



OUTCOMES & IMPACT (2020-2025)

PEMBINA VALLEY LOCAL IMMIGRATION PARTNERSHIP



2025

Contents

Pembina Valley Local Immigration Partnership: Outcomes and Impact (2020-2025)	1
Introduction	1
Background	2
Working Process.....	2
Methodological Influences	3
PVLIPs’ Work from 2020 to 2025	4
PVLIP’s Overarching Impact	5
1. PVLIP has become a functional, well-run organization pursuing its mandate to “connect cultures and communities” in the Pembina Valley.	5
2. PVLIP has successfully completed a high number of projects and activities.	7
3. There is strong alignment between the PVLIP’s activities and its organizational mission.....	8
4. PVLIP has made significant progress towards IRCC’s Intended Results.	9
Becoming More Welcome and Inclusive.....	11
From Awareness to Action.....	12
Specific Outcomes.....	13
Highlight: Connecting Cultures and Communities Project	22
Conclusion.....	23
Next Steps	24

Pembina Valley Local Immigration Partnership: 2020-2025 Outcomes and Impacts

Introduction

This report serves as a third-party evaluation of the work of the Pembina Valley Local Immigration Partnership (PVLIP) between 2020 and 2025.

Annual and implementation reports created by the PVLIP staff during this time are extensive and detailed, so the focus of the third-party evaluation was on investigating and summarizing the PVLIP's overarching outcomes and impact. Research questions guiding the evaluation were:

- What has changed in the region in the past five years?
- Why do these changes matter to different stakeholders?
- What will eventual “success” look like to different stakeholders?

In 2019, as a response to Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada's (IRCC) Call for Proposals, PVLIP established its mission to “connect cultures and communities” to improve settlement and integration in the Pembina Valley. Despite being called a “Local” Immigration Partnership, it should be noted that the PVLIP is actually a *Zonal* Immigration Partnership encompassing a large rural region with diverse small cities and towns¹. As such, parallel efforts are underway in different local jurisdictions while at the same time the larger regional (zonal) initiative is also being developed.

The PVLIP's underlying Theory of Change is that certain activities will make local jurisdictions more welcoming to newcomers and lead to positive economic and social changes in the region. Activities include awareness-raising, research, communications, resource and tool development, space-making, convening, coordination and partnership development, teaching, evaluating, and advising. By building different kinds of capacity in this way, community change gradually takes place, and newcomers' settlement outcomes continue to improve.

In reviewing the PVLIP's activities and partnerships for the evaluation, it quickly became apparent that it functions as a true “backbone” organization for collective impact as defined in the literature². Instead of providing direct services to newcomers, PVLIP plays an indirect role in supporting newcomers by

¹ <https://thelipsecretariat.ca/what-are-the-lips/>

² See, for example, John Kania and Mark Kramer, “Collective Impact,” Stanford Social Innovation Review, Winter 2011.

creating public awareness, building community connections, and working towards improved coordination in the community. PVLIP has co-developed a common agenda; it initiates or supports mutually reinforcing activities; there is continuous communication with a great variety of stakeholders; and it provides backbone support to related initiatives (e.g., providing support that helps mobilize, coordinate, and facilitate collective impact towards the identified key outcome). PVLIP is also starting to create shared measurement tools and processes.

As a result, this report describes the outcomes and impacts that emerged during the evaluation of activities and partnerships, as well as providing commentary on the PVLIP's valuable role as a backbone organization in the Pembina Valley.

Background

Working Process

Initial meetings with the Pembina Valley Local Immigration's (PVLIP) leadership established the scope of the third-party evaluation. A history of PVLIP and numerous key documents were provided to Eupraxia Training for review: the 2020-25 Logic Model, the Action Plan 2020-2025 (2019), strategy documents (March 2019), research documents such as PVLIP Action Plan Priority 2 – Communication Study (2019), resources like the PVLIP Information Guide for Members 2020-21, information on PVLIP structure and Terms of Reference, sample products like Diversity Calendars (2021, 2022), the PVLIP Welcoming & Inclusive Communities Policy Framework, PVLIP Annual Implementation Progress Reports 2020-24, PVLIP Annual Member Surveys 2022-24, PVLIP Ethnocultural Council Meeting Minutes (August 2023), IRCC commitments as outlined in PVLIP Activities – Schedules A + C, the newly developed 2025-2030 Community Action Plan, notes and agendas from diverse meetings, the website (<https://pvlip.ca/>), and feedback from workshop surveys (day of and post).

In addition, over a dozen interviews were conducted with key PVLIP partners and members to identify and confirm perceived markers of success for the PVLIP's work. Interviewees included: former and current PVLIP staff, civic leaders and provincial government staff, a committee member also working with the police force, staff at partnering employers, a leader of a settlement support agency, and newcomers on PVLIP committees. Interview transcripts were coded for emerging themes which informed the impact evaluation framework developed to communicate the evaluation's findings.

Perspectives and information missing from the interviews were identified towards the end of the evaluation so that additional feedback-gathering could take place. For example, given that the direct impact of the PVLIP was so clear, the indirect impact of PVLIP work out in the community could be explored by speaking with a representative from two community organizations. Survey data collected after a high-profile workshop were analyzed to better understand how participants intended to use what they had gained in their work or personal lives. The researcher also attended the annual Connecting Cultures & Communities event to listen to participants' reflections and ask questions about PVLIP's impact.

Research into impact evaluation, collective impact, and social impact was conducted as needed. Because the PVLIP is carrying out what can be described as a complex “ecosystem strategy” for change in which many entities contribute to progress (see Methodological Influences below), it was important to confirm that the evaluation process was supported by the academic literature.

As preliminary findings emerged, a draft version of the report was created. The findings in the draft report were discussed with PVLIP staff before finalizing the report.

Methodological Influences

The evaluation was guided by principles of impact evaluation, collective impact, and social impact.

Impact evaluation is a methodology that explores the outcomes and impacts that result from an intervention, i.e., the focus of the investigation is not just on the quality of an intervention. While quality and impact are of course closely related, an intervention can technically be high-quality (i.e., well-run activities, good use of resources, excellent staff) without necessarily leading to the desired results or longer-lasting positive change. Impact evaluation focuses primarily on changes that occur as part of a “chain of results” or “causal mechanism” that leads from immediate to intermediate and longer-term results.

Impacts identified in impact evaluation may be environmental, financial, economic, or social in nature. In some cases, organizational impacts are treated as a distinct category of change. In this evaluation, **social impact** was the main impact being investigated, although organizational and economic impacts are also referenced. Social impact may include people’s way of life, their culture, their community, their health and wellbeing, or their fears and aspirations.³ **Social Return on Investment (SROI)** considers the monetary value that can be attached to such social impacts, either through concrete social gains that have been made or through the prevention of negative effects on individuals, communities, or systems. It is expected, as the PVLIP moves beyond the start-up phase and its impact grows and expands, that more and more financial and economic impacts will therefore be witnessed or experienced, but these generally take a longer timeframe to become measurable.

Collective impact refers to initiatives where several entities are actively collaborating to achieve a shared vision. However, even if there is a strong working alliance, causality between actions and effects is more difficult to establish because stakeholders are interdependent, and the effects tend to be both direct and indirect. In fact, the people directly involved in an intervention may not even know that other entities have been influenced to work towards the same goals. As such, it becomes difficult to describe all the impact pathways that are leading to the emergence of the shared vision; one action is a catalyst for another without any particular entity being able to trace them all and various stakeholders share the credit for the results.

³ Vanclay, F. 2003. International Principles for Social Impact Assessment. *Impact Assessment & Project Appraisal* 21(1), 5-11. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3152/147154603781766491>

Finally, the evaluation was significantly informed by frameworks in Alnoor Ebrahim's book, *Measuring Social Change: Performance and Accountability in a Complex World*⁴. PVLIP's work meets the criteria for what Ebrahim calls an "ecosystem change strategy". These change strategies come to life through many nonlinear interactions among different interventions that function together as a "constellation". Some interventions may be closely connected through formal working partnerships, but others are simply operating in the resulting field of influence. It is therefore impossible in ecosystem strategies to assign results to each intervention in isolation or to aggregate the effects of various interventions into an overall statement of impact. The work is too complex and dispersed. Indeed, "any claims of attribution could undermine the collective spirit of the work"⁵. Instead, Ebrahim states that ecosystem change strategies should be evaluated by keeping an eye out for "plausible associations" between the various interventions and the constellation of outcomes. We cannot count the incidents of change or follow every indirect ripple effect, but there is a changing landscape to observe. The difference between this and trying to establish pure causality is the "high degree of uncertainty about the causal mechanisms and a greater interdependence with other actors in delivering results"⁶. This is particularly true in a region as large as the Pembina Valley.

In the absence of clear causality, Ebrahim suggests that one can use individual outcomes experienced by influencers and decision-makers, as well as the general public, as indicators of ecosystem change. Themes and patterns in individual outcomes experienced by people with different kinds of authority as well as feedback from public participants in PVLIP activities therefore became valuable puzzle pieces in understanding the emergent social impact that the PVLIP has had through its work.

PVLIPs' Work from 2020 to 2025

It is important to remember that the Pembina Valley Local Immigration Partnership (PVLIP) is a relatively new initiative within a large geographical region. Created in 2017, PVLIP developed its first strategic plan in 2018 to prepare for Immigration Refugees and Citizenship Canada's 2019 Call for Proposals. PVLIP's outcomes and impacts were therefore assessed within the context of it being in a start-up phase with significant resources going to networking, development, and communications. Despite still being in a start-up phase, these past five years have been very active, highly generative, and very effective both in terms of solidifying the presence of the PVLIP and its mission in the region and in terms of its achievements in specific areas.

To operate, PVLIP has created **new infrastructure** (e.g., working and meeting spaces in several locations, financial and administrative processes for a growing operation, trained staff, lines of communication across numerous jurisdictions, governance structures, committees, operational routines, etc.).

⁴ Ebrahim, A. 2019. *Measuring Social Change: Performance and Accountability in a Complex World*. Stanford, California. Stanford Business Books, Stanford University Press.

⁵ Ebrahim, A. *ibid.* p. 146

⁶ *Ibid.*

PVLIP has also launched many **projects and activities** in various communities across the region to build different kinds of awareness and capacity at individual, organizational, community, and systemic levels. This includes the development of a range of **resources and tools** as well as **research and reports**. An excellent overview of activities is provided on the website⁷ and in each of the annual reports.

Together, these activities are intended to further the PVLIP's mission at multiple levels:

- In the Pembina Valley "zone"
- Within civic jurisdictions (e.g., Towns, Cities)
- In systems like healthcare, education, policing, and municipal governments
- In communities (linguistic, faith, geographical, etc.)
- Within specific sectors (business, settlement, media)
- In organizations (libraries, community clubs, clinics)
- In individuals.

The PVLIP's impact can similarly be seen at various levels.

PVLIP's Overarching Impact

As mentioned above, the Pembina Valley Local Immigration Partnership (PVLIP) has a mandate to bring cultures and communities in the Pembina Valley together to make communities more welcoming to and inclusive of newcomers and thereby improve outcomes for newcomers wishing to settle in the region. In this section, we will first look at the overarching impact of the PVLIP as a backbone organization working towards that goal and then look at specific outcomes of its projects and activities.

First, we can summarize four achievements that relate to the PVLIP's establishment as a new backbone organization for collective impact.

1) PVLIP has become a functional, well-run organization pursuing its mandate to "connect cultures and communities" in the Pembina Valley.

In five short years, PVLIP has become a fully functional entity that meets all of the general characteristics of a strong backbone organization as defined by the literature around collective impact⁸.

- PVLIP has high level of credibility in the community.
- It serves as a neutral convener.
- It has a dedicated staff.

⁷ <https://pvlip.ca/resources/>

⁸ Turner, S., Merchant, K., Kania, J., Martin, E. "Understanding the Value of Backbone Organizations in Collective Impact." Accessed online 22/9/2024 at <http://www.nj.gov/state/programs/pdf/faith-based-collective-understanding-organizations.pdf>.

- PVLIP builds key relationships across members of the initiative.
- It focuses people's attention and creates a sense of urgency.
- It frames issues to present opportunities and difficulties.
- PVLIP is beginning to use evaluation as a tool for learning and progress.
- It stays "behind the scenes" to establish collective ownership.

These characteristics have been confirmed by reviewing a range of documents and feedback from influencers and decision-makers, as well as participants in PVLIP initiatives. It is apparent from this review that PVLIP has done an exceptional job of bringing together various stakeholders from across the region and across stakeholder groups with the express purpose of creating connections that will strengthen society and the economy in the Pembina Valley. PVLIP is recognized for this role within the settlement sector but is also increasingly seen by mainstream organizations and institutions as a bridge-builder between cultures and communities. LIPs in other parts of Canada also identify PVLIP as an emerging leader in the sector.

Notable is the fact that PVLIP has created effective infrastructure to connect people from different perspectives, backgrounds, and levels of decision-making authority. A number of broad-based and community-representative committees, advisory tables, and working groups meet regularly and serve as a conduit of information to and from these various stakeholder groups. This creates a critical communication network between PVLIP and the surrounding communities that is fundamental to the Pembina Valley becoming a more welcoming and inclusive region.

The 2023/24 Annual Implementation Report also highlights new staff and a new office in Altona and new partnerships created because in all activities, PVLIP is looking to reach out and expand the community of people and organizations collaborating on making the Pembina Valley more welcoming and inclusive of newcomers.

In conversations with the Executive Director and other interviewees, it was apparent that PVLIP sees its role as being responsive, not reactive. There was an expressed understanding that it takes time to connect cultures and communities, and that while important and urgent issues will arise, community representatives can collectively determine the best course of action. Key challenges that are brought to PVLIP are addressed in a sensitive, collaborative manner that reflects the values of the local communities. PVLIP staff confirmed that the aim is not to be forceful or judgemental, reinforcing a sense of respectful neutrality. In this way, PVLIP reflects the principles of appreciative inquiry and focuses people's attention on concerns and opportunities, but also reinforces collective ownership of solutions.

To guide the work of the PVLIP and its internal committees and working groups, PVLIP has created a wealth of core governance documents (Logic Models, strategic plans, action plans, terms of reference, implementation reports) that clearly outline goals, activities, and values. This infrastructure development work clearly aligns with the responsibilities commonly seen in a backbone organization striving for collective impact⁹ (see chart on the next page):

⁹ Turner, S. et al. Ibid.

ACTIVITY	SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES
Guide Vision and Strategy	Partners participate in developing and therefore share a common understanding of the need and desired result
Build Stakeholder and Public Will	Stakeholders and the public demonstrate increasing awareness of and interest in the core issues, leading to an increasing desire to act.
Establish Shared Measurement Practices	Identify suitable outcomes, indicators and metrics that can be used by various stakeholders to assess progress and achievement of goals.
Assess the Landscape and Seek Out Opportunities	Existing infrastructure, circumstances, and resources are assessed from various perspectives, identifying viable opportunities to act.
Support Aligned Activities	Partners increasingly communicate and coordinate their activities towards the common goal. Partners wishing to initiate aligned activities are provided with support.
Support the Improvement of Processes, Practices & Policies	As appropriate, backbone organizations assist with the improvement of processes, practices and policies that are not in alignment with the common agenda.
Mobilize Additional Resources (including Funding)	Funders and stakeholders commit resources to the achievement of common goals. New capacity is built through the creation or development of resources.

2) PVLIP has successfully completed a high number of projects and activities.

Beyond creating an organization that is increasingly getting recognition for its capacity to bring together cultures and communities, PVLIP has enthusiastically tackled its Action Plan so that initial goals set in 2019/2020 were met ahead of schedule, in 2023 instead of 2025¹⁰.

The number and variety of projects, activities, events, and resources (in French and English) produced in that timeframe are quite remarkable. High-impact projects and activities have included:

- Connecting Cultures & Communities Guide, Toolkit & Video Series: For building communities that are welcoming & inclusive
- Diversity in the Workplace Workshops
- Connecting Cultures & Communities Celebrations
- Diversity calendar (paper-based and digital)
- Mental Well-being Resource List
- Online/Interactive Pembina Valley Service Map (updated annually)

¹⁰ For details, please see various annual Implementation Reports (<https://pvlip.ca/resources/>).

- Large-scale surveys, including Comprehensive Immigrant Surveys, employer surveys, annual stakeholder surveys, etc.
- Volunteer engagement by diverse stakeholders, including newcomers

Other important projects and activities have included:

- Outreach, awareness-raising, and marketing to newcomers, employers, service providers, and community organizations
- The Cultural Connections Column which ran weekly in the South Central Post from October 2020 to January 2022 (columns were written primarily by newcomers to help expand awareness on newcomer's journeys, celebrations, and/or perspectives)
- Stakeholder engagement and partnership development
- Knowledge Sharing Fairs
- Social media presence
- Public engagement on issues of cultural connection and equity.

Cultural awareness-raising events were held in community locations, well-advertised to ensure that all felt welcome to attend. Promotional materials and campaigns were created (paper, online, social media). In addition, research (interviews, focus groups, surveys, environmental scans) was conducted into various topics. For example, significant research was done to understand how best to expand the accessibility of culturally appropriate mental health resources for newcomers. Valuable information for future outreach efforts resulted from this and other research (e.g., most effective communication methods used by service providers). Online resources (including social media campaigns and YouTube videos) were developed and made available to the public, so that both newcomers and others could benefit. When challenging situations arise and circulate on social media, PVLIP can be counted on to act as a stabilizing presence. Excellent evaluations (usually through surveys) were conducted for all key activities.

This high level of activity may not, however, continue at the same pace. PVLIP has clearly had a very successful five years, but depending on available resources and the complexity of issues that will need to be addressed in the future, it is possible that PVLIP will have fewer outputs and yet more powerful outcomes in the next five years when the new 2025-2030 Action Plan is implemented.

3) There is strong alignment between the PVLIP's activities and its organizational mission.

The high number of successful projects and activities correspond closely to the PVLIP's mission, ensuring that the full range of overarching organizational goals are being met. The mission is defined as "enhancing collaboration, coordination and strategic planning at the community level that will foster more welcoming and inclusive communities while improving settlement and integration outcomes for newcomers in the Pembina Valley."

The indicators of success for this mission statement are therefore:

- Enhanced collaboration
- Enhanced coordination
- Enhanced strategic planning
- More welcoming and inclusive communities
- Improved settlement and integration outcomes for newcomers

Based on interviews and a review of key PVLIP documents, there is no question that both collaboration and coordination have increased between a variety of stakeholders, not only as a side-effect of the people who have been involved with committees and working groups, but also through intentional initiatives aimed at bringing people or organizations together to investigate or address a particular issue. Examples of collaboration came up across geographic, cultural, socio-economic, sectoral, professional, community, and systemic domains. It should be noted that this level of collaboration was achieved despite the restrictions of the pandemic, which made in-person gathering impossible or difficult.

Interestingly, other external limitations beyond PVLIP's control have arisen from time to time, affecting PVLIP's ability to encourage fuller collaboration between stakeholders. Interviews revealed that a subtle sense of competition or protectiveness sometimes prevented organizations or jurisdictions from sharing information or resources. The concern was that newcomers or other citizens might go to other towns or jurisdictions if they were made aware of resources that might not be available in their own area. Or, as was the case with the research into mental health resources, it became apparent that access to mental health resources could not be increased just by making the systems more responsive; newcomers' culturally-rooted reticence to talk about mental health or emotional wellbeing also needed to be considered.

Strategic planning is however a significant success for PVLIP, especially given that PVLIP's plan can function as a shared agenda for collective impact. Not only was the 2019 planning process the impetus for the initial action plan, but by 2023 PVLIP was already working on the next 2025-30 strategic plan. Planning is done at both a higher, overarching level and at a sub-policy level. This resulted in a set of documents, available to the public, that outline the ultimate vision for a region in which cultures and communities are well-connected and thriving. The documents also show the steps that can be taken by any community that wishes to become more welcoming and inclusive of newcomers.

The final two indicators in the mission statement ("more welcoming and inclusive communities", and "improved settlement and integration outcomes for newcomers") will take more time to achieve fully, but there is no question that the "impact pathway" from the currently witnessed and experienced immediate outcomes is pointing in the right direction after only five years. In fact, it is very likely that PVLIP will have measurable data for these last two indicators by the end of the next five-year strategic plan. In the meantime, the examples of immediate outcomes (see Specific Outcomes in the next section) will serve as evidence that the steppingstones are already in place.

4) PVLIP has made significant progress towards IRCC's Intended Results.

The extensive activities completed to date do not just align with PVLIP's organizational mission, but also contribute to the federal government's achievement of its own mission to support settlement outcomes in Canada. As outlined in the Immigration Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) funding agreement, LIPS are intended to be "community-based partnerships that:

- Systematize local engagement of service providers and other institutions in newcomers' integration process;
- Support community-level research and strategic planning; and,
- Improve coordination of effective services that facilitate immigrant settlement and integration.”

In reviewing the PVLIP's schedules A and C from the 2020-25 funding agreement, it was apparent that IRCC's intended immediate outcomes had been met by the PVLIP within the above context. The following outcomes can be attributed directly and fully to PVLIP's efforts:

- **Enhanced engagement of a diversity of members in the settlement and integration of newcomers.** In the case of PVLIP's work, this included local businesses, civic leaders, representatives from key services (e.g., health care, policing), ethnocultural groups, provincial government representatives, and many more entities with a stake in the wellbeing of newcomers, organizations, and communities in the Pembina Valley.
- **Broad-based partnerships developed for planning and setting community priorities.** The lists of participants in planning activities, as outlined in various documents, support the conclusion that diverse stakeholder voices have been actively engaged in planning and goal setting. These partnerships have included representatives from diverse ethnocultural, geographic, socioeconomic, faith, political, and professional communities.
- **Community and newcomer needs assessed in a coordinated manner, and enhanced awareness of needs among a wider array of local actors.** PVLIP has been assessing needs in the region both formally and informally since its inception. For example, research was conducted into and communicated about the following: impact of Covid 19 on newcomers, community cultural events, effective communication platforms and strategies, needs and opportunities related to mental health supports for newcomers, needs of employers, experiences of racial tension, and needs and interests of municipal leaders.

The following intermediate outcomes in the IRCC funding agreement are also underway, with PVLIP playing a catalytic role in key areas. As with most intermediate outcomes, PVLIP has motivated or actively collaborated with other stakeholders to begin to achieve the following:

- **Increased capacity to support the integration of newcomers and to foster welcoming communities, including welcoming and receptive labour markets at the community level.**
- **Enhanced responsiveness of non-settlement services to the needs of newcomers and communities.**
- **Improved coordination of services at the community level**
- **Improved accessibility of services to newcomers (settlement and/or non-settlement)**
- **Sustaining partnerships at the community level**

Increasing capacity, responsiveness, and coordination across a region as large as the Pembina Valley takes significant time, but initial steps have been taken. As indicated directly above, the establishment of important sustainable partnerships is also well underway. Concrete examples are provided in the next section.

The final, ultimate IRCC outcome - **improved outcomes for newcomers** - is still in the seminal stage and focused measurement at this point would be premature. Specific success markers would first need to be

identified and baseline data collected for later comparison. Nonetheless, newcomers who were part of the PVLIP's committee structure expressed hopefulness, good will, and a strong wish for full belonging to their workplace and community. They commended initiatives to engage newcomers more fully in the community and appreciated efforts to address barriers to integration. They understood that a focused effort was being made to bring people from different backgrounds together for the benefit of everyone living in the Pembina Valley and that some of the changes would require time to take place.

Ideas about next steps on the path to the ultimate outcome were provided by various interviewees (see last section) but are also evident in the PVLIP's 2025-30 strategic plan.

In addition to addressing IRCC's expectations in the funding agreement, PVLIP's work reflects the intended outcomes for Indirect Services in Immigration Refugees and Citizenship Canada's Logic Model¹¹:

- **Immediate outcome: Partners deliver responsive and coordinated settlement and community services**
- **Intermediate outcome: Communities foster welcoming environment for newcomers**
- **Ultimate outcome: Successfully integrated and settled clients benefit Canada**

Becoming More Welcome and Inclusive

Besides having established itself as an effective backbone organization that is meeting organizational and funder expectations, we can point to several important social impacts that the PVLIP has achieved in the Pembina Valley through its activities over the past five years. These impacts were mentioned repeatedly in interviews, conversations, and survey responses and can contribute to making the Pembina Valley ever more welcoming to and inclusive of newcomers well into the future.

When analyzed, the list of social impacts forms an "impact pathway" from increased awareness/learning (about various aspects of the settlement experience) to increased sense of commitment to increased action (to improve the conditions for settlement in the Pembina Valley).

Firstly, virtually every interviewee or survey respondent - whether newcomer or established citizen - identified valuable self-awareness, awareness, or learning that had been gained directly or indirectly because of PVLIP's activities. A significant number of people then referenced the sense of commitment that resulted from that new awareness, especially if they had had the opportunity to develop new relationships. Finally, many people also commented on what they could or would now do differently – in their personal lives, in their communities, or in their workplaces - because of what they had gained.

¹¹ <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/partners-service-providers/funding/resources/settlement-logic-model.html>

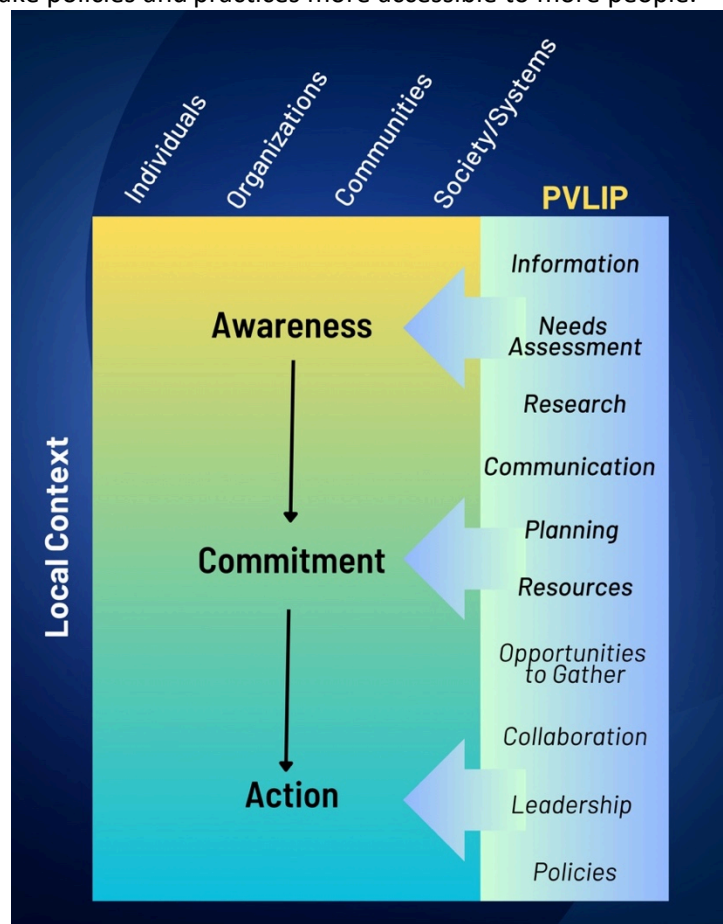
Examples of even wider ripple effects were also mentioned, in that people described **systemic changes** that did or could result from increased awareness, commitment, and action. Systemic changes can include new policies and practices, new partnerships and working relationships within systems, improved access to resources, broadened decision-making, or new initiatives in institutions, agencies, or governments. Given the PVLIP's 2025-2030 strategic plan, these kinds of systematic changes are likely to become more evident in the near future.

From Awareness to Action

According to collective impact specialists Kania, Kramer and Senge¹², this movement from increased awareness to commitment and action is critical to shifting conditions that may be “holding the problem in place”. Interestingly, Ebrahim includes a similar progression from awareness to will and action when he considers how ecosystem change takes place¹³. Without first changing mental models, it is very difficult to re-imagine relationships and connections or to change power dynamics. It is hard to effectively address needs that are not properly identified or understood. That, in turn makes it challenging to improve resource flows or to make policies and practices more accessible to more people. Shared decision-making is less likely. Hence Ebrahim's focus on evaluating changes in influencers and decision-makers in addition to those made by the general public.

Shifts in awareness, commitment, and action at individual, community and systems levels are cornerstones to making the Pembina Valley more welcoming and inclusive and appear to have been some of the PVLIP's greatest successes in the past five years.

The image to the right summarizes the impact pathway from awareness to action. Based on feedback gathered during this evaluation, the PVLIP (through activities like those listed on the right-hand side of the image) provides individuals, organizations, communities, and systems with new information and ideas that can shift existing mental models. Self-awareness about subtle and not-so-subtle cultural biases grows. Misunderstandings and assumptions can be



¹² Kania, John., Kramer, M., Senge, P. 2018. The Water of Systems Change. Accessed at: https://www.fsg.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/The-Water-of-Systems-Change_rc.pdf

¹³ Ebrahim, A. *ibid.* p.147.

addressed, and myths dispelled. The potential for empathy, compassion, and confidence increases. New points of view can be considered.

Equally importantly, PVLIP was recognized as creating many safe and often celebratory opportunities for people from different backgrounds and perspectives to gather and share experiences, stories, and cultures. New relationships, fundamental to the development of deeper engagement and commitment, were formed between newcomers and longer-established residents. Individuals' various skills and gifts were appreciated and shared. Challenges were tackled collectively. Potentially divisive issues were handled in ways that did not harm the social fabric because of commitment to the larger goal of making the Pembina Valley more welcoming and inclusive. With trusted relationships, it becomes possible to take new risks and collaborate more fully.

New commitments and actions were also evident at organizational, community, and systems levels. Key businesses were exploring ways to become more welcoming. Community-based organizations were starting to get better connected to settlement-oriented networks. Resources and decision-making were beginning to be shared more widely. Interviewees from PVLIP committees and working groups – most of whom were influencers or decision-makers representing a range of organizations - expressed a deepened sense of responsibility for newcomers' wellbeing within the broader local context. New policies and practices that support newcomers are starting to become more common. Especially in the Pembina Valley, this commitment to long-term community wellbeing is a source of great pride and the PVLIP's work both contributes to it and is nurtured by it.

At some point, the initial catalyst for change - in this case the PVLIP – is accompanied by allies and supporters in leadership roles from across the region who begin taking initiative in their own jurisdictions. Even after five years, this has been evident in the Pembina Valley. After connecting to PVLIP or engaging in PVLIP training, individual influencers and decisions-makers in business, education, civic government, etc., have turned their deepened sense of commitment into independent action within their own sphere of influence and authority. This captures the ever-widening ripple effect of the backbone's work. Perhaps the new actions are localized or appear humble, but each independent action is an invaluable contribution to achieving the larger shared goal. Influencers and decision-makers know that the backbone will be available to provide direction and support as needed, and the backbone can turn its attention to new challenges, knowing there is a growing cohort of supporters in the community.

Specific Outcomes

Let's look now at some of the specific outcomes along the awareness-to-action impact pathway that were mentioned repeatedly in interviews and survey responses. They are arranged below in loose

sequence and are accompanied by some of the examples that were mentioned in interviews or survey responses¹⁴.

1) The PVLIP has increased the availability and flow of new information related to settlement and integration in the Pembina Valley.

This first area was the most frequently mentioned positive change that resulted from the PVLIP's work over the past five years. It refers to information distributed in various ways by PVLIP (tangible resources, social media, training programs, informational campaigns, etc.) but also refers to information passed informally from stakeholder to stakeholder through the communications network created through PVLIP activities. It even includes information gained through participation on PVLIP committees and working groups. Outcomes in this area include:

- Availability of new research about new and existing areas of interest
- Improved lines of communication between previously disconnected stakeholders, allowing new issues to emerge more easily for discussion and/or resolution
- New opportunities for newcomer voices to be heard on key issues and concerns in their communities and across the region
- Improved linkages and referral mechanisms between PVLIP, settlement service providers, mainstream service providers, and other mainstream organizations.

Some examples:

- The annual reports mention various forms of needs assessment and research that were undertaken.
- A provincial government official explicitly stated that the PVLIP served as a valuable conduit of information to make local government staff more aware of issues related to settlement. These issues could be raised by newcomers through the PVLIP committee structure or by other stakeholders. The information could then be taken back into government meetings and decision-making, not only in the Pembina Valley but also in other parts of Manitoba.
- PVLIP's role as a conduit of information extends to other committees or projects that members and other stakeholders were engaged in. One interviewee described the various service providers on interagency teams that met quarterly, creating opportunities to share information on newcomer concerns and settlement issues. When other agencies know that someone is a part of the PVLIP, they become an informal community liaison and participate in community conversations in new ways. Similarly, a newcomer on a PVLIP committee considered themselves "like an ambassador or representative from the community" to ensure a good flow of information between newcomers and other PVLIP stakeholders. An HR professional said that involvement on a PVLIP committee led to "a broadening awareness and a deepening awareness". The various subcommittees and working groups ensured that various voices were being heard. "You've got your ethnocultural committee and you've got your forums and now it

¹⁴ Survey responses reviewed for this evaluation came from the PVLIP's annual survey and Border Land School Division's post-workshop surveys.

has teeth.” PVLIP’s workshops also opened opportunities for information flow and broadening the informal and formal networks being created through the PVLIP.

- An interviewee explained how better flow of information makes it more likely that necessary programming or services will be available. “When I’m hearing [newcomers’] needs, like hearing they need transportation or English classes, then my role would be to bring that information back to Regional Connections, help identify the numbers and the need. And then they would apply for the funding to facilitate direct services.”
- Interviewees mentioned both practical and social-cultural barriers to successful newcomer settlement that PVLIP could bring to the appropriate decision-makers. For example, critical issues like housing, transportation and childcare can be raised by PVLIP in ways that newcomers themselves cannot. A leader in the settlement sector gave the example that when transportation is discussed, someone unfamiliar with settlement barriers might think of bike paths only for leisure riding, but not see bike paths as a necessary connection between a new housing development and the industrial sector. Or, people with several cars in the family may not have considered that a newcomer might need to walk across town to a job in the winter. Such conversations about core infrastructure would of course benefit all citizens.
- Another civic leader stated that PVLIP played a valuable role in breaking down assumptions and communicating facts that can circulate in communities: “[In our region] there’s the police and the education system and the healthcare system, and some employers and the Chamber of Commerce and the town and the RM. We get together every few months and there’s usually updates about what’s happening with immigration in these little places. And the former chief of police was so good about bringing his report specific to newcomers. He said, I am tired of hearing about people assuming the crime rate is due to immigration. I’ve never arrested an immigrant in this community.”

2) PVLIP has been the catalyst for new awareness and learning about cultural differences and similarities.

This area was the second most mentioned consequence of the PVLIP’s work. Specialized project funding secured by PVLIP in 2021 created an opportunity to develop multi-faceted cultural awareness resources (workshop, manuals, videos, online materials) in addition to PVLIP’s regular activities, resulting in very strong impact in this area. Based on workshop feedback and interviews, PVLIP’s highly successful workshops and professional development opportunities have increased both individuals’ self-awareness (e.g., self-awareness of biases and potentially culturally insensitive behaviour) and understanding about other cultures, not just in personal spaces but also in the workplace and the wider community. Intercultural understanding, respect, and appreciation were widely recognized as being critical to effective and sustained settlement in the region. Outcomes include:

- Growing understanding about the variety of subtle and obvious ways that culture may be expressed by individuals from different backgrounds
- Increased introspection and self-awareness about one’s own values and behaviours
- Increased compassion for newcomers’ experiences and needs
- Deepened understanding about the harmful effects of exclusion based on cultural differences
- Expanded understanding of ways to build bridges between cultures and communities (e.g., geographical, linguistics, faith, professional, ethnocultural, rural/urban communities).

Some examples:

- PVLIP's information for employers about cultural connections in the workplace was mentioned as very important in several interviews with influencers, decision-makers, and newcomers. Financial security and economic success are dependent on smooth, sustained, productive working relationships. A staff person from one very engaged workplace stated: "[PVLIP's training] brings a whole layer of awareness around immigration, not just awareness around culture. An awareness of how culture is expressed." An HR person from a different workplace described how service provider attitudes can shift when deeper understanding about cultural sensitivities around mental health have been developed: "Connecting with service providers and having them hear those newcomer stories and what the newcomers' needs are, it's likely that when they have somebody sit across their desk the next time, they're going to think twice about what their approach is going to be with this person."
- In an interview, a newcomer provided a related perspective on the PVLIP's role: "In my opinion, what PVLIP did, the first thing is that they are connecting to the employers, communicating what does being diversified means and what does an inclusive workplace means? And how can you have a culture of belonging? 'Cause those are important things for you as an immigrant to fit in in a new community."
- Survey responses after a PVLIP workshop underscore the shifts that seem to take place in many participants. You can see the burgeoning sense of commitment to make changes expressed in the last two bullets:
 - ♣ *The session allowed for time to reflect on our own culture, how it is similar/different to other cultures, and what a person new to the country experiences.*
 - ♣ *I'd recommend this to a friend to deepen their understanding of the complexities of living and working alongside people who represent different cultures.*
 - ♣ *It's really important to be aware of our biases and how they inform communication. We can improve connections by improving communication!*
 - ♣ *We have many newcomers in our area and we need to know how to better welcome them and understand each other.*
- Another newcomer interviewee described the possible impact that a PVLIP presentation might have on public perspectives: "I remember this person was sitting and listening to you [the presenter] very attentively when you were having your speech about the newcomers, about how smart they are, about all this stuff. And I was observing, it was so interesting for me. Like, wow, maybe this person doesn't change their whole mindset, but you planted the idea in their head. They probably start thinking differently. And I think it's success. Even if one person change their mind about stereotypes about newcomers, that is already success."
- PVLIP's public intercultural events were mentioned several times as important venues for gaining cultural understanding and breaking down assumptions: "I think the public events, we have these events in the parks, things that are accessible, easily accessible to public, things that correspond with festivals, are neutral places that let people interact at their own pace. It gives that gentle interaction space."
- Sometimes, changes through exposure to new cultural events can be quite subtle: "Whereas a lot of the PVLIP events that we've heard about are people bumping up against each other, some people may not be ready to really set aside their [newcomer-hesitant] views. But they're willing to come and just listen to a newcomer choir. And all of a sudden, oh, that was a really nice choir. Therefore, the next time they meet somebody who's a newcomer, they have a slightly different picture in their mind of what that means."

- Another newcomer stated: “I think it's really important to let the community know what is our contribution here, and what change can we make on a positive way. Because they might not even know what we're doing to succeed.”
- After a workshop offered by the Border Land School Division, participating teachers echoed similar sentiments about the things they had learned.
 - ♣ *I learned about cultural bias, microaggressions, and communication differences in various cultures.*
 - ♣ *I was given a window into the challenges newcomers to our region face when connecting with others across cultures.*
 - ♣ *How many aspects of life can be influenced by cultural norms and engrained experiences.*
 - ♣ *Increased awareness of what newcomers may experience in Manitoba, whether it's based on language, general integration issues, racism, etc. The session reinforced the belief that immigration to Canada and Altona is wonderful on many levels, but that it requires on the part of the "existing" community and newcomers to work together in good faith to, respectively, appreciate and accept newcomers, and for newcomers to apply themselves as best they can to build their lives. The session also reminded me that the "existing community" can act as an ally in both big and small ways.*
- When asked about the PVLIP's role, a civic leader stated in an interview that PVLIP was important for “dealing with issues of feeling welcome in your community”. As an example, the leader described that “there were some [PVLIP] workshops about what does racism look like? Some of the things that you say, when they translate them, that's an insult to them in their own language. So, you have to be careful what you say.” These workshops were attended by healthcare professionals, students, and municipal staff, and other town members to continue to reduce barriers to thriving settlement.
- Cultural learning also applies to the newcomer community. One of the interviewees, a law enforcement representative in the region, stated that “[PVLIP's training] brings you the context that will prepare you to be better at connecting with cultures”. Given that some newcomers' experiences with law enforcement may have been quite negative, it is critical to have neutral organizations like the PVLIP to connect people with new perspectives. “Policing is a lot of different things in different areas in the world. A lot of times it's not nearly as sophisticated as in Canada. It may be more corrupt. Or more basic. And so, there's a lot of negative perceptions on policing. There's also a lot of confusion as to what laws are in Canada. That's one of the primary reasons I joined [PVLIP]: to be an early point of contact in what I would call ‘neutral territory’. People are free to approach me and ask questions and I can provide an understanding of how policing in Canada works. [Because of PVLIP] I can provide more accurate information. I see great value in it.”

3) PVLIP has increased awareness in newcomers, mainstream service providers, and systems about the availability of different community services. Conversations have been initiated about how to make these services more culturally responsive and accessible.

Improved availability and coordination of services is a longer-term and multi-stakeholder endeavor, as many stakeholders in different systems must participate fully and commit to making changes. This may mean assessing internal processes and infrastructure and then making the necessary changes in collaboration with the other service partners, which requires time and resources. There are also limitations unique to rural areas. Services in the Pembina Valley are spread throughout several municipalities and there may be practical barriers to access that fall outside the control of local decision-

makers. For example, government services are not easily accessible between communities due to lack of public transportation.

There is more work to be done, but PVLIP has begun to encourage service providers to become more familiar with and then address the needs of newcomers in culturally responsive ways. As barriers to access emerge, PVLIP communicates and documents them. In several instances, PVLIP played a role in developing new resources or making existing ones more accessible to newcomers. In this way, PVLIP can support organizations starting their own projects to become more welcoming and inclusive even if it is not itself offering direct services to newcomers. These kinds of projects will be continued throughout the 2025-2030 strategic plan. In the meantime, outcomes already identified in this area because of PVLIP's efforts between 2020 and 2025 include:

- Availability of new digital and paper-based resources about community services
- Leveraging of new funds to develop new tools and resources
- Identification of barriers to accessing community services
- Increased connection between mainstream and settlement service providers

Some examples:

- An interactive service map that was created in 2021-22, early in the PVLIP's current strategic plan. Currently, the service map contains over 400 listings, and PVLIP urges settlement services to highlight this tool during intake sessions to help newcomers navigate and access a diverse range of service options. As a result, the interactive service map has increased both regional and newcomer awareness of the variety of services available within their own or surrounding communities. Newcomers can see not only where a given service is offered but also how to get there. This resource also helps employers, volunteer programs, and resource centres to be better connected to information and resources for newcomers.
- As mentioned earlier, the PVLIP's presence on five interagency teams helps mainstream service providers become more aware of supports or points of referral for newcomers who require settlement and other newcomer-informed services. Mainstream service providers better understand the importance of guiding newcomers to these essential services.
- The Mental Health "Cheat Sheet" created by PVLIP, which lists mental health services available to newcomers, has been used as a resource by the Winkler police force. The handout provides concrete guidance on community resources that might be appropriate in different situations, but also indirectly reinforces the possibility of cultural differences and the benefit of sensitivity when handling some situations. The information is available in the lunchroom and on bulletin boards, as well as being available in the lobby of the police station as a take-a-way for people who come to the station. The Mental Health "Cheat Sheet" and other resources are also being distributed at the local foodbank.
- PVLIP's role in social media was mentioned in linking newcomers to services: "Creating a page, like posting something about diversity [is useful]. Even posting a link there [on social media platforms]. If you are a newcomer you will venture on that link that will give you a lot of information. And that will also bridge to the resources that are available."

4) Engagement with PVLIP and its activities has contributed to an increased sense of personal responsibility for making further positive changes that support newcomers and their settlement.

Although some of the examples above hint at the increased sense of commitment that people seem to feel for helping Pembina Valley communities to become more supportive of newcomers, the sense of responsibility was also expressed very explicitly in the interviews with influencers and decision-makers. PVLIP is helping stakeholders to understand what they can do to make the Pembina Valley more welcoming and inclusive for newcomers. Depending on the interviewee's role, contributing to positive change was described as a personal, professional, or civic responsibility. Sometimes, the focus was on economic benefits that would result for the Pembina Valley if newcomers stayed to raise their families there, but moral and ethical undercurrents seemed equally strong. Interviewees truly wanted newcomers to flourish in their new home and become part of the community. In particular, hearing about newcomers' hurtful experiences with cultural distancing or racism came up a number of times as a significant driver for compassion and positive change. The PVLIP's contribution to outcomes in this area include:

- Individuals' increased commitment and dedication to improving circumstances for newcomers in daily life
- Individuals' increased commitment to bringing positive changes to workplaces in which newcomers were employed
- New ideas about the ways that cultural barriers can be reduced or removed
- Individuals' increased willingness to be an ally in confronting racist incidents.

Some examples:

- When explaining what motivated them to make their workplace more welcoming to newcomers, an HR person described the effect that engagement with the PVLIP had on them personally: "Subconsciously it probably has made me more aware in terms of pausing and just thinking a little bit more in terms of the struggles that the newcomers may have gone through to get where they are." This sense of personal responsibility was combined with a professional responsibility to having a stable, satisfied, and productive workforce.
- A civic leader described a situation in which they witnessed a newcomer being treated with caution because of their religious background. He explained how a new sense of responsibility to address these kinds of situations can develop when PVLIP training or events increase people's understanding of cultural differences. "So, now I care about my neighbor and I might need to do something [if I see unfair behaviours]. I might need to think about something differently. Or I need to go back to my staff about something ...". In this case, PVLIP was not the catalyst for the individual's underlying compassion, but PVLIP was helping to create a public environment that reflected greater cultural competence.
- Teachers who had participated in the Border Land School Division workshop gave the following examples of concrete steps that they would take in their work:
 - ♣ *Maintain awareness of your tone, expression, and body language when communicating with newcomers.*
 - ♣ *Continue to think about how our school and school events can be more welcoming and accessible for all.*
 - ♣ *body language and facial expression is more important than the words-consider this working with students*

♣ *Improving clarity of instructions by checking my assumptions about prior knowledge and/or skills.*

- Another civic leader described how PVLIP helped them to gain skills to begin to address issues of racism when they arose: “And it was, how do we defend these newcomers? How do we stick up, you know, when we hear or witness somebody being discriminated against or when there's these racist comments ... and maybe it's how to respond on Facebook, right?” And “How do we educate our communities and leaders on how to respond to these sorts of events so that it would help the newcomer women to feel safer and [so that they feel like] ‘oh, they’ve got my back. I know that I can trust this community’.”
- In workplace settings, increased commitment to make changes can positively affect the whole workforce. To verify the connection between PVLIP’s activities and increased commitment to positive workplace change, 87% of 775 participants in the PVLIP’s popular Connecting Cultures and Communities Diversity workshop felt an increased ability to address workplace discrimination.

5) With PVLIP’s support, influencers and decision-makers have taken concrete independent actions at organizational and systemic levels to help the region become more welcoming and accessible to newcomers. Further actions are being planned.

As a final stage in the awareness-to-action chain of results, the PVLIP has played a role in supporting organizations and systems that are beginning to independently implement projects or update their policies and practices. For example, concrete actions that have been taken with the encouragement or active support of PVLIP include:

- Development of new policies and practices
- Development of new projects
- Development of sustainable community-level partnerships.

Some examples:

- To date, six municipalities have adopted PVLIP’s Welcoming & Inclusive Communities Policy to foster inclusion, improve access to services, improve belonging, and seek out newcomer voices. By adopting this resolution, accountability to the shared agenda can be encouraged, supported, and assessed. It becomes possible for PVLIP to pursue municipal leaders to implement promising practices that will enable newcomers in their community to feel accepted, hopefully leading to their long-term retention. This of course has economic implications. As one interviewee said, “on the municipal level, there is a greater understanding about immigration and settlement services. And how that all connects to economic development and the viability and the sustainability of communities.”
- The PVLIP’s annual partnership survey shows that 62% of PVLIP members (diverse stakeholders, including newcomers) agree or strongly agree that in the past 12 months their organization changed its programming or practices because of its involvement with PVLIP. 85% of respondents agree or strongly agree that in the past 12 months their organization has better access to resources to help with newcomer integration. 62% of respondents agree or strongly agree that in the past 12 months their organization has strategies/work plans to support the integration of newcomers.
- Policy changes can even occur in less weighty areas that can support newcomers. A municipality was taking stock of its sports facilities as part of its recreational master plan because sports like soccer were becoming more popular through newcomer participation.

- In another specific example, PVLIP conducted research and organized focus groups around mental health care which led to temporary counselling supports being made available through the settlement sector until provincial funds could be put into place for a longer-term initiative.
- Responses on a follow up survey several weeks after a PVLIP workshop identify some of the organizational changes inspired by the workshop:
 - ♣ *Working with others to develop a "bank" of acronyms and terms that get used regularly, but which may not be known/understood by everyone in a given setting.*
 - ♣ *Agency will concentrate on offering diversity training*
- One interviewee stated that efforts had been made to increase public visibility of supports for newcomers. "They're set up in the library now. Front and center. Right in the center of our downtown. If you go downtown as a newcomer, you know you're welcome. You see the big windows wide open. You see the workers in there and you can see newcomers in there. That's awesome."

As a direct or indirect result of the PVLIP's efforts to make the Pembina Valley more welcoming and inclusive over the past five years, connections and partnerships now exist across different cultures and communities:

- Ethnic, geographical, historical, faith, cultural, and linguistic communities (including French and Indigenous)
- Local governments and decision-making bodies
- Businesses and workplaces
- Rural and urban centres of various sizes
- Newcomers from various immigration stages and patterns (recent vs longer-term arrivals, intermittent)
- Communities with different degrees of chosen cultural segregation (wanting to remain separate, wanting to integrate).

For example, collaborative relationships were established to help host PVLIP's diversity workshop series. Employers, community centers, and non-profit organizations were willing to offer in-kind space to assist in the delivery of these sessions. This resulted in 15 collaborative partnerships, nine of which were new and will be ongoing because of this collaboration. It effectively tripled the impact of the workshops because partners were willing to host and provide in-kind support to improve engagement. In total, PVLIP delivered 74 English and 6 French diversity workshops in 7 communities, engaging 775 participants, including 36 employers.

Planning for the future also seemed to be informed by the new awareness and commitment to a smooth and supportive settlement experience. One interviewee, who has been closely associated with the settlement sector for a long time, said: "There's more intentional planning now: when we bring someone (or many people) here, where are they going to live? Did anyone let the schools know? What do we do about public health? Are there enough doctors? How do we inform the community about what the plan is?"

Previously, service providers often worked in silos: "People in the Pembina Valley were working in silos. Things were being done but there wasn't cross communication. So that was the piece that was necessary. There needed to be a platform for immigrant focused discussions". When newcomers arrived in the region in the past, "municipal governments weren't aware, employers weren't aware, it was

unclear if there was enough housing. There were a lot of moving pieces and people were making decisions without knowing what supports needed to be available because there wasn't a LIP."

Highlight: Connecting Cultures and Communities Project

To cap off this evaluation report, it is interesting to showcase one particularly successful PVLIP project as an example of the diverse and sometimes unexpected impacts that result from the PVLIP's work.

In 2023-24, PVLIP began to promote its bilingual *Connecting Cultures & Communities* guide, toolkit and video series. These resources, combined with delivery of a workshop series, focused on:

- content relevant to employers, employees, volunteers, community leaders and youth;
- promoting a better understanding of diversity, equity, and inclusion;
- empowering local leaders and employers to adopt promising practices in their organizations; and
- creating more welcoming communities by addressing discrimination.

The project offers participants the chance to enhance awareness and shift perceptions about workplace racism and discrimination; understand diverse cultures and the challenges cultural minorities face at work; and improve intercultural comprehension.

Several employers in the region, after engaging with PVLIP and its Diversity in the Workplace Workshops, have also adopted new policies and procedures on how they communicate with newcomer staff during onboarding. Or, as another example, performance reviews have been modified to account for cultural differences between management and employees' expectations on time management and communication styles.

Surveys show that this project had a significant impact on participants who engaged with the content, but interviews showed that there were also other "ripple effects" that might be occurring without PVLIP's direct knowledge.

For example, an interesting example of how labour markets become more welcoming both directly and indirectly because of PVLIP's work arrived by email during the evaluation. A consultant, who had helped to develop the *Connecting Cultures & Communities* toolkit and had later also delivered the workshop series, identified some of the ways that she was now applying the information and resources in her own work with professional and business organizations. These organizations might not otherwise have heard about or attended the PVLIP's original sessions. In one instance, information and resources from the PVLIP training were being brought to the Incident Prevention Association of Manitoba (IPAM) Conference to discuss "perspectives and common experiences (or misunderstandings) related to cultural norms¹⁷". As well, the consultant was raising cultural aspects of document literacy in her work, using the example that filling out applications can be challenging for someone unfamiliar with Canadian forms. The consultant had further been invited to develop and deliver a workshop called "Diversity and Inclusion in Construction" for the Construction Safety Association of Manitoba (CSAM). Materials from PVLIP resources were integrated into this new professional development opportunity. In the email, the consultant stated that "needs remain high for this work, the resources are relevant, and I remain proud

of the accomplishments related to this project.” The consultant has become an important ally and champion, making it possible for the information about diversity and inclusion to reach new audiences in the Pembina Valley and beyond.

In another setting, an interviewee mentioned that hiring policies for government positions had been reviewed to make them more accessible to newcomers. Foreign credentials were being evaluated more fairly so that labour market gaps could be filled more quickly by people with the right skills and experience. In fact, credential recognition and the corollary supports were embedded right into policy. The interviewee explained that most newcomers would not mention these kinds of barriers to government directly, but going through PVLIP meant that necessary information for change was getting to the right people without putting the onus on newcomers to confront government practices.

Considering that the PVLIP works across a broad region, it is to be expected that ideas raised in one municipality will be considered and perhaps taken up in another jurisdiction. This is the true meaning of collective impact, when stakeholders begin to take more and more autonomous action towards the shared vision, far beyond the initial catalyst. Several examples were provided during interviews of initiatives in one area being based on successes from another area. This can result in acceleration of progress towards the goals, not only because more initiatives arise but also because the development time can be decreased.

More recently, the impact of PVLIP’s work has started to reach beyond the Pembina Valley. The Community Development Coordinator from the Municipality of Jasper reached out to PVLIP to secure permission to use parts of the materials from the “Connecting Cultures & Communities Toolkit” in a program that they were developing, calling the PVLIP materials a “fantastic inspiration” and an “amazing production”. One of the graphics demonstrating aspects of surface culture and deep culture was used in a team meeting to discuss culture, with a strong positive reaction from the staff.

Conclusion

Considering the information gathered through a variety of sources about the Pembina Valley Local Immigration Partnership’s (PVLIP) activities in the past five years, it is abundantly clear that the PVLIP has established itself as a valuable backbone organization working to encourage and support Pembina Valley communities as they welcome newcomers and help them to thrive professionally, socially, and personally. When able to leverage additional funding, PVLIP can increase its impact by building on its foundational activities. Working alongside its many dedicated partners, PVLIP has significantly raised the profile of settlement in the Pembina Valley and helped to raised awareness about factors that can make the settlement journey easier and more successful for newcomers. In turn, individuals, organizations, communities, and systems have started to turn their individual commitment to positive change into concrete actions at personal, professional, community, and systemic levels.

Next Steps

What lies ahead for the Pembina Valley Local Immigration Partnership (PVLIP)? When asked what “success” might look like in the future, a number of items in PVLIP’s 2025-30 Strategic Plan¹⁵ were mentioned by interviewees:

- The current work of addressing stereotypes and culturally-based misgivings needs to continue until barriers to settlement are further reduced and the benefits of cultural diversity are understood and embraced.
- Mainstream community services still require enhanced capacity to address newcomers’ needs in coordinated and culturally appropriate ways, especially around mental health, if they are to address the related barriers to thriving settlement.
- Newcomer voices need to be integrated more fully into planning and decision-making, not just in areas of social or cultural importance but in all areas of community and civic life.
- Newcomers need the skills, experience, and opportunities to take on various kinds of leadership roles in their communities.

Several interviewees mentioned that the Pembina Valley has a strong history and cultural tradition that is a source of pride for many, and that making changes to integrate new voices and new ways of doing things may take some time. Nonetheless, there was a strong sense that continuing to increase awareness and commitment around settlement amongst influencers, decision-makers and the general public would be very important. New projects and activities will require support and guidance as other entities in the region work towards the shared vision of a welcoming and inclusive Pembina Valley. New issues will also emerge as the political, economic, cultural, and social landscape changes. As a highly effective backbone organization for collective impact, PVLIP has clearly demonstrated in this evaluation that it can play an important role for years to come.

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¹⁵ <https://pvlip.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/PVLIP-Strat-Plan-2024-FINAL.pdf>