

Case Study 2: Community-Based Programming, Pathways in a Changing Alberta

Alberta's population is growing and urbanizing, with increasing diversity concentrated in large centres while many rural areas face stagnant or slower growth. System leaders must build place-based, experiential programming and local pathways that keep learning rooted in community without leaving rural learners behind.

Context Overview

Alberta is projected to continue growing through 2051, with growth concentrated in metropolitan corridors; more Canadians now live in urban areas, driven largely by international migration.

Diversity is rising: **about 23% of Albertans were immigrants in 2021**, with strong concentrations in Calgary and Edmonton; **Indigenous peoples comprise ~6.8%** of Alberta's population, with many communities outside urban areas.

K–12 demand is growing unevenly (e.g., sharp enrolment increases in Calgary and Edmonton), while rural jurisdictions report pressure to sustain options with less access to services.

Planning imperative: Create community-based programs (credit pathways, dual credit/CTS, work-integrated learning, micro-credentials, land-based learning) that are scalable across sparse geographies, reflect local labour and culture, and are transferable for mobile families.

CASSCON School Division, a mixed rural/small-urban authority, must launch a division-wide Community-Based Programming strategy by June 2026.

Realities include:

- **Demographic drift:** Nearby urban areas are growing faster; rural hamlets show flat or declining youth counts.
- **Diversity & inclusion:** Newcomer families are rising in the urban areas, several feeder schools serve Indigenous communities with strong local knowledge/land-based traditions.
- **Access barriers:** Distance, transport, and limited local partners constrain work placements; broadband/service gaps complicate hybrid models.
- **Pressure to show outcomes:** Board asks for credit attainment, transition-to-apprenticeship/post-secondary, and local employer engagement metrics within 12 months.

- **Equity tension:** Principals in very small communities fear centralization while urban schools carry most newcomer/complex-needs growth.
- **Leaders must design a model that is place-anchored, experiential, and pathway-rich, yet flexible enough to travel across communities.**

Artifact A – Demographic Snapshot:

- Alberta projections show continued population growth to 2051; faster growth in metro corridors.
- As of July 1, 2024, 74.8% of Canadians lived in metros; international migration is the main growth driver for urban centres.
- Immigration= 23.2% of Alberta’s population (2021); recent newcomers to Alberta increased 2016–2021.
- Indigenous peoples = 6.8% of Alberta’s population (2021).

Artifact B – School Demand Signals:

- Provincial student population dashboards indicate enrollment growth.

Artifact C – Voices:

- *Principal (rural K–12):* “We can line up farms, trades, and health placements, but kids can’t get there.”
- *Newcomer parent (urban):* “My daughter needs credits that lead to real jobs here, not only in the city.”
- *Elder/Knowledge Keeper:* “Start on the land; the skills and belonging follow.”

Guiding Questions: Phase 1, Initial Sensemaking

Focus Area	Guiding Question
Identifying Complexity	What makes this a <i>complex</i> system challenge?
Adaptive Challenge	Which underlying systems (transportation, partnerships, timetabling, credentialing, evaluation) must adapt?
Equity & Belonging	How will you centre newcomer and Indigenous learners’ strengths while avoiding one-size-fits-all programs?
Place-Based Framing	What would make a program truly <i>of</i> the community (land, culture, employers, municipal partners)?

First Moves	What 2–3 early actions build momentum by September (ie - MOUs, pilot sites, timetable blocks, credit pathways)?
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*****THE DISRUPTOR (NUANCE CARD)*****

Guiding Questions: Phase 2 Adaptive Response

Focus Area	Guiding Question
Reframing	How do you reframe static program placement?
Networks & Partnerships	Who must be at the redesign table now?
Design Guardrails	What non-negotiables keep the model fair?
Learning Signals	What leading indicators will you use in the first 90 days?
New Actions	List 3 immediate adaptive moves you'll take in the next 30 days to realign sites, partners, and transport.