



# Reimagining Settlement: Building Community and Belonging

Insights from Four Diverse Racialized Community Organizations in Nova Scotia

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## 1. Overview

Communities across Nova Scotia have witnessed a notable influx of newcomers from various parts of the world and from other parts of Canada. This has created both opportunities and challenges of social integration and settlement in both rural and urban parts of our beautiful province. As the population has grown by an estimated 10.5% between 2020-2022, with a third of that growth coming from inter-provincial migration, the need for inclusive, culturally sensitive, responsive, and community-driven settlement strategies has become even more important and pressing.

This study focuses on four diverse racialized community organizations, an indicative sample of community institutions that are making notable contributions to the socio-cultural dimensions of settlement of newcomers in Nova Scotia: the Multicultural Association of Pictou County (MAPC), the Boys and Girls Club of Cape Breton (BGC-CB), Breaking Circus in Kijipuktuk (Halifax), and the East Preston Recreation Centre (EPRC), East Preston. These case-studies<sup>1</sup> offer invaluable insights on how local community-rooted institutions are responding to the changing demographics, building inclusivity, and most importantly - fostering a sense of belonging among both new and old. Each organization presents its own unique space and approach, helping us learn how the sociocultural engagement and dimensions of 'settlement' complements, more traditional settlement elements such as language housing, jobs and legal processes.

<sup>1</sup> Case studies of each individual organization are available at [www.isans.ca](http://www.isans.ca)

## 2. Four Diverse Racialized Organizations in Newcomers' Settlement Space

### 2.1 Multicultural Association of Pictou County (MAPC), Pictou

MAPC is a volunteer-driven organization that celebrates multiculturalism and builds connections between newcomers and long-standing residents in Pictou County. The Fusion Festival, multi-cultural cuisine potluck dinners, and conversation circles are some of MAPC's hallmark initiatives that create inclusive and shared spaces for cultural exchange and develop mutual appreciation and respect. MAPC's multi-cultural and multi-racial board of volunteers, always open to new people and ideas, also offers facilitated sessions to develop multi-cultural competence, making inclusivity a lived practice across five towns of Pictou County.



*Recreational activities from snowshoeing to cricket, build a sense of community and cross-cultural understanding.*

The grassroots, multicultural nature of MAPC is both a strength and a springboard for expansion. Their extensive network of diverse volunteers and community members allows them to scale an inclusive programming approach that reflects the emerging needs of Pictou County communities. As a go-to organization for cultural celebrations, building bridges across intercultural gaps, MAPC has the opportunity to formalize its programming, expand its multi-cultural educational initiatives, formalise partnerships with the Towns and County, local schools, businesses, and with other civil society organizations engaged in the newcomers settlement service provisions.

However, the entirely volunteer-led and run structure and initiatives pose their own challenges. Current ways of working allow MAPC flexibility and responsiveness, but it also constraints and limits how much it can expand its scale and scope of programming and outreach. Securing funding to sustain and expand its programs, formalise partnerships, and hire part or full-time staff member(s) for a more stable operational model is a key consideration for MAPC; but without losing the grassroots, volunteer-led spirit that makes them unique and different from many other settlement services organisations.



*MAPC volunteers promote understanding through multicultural presentations at elementary schools and with community groups.*



## 2.2 Boys and Girls Club of Cape Breton (BGC-CB)

BGC-CB, located in Cape Breton, provides structured support and programming for children and youth in a culturally and ethnically diverse local community of Whitney Pier. Rooted in a historical context of generational immigration, home to a historic African Nova Scotian community and led by a long-term, dynamic Executive Director who is of African Nova Scotian descent - the club offers after-school activities, youth mentorship, and food security programs that engage both long-standing residents and newcomers. The club's emphasis on developing life skills, strong social values-based leadership, and socio-economic empowerment supports youth from all backgrounds, creating a sense of belonging and pride of an inclusive and diverse community.

BGC-CB's deep historical roots in the Whitney Pier community provide a solid foundation for serving an ever expanding racially and culturally diverse population. The club's ability to support a wide range of issues - youth engagement and empowerment, food security, sports, life skills training, inclusive social events - positions them to offer comprehensive and critical programming, inclusive of both long-standing residents and newcomers, creating a sense of belonging for everyone that walks into their facilities and participates in their wide range of initiatives throughout the year. They also engage with parents and family and do not limit their engagement with youth and children, promoting a 'relational' approach. Their ongoing partnerships with Family Services, local schools, and First Nations communities makes them unique to explore new opportunities and expand programming for newcomers arriving in Whitney Pier.

Many new opportunities are on the horizon for BGC-CB, to build upon inclusiveness and the high quality of their programming and their reputation in Cape Breton region and beyond. But the organization also faces constant challenges in securing sustainable funding and will have to seek additional resources to be able to expand its services to meet rising demands. It is already striv-



*Youth from many diverse backgrounds learn about and celebrate truth and reconciliation.*



*BGC programs support members ongoing learning with several recreational, educational and cultural programming activities and field trips.*

ing to recruit staff from various racial backgrounds that can represent changing faces of the community, and to offer more comprehensive mental health and settlement support that is so much needed. Current levels of funding limits BGC-CB's ability to deliberately scale and maintain programs that expand their vision of inclusivity and youth empowerment. Furthermore, BGC-CB's reliance on grants that cover programming, but not operational costs make it difficult to enhance the capacity for that expansion. BGC-CB does not just offer these programs, it is working to build a next generation, often with marginalised socio-economic backgrounds, building a strong sense of an inclusive and diverse community.

## 2.3 Breaking Circus Halifax

Breaking Circus employs circus arts as a unique approach to community building and inclusivity. The organization's leadership reflects diverse racial identities, and its programs are intentionally designed to transcend cultural and language barriers through shared creative experiences. 'Breaking' Circus signifies that they define circus art differently, breaking traditional boundaries, seeing circus as leadership building, creating an environment of mutual trust and friendship (where one can trust the other with their life) and building not only skills but character. Their beautiful and carefully architected space in downtown Kijipuktuk / Halifax serves not only as a training ground for circus arts but is also utilised as a multi-use hub for artistic collaboration by many other sister art performance groups, offering mentorship and a welcoming environment for all, especially the marginalized communities and newcomers.

Breaking Circus thrives on its innovative approach to community building through the arts, offering inclusive spaces for creative expression and trust-building, and offering inclusive experience among racially diverse participants. Their open-door policy and commitment to providing a welcoming environment for dancers, musicians, artists, and circus students from all backgrounds allow Breaking Circus to serve as a cultural and social hub that transcends traditional settlement services. Their work with Acadian, African Nova Scotian, African-descendant and newcomer communities—alongside their mixed-race leadership—positions them uniquely to build natural bridges across cultural and racial identities and boundaries.

While their non-traditional approach to inclusion and empowerment is a strength, they continue to juggle limited financial resources continuously. Securing sufficient and flexible funding for their approach that blends a social enterprise and an artists' collective is an ongoing challenge, as is maintaining and upgrading their physical space to be fully accessible and conducive to diverse programming.



*Diverse group of mentors and mentees in professional training program.*



*Mentees commit to a rigorous training program in the Breaking Circus studio, customized to support the practice of circus arts.*



## 2.4 East Preston Recreation Centre (EPRC)

Serving the historic Indigenous African Nova Scotian community of East Preston, EPRC has long been a space where community groups provided programs that foster cultural pride, personal development, and community empowerment. The center's leadership is exploring new ways to expand its reach to include newcomer families and communities, while balancing with its legacy as a cultural and social anchor for African Nova Scotians. EPRC's challenges lie in funding, internal capacity, and infrastructure renewal, even as its commitment to racial inclusivity remains strong.

EPRC's deep historical roots in one of Canada's oldest Black communities provides a rich foundation for cultural preservation and renewal of community inclusivity. The center's recent revitalization and interest in expanding programming to welcome newcomers present opportunities to create spaces where cultural exchange, anti-racism awareness, and intergenerational learning can thrive. Strategic partnerships with Halifax Regional Municipality, who owns their building, is seen as more than a recreation centre, a space shared with other local organizations. Strong historical relationships with schools and other settlement service providers could enhance EPRC's programs offer and support to new immigrants and newcomers from other parts of Canada.



Decorations in the centre promote community, pride in cultural heritage and values such as kindness and respect.

EPRC faces a delicate balance between honoring its legacy of serving Indigenous African Nova Scotians and expanding its focus to meet the needs of newcomers. Financial constraints, capacity limitations, and infrastructural needs, such as facility upgrades and equipment, are significant hurdles. The shift from serving a predominantly Black community to a more inclusive demographic requires careful thinking, planning, outreach strategy, and internal capacity to ensure that both long-standing residents and newcomers can experience a collective sense of belonging, together.



An annual basketball tournament awards athletic skills, hard work, commitment, education, equity and community.

## 3. Learning with Diverse Racialized Organizations about Settlement

The four case studies—MAPC, BGC-CB, Breaking Circus, and EPRC—illustrate a critical reality and some deep insights: smaller, racialized community organizations have unique strengths and programming approaches that make them key actors in the *social-cultural dimensions of settlement*. Their work offers a set of nuanced lessons and insights that not only inform how newcomers feel integrated into local communities but also redefine what settlement support looks like in rapidly diversifying regions of Nova Scotia. While classes for learning English or French, finding family doctors and accessing the health system, creating additional capacities in schools, writing resumes and finding jobs, securing housing or accessing banking services remain critical elements of settlement; experiencing a sense of belonging – the socio-cultural dimension of settlement- where both old and newcomers can together

envision a new, emergent community, is where perhaps real settlement takes shape. These four organisations offer rare glimpses of what that looks like, and why the ‘settlement’ services definition needs reimagining for truly vibrant, future communities.

### 3.1 Lived Experiences and Cultural Sensitivity Bridges Gaps

Each organization, through its own unique approach, demonstrates the power of culturally sensitive programming rooted in shared, culturally and racially diverse lived experiences. Unlike larger, traditional settlement services that often focus on practical needs, these organizations pay attention to the importance of addressing emotional, cultural, and social integration. Each of these organizations is led by individuals who have personal experience navigating diversity and inclusion. This representation is evident in the multicultural leadership of MAPC, the historical diversity within BGC-CB’s community and team, Breaking Circus’s mixed-race leadership, and EPRC’s connection to Indigenous African Nova Scotian heritage. These lived experiences have shaped their programming that resonates with both newcomers and equally importantly, the long-standing residents, presenting relatable role models and culturally informed approaches to community building.

- **MAPC** celebrates multi-culturalism and builds intercultural respect through events like the Fusion Festival, events sharing food, music, and art, offering low-barrier, safe and inclusive opportunities for conversations, establishing community connections and life-long friendship bonds. Their board and volunteer network, representing many diverse backgrounds, understands that newcomers need more than language or employment support, they know that newcomers need to feel valued within the community’s social fabric. Importantly, they engage with long-time residents and the town and county leadership, helping create mutual appreciation, awareness, and a sense of celebration in multi-culturalism. They also recognise that they need to build stronger relationships with African Nova Scotian and First Nation communities of Pictou County.



*The Fusion Festival has been a signature event for over ten years – recently attracting 1,000 people to celebrate multiculturalism*

- **BGC-CB** addresses social gaps through programs that support mental health, food security, games, sports, social events, and mentorship for children and youth. Their ability to relate to families from multiple racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds is grounded in the history of Whitney Pier community, where diverse ethnicities have long immigrated and lived alongside each other, often sharing the challenges of socio-economic marginalization. The embracing of a First Nations perspective is another testament to their nuanced understanding of diverse lived experiences and how these intersect with the needs of newcomers.
- **Breaking Circus** demonstrates how the arts can be a powerful connector, transcending cultural and language



barriers. By welcoming participants of all races, creating inclusive artistic spaces, and encouraging expression through circus arts, they provide a unique way for people to connect on a level beyond words—through creativity, shared performance, and mutual trust.

- **EPRC** reflects the importance of maintaining and honoring cultural heritage as a means of approaching new community connections. Their experiences, developed over generations, highlight the need to create spaces where marginalized groups can build pride and unity, laying a foundation for building bridges to new communities as they envision to expand their programming to the latest newcomers in the community.

### 3.2 Sociocultural Programming Builds Community Bonds and Social Capital

The case studies confirm that reimagining settlement requires a very deliberate focus on *sociocultural elements*, on expression and celebrations of arts and cultures, which are as vital as practical supports like employment and housing. Each organization exemplifies the value of fostering a sense of belonging and offering opportunities for social connection that go beyond more transactional settlement services. These sociocultural elements—cultural exchange, social bonds, and inclusive spaces—create the foundation for newcomers to thrive in their new communities, and for the host communities to embrace and celebrate change. They support holistic family well-being and their emotional and social sense of being that has direct influence on employment, access to housing or health services, schooling experience, and developing a supportive social ecosystem for integration.

### 3.3 Creating Club-Like Atmospheres

The “club” like informal atmosphere and safe, inclusive spaces seem to be a crucial feature in promoting belonging and inclusivity across all four organisations. MAPC’s community events, BGC-CB’s youth programs, Breaking Circus’s artistic environment, and EPRC’s intergenerational activities all offer informal and open spaces where



BGC-CB really has the feel of a youth-centred club with multiple different activities going on all the time.

newcomers can control their own levels of engagement without feeling the pressure of forced-integration. These informal, friendly environments help newcomers connect not only through shared activities but through respectful exploration of diverse family values, traditions, and life experiences.

Friendships formed within these informal spaces have proven to be pivotal for deeper integration, offering newcomers emotional and social support and safety net. From MAPC’s conversation circles and potlucks to BGC-CB’s youth identity as “club kids” and Breaking Circus’s mentorship programs, the friendships cultivated have provided the newcomers with a deep sense of community, addressing isolation, and building networks for long-term settlement and integration.

### 3.4 The Power of Community-Led, Relational Approaches to Settlement: Creating Belonging

Unlike larger institutions, which often deliver top-down services, these smaller community organizations demonstrate a ‘relational approach’—building trust through genuine, person-to-person engagement, grounded in the respective local community contexts.

Volunteer energy is yet another common driving force for all four organisations. Volunteerism and community dedication drive the success of these organizations. The passion of MAPC’s volunteers, BGC-CB’s staff, and volunteers’

commitment to supporting youth and families, Breaking Circus's Artists' Collective model, and EPRC's club structure all embody a shared ethos of *"building the community we want to live in."* This grassroots volunteer-led relational approach allows in building deeper socio-cultural bonds.

- **MAPC's** emphasis on volunteer-led programming enables authentic, grassroots community connections and a relational approach. Volunteers come from within the communities offering newcomers' insights and support based on their own lived experiences. They openly welcome new volunteers who inform their activities on an ongoing basis while also keeping long time volunteers engaged and informed. MAPC remains an ever emerging and expanding melting pot of volunteers, allowing for integration that feels organic rather than imposed.
- **BGC-CB** emphasizes building long-term relationships with the children and youth they support, but also with their families and community at large. Youth who participate in their programs often come back as volunteers as they grow up, offering mentorship to younger generations and fostering a cycle of inclusion and empowerment. Their practical focus on values based leadership development and life skills reflects their ability to nurture deep community bonds.
- **Breaking Circus** uses mentorship to foster inclusive spaces, creating connections that go beyond formal programs. By mentoring artists and newcomers of all backgrounds, they create an environment where individuals feel respected and empowered to contribute, regardless of their race or cultural background. Their emphasis on artistic collaboration builds relational ties based on shared passions, creativity and trust.
- **EPRC** reflects how long-standing community roots offer a platform for genuine, relational engagement. Though their primary focus remains on serving Indigenous African Nova Scotians, their desire to collaborate with community groups and build programs that welcome new immigrant



*Free potluck dinners and multicultural food fairs bring people together in a celebratory atmosphere of mutual learning. They build a sense of pride and belonging.*

families speaks to their sensitivity to building relationships beyond their core community. This relational approach lays the groundwork for future programs.

### 3.5 Inclusive Programming That Engages Long-time Residents

The programs offered by these organizations highlight the idea that settlement is not just about working with newcomers but also engaging with local community and residents, fostering broader social cohesion through shared spaces, activities, and experiences.

All four organisations strive to create safe, open spaces, making deliberate efforts to engage and invite long time residents of the host community. Diverse activities they organise serve as public hubs, offering free or low-cost access to spaces where both newcomers and long-time residents can come together. Whether it is BGC-CB's after-school programs, MAPC's community potlucks, Breaking Circus's creative space or extension activities at multiple locations, or EPRC's multi-use center, these environments foster exchanges between new and oldcomers, a collective sense of ownership, mutual understanding, appreciation and respect.

- **MAPC** provides a range of programs—from bi-weekly Conversation Circles to cultural competency sessions at



school— bring together different generations and cultures. These initiatives allow both newcomers and long-time residents to learn with and from one another, build mutual respect, and develop a shared sense of belonging. MAPC shows that settlement is about integrating communities organically, reimagining it rather than only helping newcomers adapt and fit-in.

- **BGC-CB** emphasizes inclusive youth programming that draws in children from all backgrounds, ethnicities, and cultures, creating spaces where they can engage with their peers, learn about diverse cultures, and develop social values-based leadership skills. By focusing on both practical needs and diverse cultural sensibilities, BGC-CB very naturally involves both long-standing families and the newcomers in all its programming activities.
- **Breaking Circus** reimagines what inclusive programming can look like by centering creativity, collaboration, and open space for artistic self-expression. By offering their physical space to artists from multiple racial backgrounds, Breaking Circus embodies inclusivity, allowing people to connect through shared creative experiences. This emphasis on celebrating differences through performance and collaboration nurtures a culture of respect and inclusion, honors circus art as a way of life and a sense of community, together, among both new and long-time resident artists.
- **EPRC** is in the preliminary stages of developing more inclusive programming that reaches beyond its historic focus on Indigenous African Nova Scotians. However, its long-standing community role and commitment to offering programs like anti-racism workshops and cultural events lay the foundation for more integrated, inclusive programming in the future.



*BGC-CB tripled in size in 2016 and now has extensive indoor and outdoor spaces for its members.*

### 3.6 Creative Expression and Flexible and Responsive Programming is Essential

All four organizations recognize that deeper settlement is about finding and creating ways for cultural and artistic expressions. The arts offer alternative forms of engagement that allow newcomers to explore their identities, build trust with others, and find new connection. Breaking Circus provides one model for how creative outlets can serve as inclusive, non-traditional pathways for community belonging for newcomers. MAPC organises events around multi-cultural expressions of food, art, songs, dance, and fashion, creating spaces to celebrate and learn about different art and cultural expressions. BGC-CB does that through sports and games and other collective social activities involving children and youth making their music room and video facilities available for creative expression. EPRC offers facilities for sports and games and has hosted many other creative programs over the years for youth, adults, and seniors. These spaces for creative expressions are opportunities for newcomers to feel recognised and acknowledged.

Another consistent theme is the ability of these smaller organizations to be responsive and flexible to the emerging needs of their communities. MAPC's volunteer-led programs evolve based on community feedback, BGC-CB tailors activities to youth interests, Breaking Circus



*Creative, professionally staged performances demonstrate circus can be an educational tool, a livelihood and a lifestyle.*

embraces creative exploration, and EPRC is adapting to changing demographics while honoring its legacy. This flexibility is rooted in a deep understanding of the communities served and an internal motivation to foster inclusive environments.

### 3.7 Engaging Youth Beyond School Education benefits Family Settlement

Engaging youth in extracurricular activities, mentorship, recreation, and cultural programs has a great benefit for developing a sense of belonging and empowerment. These organisations realise that youth engagement supports the holistic integration of families, as children and teenagers develop roots in their new communities through positive experiences and connections. Investing in diverse child and youth programming has provided opportunities for youth and helped avoid the attraction of negative, anti-social behaviors. Such program approaches directly support mental well-being for young people, and indirectly for their families, channeling adolescent energy and enthusiasm productively. Such programs, when accessible and inclusive for both long term residents and newcomers, has proven to be a cost-effective way to support the settlement, integration and well-being of youth, their families, and community at large.

### 3.8 Navigating Funding and Capacity Constraints in a Dynamic Context is Imperative

These organizations do amazing, thoughtful, quality work with very limited resources, leveraging their caring, passion and volunteerism to offer services and opportunities for newcomers and established Canadians that can be only described as highly cost-effective and impactful. And yet, the organizations also face common challenges related to limited funding, internal capacity to respond to expanding demands, and infrastructural deficiencies. Their grassroots nature means they often struggle to secure sustainable financial support, yet their unique positions as racialized and culturally sensitive, responsive organizations mean that they play a critical role that larger, more formal institutions cannot easily replicate.

- **MAPC's** volunteer-driven structure makes them flexible and responsive, but also have left them vulnerable to burnout. Funding that supports not just programs, but



*Posters around the club spaces help youth learn about respect, diversity and to value their cultural heritage.*



also operational needs is crucial for them to continue being a go-to organisation and the cultural connector in Pictou County. They face resource challenges for hiring part- and full-time staff to manage a whole range of activities to augment their volunteer based capacity and organisational ethos.

- **BGC-CB** contends with the challenge of securing comprehensive funding that covers both programmatic and operational costs. This impacts their ability to recruit qualified and experienced staff from diverse racial backgrounds, build partnerships, and deliver mental health support, all of which are critical for inclusive programming.
- **Breaking Circus's** dual role as a creative social enterprise, an Artists' collective and a community hub for other partner arts organisations requires a delicate balance of securing funding to maintain the open, inclusive space they provide while delivering innovative and inclusive programming. They face the challenge of sustaining and growing this model over time.

**EPRC** is at a crossroads, balancing its historical role in serving Indigenous African Nova Scotian communities with the desire to expand inclusivity. Limited funding for infrastructure and staff capacity restricts their ability to adapt quickly to changing demographics, though their vision for more inclusive programming remains strong.

## 4. Moving Forward – Reimagining Settlement and Recommendations for Action

This research was somewhat limited in its scope, but was in-depth, capturing slices of realities that small, racialized organisations experience, observing first-hand what people they reach or serve have to say about them. These four case studies make it possible to put forward the following propositions and recommendations for action. Government and settlement service sector stakeholders – and all

those concerned with services to build the communities we want to live in in the future – can benefit from considering these insights.

### 4.1 Settlement as a Broad and Inclusive Concept:

#### 4.1.1 Re-imagining the Scope of Settlement:

The traditional understanding of settlement services—focused on practical needs like housing, employment, and healthcare—often fails to account for the social, cultural, and emotional needs of newcomers. This limited but in-depth research highlights how current models of settlement are too narrow, and there is a need to embrace a broader vision that includes not only newcomers' immediate needs but also long-term integration strategies that focus on community, belonging, and well-being, as well broader engagement of resident communities. This will mean funding for infrastructure and programs that enhance social and cultural inclusion through a multitude of activities and funding for informal spaces such as community festivals, club like facilities for youth and children, facilities and mentorship for art and cultural expressions, or cultural education and exchange programs. These activities may often be seen as peripheral but actually play an essential role in creating a shared sense of belonging for newcomers as well as the host communities.

#### 4.1.2 Diverse Perspectives:

The settlement experience is not uniform, and there are significant differences between how newcomers experience settlement in rural versus urban areas. For instance, rural communities may lack formal services but offer social integration through informal networks, such as knowing local people who can provide practical assistance. These nuances are critical when considering how to design and fund the programs and services that are responsive to the diverse experiences of newcomers. Equally, the socio-economic status of newcomers – and of all Canadians – is not uniform and therefore approaches to help people feel part of the community needs to account

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for those diverse realities. Special and deliberate, more nuanced efforts need to be made to integrate those from diverse backgrounds, especially socially and economically marginalised newcomers. The research emphasized the importance of capturing these varying experiences to build a settlement services model that reflects diverse economic, social, and cultural realities.

## 4.2 Community Engagement and Collaboration:

### 4.2.1 A Strength and Asset-Based Approach:

Decision and Policy makers at all levels (Federal, Provincial and local) need to recognize the complimentary strengths and capacities of smaller grassroots organizations, especially racialized organisations, in helping all Canadians feel a sense of community and belonging. These organizations, and organisations like these four, provide many essential opportunities for a vibrant and productive society, developing a sense of belonging. Investment in such organizations is needed and essential. Focussing on an asset-based approach and the unique niches these organizations fulfill (rather than a deficit approach) is empowering. This shift in perspective would help reposition these organizations that may otherwise feel excluded by the current scope and definition of settlement. By capturing and highlighting their contributions—whether it is cultural knowledge, local connections, or innovative support services—smaller, racialized organizations need to be recognised and supported to play a role in the broader settlement ecosystem.

### 4.2.2 Organizational Ecology:

Building sustainable services and systems for settlement must go beyond individual organizations and leaders and take an organizational ecology approach. It requires creating networks and ecosystems that are collectively working to provide holistic support. This ecosystem approach suggests that settlement work should be seen as part of a broader social fabric, where diverse types of organizations—large and small, formal and informal—

play complementary roles, responsive of diverse needs, with specific attention to socio-cultural dimensions, and especially recognising, and integrating smaller, racialized community organisations that are perhaps uniquely placed in creating that collective sense of belonging for the new and the old.

### 4.2.3 Reconciliation, Anti-racism, and Inclusion:

It is perhaps also important to recognize “settlement services” within the context of the broader reconciliation efforts in Canada. Just as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission brought attention to the ways of Indigenous communities, the newcomers’ settlement sector faces similar challenges in ensuring that BIPOC-led and managed organizations are given equitable, if not preferred access to funding and decision-making spaces. The underlying legacy of colonization perhaps continues to shape, often inadvertently, who gets funded and which services are prioritized. An inclusive and holistic settlement ecosystem must actively work to address these historically rooted imbalances. In this context, this study highlights and reconfirms that the notion and process of “settlement” needs to be reframed, so newest newcomers become aware of the historical environment and the idea and conception of Canada that is informed by Indigenous peoples’ and African-descendant communities’ perspectives.

### 4.2.3 Multi-culturalism and Anti-racism Approaches

Organisations’ origins and their constituencies’ philosophies influence their nuanced approach to social-cultural dimensions, implicitly and explicitly. Some organizations take a multi-cultural celebration and education approach, some in sports and recreation, some in expressions of arts and creativity, and some more explicitly applying a critical, anti-racism lens. Funding mechanisms should have the scope to support the whole continuum of programs across the ‘celebrations - education – advocacy’ continuum. Such an inclusive approach will allow the presence of diverse community-based organisations that can then become a ‘resource’ for other traditional settle-



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ment institutions in the eco-system, especially for local Municipalities.

### 4.3 Addressing Structural Barriers:

#### 4.3.1 Barriers to Participation:

There was consensus that the binary distinction between settlement and non-settlement organizations is not very useful from the perspective of newcomers. Newcomers do not necessarily care whether they are receiving services from a formal settlement organization or a local community group—they value and care about how those services meet their multitude of needs.

The structural barriers faced by smaller organizations—whether space and infrastructure, financial, or relational vis-à-vis funding ecosystem—are significant. These organizations often feel excluded from funding processes that tend to favor larger, more established entities in the ‘settlement’ space. The research recommends exploring solutions such as creating liaison roles or intermediaries that have multi-cultural and ethnic sensibilities, can be an effective channel for resource delivery to smaller organizations. These intermediaries must also help them navigate the complexities of funding applications.

The settlement funding ecosystem should, therefore, seek to be more inclusive, holistic, flexible, and nuanced, breaking down these artificial boundaries and foster greater collaboration between diverse types of service providers.

### 4.4 Funding and Sustainability:

#### 4.4.1 Diversified Funding Models:

This research identifies a critical need to reimagine the way settlement services are funded, suggesting a shift away from a traditional model dominated by government agencies and large organizations. Smaller community-based organizations, especially those outside the traditional settlement sector, feel left out due to the

complexity and competitiveness of federal applications and perception of inaccessibility. This points to a gap in understanding how funding models can better cater to grassroots organizations such as these four that play a pivotal role but do not see themselves represented in the calls for funding applications. Often calls for proposals do not even address socio-cultural dimensions of settlement, nor do they have the flexibility in scope to accept smaller, non-traditional organizations’ activities and proposals. The federal government funding vehicles, especially IRCC, should consider expanding the scope of ‘settlement’ services, making it more flexible, simplified funding processes, offering support that acknowledges the distinct contributions of local, especially racialized organizations to the overall settlement ecosystem, especially around social-cultural dimensions of settlement. The need is rather urgent, given rapid and massive scale of human migration, both immigration as well as inter-provincial migrations.

#### 4.4.2 Gap in Federal Funding:

Smaller organizations do not apply for federal funding because they often find the forms and process inaccessible. These organizations are often doing essential work at the community level but are unable to scale or sustain their efforts without appropriate funding. A key theme from this study was the need for the federal government to understand the specific challenges faced by smaller players—often isolated by geography or excluded by sectoral boundaries—and adjust funding streams accordingly. This would require federal bodies like IRCC to re-think their approach, focusing not only on outcomes but on the processes that become more accessible and enable small, diverse organizations to participate more visibly, imagining the role for an intermediary organisation that can design and deliver support and has embedded diversity in its governance and management structures.

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## 5. Recommendations for Enhancing Diverse Sociocultural Settlement Efforts

### 5.1 Elevate Sociocultural Engagement as a Core Settlement Goal

As already mentioned, policy and funding frameworks should explicitly value the sociocultural dimensions of settlement—fostering friendships, cultural exchange, and creative collaboration. By elevating these elements as core components of successful settlement, funders and policymakers can support a holistic model that promotes a sense of belonging and shared community.

### 5.2 Recognize the Importance of Safe, Inclusive, Informal, Diverse Spaces

Funding and policy efforts should support the creation and maintenance of public, free, and accessible informal spaces and infrastructures where newcomers and host community can engage in social, cultural, and recreational activities. The role of such, often informal spaces in fostering social cohesion and a sense of belonging should become more central focus of settlement strategies.

### 5.3 Expand Funding Models to Support Sociocultural Programs

This study has demonstrated how smaller, localised response is creating disproportionate positive impact, often unacknowledged and under-funded. Social cultural dimension of settlement have many diverse elements - sports, arts, theater, songs, dance, story telling, media and social media visibility, food, cultural festivals and holidays, conversations around family and religious values, mental health and family well-being etcetera. Programming support can be inclusive of these elements as all have a profound impact on developing a sense of community and belonging. To enhance the impact of socio-cultural settlement work, funding must extend to smaller, especially racialized community initiatives and organizations and provide funding beyond program delivery to include core operational support, capacity building, and

infrastructural needs. Multi-year, flexible funding models would enable organizations like MAPC, BGC-CB, Breaking Circus, and EPRC to plan sustainably, develop staff, and maintain welcoming spaces for all community members. Their socio-cultural impacts would be different and still be measurable through a different assessment rubric.

### 5.4 Role of Local Leadership, Municipalities, Councils

While speaking with key stakeholders of these four organisations, it becomes clear that one of the key roles in settlement process is that of local Municipalities, who at the end, have the mandate to harmonise, create and support a new vibrant, inclusive, and mutually respectful community in their neighbourhoods. They also have a significant role to play in recognising the contribution of socio-cultural dimension, as communities change in their demographics across Nova Scotia. Federal (and Provincial funding) mechanisms should actively collaborate and consult with local municipalities and leaderships to identify and support smaller but mightier local organisations like these four, in helping create a new, vibrant, emerging, and inclusive community. Local Municipal Councils, in turn must review their policies to formally recognise and develop partnerships with such smaller organisations, create spaces and mandates for them to play a larger role.

### 5.5 Support Volunteer and Community-Led Approaches

Grassroots volunteer-led organizations offer unique relational approaches to settlement. Supporting these organizations with resources for volunteer engagement, management, training, and governance development is essential to enhance their capacity further to continue their work in building strong, inclusive communities. Investing in volunteers, especially in these smaller, racialized organisations will be an excellent value for taxpayers' money, with low overheads and more lateral rather than hierarchical structures.



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## 5.6 Promote Youth Engagement Beyond Formal Education

Investment in youth programs that foster leadership, life skills, and social connection is essential for long-term community integration, seeing it as ‘investing in the next generation,’ building future inclusive communities. Supporting programs that engage youth beyond school, through recreation, mentorship, and cultural experiences, will lay the groundwork for the next generation to build inclusive, diverse communities, multi-cultural and multi-ethnic societies.

## 5.7 Reimagining Settlement from a Historical Perspective

The four case-studies give insights and evidence of both inclusion and exclusion of settlement perspectives of First Nation communities as well as Indigenous African Nova Scotian communities. Historical marginalization needs to be redressed and how BIPOC led and managed organizations must become more front and central to the new newcomers/ settlers’ experience, education, and celebration of multi-cultural society is emerging across the province of Nova Scotia. Smaller, racialized community organisations like the four who shared their experience and perspectives suggest that they are more likely to be integrative of those important perspectives, even as these two perspectives should become visible across the broader settlement services sector.

## 5.8 Document and Share Best Practices in Sociocultural Settlement

To amplify the work of these community organizations, the study has shown us why there should be ongoing efforts to document, share, and celebrate best practices in sociocultural dimension of settlement. Platforms for knowledge exchange, case studies, and peer learning will enable organizations across the province—and beyond—to adopt effective strategies for fostering belonging and inclusion. This project, limited in scope and scale, present

an example of how such learning can be imagined and designed at a larger scale.

By embracing the insights and learning on an ongoing basis, such as what this study has gathered from the case studies of MAPC, BGC-CB, Breaking Circus, and EPRC, the settlement work in Nova Scotia can develop a ‘learning’ ecosystem to better support both newcomers and long-standing residents in building inclusive, diverse communities where everyone feels at home.

## 6. Conclusion: An Opportunity and A Necessity

The changing demographics of Canada are (re)building a rich and robust nation. To help newcomers feel part of the fabric of this nation services to help them settle in this new place, and not only become productive members of society but develop a sense of community and belonging are essential. Small diverse racialized community-led organizations can play a unique role in this process of settlement – its important to learn from them, support, and resource their unique niche and work with them to compliment the more traditional services being offered.

