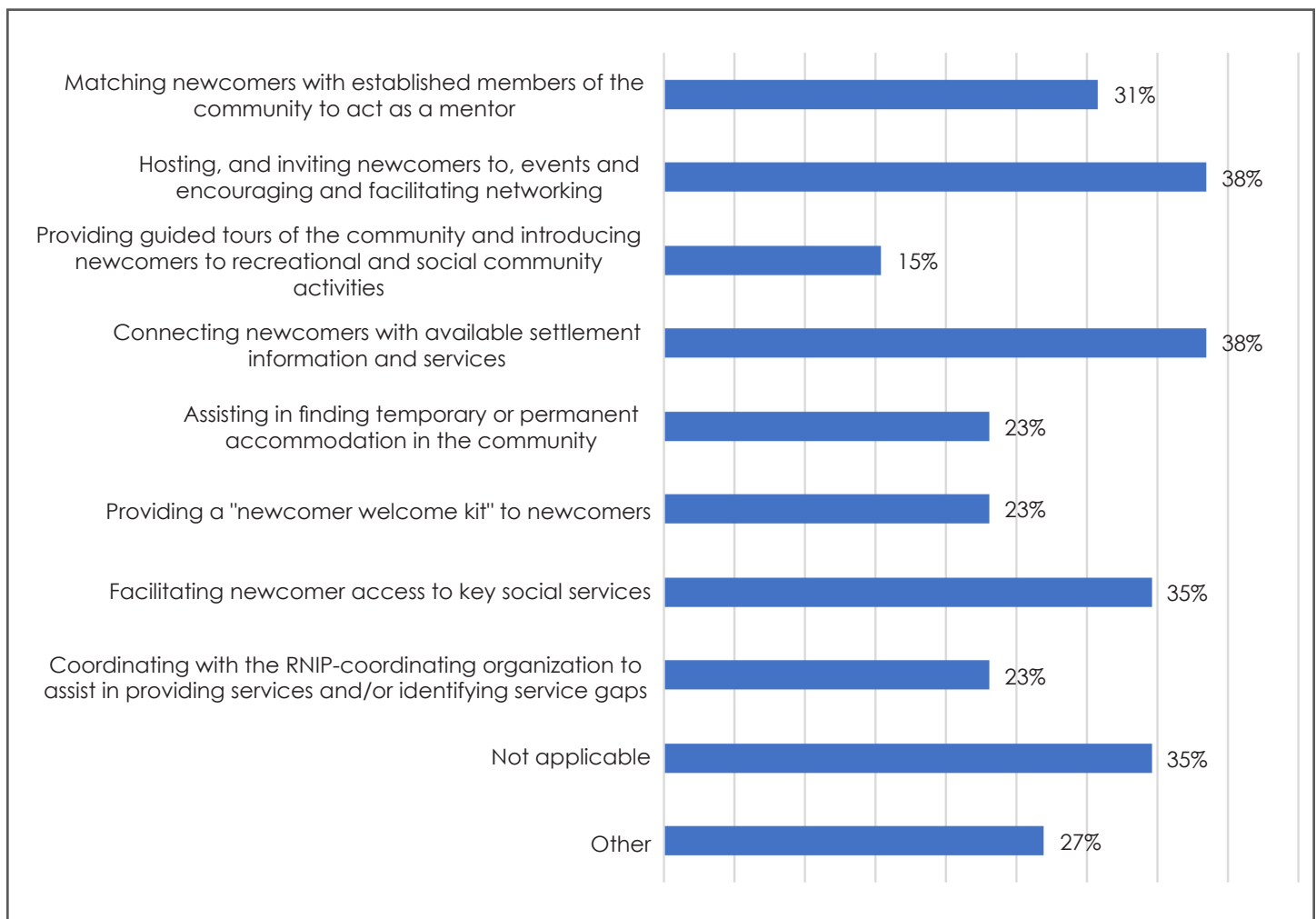
Although services may be available in a community, it does not necessarily mean that all residents are aware of or eligible to access them. Services are geared most towards permanent residents, Francophones, and the general public. Many services funded by IRCC are not available to temporary residents which is evident given that out of the 22 French-servicing organizations, 68 per cent provide services to permanent residents, while 41 per cent provide services to temporary residents.

When asked if any of the programs and/or services offered were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, 58 per cent of respondents indicated yes. Most organizations indicated that operations and delivery had to be shifted to a virtual format, and in-person activities and events were cancelled.

Programs and Services

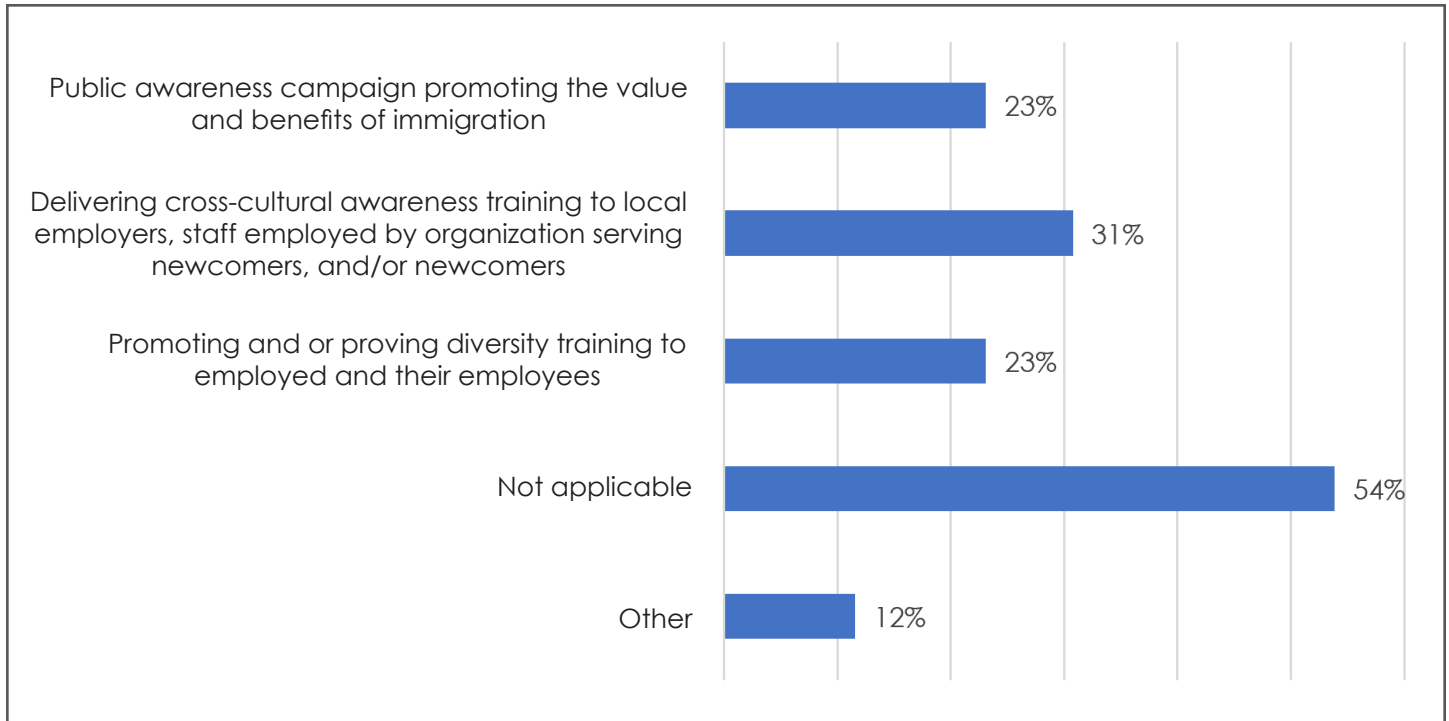
Organizations that responded to the survey offer a variety of programs and services to help with the integration and retention of newcomers. The most common are connection services (38 per cent), hosting and inviting newcomers to events and networking (38 per cent), and facilitating access to key social services (35 per cent). Approximately 35 per cent of respondents do not provide programs and/or services to help with the integration and retention of newcomers.

Figure 2: Programs and/or services to help with the integration and retention of newcomers, 2022



Organizations that responded to the survey also provide programs and/or services to promote community acceptance and welcoming of newcomers. The most reported is cross-cultural awareness training for local employers, staff employed by organizations serving newcomers, and/or newcomers themselves (31 per cent). Organizations also indicated that they partner with other local organizations to promote welcoming initiatives. Fifty-four per cent of organizations that responded do not provide such programs or services.

Figure 3: Programs and/or services to promote community welcomeness and acceptance of newcomers, 2022

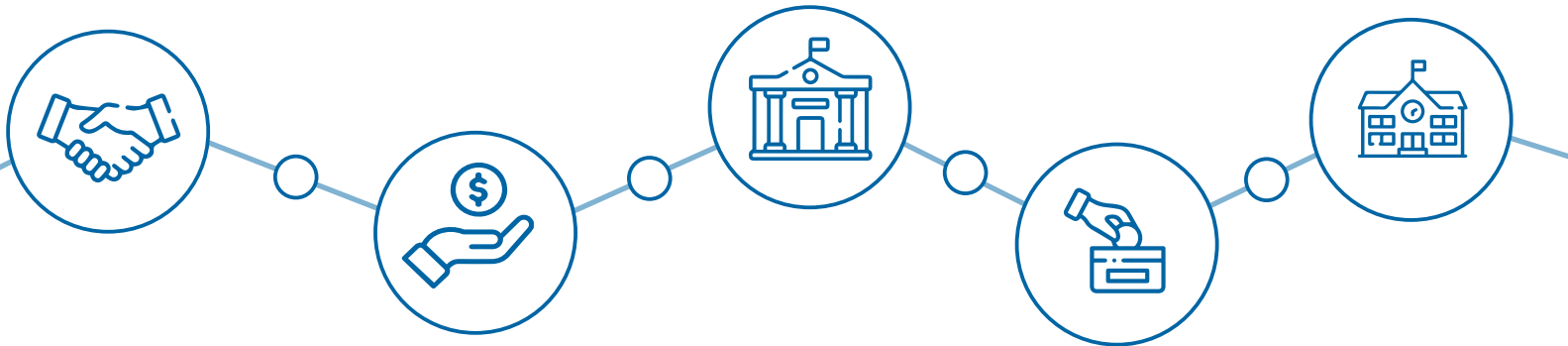
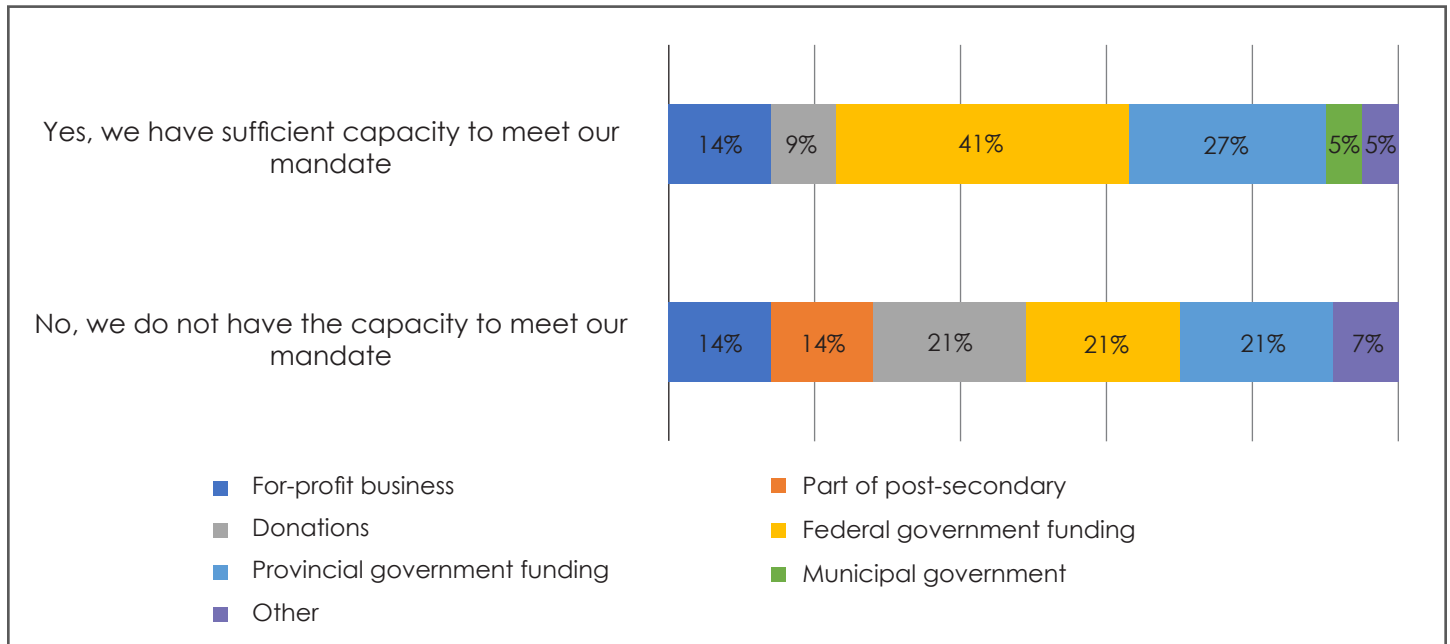


Capacity and Funding

Among the organizations that responded to the survey and serve the Big 5, 56 per cent indicated they have sufficient capacity to meet their mandate. Some of these organizations receive funding from¹ the federal (41 per cent), provincial (27 per cent), and municipal governments (5 per cent). Additionally, 14 per cent of these organizations are for-profit businesses, and 9 per cent receive donations.

Conversely, 28 per cent of organizations indicated that they did not have sufficient capacity to meet their mandate. Of these organizations, funding sources include federal and provincial government funding, as well as donations (21 per cent). None of these organizations receive funding from municipal governments. Also notable, 27 per cent of organizations that do not have sufficient capacity to meet their mandate had to alter operations because of COVID-19.

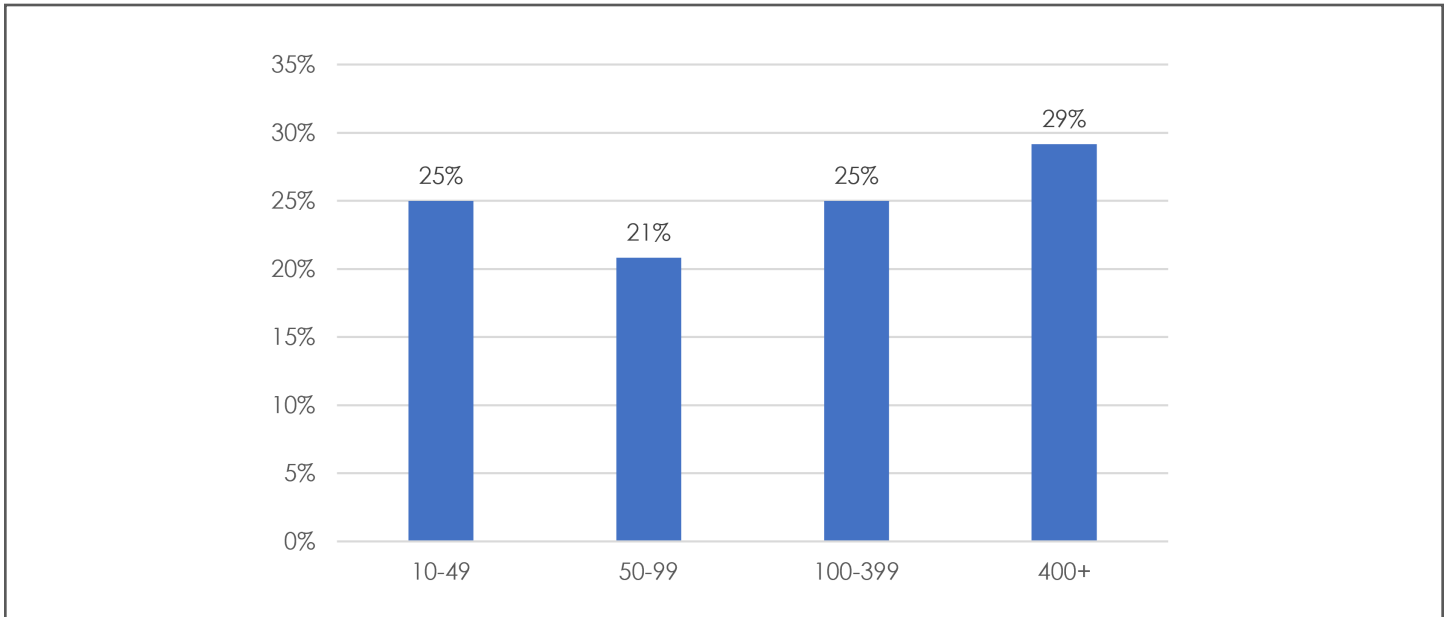
Figure 4: Capacity of organizations to meet their mandate by funding source, 2022



¹ Organizations can receive funding from multiple sources. The figures in Figure 4 indicate the percentage of organizations that receive some funding from a specific source.

A sizeable number of respondents indicated that they serve over 400 clients annually (29 per cent). On the other hand, 25 per cent indicated that they serve between 100 and 399 clients, while 46 per cent serve fewer than 100 clients. Of the responding organizations, 31 per cent reported an increase in client numbers in the past 12 months and 38 per cent indicated no change during that time.²

Figure 5: Clients served, February 2021 to February 2022



Involvement with the RNIP

Among respondents, 24 per cent indicated their organization has aided in the reporting activities, outputs, and/or outcomes of their community's RNIP program. 24 per cent were unsure and 52 per cent did not aid in RNIP reporting activities, outputs, and/or outcomes.

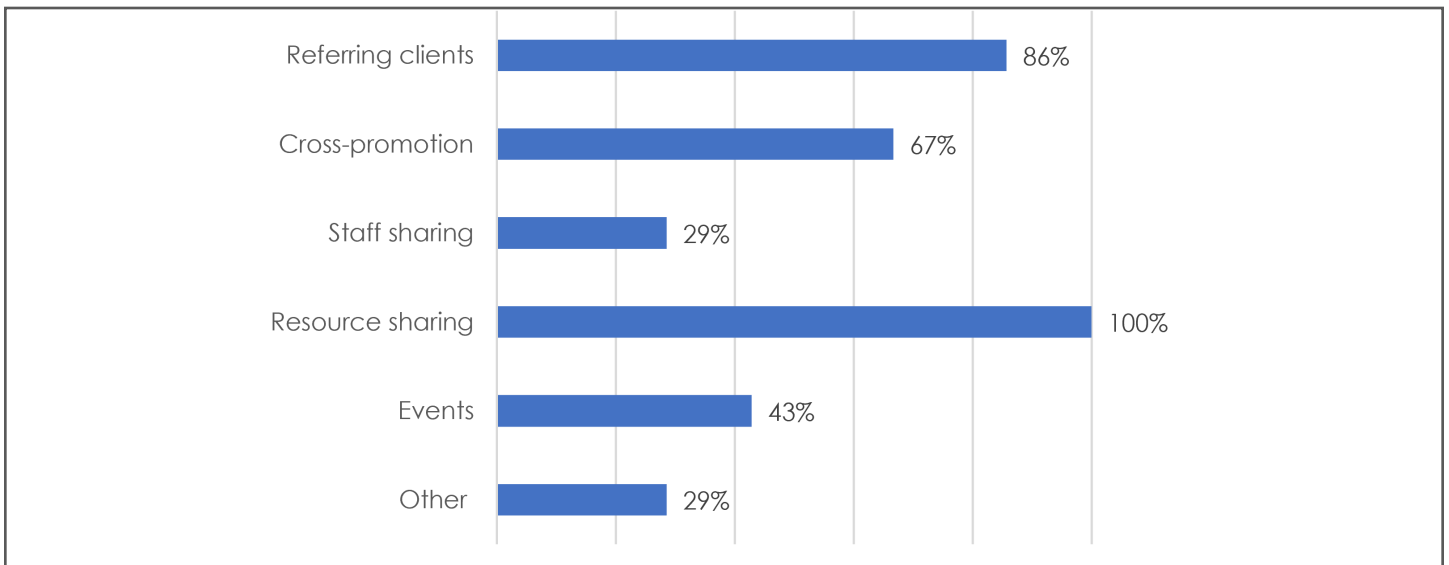
Furthermore, 52 per cent of respondents indicated they had interacted in some way with their local community's RNIP program. Twenty-eight per cent indicated no interactions and 20 per cent were unsure.

² The remaining per cent of respondents either did not provide a valid response, or reported a decrease in clients.

Collaboration with Other Organizations

Eighty-one per cent of respondents indicated that their organization has worked in collaboration and/or partnership with other service providers. The most common types of collaboration include resource sharing (100 per cent), client referral (86 per cent), and cross-promotion (67 per cent). When asked about willingness to collaborate with organizations doing similar work, most respondents were very willing (68 per cent) and some were somewhat willing (24 per cent).

Figure 6: Collaboration with other agencies, by type of collaboration, 2022



Conclusion and Recommendations

Community-level data availability is crucial in making informed decisions. Thus, there should be continued effort to share, promote, and participate in these surveys across Northern Ontario. With granular data, there is the opportunity for comparability across regions, allowing for the identification of best practices and areas for improvement.

Regardless, valuable information about the responding organizations has been gathered through this survey, notably:

- There is a high willingness to collaborate with other organizations doing similar work. In fact, all respondents that indicated they collaborate with other organizations do so through resource sharing. Continuing to form strategic partnerships might address feelings of 'not having enough capacity to meet our mandate.'
- Collaboration in terms of referring clients, which many organizations already do, will help promote a 'no-wrong-door approach,' ensuring that people seeking services are directed to the correct organization based on their situation. Additionally, continuing to communicate services that are available will help raise the profile and use of these services among those already in the community and those looking to migrate.
- There are services available to help with the integration and retention of newcomers, and to promote community welcomeness and acceptance of newcomers. But there are still organizations who do not offer or partake in these activities. As a starting point, employers can work to promote and/or provide diversity training to other employers and their employees (note that service providers are also employers). This is particularly important when working with/providing services to newcomers and/or groups that identify as marginalized.



About Northern Policy Institute

Northern Policy Institute is Northern Ontario's independent, evidence-driven think tank. We perform research, analyze data, and disseminate ideas. Our mission is to enhance Northern Ontario's capacity to take the lead position on socio-economic policy that impacts our communities, our province, our country, and our world.

We believe in partnership, collaboration, communication, and cooperation. Our team seeks to do inclusive research that involves broad engagement and delivers recommendations for specific, measurable action. Our success depends on our partnerships with other entities based in or passionate about Northern Ontario.

Our permanent offices are in Thunder Bay, Sudbury, and Kirkland Lake. During the summer months we have satellite offices in other regions of Northern Ontario staffed by teams of Experience North placements. These placements are university and college students working in your community on issues important to you and your neighbours.

Related Research

**Magnetic North Conference Report,
February 2022**
Mercedes Labelle

**Serve it Up: The Roll of French-Serving
Service Providers in Creating Welcoming
Communities, January 2023**
Mercedes Labelle

**Come North 2020 Conference Report,
December 2020**
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