

"Working Together" Series – Paper #3

**Working together
BETWEEN MUNICIPALITIES**

**Family and Community Support Services
Association of Alberta**

1999

Family and Community Support Services

Family and Community Support Services (FCSS) is a municipal-provincial program through which a municipality or Métis settlement may provide preventive support and community development services. The province funds up to 80% of the net cost of FCSS programs, while local governments contribute at least 20%.

FCSS is an optional program – municipalities and Métis settlements choose whether or not they wish to participate. Within the broad guidelines of the *Family and Community Support Services Act and Conditional Agreement Regulation*, municipalities determine how they will organize their FCSS program, what community issues they will address, and what FCSS services, if any, will be developed in response to local priorities.

Family and Community Support Services Association of Alberta

The Family and Community Support Services Association of Alberta ("FCSS Association") is a provincial organization of FCSS programs. The Association is private, non-government, not-for-profit and voluntary (that is, membership in the Association is optional). The Association is a registered society operated by and for the member FCSS programs.

The mission of the FCSS Association is to unite and strengthen the FCSS community by representation and advocacy on behalf of member boards. The FCSS Association fosters networking, education and advocacy; investigates issues of common concern to community FCSS programs; and develops critical tools to assist communities and local programs to meet local mandates and needs.

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THANK YOU

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- To the 48 individuals representing FCSS programs, municipalities and Métis settlements, who helped to develop this paper by participating in interviews, and who contributed insights, experiences and sample documents through phone, fax, and E-mail.
- To the 33 individuals who volunteered to review draft versions of this paper.

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The FCSS Association "Working Together" project

The FCSS Association's "Working Together" research project grew out of frequent questions and discussions among FCSS programs, about ways to work together within and between municipalities, and with regional authorities that affect communities.

With the support of Alberta Family and Social Services, the FCSS Association conducted a research project to learn the experiences of FCSS programs in working with others, in order to identify models of working together.

The FCSS Association board appointed a **"Working Together" Committee** to oversee the project:

- Sheryl Fricke, Strathcona County
- Colleen Jensen, Red Deer and District
- Greg Pratt, Barons-Eureka-Warner
- Wendy Gregorwich, Camrose and District
- Joe Bath, Wood Buffalo

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This is one of six papers developed to assist FCSS programs in working together with others. The papers are:

Theme One: Working together overview

- Paper #1: Working together in FCSS – gifts and challenges

Theme Two: Working together in FCSS communities

- Paper #2: Working together within municipalities and Métis settlements
- Paper #3: Working together between municipalities (*this paper*)
- Paper #4: Working together with community organizations

Theme Three: Working together with regional authorities

- Paper #5: Working together with Child and Family Services Authorities
- Paper #6: Working together with Health Authorities

All papers are available on request from the
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Working together BETWEEN MUNICIPALITIES

A. Introduction: the FCSS family

Municipalities and Métis settlements that choose to participate in FCSS enjoy a high degree of operational autonomy. Within provincial guidelines regarding the FCSS mandate, the municipality or Métis settlement has authority to establish local program priorities and to determine how the local program will be organized and operated. Communities are essentially on their own, or, more accurately, they look to one another for advice and support.

As of January 1999, 271 Alberta communities are FCSS-funded. Many of these are tiny villages and hamlets, rural counties and municipal districts, small and mid-sized towns. Some FCSS communities are quite isolated from their FCSS neighbors; others operate along-side numerous other FCSS programs. In one way or another, all belong to an FCSS network which rather resembles an extended family – one that includes close-knit nuclear arrangements, cousins who get together from time to time, siblings who don't, elders, the new kids on the block, and regular family reunions.

This paper explores how FCSS programs participate in their family network. Specifically, it identifies types of partnership and cooperation that exist between FCSS-funded municipalities and Métis settlements, with special attention given to the experiences of multi-municipality programs and single-municipality programs.

No family is entirely perfect and few families are entirely awful. Most of us receive significant support and assistance from our families, and contribute the same to other family members. Being part of a family or network is an investment that involves joy, sorrow, frustration, satisfaction, effort and commitment. This paper looks at the FCSS partnership **experience**. What makes it work? How can the balance be one of more joy and less sorrow; more satisfaction and less frustration?

Based on information from interviews and documents gathered and analyzed during the "working together" project, this paper summarizes:

- What are the ways in which municipalities and Métis settlements cooperate with one another in operating their FCSS programs?
- What are advantages and disadvantages of different types of working relationships between municipalities?
- What have FCSS programs learned about working together with other municipalities and Métis settlements?

Each community and each FCSS program is unique, and organizes its working relationships with other communities so as to best fit its own circumstances. This paper is intended to assist municipalities and Métis settlements who would like to know more about the experiences of other communities, as they are deciding what will work best for their own situation.

B. A continuum of cooperation between FCSS-funded communities

To a large extent, networking, cooperating and forging partnerships are what FCSS programs do. It is in their blood. They do it with other community groups (like neighborhood youth centres); with other municipal departments (like recreation); with regional authorities (like Health, Education and Children's Services), with government agencies (like Family and Social Services or Employment Canada); and with each other.

For many FCSS programs, cooperation with other FCSS programs is a matter of survival – survival in terms of staff well-being and in terms of meeting program objectives. Cooperation is especially important to new FCSS programs or directors, who benefit from the experience of FCSS "elders" in some kind of mentoring relationship. Cooperation is often important to small communities that cannot afford to offer sufficient services entirely on their own.

But cooperation is important to all FCSS programs. To maintain organizational integrity as they promote partnership in the world at large, FCSS programs need to understand what it means to work together within the FCSS family itself.

As illustrated in the diagram on the next page, FCSS programs work together in at least six ways, with varying degrees of formalization and commitment. Attachment #1 of this paper provides examples of each of the six ways.

3. **Jointly sponsoring events** or short-term projects – Examples include FCSS programs that co-sponsor joint workshops, speaker visits, conferences and other single-event projects. As well, sometimes neighboring FCSS programs cooperate on short-term projects such as assisting with information and referral services, including the sharing or sales of neighboring Community Services Directories.
4. **Regional projects** such as regional needs assessments, family violence prevention or suicide prevention activities – Many FCSS programs collaborate on region-wide initiatives that they see as being of benefit to the "collective" community as well as their own individual communities.

Many FCSS programs find themselves working together because individual responsibilities lead them into cooperative ventures with a common "third party". It often makes sense for FCSS programs to share costs unofficially (i.e., car-pool; share ideas and paper-work; even share meeting attendance responsibilities from time to time). Examples of inter-municipal FCSS cooperation with third parties include participating on regional interagency or adult learning committees.
5. **Entering into cost-sharing contracts** for the provision of on-going programs and services to neighboring communities – This is a more formal way that FCSS programs cooperate. Attachment #1 of this paper includes examples of cost-sharing arrangements.
6. **Forming multi-municipality FCSS programs** governed by formal multi-municipality agreements – This may be the most intensive way that FCSS-funded communities cooperate with one another. Section E of this paper provides more information.

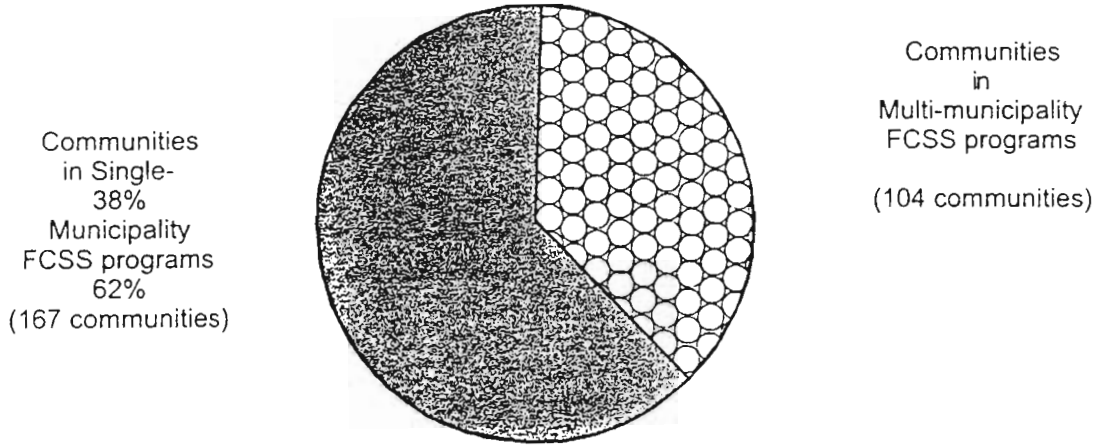
C. **Organizational structures for inter-municipal cooperation**

The majority of FCSS programs have contact with other programs in ways that do not include forming multi-municipality agreements. As of January 1999:

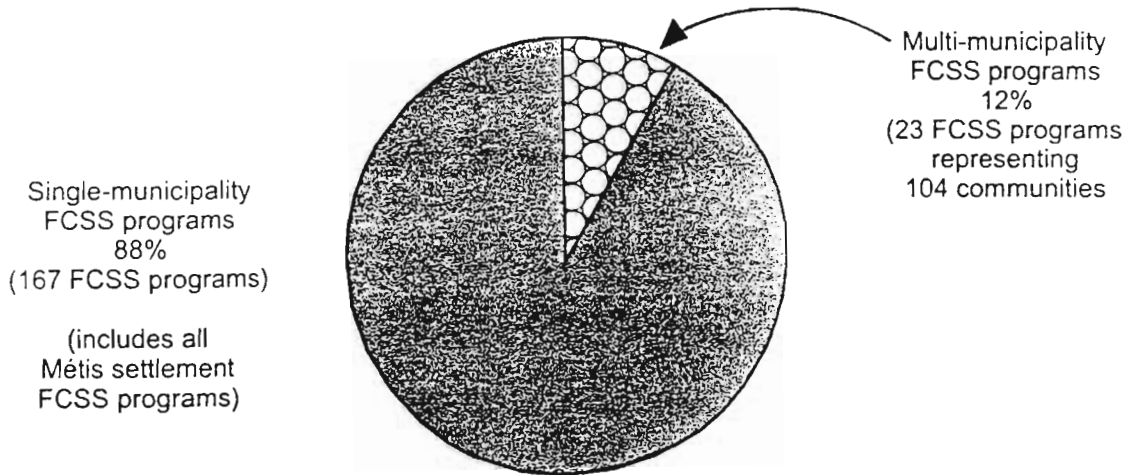
- Of 271 FCSS-funded communities in Alberta, 167 (62%) operate as single-municipality FCSS programs and 104 (38%) participate in multi-municipality programs.
- Of the 190 FCSS programs in Alberta, the vast majority (88%) are single-municipality programs while 12% are multi-municipality programs.

These statistics are illustrated in the diagrams which follow.

**Number of Alberta communities in
single- and multi-municipality FCSS programs**
(total = 271 communities)



Number of single- and multi-municipality FCSS programs
(total = 190 FCSS programs)



In looking at **single municipality FCSS programs**, three patterns are:

- Alberta's two largest urban municipalities, Edmonton and Calgary, are single-municipality programs.
- In contrast, 78 of the single-municipality FCSS programs (41% of all FCSS programs) are in rural communities with small populations, and have no FCSS director or staff. FCSS funds are administered by municipal staff and the municipal council acts as FCSS board.
- All eight of the Métis settlement FCSS programs are single-settlement programs.

Multi-municipality FCSS programs have different size preferences.

- 11 of the 23 multi-municipality programs (48%) include 2 or 3 municipalities.
- 5 of the 23 multi-municipality programs (22%) include 4 or 5 municipalities.
- 5 of the 23 multi-municipality programs (22%) include 6 or 7 municipalities.
- The two FCSS programs with the greatest number of municipalities are:
 - Flagstaff with 11 municipalities;
 - Barons-Eureka-Warner with 16 municipalities.

The next two sections of this paper provide background information about the nature, benefits and challenges of single- and multi-municipality FCSS programs, as described by people who live and work in them.

D. The SINGLE-MUNICIPALITY option

We have the best of both worlds. We've stayed single, but we keep in constant touch and have worked together on many projects. Our communities get the program benefits of a multi-municipality program as well as the autonomy of a single program.

I don't think our collaboration would be as successful if it were formalized in a multi-municipal agreement. We have no reason to have "trust" become an issue, so we simply trust each other to work on making a particular cooperative venture a great success.

– FCSS director in a single-municipality program

I make my connections on the golf course and build relationships as a parent at my kids' school or at the grocery store. That's where trust and familiarity happen. You're really always working because you are always part of the community.

– FCSS director in a single-municipality program

1. Why municipalities choose the single-municipality program option

Common reasons why municipal councils and Métis settlements choose to operate FCSS as a single-municipal program include:

- **To reflect community diversity:** Common wisdom in favor of single programs claims that single programs best suit diverse communities. Even communities with much in common do differ from one another. Commonly cited differences include being more or less rural/urban; having different economic/employment bases; other demographic considerations; having a stable or transient population; and the kinds of services, clubs and community groups that are active in the community.
- **To serve "big enough" communities:** When communities feel they are "big enough," they choose the single program option. What does it mean to be "big enough"? Having an adequate population/funding base helps make the single program viable. It also helps if there are enough local services and groups with which to work. Being "big enough" is not limited to large or medium cities and towns. Many smaller communities also operate single FCSS programs.
- **To serve "too small" communities:** As mentioned earlier, close to half of single-municipality programs are in small communities with small FCSS budgets. Municipal councils of these programs have chosen to allocate FCSS dollars entirely on programming and do not want to contribute to administrative costs of any kind.

- **To meet complex community issues:** Some municipal and Métis settlement councils believe they have enough problems and issues to work on as a single program. They have never thought of the multi-municipality option because they are too immersed in their own issues, or they are too busy to go beyond just thinking about it. These communities believe the single municipality option suits them best.
- **Due to geographical isolation:** Métis settlements and other isolated northern communities are far from their nearest FCSS neighbors. Joining together in a multi-municipality arrangement doesn't make geographic sense, especially given limited administration and travel dollars.
- **To ensure program autonomy and control over funds:** Some municipalities want complete control over their FCSS funds to ensure total program autonomy. They feel they can only have this as a single-municipality program. Municipalities may also consider the multi-municipality option as "risky" in that they could be "swallowed up" by large representational boards, or by large unit authorities.
- **Due to municipal rivalries:** Municipal politics and rivalries can present barriers to inter-municipal partnership and cooperation, particularly when it comes to forming multi-municipality agreements. Politics and rivalries have contributed to the dismantling of some multi-municipality programs. While it may be best for some programs not to work too closely at the political level, staff still can and do develop solid cooperative relationships.

2. **Benefits of the single-municipality program option**

- **Enhanced control, autonomy and self-determination:** Administrators of single programs believe they have more control over how their FCSS dollars are spent than they would under a multi-municipality agreement. Control over spending is linked to program autonomy and meeting community needs. Self-determination is a treasured program benefit. ("Administrators" include councils, boards and staff who manage FCSS funds.)
- **Enhanced efficiency:** Some single-municipality staff value the efficiency they believe comes from working with single-municipality boards that are "non-representational."
- **Increased director "dedication" to local programming:** Some single-municipality communities believe that having an FCSS director who lives in their community and is fully dedicated to working for the one community benefits the FCSS program. Multi-municipality program directors are also dedicated to their programs, but they cannot be dedicated to just one community.

- **Solid capacity to attract and work with volunteers, local community groups and municipal departments:** Single-municipality programs, especially those without volunteer centres, report that success with volunteers is largely due to the connection volunteers have with local FCSS staff. Single-municipality programs with self-determination and program efficiency have the energy, time and program focus to build cooperative relationships with local community groups and other municipal departments.
- **Freedom to work with other FCSS-funded communities and programs:** Single-municipality programs do work cooperatively with other FCSS communities in a wide variety of ways. Some programs feel they may even approach inter-municipal partnership and cooperation in a more positive spirit because they are not "coerced" into doing so by being part of a multi-municipality agreement.

3. Challenges to the single-municipality program option

- **Increased proportion of administrative costs:** The administrative costs of operating a single-municipality program may represent a higher proportion of the total FCSS budget, compared to multi-municipality programs. Many councils would like as much as possible of their FCSS grant to be spent on "direct programming." Money spent on administrative costs – including staff salaries – is viewed as a liability.

An important question regarding administrative costs is what proportion of a director's salary is considered an administrative cost. Some FCSS directors comment that municipal councils and managers contrast salaries with program costs. Some believe that providing or supporting programming is the sole business of FCSS. Others believe that FCSS also plays a role in community development, which may be a large part of a director's job. A director's salary is then viewed more as a program investment in the community.

The term "FCSS Director" may be interpreted as an administrative role. If the position is called "Community Worker" or "Coordinator," the role may be more likely to be equated with community development and the provision of other support to the community.

Whether staff salaries end up being viewed as a liability, an asset, or somewhere in the middle largely depends on the council's understanding of the FCSS mandate and goals. That understanding also colors the way council chooses to structure management of its FCSS funds.

- **Decreased programs and services/decreased capacity to meet community needs:** Small single-municipality programs with small budgets have smaller pots of money to develop, operate and support preventive services in their communities. (Of course, the possibility of addressing this challenge without entering into a formal multi-municipal agreement does exist, since small, single programs work with other FCSS programs in a variety of ways that frequently reduce program costs for each municipality.)

- **Increased potential for non-resident program expenditures:** Because the FCSS "family" contains many small single-municipality programs, and because many of those programs choose to remain single to better meet the diverse needs of their respective communities, community services vary. Consequently, neighboring residents may access services not found in their own communities, at some cost to the "host" program. Unless the costs are recovered by way of a cost-sharing agreement (which some single-municipality programs have), the expenditure can put pressure on FCSS budgets.
- **Increasing need for fair cost-recovery arrangements to cover non-resident users, and the impact that could have on the FCSS community:** Some single-municipality programs that are presently able to afford non-resident users are concerned that any cuts in provincial grants will mean they will no longer be able to afford to provide these services. Program directors worry about the impact a significant increase in the need for cost-recovery arrangements could have on their FCSS "neighborly spirit."

Others who now need to operate under cost-recovery arrangements are concerned about fair formulas and accurate record-keeping. Program users, costs and cost-recovery are sometimes difficult to track.

- **Increased potential for isolation:** Some single-municipality programs work pretty much on their own. Their contact with other FCSS programs is infrequent and rarely goes beyond minimum networking and sharing of information. This is not a problem for some, but others would appreciate more partnership and cooperation. The risk of too much isolation is especially high in geographically isolated northern and Métis Settlement communities. Some larger towns and cities elsewhere in Alberta also tend to focus almost exclusively on their own community issues.
- **Métis experience:** Further to the above, the Métis FCSS experience seems to include few partnerships with other FCSS municipalities, particularly in the non-Métis community, but also with other Métis settlement programs. Distance has a lot to do with this, but other issues also come into play, such as the broader historical and social context of Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal relationships. Métis settlement programs would generally welcome efforts to bridge gaps.

4. **Making it work: Six factors that enhance inter-municipal cooperation as a single-municipality FCSS program**

From the perspective of the single-municipality program, what makes inter-municipal partnership and cooperation work? Six characteristics were identified in interviews:

- **Positive history:** Positive experiences breed expectations of future positive experiences. Negative experiences have the opposite effect. Single-municipality programs with a solid history of working together with other FCSS programs will likely continue to do so. For some programs, the challenge is to put to rest negative feelings from past experiences.
- **Communication, knowledge and relationship-building:** Knowing other FCSS directors and boards helps increase the likelihood of entering into cooperative partnerships. Successful partnerships are grounded in relationship, trust and respect. Keeping up-to-date on what other programs are doing helps single-municipality program directors know who to turn to for assistance, support and collaboration.
- **FCSS Association networking opportunities and travel dollars:** Increased opportunities to meet on a provincial and regional basis enhance cooperation between programs. FCSS directors most able to participate in FCSS networking are most likely to work together between networking meetings. More isolated FCSS programs say they need additional financial subsidies to help them take advantage of networking opportunities.
- **Municipal administrators networking:** Because a large proportion of single-municipality FCSS programs are directly managed by municipal administrators, it is important that they create opportunities to discuss FCSS business during their regional and provincial meetings. The FCSS Association could be of assistance by arranging FCSS presentations at administrator meetings, or by scheduling FCSS meetings to coincide with municipal administrator meetings.
- **Bridging gaps between Métis and non-Métis programs:** Finding ways to bridge gaps between Métis and non-Métis programs will enhance partnership and cooperation between the two groups. Discovering those ways, however, will take some work and require cross-cultural consultation that goes beyond the scope of this project. Cultural differences have to be respected. There are times when working together will be of great value to both communities, and times when working apart will be more appropriate.
- **The single program "home place:"** Maintaining a sense of autonomy, control and self-determination can actually "liberate" some single-municipality programs to increase partnerships with other programs. Being firmly grounded in their own FCSS "home place" seems to be a key component to the inter-municipal experience of many single-municipality programs. In this regard, being free of the "fear of regionalization" that is thought to be increasing may also help facilitate inter-municipal partnership and cooperation between FCSS programs.

E. The MULTI-MUNICIPALITY option

"We have equal representation and participation of all the communities, big or little. We get everyone at the table. . . . Needs have to come from the communities themselves and programs should be personalized. The coordinator should be local and knowledgeable about the whole area – like our coordinator!" – County reeve from a multi-municipality FCSS program

"It is important to remember that communities have entrusted us to deliver their services. They have given up a portion of their control. We must always be conscious of this trust, and honor and respect those municipalities. If they come to me with a concern, I've got to answer it right away."
– FCSS director in a multi-municipality program

"Our FCSS board structure helps. We have positive people who take FCSS business back to their own communities and are the link with council. It used to be whoever drew the short straw had to take FCSS. Now it is something they almost vie for." – FCSS director in a multi-municipality program

"Program spending is based on community need, not program 'equity.' For example, in one community five years ago, the big need was seniors, so their programs were really geared to seniors. The seniors have now passed away, and the focus in that community now is on young people. Other communities still have large seniors populations. It would not make sense to keep one community part of a multi-municipal focus on seniors, or shift the whole program focus onto young people. It all balances itself out over the years."
– FCSS director in a multi-municipality program

1. What is a multi-municipality program?

Some FCSS-funded municipalities have chosen to join together to form a multi-municipal program. In these programs, one of the partnering municipalities signs the Conditional Funding Agreement with the province, and is known as the local "unit authority." The unit authority may be the community with the largest population base, or the community with the greatest number of additional services, but that need not be the case.

The provincial grant allocation for all the partner municipalities is sent to the unit authority, which is responsible for administering it. The unit authority provides an annual report to the province, and must ensure that each partner receives its share of FCSS programming according to the local agreement between municipalities. Program development and program management are done by FCSS board and staff. The way programming is done is partly determined by the provincial FCSS mandate and guidelines, and partly by the Multi-municipality Program Agreement.

2. Why municipalities choose the multi-municipality program option

- **To afford adequate programming:** Smaller communities with small populations and grant allocations choose to "pool their resources" so they can afford a full FCSS program – one that includes a director, space, other administrative needs and enhanced community programming. Small communities believe they could not afford a "complete" program on their own. They also believe that services are increased (in terms of quantity) and often enhanced (in terms of quality) under the multi-municipality option.
- **To build community/communities:** Some neighboring communities have formed multi-municipality programs around "natural" connections in order to take advantage of regional initiatives that help build their individual and collective communities. In this sense, part of the rationale behind multi-municipal programming touches upon a particular value for, and interpretation of, community development.

This rationale makes sense only when there already exists a sense of belonging to a regional or "collective" community, as well as to the local or "individual" community. A collective community cannot be created simply by drawing up a multi-municipality agreement.

3. Multi-municipality FCSS agreements

A multi-municipality FCSS agreement is a legal document that must be signed by all the participating municipalities before the local unit authority can sign the Conditional Funding Agreement with the province. Multi-municipality agreements vary in form and content, depending upon the particular needs and preferences of the communities involved. In some cases, the unit authority signs a separate agreement with each individual municipality. In most cases, all participants sign one agreement.

Multi-municipality agreements usually have two purposes:

1. To provide the legal requirements enabling the province to enter into an agreement with the local unit authority, and send the local unit authority the provincial grant allocated to all the partnering municipalities.
2. To provide the legal basis for the inter-municipal partnership, and formally articulate the agreements according to which the program will operate.

Usually a multi-municipality agreement spells out the powers and duties of the participants in an agreement, how each participant will be represented on the FCSS board, and the cost-sharing agreement. Attachment #2 of this paper includes information about topics and types of clauses typically included in a multi-municipality agreement about FCSS.

4. **Benefits of the multi-municipality program option**

As perceived by people who participate in multi-municipality programs, the advantages include:

- **Enhanced programming capacity:** By pooling their resources, smaller FCSS-funded communities believe they can deliver better FCSS services to their communities.
- **Increased FCSS accessibility:** The multi-municipal program enables residents of tiny villages, hamlets and other rural communities to have access to FCSS services that might not exist without the multi-municipal option. Accessibility is achieved through a variety of ways, including increased local programming and availability of neighboring services.
- **Enhanced community development:** "Pooled resources" may better enable communities to initiate regional and local community development initiatives. The general FCSS feeling is that everyone benefits from relevant community development, and regional community development is often very relevant to at least some local needs.
- **Improved municipal relationships:** Multi-municipality programs often deal with municipal rivalries that go beyond FCSS borders. There is always a risk that "difficult politics" will have a detrimental affect on FCSS programs. But the opposite can also happen. Some FCSS programs have experienced that as FCSS board representatives from conflicting councils start really listening to one other at FCSS meetings, they are able to make connections that help resolve other issues.

5. **Challenges to the multi-municipality program option**

- **Increased staff time and salary expenditures to maintain the partnership:** Maintaining a multi-municipality program can take a lot of time to work. Few programs rely solely on board representatives to maintain links with partner communities. Multi-municipality programs risk having staff – especially directors – redirect hours away from other responsibilities and towards building inter-municipal relationships. This can be exhausting, and risk director "burn-out," particularly during periods of conflict.
- **Potential for municipal resentment:** If any partner municipalities feel coerced into belonging to a multi-municipality program, resentment is likely. Such resentment will inevitably weaken the entire program. Coercion can be economic or "philosophic."
- **Potential for uneven municipal enthusiasm:** Lack of municipal enthusiasm can weaken FCSS programs. This problem is not limited to multi-municipality programs, nor are multi-municipality programs necessarily cursed by it (multi-municipality boards can have very enthusiastic representation from all partner councils and communities). It is uneven enthusiasm that is unique to the multi-municipality experience.

- **Infiltration of inter-municipal politics:** Multi-municipality FCSS programs are in a particularly vulnerable position with respect to possible adverse affects of inter-municipal politics and rivalries. As already indicated, however, dealing with rivalry is not at all beyond FCSS influence.
 - **Risk of conflict over equity and fairness:** Conflicting interpretations of fairness and equity overburden programs. Programs may think they have this angle covered, but outdated or inappropriate formulas for determining equitable access and fair distribution of resources can exist.
6. **Making it work: Seven factors that enhance inter-municipal cooperation as a multi-municipality program**

Representatives of multi-municipality FCSS programs identify seven qualities that make it work.

- **Common interpretations of equity and fairness:** In order to work, multi-municipality programs must be perceived to be equal and fair by everyone involved. Developing common statements of equity and fairness is probably a good idea. Programs need to talk about whether fairness means equal expenditure, equal access, equal fulfillment of different community needs – or a combination of all of these!
- **Regular communication between each council and the FCSS program:** Keeping in regular contact with individual councils is crucial. A council that is well consulted is usually supportive, and has less difficulty finding enthusiastic councilors to sit on the FCSS board. Contact is achieved via each council's board member, as well as periodic visits by FCSS staff. It should include frequent program reports. Some FCSS programs further strengthen inter-municipal relationships by hiring local community workers or outreach staff who live and work in participating communities.
- **Appropriate multi-municipality agreements:** Agreements should reflect the nature of the program, and facilitate cooperation as well as accountability. In less homogenous partnerships, it might be helpful to articulate definitions, interpretations, mission and value statements, and dispute resolution processes right in the agreement itself.
- **Freedom to choose:** Multi-municipality programs work best when participating municipalities perceive themselves as having freely chosen the multi-municipal option, and continue to affirm that choice. Freedom of choice helps reinforce a sense of ownership, and commitment to the well-being of the entire program.
- **"Organic" membership:** Multi-municipality programs work best when they reflect other links that already exist between the member communities. Many are based on a history of cooperation, along with pre-existing travel and trade relationships.

- **Focus on community needs and issues:** Keeping focused on community needs and common issues keeps the program strong. It helps partners deal with conflict (from inter-municipal rivalries, or different perspectives of equity and fairness) and get the job done.
- **Fun, joy and celebration:** FCSS issues can be tough issues. Working with inter-municipal politics, and struggling to nurture that "collective" community, are sometimes difficult tasks. It helps enormously if members of the board and staff support each other and enjoy working together. As one director of a multi-municipality program put it: "We have fun and we laugh a lot. We like each other. FCSS exists to celebrate the human spirit in the whole community – that's what we do as a program. We celebrate the joy."

F. A story with no conclusion

In a paper intended to help facilitate, enhance, or even increase partnership and cooperation, it may seem strange to ask the question: **must all FCSS-funded municipalities cooperate with other FCSS-funded municipalities all, or most, or even some of the time?**

This is an important question, especially to the single-municipality experience. It is probably true that most people involved in FCSS programs value the principle of cooperation, and value opportunities to cooperate with other FCSS-funded communities. However, it is also true that the need to cooperate at the inter-municipal level varies from program to program, as do the kinds of inter-municipal partnerships thought to be appropriate or appealing.

Is cooperation for its own sake a good thing? Should cooperation always be for a **reason**, or is cooperation in and of itself an appropriate goal? The collective FCSS wisdom may be split on this issue. Are FCSS programs who have a high level of inter-municipal partnership and cooperation somehow better or more successful than those who don't? This is an ongoing conversation the FCSS family should be having, if it is not already.

It is impossible to conclude this paper, perhaps because it really does take a lifetime of relationship-building to build a relationship. The story simply isn't over.

The story thus far, however, is an inspiring story. Working together in a reasonably happy and healthy partnership is both challenging and enormously satisfying. The FCSS extended family has had varying levels of success, but it is committed to success, and success, for the most part, is **there**. After all, cooperation is what FCSS programs **do**. When it comes to partnership and cooperation with other groups, what better place to start than with the family?

"Working Together" Series – Paper #3

**Working together
BETWEEN MUNICIPALITIES**

ATTACHMENTS

- 1. Examples of inter-municipal cooperation**
- 2. Examples of topics in multi-municipality agreements**
- 3. Two unique program examples**
- 4. People who participated in developing this paper**

Attachment #1: Examples of inter-municipal cooperation

Both single- and multi-municipality programs cooperate with other FCSS programs. Though multi-municipality programs must concentrate on internal cooperative efforts, that does not stop them from "teaming up" with other FCSS programs. Moreover, some single-municipality programs engage in infrequent cooperation at best. The challenges and benefits of one program type are frequently experienced by the other program type.

When it comes to partnership and cooperation between municipalities, there is no "one right way" of achieving success. The following examples can apply to both types of programs.

1. Internal FCSS Networking

Inter-municipal networking and the sharing of information and other resources is highly valued by FCSS programs, and is, perhaps, the only "universal" cooperative activity. Even isolated programs have some contact with other FCSS programs, or with the FCSS Association.

Why is internal networking and information sharing treasured so much? Because, despite the fact that FCSS programs are closely connected to other agencies and community groups, FCSS people are probably best understood, supported and cared for by other FCSS people. At least, that is what they tend to believe.

Examples of internal networking and information-sharing include:

- Participation in the FCSS Association
- Participation in regional and provincial FCSS Association events
- Participation in the FCSS Directors Network
- Participation in regional FCSS directors meetings
- Participation in town/county administrators provincial and regional meetings
- Individual networking and information-sharing
 - Based on contact and relationships arising out of Directors Network, regional directors meetings and town/county administrators meetings
 - Based on contact and relationship arising out of joint-participation in "third party" collaboration

2. Mentoring

"Mentoring" relationships between new and experienced FCSS programs are very informal, but they are frequent and take at least three different forms:

- Most new FCSS people have the opportunity to meet and learn from more experienced FCSS board members and staff at regional and provincial gatherings.
- Some new programs ask experienced FCSS board members and directors to visit them and provide orientation sessions for the new board or council, and to provide other guidance and assistance. A number of experienced FCSS people have provided this assistance on a volunteer basis.
- Many experienced FCSS directors and board members provide telephone consultation and information to newer directors and board members.

3. Jointly-sponsored events and regional initiatives

Neighboring FCSS programs frequently co-sponsor or co-facilitate special events (usually workshops, presentations or speaker's visits).

Why do FCSS programs co-sponsor events? Because they believe their respective communities would benefit from the same workshop, presentation or speaker, and because it saves money to share common expenses (like speaker fees; travel and accommodation costs; facility, publicity and other material costs; and time spent organizing the event).

How does co-sponsoring work? For the most part, co-sponsoring is quite informal and context-dependent. In terms of **location**, the event may be held in one central location, or a series of the same event may be located in each of the participating communities. **Costs** (staff time as well as monetary) may be equally or unequally shared, depending upon need, use, affordability, availability and the general way the programs feel like sharing costs in that particular instance.

Examples of jointly sponsored events include all the usual FCSS-favoured presentations and workshops (i.e., parenting, suicide prevention, family violence prevention, resilience) and speakers related to these topic areas.

Many FCSS programs collaborate on region-wide initiatives that they see as being of benefit to the "collective" community as well as their own individual communities. Similar in rationale and cost-sharing arrangements to co-sponsored events, joint regional initiatives usually have a different investment intent than that of the single events. The focus is more on community development and cooperating in well-established service-areas.

Examples of regional initiatives include:

- Regional needs assessments (often jointly contracting an outside consultant)
- Regular community conferences at the regional level
- Annual Family Violence Prevention Week activities
- Suicide prevention/awareness campaigns

4. Regional projects – Inter-municipal FCSS collaboration with a third party

Many FCSS programs find themselves working together because individual responsibilities lead them into cooperative ventures with a common third party. In these cases, the rationale for working together is obvious. While there are no "official" inter-municipal costs that must be shared, it often makes sense for directors to share costs unofficially (i.e., car-pool; share ideas and paper-work; even share meeting attendance responsibilities from time to time).

Examples of inter-municipal FCSS collaboration with third parties include:

- **Participating in regional or provincial committees**, such as:
 - Participation on the Inter-City Forum on Social Policy
 - Participating on regional committees like Interagencies, Adult Learning Councils and regional Planning Councils.
- **Working with the same regional authority:**
 - Working with the same Regional School Division (Family/School Liaison; Out of School Care programs; cross-regional youth initiatives)
 - In the Starland County area, the small directly managed FCSS communities of Delia, Morrin, Munson and Starland County turn over all their FCSS dollars to the Prairie Land Regional School Division #25, which administers a Family School Liaison Project with Mental Health and Family and Social Services.
 - Working with the same Regional Health Authority (Home care/home support services; participation on community "wellness" committees, sometimes with the support of Canada Health)
 - Working with the same Children and Family Services Authority (in past: working together on the Children and Family Services initiative in working groups; in the future: collaborative relationships between FCSS programs and Child and Family Services Authorities are anticipated)

- **Working with other agencies on regional services or programs:**
 - Working with the RCMP on regional Victim's Services programs
 - Working with the same AADAC programs, counselors, and administration
 - Working with Mental Health on joint "three party" service provision arrangements (Mental Health and the FCSS participating programs; there is usually one committee overseeing activities)
 - Working with the Association of Communities Against Abuse (formerly ECCASAT) to provide specialized counseling and community education regarding sexual abuse and other forms of abuse.

For further information on how individual FCSS programs work with third parties, see other papers in this "Working Together" series:

- Paper Four: *Working Together with community organizations;*
- Paper Five: *Working with Regional Health Authorities;*
- Paper Six: *Working with Child and Family Services Authorities.*

5. Services to non-residents

Many FCSS programs serve people who reside outside area boundaries and are not included in the program's provincial grant allocation. Either non-resident clients travel to the FCSS community to access those services, or else the FCSS program "sells" services to the neighboring community (i.e., to the other FCSS program).

Why do FCSS programs provide services to non-resident clients or other FCSS-funded communities? Usually, the other community cannot afford the service, or does not have sufficient need to establish it. In some cases, there is no FCSS program because the neighboring municipality chose not to enter into an agreement with the province and contribute twenty percent of the costs.

How does the provision of non-resident services work? Non-resident services are frequently provided **free of charge**. In such instances, user statistics may or may not be kept. When they are, it is more for interest's sake than anything else, although tracking does allow programs to ensure that non-resident use is not a "burden." In many instances, however, two FCSS programs agree on a **cost-recovery arrangement** between the "host" FCSS program (where residents receive services from another FCSS program) and the "home" FCSS program (which provides services to residents of the "host" community).

- **Informal, voluntary cost-recovery arrangements:** The home program provides the host program with user statistics and asks for a reasonable "donation." The donation is not always forthcoming, but this initial informal contact may be useful in the event that more formal cost-recovery arrangements are needed.
- **More formal "lump-sum" cost recovery arrangements:** The host program and the home program agree on a reasonable "price" which the home program pays at the beginning of year. The price is usually based on previous year's statistics; cost variations between programs, and affordability (of the home program) may also be taken into account. This arrangement can involve a formal cost-sharing agreement signed by both partners, or annual letters of intent and/or invoices.
- **Formal cost-per-user arrangements:** The host program invoices the home program for services rendered. The invoice is based on user statistics, and follows an agreed-upon formula to determine a reasonable cost-per-user calculation. This arrangement normally involves the signing of formal cost-recovery agreements, although letters of intent or invoice may also be used in place of an agreement.

Examples of non-resident services:

- Youth services such as youth groups and Boys and Girls Clubs
- Family Centres
- Services for seniors (can include home support/home care services)
- Information and referral services; Community Service Directories
- Distress/Crisis lines

Attachment #2: Topics in multi-municipality agreements

Twofold purpose of multi-municipality agreements

Multi-municipality FCSS agreements usually have two purposes:

1. To provide the legal requirements enabling the province to enter into an agreement with the local unit authority, and send the local unit authority the provincial grant allocated to all the partnering municipalities
2. To provide the legal basis for the inter-municipal partnership, and formally articulate the systems according to which the program will operate

Two Types of Forms

Multi-municipality FCSS agreements take one of two forms:

1. Universal agreement forms: Universal agreements are between the local unit authority and all partner municipalities. Each municipal signatory reviews and signs one universal agreement.
2. Individual agreement forms: Individual agreements are between the local unit authority and each partner municipality. Each municipal signatory reviews and signs an individual agreement that concerns that municipality only. (Individual agreements are often based on master documents and contain only slight variations.)

Typical topics included in multi-municipality agreements

Multi-municipality agreements vary. Not all agreements include these "typical" contents, nor are they limited to them. However, the items listed below are typical in many multi-municipality agreements which were reviewed during this project.

1. **Preamble which:**
 - identifies unit authority and municipal partners
 - usually refers to the FCSS Act and guidelines (re: providing FCSS services, and/or forming multi-municipality agreements, and/or following program guidelines and limits)
 - may refer to previous agreements or bylaws that are to be replaced by the current agreement

2. Unit Authority powers and duties

- Authority to enter into an FCSS agreement with the province
- Authority to receive the provincial FCSS allocation on behalf of the participating municipalities
- Unit Authority may also have other duties and powers, such as responsibility for financial record-keeping and reporting

3. Board regulations – a discussion of rules and regulations that typically include:

- establishment of the multi-municipality FCSS board, including inter-municipal representation (councilors and/or citizens - see below for further discussion on board representation)
- roles and responsibilities of board members (specifically respecting board involvement in budget development and financial accountability; in program development; in personnel management and support; and in and inter-community liaison, reporting and accountability)
- establishment of board executive, if any
- board meetings, quorums and absenteeism
- limits to board power and authority

4. Financial administration and accountability, which

- delineates board, staff and unit authority roles and responsibilities
- delineates the level of power and responsibilities individual partner municipalities have regarding development, review and/or approval of the budget

Note: Some individual partner municipalities have what amounts to a budgetary veto power, while others primarily ratify a budget developed by the FCSS board and staff. In the latter case, the municipalities invest their council/citizen representatives on the FCSS board with the authority to approve the budget on behalf of the participating municipalities.

In some multi-municipality programs, each participating municipality approves only its share of the local portion of the cost of the total FCSS program.

5. Director roles and responsibilities, including

- overseeing community development
- responsibility for hiring and supervising staff
- involvement in budget development and financial administration/accountability
- involvement in program reporting and inter-council/community liaison

6. Termination of municipal participation and/or the agreement (which generally entails a notification period of between three and six months)

Additional topics included in some multi-municipality agreements

The following examples are unique to specific agreements.

- 1. Mission statement** of the multi-FCSS program
(**Note:** Along with mission statements, programs might consider including statements on value-laden terms like "equity", "fairness", "community" and "community development." No agreement reviewed for this project included such explanations.)
- 2. Dispute resolution process**
- 3. Agreement amendment process**
- 4. Definitions and interpretations** (i.e., "Council," "Minister," "unit authority," distinctions between "programs" and "projects," and "county boundaries." The latter is especially important when counties are split between two unit authorities, as is the case with Beaver County and Paintearth County, for example.
- 5. Accessibility statement:** a statement ensuring that all FCSS programs are available to all residents of the multi-municipal service area.
- 6. Cost-recovery provision:** a provision allowing the program to provide programming to individuals or municipalities that are not part of the multi-municipal agreement on a "total cost recovery-basis."
- 7. Separate programming provision:** a provision that allows partner municipalities to provide FCSS-type programming independently of the multi-municipal program, providing that the independent programming is not covered by the normal provincial grant allocation and 20% municipal contribution.

Municipal representation on FCSS boards

The way in which an agreement deals with municipal representation on FCSS boards can influence the multi-municipal partnership. Three common patterns are:

- 1. Equal representation of elected officials (i.e., one councilor per municipality).** This option helps reinforce each council's commitment to FCSS. Equal representation can also help balance individual interests with commitment to the well-being of the whole program. It probably works best when communities have roughly the same population bases and grant allocations; however, with some nurturing, it can also work in other circumstances.

2. **Equal representation of both elected officials and citizens of the community:** This option serves similar purposes to the first option; however, citizen representation may further emphasize FCSS activities in community development.
3. **Weighted representation (of either elected officials only, or of elected officials and citizens of the community):** Weighted representation is based on community size. Larger partners have more than one representative; smaller partners have only one representative, or may even share a representative (in the case of very small partners with a history of difficulty finding people to sit on the FCSS board). Council and citizen representation may be weighted differently.

Weighted representation works best in multi-municipality programs comprised of large and small communities. It helps alleviate concerns of larger partners that they will "over-subsidize" the smaller partners. Effort must be made to keep self-interested representation in perspective.

Attachment #3: Two unique municipalities

FCSS provides important preventive social services to Alberta communities, families and individuals. They meet the needs of people and communities, and people and communities are special. That reason alone is sufficient to conclude that all FCSS programs are special. However, two particular programs are "more unique than usual" in that they combine elements of both single- and multi-municipality programs.

1. Wood Buffalo Regional Municipality

The Wood Buffalo FCSS program used to be a multi-municipality program with Fort McMurray as the unit authority. In 1995, Fort McMurray and the surrounding area amalgamated into one regional municipality that covers a large portion of northeastern Alberta. Included in the new single-municipal program are Fort Chipewyan, Fort Fitzgerald, Janvier, Conklin, Anzac and Fort McKay, as well as the rural spaces between those centres.

Within the geographic boundaries of Wood Buffalo Regional Municipality are five First Nations. While each of the First Nations is an independent entity, members of the First Nations may access services provided through Wood Buffalo Regional FCSS.

Another complexity of the municipality is geography. Some communities such as Fort Chipewyan can only be reached by air for some or all of the year. Sometimes the community is accessible by water, but if the water level is too low, no barges travel.

There is great diversity within the Wood Buffalo program, not the least of which is a high degree of economic and cultural difference between Fort McMurray and the other communities. Fort McMurray is also significantly more urban than the others, with urban expectations, incomes and services, and a somewhat mobile population base.

The total population of Wood Buffalo Regional Municipality is rapidly increasing, and currently estimated at about 45,000 to 46,000. Of the total population, about 43,000 residents live in Fort McMurray, while the remaining 3,000 or so residents live in one of the smaller communities or in the rural spaces between them.

Fort McMurray could be seen as the "power centre." The challenge is not to impose its way onto the rest of the regional municipality. The FCSS program is meeting this challenge by adopting processes common to multi-municipality structures, such as representational board membership. Wood Buffalo also tries to ensure that many individual community needs are met locally. But, Wood Buffalo FCSS is a single-municipality program with only one grant to manage. When it comes to establishing program equity, it hasn't the added "incentive" (or burden) of multi-municipal accountability.

2. Strathcona County

Strathcona County is also a specialized municipality, although it differs significantly from Wood Buffalo. Strathcona County covers the urban centre of Sherwood Park, plus the surrounding rural area. In turn, the surrounding rural area includes smaller communities like Ardrossan.

Because Strathcona County is close to Edmonton, there is a certain urban flair to the area. The temptation to characterize the FCSS program as basically urban is reinforced by the presence of Sherwood Park. Of a total county population of 66,300, almost two-thirds of the residents (41,989) live in Sherwood Park. About 17,302 residents live in suburban or acreage communities, while 4,885 are rural residents. The population mix creates an on-going requirement to balance the needs of Sherwood Park residents with those of other Strathcona County residents.

Despite rural and urban differences, Strathcona County is more homogenous than Wood Buffalo. Strathcona County FCSS operates more like a single municipality program. Some FCSS programs and services are provided in suburban or rural areas of the County, but most FCSS services are located in Sherwood Park. Over the years, development of excellent commuter roads have been both a response to and an encouragement of travel to Sherwood Park. People residing elsewhere in the county may have to drive 30 to 40 minutes to get there, but that is the norm.

Attachment #4: People who participated in developing this paper

Between April and November of 1998, the consulting team of Hutchinson Associates had contact with 60 representatives of FCSS programs and municipalities. Most of these contacts were through interviews, while some were via letter, fax and E-mail messages. Of these 60 people, the 48 listed below provided information about working together with other municipalities. Several provided sample copies of multi-municipal agreements and other documents related to working relationships between municipalities.

Information from all sources was analyzed to identify the range of ways in which municipalities cooperate with one another, and the advantages and disadvantages of each. A draft of this paper was circulated to about 33 FCSS representatives who volunteered to review it. The draft paper was then revised based on feedback.

*CAO = Chief Administrative Officer or
Municipal Administrator*

Alberta Family and Social Services

- Veronica Facundo
- Mic Farrell
- Debbie Trachimowich

Athabasca FCSS

- Diana Johnston, Town Accountant

Barons-Eureka-Warner FCSS

- Greg Pratt, Director

Town of Bashaw

(Camrose and District Support Services)

- Karen Cox, Councillor
- Arlene Wigglesworth, CAO

Beaverlodge FCSS

- Betty Miller, Director

Town of Bowden

(Red Deer and District FCSS)

- Kevin Moore, CAO

Buffalo Lake Métis Settlement FCSS

- Terry Burke, Director
Community Services

Calgary Community and Social Development

- Frank Hoebarth, Manager

Camrose and District Support Services (CDSS)

- Wendy Gregorwich, Director

Claresholm Community Services

- Randy Ell, Director

Coronation and District FCSS

- Linda Bunbury, Community Liaison

Didsbury FCSS

- Evan Parliament, CAO

Edmonton Community and Family Services

- Kathy Barnhart, Director (FCSS)

Flagstaff Family and Community Services

- Gail Watt, Director

Gibbons Community Services

- Marg Clark, Director

City of Grande Prairie FCSS

- Lana Wells, Director

County of Grande Prairie FCSS

- Mary Ann Eckstrom, Councillor

Hanna Community Services

- Kim Neil, Director

Hinton Parks, Recreation and FCSS

- Betty Osmond, Director

Innisfail FCSS

- Valaine Vienneau, Director

County of Kneehill FCSS

- Shelley Jackson, Director

Lac Ste. Anne Regional Community Services
Council

- Donna Geiger, Coordinator (FCSS)

City of Leduc FCSS

- Ted Tymchuk, Manager

County of Leduc FCSS

- Betty Ann Nemish, Director

Lethbridge Family and Human Services

- Rosalind Annis, Coordinator

Morinville FCSS

- Cathy Clarke, Director

Village of Morrin FCSS

(Starland Resource Program)

- Annette Plachner, CAO

Okotoks Community Development

- Linda Blasetti, Coordinator

Paddle Prairie Métis Settlement FCSS

- Joanne Ducharme, Coordinator
Community Services

Prairieland Regional Division #25

(Starland Resource Program: Morrin FCSS, Delia
FCSS and Starland County FCSS)

- Art Aitkin, Superintendent of Schools

Provost and District FCSS

- Cindy Morrow, Program Coordinator

Red Deer and District FCSS

- Colleen Jensen, Manager Social Planning

County of St. Paul FCSS

- Linnette Newby, Director

Town of St. Paul FCSS

- Cheryl Snider, Director

Stettler and District FCSS

- Faye Blakely, Administrator

County of Strathcona FCSS

- Sheryl Fricke, Coordinator
Community Development
- Catriona Gunn-Graham, Counsellor
- Jackie Winter, Manager

Tofield-Ryley-Beaver FCSS

- Yvonne Allan, Director

Village of Trochu

(County of Kneehill FCSS)

- Maureen Makala, CAO

Viking-Beaver FCSS

- Joanne Stewart, Director

County of Wheatland FCSS

- Ken Larson, Reeve
- Sharon Thibeau, Program Coordinator

Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo FCSS

(Fort McMurray and district)

- Joe Bath, Superintendent

Yellowhead Community Services

- Debbie Charest, Director